



**Making Sense of Climate Change
Encounters with Low-Carbon Life in an Urban Community in China**

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Making Sense of Climate Change

Encounters with Low-Carbon Life in an Urban Community in China



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Dedicated to the memory of Zhu Keming (1935-2013)

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	7
Climate change and humans	10
Climate change and China	12
Low-carbon life in Dongping Lane	13
Worlding low-carbon life.....	15
Low-carbon life as community building	18
Low-carbon life as an unspectacular spectacle	21
Low-carbon life as cultural critique	24
Research questions.....	26
Outline of the thesis	28
2. Fieldwork in Dongping Lane	30
Motivation	31
Selecting the field site	32
Description of Dongping Lane	36
The world in a drop of water	40
Getting access.....	44
My position in the field.....	45
Language.....	47
The question of anonymity.....	48
In the footsteps of the local press.....	50
Conclusion	52
3. First Encounters with Low-Carbon Life	54
The campaign initiative	55
The early stages of campaigning	57
Low-carbon life golden points	60
A standard for low-carbon life.....	64
Delineating low-carbon life	66
Conclusion	69
4. Building a Low-Carbon Community	71
Community building	72
Changing notions of citizenship.....	77
Volunteering.....	79

Climate change and citizenship	82
Low-carbon life as civilized community life.....	84
Enabling moral action.....	87
Conclusion	89
5. Campaigning in the Material World	90
The materiality of low-carbon life	94
Generating visibility.....	99
Setting air conditioners at 26 degrees	102
Improvised experimenting with refrigerators.....	105
Garbage sorting	108
Low-carbon handicrafts.....	113
The landfill at Tianziling.....	118
Greening the community.....	121
Conclusion	124
6. Connecting Concerns	126
Omitting climate change	129
Connecting the near and the far	133
Connecting concerns about food	135
Connecting concerns about air conditioning.....	141
Connecting concerns about transportation	142
Toxic China.....	144
Cultivating good habits.....	146
Low-carbon life as hobby-like activities	148
Conclusion	150
7. Campaigning in a New Era	152
Living in a new era	156
Low-carbon life as a campaign	159
Remembering class struggle.....	161
From propaganda to information.....	164
The role of the media	166
Exemplars of low-carbon life.....	168
Role models for a New Era	173
Competition as ritual-like space	176

Low-carbon culture	179
Conclusion	182
8. Comparison and Cultural Critique.....	185
Age groups.....	188
Gender	191
Locals and migrant workers.....	193
Belonging to a model community	195
The green urban imaginary of Hangzhou	198
Low-carbon life and Chinese culture.....	201
Comparing with other countries	204
Climate citizens of the world?	207
Conclusion	211
9. Conclusion.....	215
References.....	222
Summary.....	243
Resume	244

1. Introduction

"This is the problem: lamb kebabs have to be roasted, right? For this you need charcoal. It comes from wood that has been burned. You shouldn't eat that stuff! Just have a biscuit instead, that should be fine. It also has a bad influence on your body. And it isn't low-carbon. This is how we need to teach them". Sitting on the party secretary's chair in the small community office, Mr. Zhu, a fit-looking 76-year old pensioner explains to me the virtues of living a "low-carbon life". This is the focus of an ongoing local climate change mitigation campaign in the residential community Dongping Lane (东平巷社区) in central Hangzhou. I have come to the community to carry out ethnographic fieldwork focusing on the low-carbon life campaign. As an anthropologist focusing on China and environmental issues, I am interested in exploring the intersection of universal claims and particular cultural and social contexts in community-based engagements with global climate change. The aim of my research project is to examine the specific practical and interpretive processes through which local officials and residents attempt to make sense of and respond to climate change as a new issue of concern. It is around noon on a mild day in early November 2011. The community office staff have all gone for lunch, so we are alone. Mr. Zhu is wearing a blue and white sports jacket and blue trousers.

"I have deep feelings for this community. You return to your hometown when you retire, and this community is my home". Before his retirement in 1995 Zhu worked as a factory manager. He is a party member, volunteer mediator and neighborhood watchman, and he has lived in Dongping Lane since 1976. Zhu is a – self-proclaimed as well as recognized – low-carbon doyen (低碳达人), which is to say that he is known locally for being an expert on energy saving, garbage sorting and other areas of low-carbon life.

"Mr. Zhu!", Little Zheng, a skinny young community official with a winning smile that reveals a chipped front tooth, pops his head in the door with a quick reminder: *"Mr. Zhu! Don't forget to lock up when you leave for lunch"*.

Mr. Zhu's admonition against lamb skewers encapsulates the way the residents attempt to make sense of climate change through the concept of low-carbon life. In stressing the carbon emissions and resource use of burning charcoal as well as the potential for negative health implications of eating barbecued food, he is performing a discursive connection of concerns that characterizes the overall sense-making in the campaign. Climate change, resource depletion, air pollution and

personal health are routinely drawn together in local discussions of low-carbon life practices. In this specific case Zhu was talking about teaching his grandson. The campaign is built on the assumption that older people's experience of a materially much simpler lifestyle in the past has given them frugal habits that place them in a favorable position for understanding the need to cut down on consumption, which has arisen as a consequence of climate change. Like many other retired people in urban China, Zhu engages with current social and environmental issues by working as a community volunteer. Heeding the call of the Chinese party-state for the ongoing and deliberate work of generating social cohesion and a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing urban setting, he has managed to claim for himself a status as an exemplary individual capable of teaching and leading others. The retired volunteers collaborate with community officials, many of whom, as is the case with Little Zheng, were born after 1976 and have no experience of the mass-mobilization campaigns, the austere material conditions or the political violence of the Mao era.

The focus of this thesis is on processes of sense-making related to the concept of low-carbon life. In the outset, my research in Dongping Lane was informed by a general question, prompted by the emergence of climate change mitigation as a policy priority that prompted big investments and big rhetoric from various governing agents of the Chinese party-state: *how do ordinary people in urban China respond to climate change mitigation initiatives?*

As a consequence of the relative novelty of the issues of global climate change and the concept of low-carbon life paired with an official conception of public participation granting citizens more interpretative space than they had in the mass-mobilization campaigns of the Mao era, a major part of the response to the campaign initiative consists of interpretation and sense-making. Bringing into focus the residents' attempts to answer the questions of what the purpose of low-carbon life is and of why they should participate, gives rise to the main research question of this thesis:

How do campaign participants in Dongping Lane make sense of the idea of climate change?

Sense-making has been theorized in the field of organizational studies as a concept to capture a dimension of social construction that goes beyond interpretation of the already given and emphasizes how people come to terms with various interruptions of normalcy (Weick 1995). My use of the term sense-making takes its cue from Anna Lora-Wainwright, who in her study of cancer etiologies among Sichuan villagers refers to the reasoning of her informants who try to find explanations for cases of cancer as "making sense of cancer" (Lora-Wainwright 2013: p. 25).

Whereas the focus on cancer embeds her work in a theoretical field of medical anthropology, my focus on climate change embeds my study in the new and emerging field of climate ethnography.

For the purposes of this thesis, I understand sense-making as a series of practices of interpretation and social construction connecting knowledge and imagination. The analytical strategy for examining the sense-making processes of the low-carbon life campaign is to focus on the ways in which low-carbon life campaigners contextualize, compare, connect, exemplify and evaluate the ideas and practices that they identify as part of low-carbon life. These various practices make up a local repertoire of sense-making. While these sense-making practices may also be applied to other interruptions of normalcy or challenges to the quest for good and meaningful lives such as corruption or air pollution, my strategy here is to approach them in the context of people's various encounters with the idea of climate change. Rather than focusing on sense-making as a general human practice, then, I am examining how a group of people specifically attempt to make sense of climate change.

Based on the proposition that as concern about global climate change becomes part of the way people in urban China practice, imagine and reason about their lives, it has the potential to alter the practices as well as the rationales for practices among those who take it up, this thesis situates the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane within the wider frameworks of community building, changing notions of citizenship, changing consumption patterns and changing ideas about consumption, mounting anxieties about health issues in the shadow of a looming environmental crisis, and the comparisons with other times and places that are part of the stories that both community officials and community residents tell about who they perceive themselves to be. As conceptions of climate change are reconfigured global climate change is transformed from a problem to be technically fixed into a vastly complex condition of life. Accordingly, cultural and social responses to the idea of climate change must be explored in their local specificity.

The thesis offers an ethnographic account of a local climate change mitigation campaign focusing on the sense-making processes involved when the concept of low-carbon life is deployed locally to guide practices in directions that take account of the connections between everyday life and climate change. It explores the ways campaign participants attempt to come to terms with climate change both through practice and through their reasoning about the concept of low-carbon life.

Climate change and humans

The global climate is changing. Connections between climate change and human activities such as deforestation and the burning of fossil fuels have been established beyond reasonable doubt (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2013). Until recently, the study of problems relating to climate change has been seen as belonging to the domain of the natural sciences and of economics (Urry 2011: p. 2; Sørensen & Eskjær 2014: p. 11). This near-monopoly is now history as a growing number of studies within the social sciences and the humanities have begun addressing issues pertaining to the connections between humans and climate change. Studies of the psychology of climate change (Stern 2011), linguistic studies of climate discourse (Fløttum & Dahl 2012), literary studies of climate fiction (Andersen 2014), media studies of the coverage of climate change (Boykoff 2008), discourse analysis of debates on climate change (Malone 2009), and ethnographic studies of people responding to changing natural environments (Crate & Nutall 2009) have all contributed to the emergence and development of this new research field.

Whereas natural sciences work towards generating knowledge about climate change, the contribution of social sciences and humanities becomes that of engaging with the *idea* of climate change; how it is engaged with, socially and culturally, in a variety of ways around the world and what happens as results of these engagements. The theoretical point of departure for this thesis, then, is that the idea of climate change has the power to change local ideas and interactions, or in the words of British climate scientists Mike Hulme: "to alter how we strive toward our individual and collective goals" (Hulme 2009: p. xviii).

The focus on climate change in the humanities and social sciences has coincided with a material turn that has drawn attention to the roles of things in social and cultural life. Some studies of climate change have begun to focus on interactions between humans and non-human beings and things (Shove 2010: p. 279). Part of the literature on climate change and humans has begun to crystallize around the term "the anthropocene", which introduces the idea of seeing humans as a geological force (Cruzen & Stoermer 2000; Cruzen 2002). One of the implications of the anthropocene is that it changes the meaning of being human. It posits humans as climate changers and directs attention to human beings as a species (Chakrabarty 2009: p. 213). The predicament of the anthropocene, then, is that human consumption activities, especially those connected with the use of fossil fuels, as they are carried out at present, are changing the composition of the atmosphere in ways that lead to global climate change, which deteriorates natural environments and

threatens to render parts of – if not the entire – planet uninhabitable for human beings. This view of anthropogenic climate change as a human condition has been criticized on the grounds that it might as well be viewed as a condition of capitalism rather than a condition of life as such (Chakrabarty 2009, Žižek 2011). Defining global climate change as a condition of life rather than a problem to be solved by formal political or technical means has implications for how responsibility and global connections are envisioned. According to Ulrich Beck, global climate change releases a 'cosmopolitan momentum', as everyday life practice and meaning-making come to be understood in relation to distant and different others (Beck 2010: p. 259).

While Hulme's claim that the idea of climate change can act as an intellectual resource, and Beck's idea of a 'cosmopolitan momentum' seem to promise that it can stimulate new ways of thinking and acting, others may see severe obstacles to the social, cultural and economic changes that could mitigate global climate change. This view is summarized in the Giddens paradox which holds that "[...] since the dangers posed by global warming aren't tangible, immediate or visible in the course of day-to-day life, however awesome they appear, many will sit on their hands and do nothing of a concrete nature about them. Yet waiting until they become visible and acute before being stirred to serious action will, by definition, be too late" (Giddens 2009: p. 2). Climate change mitigation initiatives such as the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane indicate ways of unlocking this paradox by pointing out ways to connect climate change with people's everyday lives as well as with things that are tangible, immediate and visible.

The thesis offers a view of particular local engagements with the universalizing claims inherent in approaches to climate change that posit humanity as the unit of analysis. Following Anna Tsing, who proposes that "[a]bstract claims about the globe can be studied as they operate in the world" (Tsing 2005: p. 6), I approach the universal claim that humans are "climate changers" not as claim to be falsified or verified, but as the point of departure for an examination of engagements with the global in the shape of ideas and practices related to climate change mitigation. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a residential community in urban China, the thesis offers an account of how the idea of climate change becomes entangled in local interactions and in local sense-making. As such it contributes to a view of globalization that sees it not as a master process of homogenization that changes places through circulations, but rather as a multitude of particular local encounters (Tsing 1999). The campaign becomes an example of how the politics of climate change can be addressed locally in early 21st century urban China.

Climate change and China

China has a long history of anthropogenic environmental destruction (Elvin & Liu 1998; Elvin 2004). China's environmental challenges in antiquity are neatly summed up in the title of Mark Elvin's article "Three thousand years of unsustainable growth" (Elvin 1993). In modern times rapid population growth as well as rapid economic growth has intensified already problematic development patterns. Massive campaigns in the middle of the 20th century to change the environment for the purposes of modernization and increased production have been characterized as a "war against nature" (Shapiro 2001). As a result of economic development strategies with a single-minded focus on rapid economic growth at almost any environmental cost, poisoning of air, water, soil and food has taken place on a vast scale and with devastating consequences in many places over the last decades in China. In a recent survey of people emigrating out of China, 70 percent of respondents listed environmental concerns among their major reasons (Liu 2014). Reports on ecological devastation on a large scale have become a fixture of international news reports on China. In 2012 the eyes of the world turned to Beijing as the city was enveloped in thick smog and reports about the city's massive air pollution are now a staple in international news reports on China (see for example the series on air pollution in South China Morning Post).¹

The situation is described in much detail and often defined as an environmental crisis in the academic literature on the environment of China (Economy 2004; Kassiola & Guo 2010; Tilt 2010; Shapiro 2012). Breathing, drinking, eating and moving about in China means coming into contact with, or being permeated by, increasing concentrations of many potentially toxic substances. Parallel to the development summarized as China's environmental crisis, China's greenhouse gas emissions have risen dramatically and in 2007 China overtook the USA as the world's number one emitter of CO₂ (Kassiola & Guo 2010: p. 3). China is simultaneously a world leader in renewable energy development and a country where mind-boggling numbers of coal-fired power plants are opened at alarming speeds. Climate change has become an important issue in Chinese politics. In 2010 the Chinese government initiated climate change mitigation programs in a number of provinces and cities, among them Hangzhou, where a dimension of the climate change mitigation strategy addresses consumption in the everyday lives of citizens (Delman 2014).

¹ South China Morning Post Topic series: <http://www.scmp.com/topics/beijing-air-pollution>. The fieldwork that informs the thesis was carried out in 2011 and 2012 before the smog crisis in China unfolded in the media. People in Hangzhou did not talk as much about air pollution at the time as they do now. The massive focus on this problem at present may prompt the low-carbon life campaigners to connect their activities more closely with air pollution, but at the time of the fieldwork air pollution was not the dominant theme of low-carbon life campaigning. In that sense the findings in the thesis represent an ethnographic present.

China studies scholars working on environment and climate change have focused mainly on such topics as governmental climate policies, popular protests against pollution or dam projects, and on the work of environmental NGOs (Jahiel 2000; Jing 2000; Ho 2001; Mertha 2008; Schroeder 2008). Locally focused ethnographic studies supplement these studies with a focus on local projects and the everyday life practices and sense-making of ordinary individual citizens. Notable recent examples include Bryan Tilt's study of pollution and citizen responses in a Sichuan township (Tilt 2010), Shannon May's study of the Huangbaiyu Eco-City project in Liaoning (May 2011), and Anna Lora-Wainwright's studies of cancer etiologies and pollution in a Sichuan village (Lora-Wainwright 2013). To understand how local practices and sense-making may change in the face of not only environmental issues but also engagements with global climate change, these environmental ethnographies must be supplemented with ethnographies of climate change. Anthropologist Susan Crate has called for "climate ethnographies" capitalizing on the skill of "being there" for the purpose of investigating locally specific physical as well as socio-cultural climate situations (Crate 2011: p. 176f). Anthropological studies of climate change have yielded a range of climate ethnographies focusing on adaptation by people living in changing environments as well as science and technology studies (STS) inspired examinations of various social and cultural aspects of climate science (Crate & Nutall 2009). What I propose to do here is related to the projects that these climate ethnographies embody, but departs from them in focusing on mitigation efforts of ordinary people rather than focusing on adaptation strategies or the workings of climate science. This thesis is conceived as a climate ethnography that examines the contingent assemblage of global climate change and local interactions as differently situated local actors encounter articulations of the predicament of the anthropocene, by examining what happens when global climate change becomes part of what makes practices meaningful and part of what prompts the endeavor to alter practices that is embodied in campaigning.

Low-carbon life in Dongping Lane

The term low-carbon has become a near-ubiquitous part of environmental discourse in China. Government policies, national television shows, city-branding strategies and NGO-led campaigns alike employ the term in the framing of their approaches to climate change mitigation.² *But what is low-carbon life?* Definitions and descriptions of low-carbon life in and outside of China share a number of characteristics. The following two examples are typical introductions to low-carbon life that illustrate the prevalent elements of basic definitions of low-carbon life. Without offering a

² See for example: CCTV 2010, <http://english.cctv.com/program/chinatoday/Low-carbon/>

specific definition, the introduction to Chris Goodall's book "How to Live a Low-Carbon Life" (Goodall 2010) touches on some basic elements that have also become part of the way low-carbon life has developed in Dongping Lane. Here low-carbon life involves acting on knowledge about "how the activities of our day-to-day lives generate emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and other greenhouse gases", and his aim is to "provide information and practical suggestions that will enable concerned individuals to do the best they can to reduce their personal responsibility for climate change" (Goodall 2010: p. 3). This is similar to the approach taken in Dongping Lane. A Xinhua news report from 2009 characterizes the main message of low-carbon life as "promoting that everyone begins from their own habits, controlling or paying attention to their personal volume of carbon dioxide emission in order to reduce the emission of carbon dioxide worldwide" (Li 2009). Low-carbon life is thus conceived as having to do with the relationship between day-to-day lives of individuals and emissions of carbon dioxide affecting the whole planet. It connects the personal with the global by casting ordinary people as responsible for climate change and their daily lives as the site of engagement. The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane has adopted the following definition:

What is low-carbon life?

It means reducing energy consumption in daily life so as to reduce carbon (especially carbon dioxide) emissions. For us ordinary people, low-carbon life is an attitude, not an ability. We should actively promote and practice low-carbon life, paying attention to saving electricity, oil and gas, bit by little bit." - Dongping Lane Residents Handbook (DPX 2009)

Dongping Lane is a residential community (社区) in the centre of Hangzhou. It has a population of 5522 people registered in 2004 households making it a relatively small community (DPX 2009). Two thirds of the residents are pensioners, many of whom have lived there for several decades. Most buildings are the grey seven-storey apartment buildings common to Chinese cityscapes. The latest round of demolitions and renovations in the community took place in the mid-1990s. At the centre of the community is a small park made up of a square lined with trees and bushes. The local Community Work Station (社区工作站) is run by a small staff of salaried public servants who provide various services to the residents and are responsible for promoting civilized (文明) behavior among them. This mandate takes various forms in China's many urban communities. In Dongping Lane this broadly conceived civilizing project has recently taken the shape of a campaign

to promote garbage sorting and energy saving in everyday life. On the initiative of a young community official, the campaign began in late 2009 with meetings, expert lectures and the development of information material for distribution in the community. In 2010 the community got the attention of national and local media by initiating a competition among residents to become designated "low-carbon model households" (低碳家庭示范户). The households that participate in the competition subject themselves to a standard requiring them to make specific lifestyle changes such as reducing the consumption of water, gas and electricity. Points are awarded for various lifestyle changes and the households can become low-carbon models by earning a certain number of points. In 2011 the main focus of the campaign was garbage sorting, which was propagated through a competition. These campaign activities are supplemented with neighborhood day events, exhibitions of "low-carbon handicrafts", excursions to Hangzhou's Low-Carbon Science and Technology Museum (杭州低碳科技馆) and the local landfill Tianziling (天子岭).

There are no hard targets for reaching a certain number of people and there is no formal definition of participation in the low-carbon life campaign. Participation can take different forms and the intensity and frequency of participation may vary greatly from person to person. Participation is voluntary and it is far from everyone in the community who has joined in the various activities. Around ten percent of all households in the community have been designated low-carbon model households. Around a third of all residents participate in the garbage sorting scheme. The propaganda efforts of the campaign have reached most people in the community through meetings, posters, performances, leaflets and home visits. The vast majority of campaign participants are retired community residents. The core group of people who organize campaign events is comprised of community officials and retired volunteers, most of whom have organizational experience from their previous jobs, from the resident committees that preceded the Community Work Station (社区工作站) and from membership in the local communist party branch.

Worlding low-carbon life

For the participants in the campaign low-carbon life is a new and unfamiliar concept. This means that the work of developing and implementing the low-carbon life campaign is to a large extent an interpretive and generative process. Rather than being an object that is already in some sense out there to be observed, analyzed, and put into practice, low-carbon life as it becomes articulated locally in the campaign is the product of interpretive work. Campaign participants analyze information about climate change and attempt to make sense of it by placing it in contexts that are

meaningful to them. These contexts are not given, but should instead be seen as products of the reasoning about how the world works and what can be considered relevant to their campaign efforts, that campaigners engage in. Low-carbon life campaigning, then, depends on world-making practices. Drawing on literary theory, Anna Tsing suggests that the concept of worlding can be applied to the cultural interpretive work of making contexts (Tsing 2010). Worlding involves giving actors and their practices and imaginations meaningful and relevant settings in which to unfold. Making sense of human endeavors requires acts of imagination. The concept of worlding captures the vastness of potential contexts involved in sense-making processes. In the words of Charles Taylor, "the relevant sense-giving features cannot be circumscribed; because of this, we can say that sense giving draws on our whole world" (Taylor 2005: p. 28). Approaching the low-carbon life campaign as an emergent phenomenon, the possible meanings of which are not given in advance, my analytical strategy in this thesis mimics that of the campaigners and, more importantly represents an attempt to follow their analyses. Rather than finding out what pertains to low-carbon life and what doesn't, the practitioners of low-carbon life make things relevant and meaningful through their practices and through their reasoning.

However, this does not mean that all possible understandings of what low-carbon life means and arguments about, why people should engage in it, are equally likely to inform the campaigning effort. In an essay on worlding, Philippe Descola connects the concept to the categorization of various ways of thinking about the world. For Descola, worlding means discovering affordances understood as folds and clusters of properties in our material and immaterial surroundings rather than freely deciding what part of experience are made to count as significant (Descola 2010: p. 338). Applied to the situation of the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane a combination of Tsing's idea of worlding as the cultural production of contexts and Descola's idea of worlding as the discovery of properties, the worlding of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane can be defined as the interpretive work of making contexts for campaigning predicated on local ways of knowing the world. The predicament of the anthropocene, which is that human consumption activities are altering the composition of the atmosphere in ways that may render the planet uninhabitable for human beings, represents a scholarly worlding of climate change involving the properties of both the material and immaterial environment. The materiality of the Earth and its atmosphere is constitutive of the problem of greenhouse gas emissions, but the focus on humans at species level represents a cultural construction of climate change. Among pensioners and community officials in contemporary urban China the post-Mao consumer revolution, the state-sponsored project of

community building, memories of urban life in earlier times, and growing concerns over health in an increasingly toxic urban environment, represent "clusters of properties" in our material and immaterial surroundings (Descola 2010: p. 336) that make some interpretations of low-carbon life more likely than others.

The worlding of low-carbon life is thus not entirely open-ended, but neither is it given in advance. Global climate change has inescapable material properties that are not open to interpretation, but their consequences for the social lives of humans may, as Shannon May points out, be interpreted in infinite ways until they are circumscribed politically (May 2011: p. 108). When low-carbon life is conceptualized as a variant of everyday life in the community, this intersection of activities (everyday life consumption practices), actors (residents and officials), and place (the residential community) constitutes the boundaries within which low-carbon life can legitimately be further interpreted. Changing party-state approaches to voluntary work in China have generated a widened interpretive space. In China's urban communities, voluntary work is conceived as part of a wider project of strengthening civic culture (Luova 2011). When the sense-making inherent in local negotiations of the meanings of state policies are not constantly examined in every minute detail with a view to measuring it against a strict party-line under the threat of political persecution, but instead understood as a necessary condition for campaigning, the result is a proliferation of meanings. In the low-carbon life campaign the participants have been relatively free to work out what sense they make of the practices of low-carbon life. Departure from the principles laid out in the explanations of the low-carbon life standard is not seen as punishable dissent, but rather encouraged in a mandate to come up with new low-carbon ideas. The emission reducing effects of various low-carbon life practices do not stand alone as motivation for the campaigners. One of the most prevalent sense-making practices among practitioners and proponents of low-carbon life is to connect concern over global climate change with concern over personal health, in arguments that stress how practices have multiple effects, some of which benefit the individual and some of which benefit larger collectives. While the practices of low-carbon life are sense-making practices in their capacity of connecting climate change with everyday life, they also depend on sense-making processes that connect them with various concerns that make them meaningful to their practitioners in a wider perspective, i.e. as universalizing claims that become localized in the encounter with their ways of knowing the world through experiences and imagination.

Low-carbon life as community building

The conception of low-carbon life as a community-based campaign organized by officials and volunteering residents represents one way of circumscribing climate change mitigation politically. The focus on energy- and resource consumption of everyday life practices represents another. The combination of these two ways of conceiving of low-carbon life leads to an embedding of the campaign into the party-state-sponsored urban reform project of community building, and specifically into a normative aspect of that project, namely the promotion of "civilized community life" (文明的社区生活). As a result of urban reform in the 1990s, residential communities, rather than the work units (单位) that had dominated urban life, became units of administration in urban China (Bray 2006). Based on the idea that if urban communities are to have an identity beyond that of administrative units and generate some level of social cohesion, they must be imagined as meaningful social communities to which people can feel they belong, the Chinese party-state has been pursuing a policy of community building (Bray 2005; Bray 2006; Heberer 2009; Tomba 2009).

Conceiving of community building as a necessary project for the generation of a sense of belonging resonates with Michael Lambek's suggestion that instead of seeing locality as primary, something that is just there, and people inhabiting it as secondary, the process could be seen in reverse, so that "acts of inhabiting" are what make the local (Lambek 2011: p. 206). The idea of civilized community life constitutes communities as meaningful places rather than empty spaces in an administrative grid. Appadurai's characterization of locality as a "fragile achievement" hinging on rituals that produce local subjects directs attention to the contingent, imagined and constructed nature of local communities as well as the connections between what could be called place-making projects and people-making projects (Appadurai 1996: p. 196). In advocating community building as a project that moves well beyond public administration into orchestrated attempts at fostering a certain sense of belonging, the Chinese party-state subscribes to the idea of communities as imagined and constructed (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996).

State-sponsored community building efforts and citizen responses to them, for example by volunteering or joining various campaigns, lead to the production of locality through "realized moral action" (Lambek 2011). The low-carbon life campaign is inscribed onto the assumed background understanding that a part of the local population subscribes to the ideas of community building by identifying themselves as civilized community people and by recognizing the idea that a sense of belonging is necessary in order to make the residential community a good place to live. In

a study of a former model community in Shanghai, Wing-chung Ho notes that appeals to local sense of belonging is expressed metaphorically in the popular slogan "*Community is my family, everybody loves it*" (Ho 2010: p. 209). A similar appeal is found in Mr. Zhu's likening of retired community life to a return to one's native home. The ideological underpinning of community building by state mandate as embodied in the case of residential communities in China has been characterized as "authoritarian communitarianism" by Thomas Heberer, who argues that through the project of community building the Chinese party-state acts as a "moral state" trying to counter expected negative consequences of individualization by means of "moral engineering" (Heberer 2009: p. 510).

Like nation building, community building is a homogenizing project which is challenged in the encounter with heterogeneity. Co-residence does not necessarily equal shared ideas and values or a sense of belonging to the same collective. As Benedict Anderson notes in a significant parenthesis in the introduction to his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, even communities based on face-to-face contact are to some extent imagined (Anderson 1991: p. 6). Residential communities in urban China are small enough to make possible a fair amount of face-to-face contact, and Dongping Lane is smaller than the average community, but it is also perfectly possible to live there without much interaction with neighbors and local officialdom. While the idea of civilized community life projects an image of community as a social collective, there are also residents, such as migrant workers, who are excluded from the imagined community on the grounds that they are seen as lacking the qualities required for genuine membership. Residence alone is thus not enough to be seen as fully belonging to a Chinese urban community. In addition one must meet the requirements of "civilized community life" (文明的社区生活). The social construction of this kind of community identity has been closely connected with the notion of population quality (人口素质) implying that people need to develop certain knowledge and certain refinements of their habits (associated with the habits of the urban middle class) in order to become proper citizen (Jacka 2009; Tomba 2009).

The low-carbon life campaign is part of the place-making that constitutes a certain space framed by four particular streets in Hangzhou as the meaningful place Dongping Lane. Local officials are important agents in the place-making processes of the community. They don't live there but they work there and through their active presence they contribute to the liveliness and the negotiations of meaning and morality that constitute the locality. Developing and conducting a climate change

mitigation campaign with constant reference to community and in collaboration with residents the local officials are taking on the task of engendering a sense of shared identity and belonging and they are doing so with reference to global climate change. Campaigning then becomes moral action that makes locality in the sense that community building becomes part of what shapes the issues that volunteers address in their day-to-day engagement with the idea of climate change mitigation through living low-carbon lives. Paraphrasing Mike Hulme, we can say that the idea of climate change has the potential to alter notions of citizenship (Hulme 2009: p. xviii). In other words, how one responds to the call to change everyday life practices in the light of anthropogenic climate reflects on one's identity and agency as a citizen. In Dongping Lane climate change has become part of the enactment of community. The climate change mitigation activities of low-carbon life produce a community of campaigners by constructing participants and non-participants as different groups of people. The community of campaigners then becomes a community in the normative sense of being a group of people who enact their sense of belonging to the residential community through moral action directed toward climate change mitigation.

Not everyone in Dongping Lane has embraced low-carbon life. If we view the low-carbon life campaign as a form of community governance it reaches a limited part of the population comprised of those who are willing and able to participate. Outsiders to the campaign can then be divided into two groups: those who lack the understanding or motivation or simply do not get in contact with the campaign because insiders either do not meet them or assume they cannot be made part of the campaign. Following a dominant pattern of discursive marginalization, migrant workers are routinely placed in this category by campaigners. We might call this group the excluded. Another group, businesspeople and young professionals, are not drawn into the campaign and are generally not drawn into community affairs. We might call this group the excused. These groups are cultural constructs made by the campaign insiders and as such must be viewed as locally prevalent ideal types rather than products of official demographic and sociological analysis. Boundary talk about who is and who is not participating in the campaign and what their reasons are, is a vital part of the sense-making process of low-carbon life. I focus in this thesis on the community based climate change mitigation campaigning that goes on among retired people in Dongping Lane rather than on an examination on the nature and extent of climate change mitigation activities of the general population.

Residential communities are not the only collectives to which people may have a sense of belonging and they are not the only collective identities promoted by policy makers and other governing agents. City-making, understood as urban identity-promoting projects become implicated in the positioning of cities vis-à-vis other cities (Çinar & Bender 2007; Delman 2014). In "Worlding Cities", Aihwa Ong draws attention to the way cities become involved in networks of comparison as they strive for status as "world-cities" (Ong 2011). Dongping Lane is embedded in formal networks of comparison at community level through participation in various competitions for model status. Comparison with other communities contributes to the constitution of Hangzhou not only as an arena for competition to stand out but also as a unit of identification to which one can have a sense of belonging. Exemplary communities reflect on the status of Hangzhou vis-à-vis other Chinese cities. As a low-carbon community, Dongping Lane contributes to the image of Hangzhou as a green and livable city. The campaign activities can thus be seen as activities that feed into an urban imaginary of green, low-carbon city-making, which has developed in Hangzhou (Delman 2014). The low-carbon life campaign can be viewed as a propaganda effort not only in the sense of aiming to change everyday life practices of the residents but also in the sense of being communication intended to reach audiences beyond the community and promote the exemplary status of individuals and of the community.

Low-carbon life as an unspectacular spectacle

Global climate change cannot be perceived or grasped in its entirety. Connections between everyday life consumption and the chemical composition of the atmosphere have to be established for low-carbon life to make sense as a response to climate change. In the words of Bruno Latour: "Right now there is no path leading from my changing the light bulbs in my home straight to the Earth's destiny: such a stair has no step; such a ladder has no rung" (Latour 2011: p. 7). Global climate change understood as an issue of concern and motivation for action is an assemblage of natural processes and human activity and meaning-making (May 2011). In the low-carbon life campaign, a crucial step toward countering the tendency to inaction that may follow from the intangibility and invisibility of the connection between the local practices and global climate change, is that of focusing on things that are immediately visible and tangible (Giddens 2009). Following Ong & Collier, I view the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane as a site of technological, political and ethical renegotiation of what it means to be a citizen at the historical conjuncture of the reform era in China and the moment of concerted engagements with climate change in China as well as worldwide (Ong & Collier 2005). The practice of low-carbon life as it has developed from

its original schematic rendering laid out in the low-carbon life standard is a series of specific reductions and replacements of materials and actions.³

Specific reductions and replacements of materials and practices are only part of what the low-carbon life campaign is about. Another significant aspect of the campaign is that of practice as spectacle. The aim of the campaign is not only to bring about a reduction of the emission of greenhouse gases from the households of the local community, the campaign participants are also enacting citizenship by "going green to be seen".⁴ Environmentalist consumer behavior has been identified with a form of altruism that is – in the final analysis – not really altruistic because it serves as "costly signaling", showing that one can afford to generously do what is best for a larger collective rather than just for oneself (Griskevicius et al 2010).⁵ The campaigners' use of competitions and appeals to the emulation of exemplary individuals seem to suggest a focus on prestige. This would – perversely – cast low-carbon life consumption practices as a convoluted form of distinction through the "conspicuous consumption" that has been a focus of studies of consumption and identity since Veblen's "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (Veblen 2007[1899]). Surely there is prestige involved in being singled out as an exemplary individual, a model household or a low-carbon community, and that prestige certainly has social benefits, but the specific consumer practices of low-carbon life are not examples of "costly signaling" or environmentalist variants of "conspicuous consumption". On the contrary, conceived as economic and easy to do, the practices of low-carbon life are inconspicuous and jokingly characterized as expressions of "stinginess" by campaigners.

There is a tension between the sense of magnitude and gravity of the issue of global climate change conveyed by international climate scientists and policy-makers and the non-heroic, low-key responses of the campaigners in Dongping Lane. The unspectacular everydayness of the practices propagated in the low-carbon life campaign paradoxically becomes that which is spectacularized, as campaigners and media highlight the exemplary individuals of low-carbon life and their practices.

The prestige of being an exemplary low-carbon life campaigner is rather limited and the campaign's proposed changes to consumer practices are presented as neither costly nor troublesome. What is at

³ Mr. Zhu's admonition against lamb skewers is an example of such replacement. He is targeting one specific food, suggesting an easy replacement and giving more than one reason to do so.

⁴ This term is borrowed from an article in *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Griskevicius et al 2010).

⁵ This proposition rests on the assumption that environmentalist consumer behavior is costly because "green" products such as organic foods or energy-efficient appliances are more expensive than their conventional counterparts. The information material of the low-carbon life campaign suggests that residents who consider buying a car should choose a fuel efficient and *cheap* model (DPX 2009).

stake for campaigners, then, is not social differentiation through display of spending power or willingness to endure trouble. If we are to take the notion of exemplarity, as it informs the campaign, seriously, it may make more sense to focus on another motivation for generating visibility, namely trying to let exemplarity do its work of reproduction. Conceived this way, the campaign is not primarily about generating difference by singling out those who perform well, but rather about generating sameness by inviting imitation. Exemplars are not just supposed to be admired; they are also supposed to be followed, or at least to provoke reflection. The recognition of low-carbon life practices as meaningful responses to global climate change depends on a degree of common understanding among practitioners and witnesses of low-carbon life. Journalists play a crucial role in disseminating knowledge about the campaign, officials from various levels of the municipal administration visit to learn about the campaign, and the non-participating residents witness the slogans and other public manifestations of the campaign.

The problem of visualizing the invisible that is inherent in climate change mitigation campaigning may be understood through trans-historical juxtaposition with other campaigns involving assemblages of science, politics and ethics. It is not the first time that the retired residents have been part of a campaign calling for new or altered practices in the face of an invisible threat. The Patriotic Hygiene Campaign (爱国卫生运动) initiated in the 1950s was directed at the reduction or eradication of germs, which are no more visible to the human eye than are carbon dioxide emissions. As is the case in the present campaign the aims of that campaign were connected with other issues of concern to people and to the party-state at the time. Where patriotism and the perceived threat of foreign imperialism were harnessed as motivations for washing and cleaning in the Patriotic Hygiene Campaign (Rogaski 2004), the present campaign becomes connected with a new set of concerns that is meaningful to people's reasoning about their everyday lives in contemporary urban China. The campaigners' reasoning about low-carbon life draws on their concerns for health, comfort and convenience and their general quest for good and meaningful lives in a rapidly changing social and physical environment. In this regard, low-carbon life is similar to *yangsheng* (养生), the "life-nurturing" activities such as calisthenics, ballroom dancing, singing patriotic songs, tai chi and walking backwards practiced by middle aged and elderly Chinese in the parks of urban China (Farquhar & Zhang 2012).

Garbage sorting and recycling play central roles in the campaign. A focus on garbage can reveal connections between everyday life and greenhouse gas emissions from the burning of garbage or

the fuel needed to transport it to the landfill, but it can also be illustrative in a more indirect way. Greenhouse gas emissions are invisible to the human eye. This tricky material property of the targets of the campaign can be overcome by focusing on specific practices that involve visible and tangible things. Its tangibility and visibility makes garbage disposal well suited as a mental model for thinking about greenhouse gas emissions by drawing attention to the notion of limits and the notion of putting things in their right places. Based on the proposal by Mary Douglas that dirt is "matter out of place" and on more recent "garbage theory" building on that proposal, I suggest that the way officials and residents relate to garbage may hold clues to the general ideas about order and chaos that underlie their conception of low-carbon life (Douglas 1984 [1966]). One reason for the centrality of garbage sorting in the campaign may be that garbage bags, garbage bins and landfills are "good to think". Another reason may be that "putting things in their right place" is not merely dependent on cognitive operations of categorization but also on moral reasoning regarding what constitutes "the right thing to do". Joining a garbage sorting scheme that involves competing for distinction – as many residents in Dongping Lane have done – can be interpreted as an acceptance of seeing garbage as a domain of moral concern (Hawkins 2001).

Low-carbon life as cultural critique

The officials who promote the campaign claim that as a community with many retired residents, Dongping Lane is an especially well-suited place for running a climate change mitigation campaign targeting everyday life. The rationale behind this claim is twofold: firstly, the retired residents have experience of materially simple lifestyles that may be useful in the attempt at transforming the present high-carbon lifestyle into a low-carbon lifestyle, and secondly they have time to engage in this voluntary work because they don't have to study or work. From this perspective the campaign can be seen as an attempt to mobilize resources embodied in people who might otherwise easily be dismissed as marginal or irrelevant to the mainstream development of Chinese society. I engage this claim: that the experiences of older residents could be a useful intellectual resource for facing the present predicament of the anthropocene, by examining how the experiences of older residents figure in their reasoning about low-carbon life. By discussing what they focus on in recollection of earlier times, I aim to show what parts of their past become significant to their emerging understanding of low-carbon life.

Through a range of historical and cross-cultural comparisons residents and officials in Dongping Lane employ what Fuyuki Kurasawa calls "the ethnological imagination". This refers to specific

sense-making acts of imagination that juxtapose one's own life with temporal and spatial difference (Kurasawa 1996). In other words, local conceptions of new identities as practitioners of low-carbon life are shaped by comparison with images of what life in the community used to be like and images of how people in other parts of the world live their lives. Like one of the most infamous products of the ethnological imagination, Rousseau's "noble savage", the Others evoked through campaigners' discussions of low-carbon life, perform sense-making work by being paradoxically present even in their absence (Hetherington 2005). Examples of these Others include American consumers, German people disposing of garbage, as well as their own past selves, who participated in the mass-mobilization campaigns of the Mao era. Remembering Dongping Lane as a dirty and disorderly place and their own lives as frugal to the point of bitterness, the campaigners set up the Mao era as a time of vast difference from the present, which becomes a context for making sense of low-carbon life. Appadurai proposes that in the modern era imagination has become a collective social fact as it informs everyday life in ways that are shared and constitutive of practice and that its global connections mean it can make social change happen much faster than "the glacial pace of habitus" would allow for (Appadurai 1996: pp. 5-8). Images of desired life which is different from the actually realized life, and images of undesirable life of other times and places interpreted as possible futures for China, generate a sense of lack and a sense of danger respectively, both of which may propel action.

The residents of Dongping Lane have access to a wide range of representations of foreign places, people and practices through the media and they have become mobile to the extent that international travel is part of the experience of many campaigners. In addition to comparisons with their own past selves they engage in comparison with people in faraway places in their attempts to make sense of low-carbon life. Rather than a comparative study, then, my examination of the low-carbon life campaign is a local study of people who compare (Choy 2011). The evaluations that stem from the sense-making process of comparison are not unidirectional. It is not only low-carbon life which must be made sense of because of its novelty and claim to be important, but also the rapidly changing social environment in which the low-carbon life campaigners find themselves. Making sense of climate change becomes a way of making sense of social change as well, and of making sense of difference. In addition to Kurasawa's "ethnological imagination" which focuses on difference, their attempts to make sense of climate change involve the kind of orientation towards a global community of all of mankind, which Gerard Delanty refers to as "the cosmopolitan

imagination", and associates with "a transformation in self-understanding as a result of the engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty 2008: p. 218).

As climate change becomes an issue of concern, the residents of Dongping Lane find themselves placed in a new situation in which the lifestyle of relative comfort and affluence they have recently embraced is being called into question. It can be seen as representing an attempt at re-moralization of areas of life that used to be public and highly moralized in the Mao era but had become increasingly private in recent decades. The experience of living together at specific historical junctures has important implications for social memory (Jing 1996). The retired campaign volunteers in Dongping Lane have very similar experiences of youth in the Mao era and middle age in the reform era. In the process of making sense of low-carbon life the experience of vastly different conditions of life in other times comes to serve as an important intellectual resource. Many of the low-carbon life campaigners are in their 60s and 70s. They have lived in the community for several decades and they have seen it change with the times. The process of coming to terms with living in a new era is not new to the residents of Dongping Lane. The early years of the People's Republic were also conceptualized as a new beginning, and the same was true of the beginning of the reform era in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Each new beginning called for the making of new kinds of people (Cheng 2009). The changes in notions of citizenship brought about by urban reform in the late 1990s and the process of becoming low-carbon life campaigners in the 2010s are thus informed by earlier experiences that have made people in the community familiar with the notion of leaving an old era behind, entering a new one and becoming transformed in the process. Engaging the memories of the past and stories of faraway places that the residents find relevant for making sense of low-carbon life, my analysis aims to elicit which parts of their experience they treat as intellectual or embodied resources in their attempts to craft enjoyable and moral lives in early 21st century urban China.

Research question

While the sense-making processes as such may be similar to earlier processes of coming to terms with new issues of concern, the content of low-carbon life is new and complex and its material properties connects it with so many parts of local social, practical and cultural worlds that it has the potential to alter the ways people conceive of and live their everyday lives. Rather than starting out from the view that the idea of climate change will be appropriated by local culture making low-carbon life nothing but another round of something old and familiar, I approach low-carbon life in

Dongping Lane as something potentially novel, taking my cue from social theorists such as Ulrich Beck (Beck 2010) and Bruno Latour (Latour 2011), who argue that the predicament of the anthropocene requires new ways of conceptualizing and practicing social life. The same sense that climate change is a genuinely new problem that prompts people in Dongping Lane to discover and develop its possible meanings, also prompts me to adopt an explorative approach to the study of their engagements.

It is entirely possible; perhaps even likely, that the concept of low-carbon life will fail to capture the imagination of wider publics in China, but that is not a yardstick by which I propose to measure it here. Recognizing climate change as a condition of life to be interpreted and confronted in myriad ways rather than a single problem to be solved by technical means alone means leaving open the possibility that a project such as the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane does address the predicament of anthropocene in a meaningful way, and that in doing so it may develop ideas that could be applied in other social and institutional contexts. The thesis is a study of small beginnings that may or may not be followed by more sustained climate engagements. The novelty of climate change as an issue paired with the relatively wide interpretive space that has emerged as a consequence of the non-controlling approach to campaigning of the officials initiating the campaign, means that those citizens who do engage it, have to learn about it and form their perceptions of it even as they begin applying campaign prescriptions in their own lives. My fieldwork in Dongping Lane exposed me to a group of people that, while they had been campaigning for more than a year, were in the process of finding out what their campaign effort was about and what it could be about. From a relatively simple and schematized form developed at the outset they were developing a complex set of ideas and practices by, to some extent, making up low-carbon life as they went along. In this setting, sense-making becomes a crucial type of campaign work. The overall research question that this thesis addresses then becomes the following:

How do the campaign participants in Dongping Lane make sense of the idea of climate change?

The short answer, of which the entire thesis is an elaboration, is that they take up and further develop the idea that a new comprehensive social imaginary informing the quest for good and meaningful lives in 21st century urban China must include a concern for global climate change. This concern must be embedded in changes to certain everyday life practices, and these changes will be beneficial to other domains of life than climate change mitigation.

The primary unit of analysis in this thesis is thus the sense-making processes of the low-carbon life campaign. When the material and social environment remains homogenous and stable, explaining why things happen the way they do need not be a pressing concern. Change and difference, however, call for explanation. Calls to embrace and seek to effect change, such as the low-carbon life campaign must be backed up by claims about rationales for the proposed changes. It must answer the question: *why should we do things differently?* The sense-making of the campaign includes contextualizing, comparing, connecting, exemplifying and evaluating. Sense-making addresses more than what low-carbon life is or how it works by directing attention to the question of why people get involved in it. Focusing on the sense-making of the low-carbon life campaign, rather than on the campaign activities per se, I aim to show how sense-making connects the campaign practices it is applied to, with local understandings of how to live good lives in the dual sense of living morally and enjoying life.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter 2, *Fieldwork in Dongping Lane*, offers a description of the community followed by an account of the fieldwork process and a discussion of the methods of the study.

Chapter 3, *First Encounters with Low-Carbon Life*, describes the campaign at its outset, offering an analysis of the early schematized version of low-carbon life that emerged from the first stages of campaigning. The chapter is structured around the presentation of three texts produced at the outset of the campaign that have, to varying degrees and in different ways, come to inform later campaign efforts.

Chapter 4, *Building a Low-Carbon Community*, examines the low-carbon life campaign in the context of the state-sponsored project of community building (社区建设). Exploring local expressions of changing notions of citizenship through a focus on ideas about volunteering the chapter situates the campaign within the wider framework of the social imaginary of civilized community life. As responses to the requirements of low-carbon life become part of what it means to be a proper citizen, the campaign is conceived as a confrontation with the twin modern malaises of social fragmentation and environmental destruction. The chapter explores how this connection of concerns is played out in the community and suggests that campaigning serves to empower the residents by enabling moral action.

Chapter 5, *Campaigning in the Material World*, focuses on the practical changes to consumption proposed by the campaign and examines how the residents apply them in their everyday lives. Revolving around notions of materiality and visibility, the chapter explores how low-carbon life is enacted and understood through relating to, and interacting with, various material things such as air conditioners, refrigerators and garbage. Drawing on theoretical approaches to materiality that focus on the non-social building blocks of social construction, the chapter discusses the consequences of the various material affordances of the things that becomes part of the low-carbon life campaign.

Chapter 6, *Connecting Concerns*, deals with the intersections of different motivations for taking up low-carbon life practices. Taking the relative absence of climate science and statements about global climate change in local discussions as the point of departure, the chapter explores how residents combine various motivations when arguing for the virtues of specific low-carbon life practices. Their interpretations of low-carbon life represent local ways of knowing the world that resist clear-cut categorization of issues, as well as hierarchies of motivation with climate change at the pinnacle. The chapter examines how low-carbon life, through association with the notion of cultivating good habits, is understood as a series of health practices and hobby-like activities.

Chapter 7, *Campaigning in a New Era*, examines how the historical experience of China and the personal experiences residents come to matter in the campaign as past and present situations are compared by campaigners. The chapter examines how a generalized image of the Mao era becomes an "other" of comparisons that inform the way present day interactions and concerns are understood. Contrasting campaign methods, notions of exemplarity and interpretive space available then and now, the chapter mirrors the ways in which the campaigners make sense of low-carbon life by placing it in the context of their experiences of campaigning and everyday life in the Mao era.

Chapter 8, *Low-Carbon Life as Cultural Critique*, attends to the question of how the ways campaigners imagine the relations between various people and places in and outside of the community become implicated in the process of making sense of low-carbon life. The first part of the chapter deals with comparisons of various groups of people within the community, examining how campaigners draw age, gender and geographical origin into discussions of low-carbon life. The last part of the chapter addresses comparisons with other places and discusses the universalizing claims of low-carbon life through the concept of cosmopolitanism.

The conclusion sums up the main ideas, arguments and findings of the thesis.

2. Fieldwork in Dongping Lane

The door to the community office is open. An old man is sitting on a beige faux leather sofa talking to a woman who is wearing a red sweater, black sweatpants and tennis shoes. As I step into the office accompanied by two Chinese research assistants the woman gets up, welcomes us and asks the old man to come back later. She introduces herself as Du Juan, director of Dongping Lane Community. Along with ten other officials she is responsible for the public administration of the community. We have an appointment to interview some residents and officials in the community and she immediately volunteers to be the first person we talk to. Her close daily contact with residents is underscored several times during our conversation as she has to ask people who enter the office to come back when our interview with her is over. The community office is lively and noisy. Pop tunes from ringing cell phones, a crackling portable radio and three or four loud conversations that sometimes get so loud, that they sound more like arguments to the untrained ear, float through the open doors and windows.



A conversation with the Director Du in the alley outside the office (photo: Zhang Liyan)

Director Du tells us about the campaign. She is smiling and there is enthusiasm in her voice as she highlights a number of examples of residents who have been especially active, contributing to the campaign from both local and national media. All of them are elderly women and they are known for producing and exhibiting various objects made out of recycled materials. One of these women, Auntie Sun, has become a campaign icon of sorts. A number of local and national media have portrayed her as one of the main driving forces of the campaign and a person of initiative who gets many good ideas for recycling and saving energy.⁶ When I mention that I have read about Auntie Sun back in Denmark and that I find her ideas interesting, Director Du reacts by grabbing the phone and calling Auntie Sun. A few minutes later she is sitting in front of us telling us about her recycling ideas and her volunteer work.

Motivation

The first connection I made between China and environmental issues was sensory. In April 1999 the first thing I noticed as I got out of Beijing Airport at the beginning of my first visit to China was the strong smell of diesel and dust proclaiming that I had arrived in a heavily polluted city. Since then, the environment has been a recurrent theme in both my academic and personal engagements with China. On the personal side after a two year stint in Urumqi, one of the most polluted cities on the planet, air pollution had come between China and me as it was a major reason why I decided not to settle there. On the academic side I was drawn to the budding environmental movement in China, which in the 1990s and early 2000s was seen by observers as a frontrunner of civil society.⁷ During research from my MA thesis I came across Kay Milton's book "Loving Nature", which tackles one of the burning questions of our time. "Why isn't everyone an environmentalist? Why do some people care more about the future of the natural world than others do? Why do some people actively protect nature while others, by indifference or intent, are prepared to see it destroyed?" (Milton 2002: p. 1).

Shifting the focus from local pollution to global climate change, which is the issue addressed by the campaigners in Dongping Lane, a variation of Milton's burning question could be this: *why do these particular people in urban China care about global climate change while others around them seem not to care at all?* A simple answer would be that they have been made aware and have been told to care by agents of the powerful party-state and being, as one campaigner described his generation,

⁶ See for example Xu 2010.

⁷ See for example: Brook & Frolic (1997): Civil Society in China, Knup (1997): Environmental NGOs in China: An Overview, Ho (2001): Greening Without Conflict? Environmentalism, NGOs and Civil Society in China, Young (2001): Green groups explore the boundaries of advocacy

obedient and well-behaved⁸ they have followed the call. Other answers are possible. Mike Hulme's assertion that the idea of climate change has the potential to alter individual and collective strivings casts the gravity of the issue itself as a force for social change (Hulme 2009). Following this logic the campaigners can be seen as frontrunners of wider social change that is to come. Another possibility is that the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is not really about climate change, and that a focus on climate change is used by various agents to further other agendas.

In this study I opt for a combination of these approaches. The campaign in Dongping Lane addresses climate change in ways, which suggest that a group of people are ready to alter their strivings for their personal goals, but the campaign is clearly not only about climate change. The task of fieldwork in the community then becomes to find out what it is also about and how that is or is not connected with climate change. Investigating the campaign in its local context can then be a way of examining Hulme's claim that climate change has the potential to alter how people strive toward their individual and collective goals (Hulme 2009). The retired residents of Dongping Lane are striving for the goal of living good and meaningful lives in early 21st century China. Fieldwork in the community can illuminate how ideas about climate change are articulated and put into practice by ordinary citizens in their daily lives. From policy studies and institutionally focused studies we have some knowledge of how government agents in China address climate change.⁹ The objective of the study is not to gauge the level of engagement in climate change mitigation among common people in China, but rather, inspired by Milton's questions, to ask what shapes the engagements take among those for whom climate change becomes a matter of concern. This study offers a view of a group of engaged ordinary people who have become involved in an "unspectacular spectacle" as they campaign for climate change mitigation through small changes to consumer practices of everyday life.

Selecting the field site

I selected Dongping Lane as the site for researching citizen responses to climate change initiatives because of the low-carbon life campaign that I knew was taking place there. Having read an article online (Xie & Luo 2010) about a competition to become local Low-Carbon Model Household (低碳家庭示范户), I was curious to find out how local citizens responded to the idea of confronting

⁸ Besides obedient (听话) he used the term *laoshi* 老实 which besides the meanings 'nice' and 'well-behaved' can also connote simple-mindedness and naïveté.

⁹ See for example: Qi et al (2008): Translating a global issue into local priority: China's local government response to climate change; Gilley (2013): Authoritarian environmentalism and China's response to climate change

global climate change by staging a competition among community residents. Being a designated low-carbon model community, Dongping Lane cannot be seen as representative of how climate change is addressed by the citizens of urban China in general. Instead models can, as Thøgersen and Heimer point out serve as a counter image of things that do not work in other places, thus directing attention to urgent problems in Chinese society (Thøgersen & Heimer 2006: pp. 14-15). The lack of decisive action as response to global climate change is such an urgent problem. Dongping Lane is not only a model community; it is also a pilot community, which is to say that the local focus on climate change mitigation as the defining dimension of community building is conceived as an experiment by the community officials who carry it out and by their superiors in the municipal administration. The low-carbon life campaign shows possibility and small beginnings that may or may not become replicated elsewhere, depending on the evaluation of the campaign.

I had two reasons for situating the study in Hangzhou. The first reason was the comprehensive low-carbon city strategy promoted by the municipal government which includes a focus on consumption among citizens (Delman 2014). This ties community campaigning into city-wide developments and makes it likely that community officials take climate change mitigation campaigning seriously as it becomes part of the evaluation of their work (Delman 2014: pp. 251-252). The second reason was the cooperation between Copenhagen University and Zhejiang University, which meant that I could have a local institutional affiliation that would make entry into the field easier, because of the legitimacy a local university could bestow on me and my project. Being affiliated with Zhejiang University's School of International Studies, I was able to recruit two of its talented and energetic young master students as research assistants, who could facilitate my entry and initial research in the community. They were recommended to me by their supervisor Professor Wu Zongjie, who also facilitated my stays in China by providing me with formal invitations. I was fortunate to be welcomed into the group of PhD and MA students around Professor Wu and benefited greatly from attending their weekly seminars.

Selecting an urban residential community as the fieldwork site for studying climate change mitigation was motivated by a number of concerns. Following urban reform in the 1990s, residential communities have come in focus both as units of organization of urban life and as units of attachment and sense of belonging (Bray 2005; Heberer 2009). This means that residential communities to some extent are taking over the roles that work units have played in the lives of urban citizens in China. Situating a study of climate change campaigning in a residential

community then creates opportunities for examining connections between the concept of low-carbon life and the party-state-sponsored project of community building. Fieldwork focusing on a campaign in an urban residential community presents opportunities to observe how local engagements with global climate change are played out in the interaction between citizens and representatives of the Chinese party-state. Interviewing community officials and residents as well as observing their interactions allows for an examination of what happens when climate change becomes a matter of concern and two specific groups of people come together in the attempt to translate their concerns into local action. Fieldwork in the community offers the opportunity to examine what happens when a climate change mitigation initiative encounters the other concerns that inform and motivate the strivings of retirees in urban China and how the various concerns connect and interact to reshape consumer practices and social imaginaries.

I carried out fieldwork in the community over two periods: three months in the autumn of 2011 in the company of two research assistants from Zhejiang University and five months in the summer and autumn of 2012 mostly by myself. These two rounds of fieldwork were followed by a brief visit in October 2013. The fieldwork material used in this thesis comes mostly from interviews,¹⁰ group discussions, observation, documents and casual talk with officials and residents. As an anthropologist endeavoring to examine local processes of sense-making around the connections between climate change and everyday life, I talked mostly to people who were involved in the low-carbon life campaign. Rather than interviewing a random sample of community residents to find out what an "average" resident thought of the campaign, I wanted to find out how those who were involved and interested practiced and articulated low-carbon life as they understood it. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish between interviews and informal talk. Formal, recorded interviews formed one important part of the fieldwork, but of equal, if not greater, importance was the time spent hanging around in the community office talking to the local officials, casual talk with random residents in the community park, or visits to the homes of residents showing me their practical application of the various energy saving tips of the campaign. I also participated in the campaign by giving a lecture about climate change mitigation in Denmark¹¹ as well as by giving interviews to local journalists and by discussing climate change mitigation with the officials and

¹⁰ We recorded 37 interviews in 2011. The typical length was around one hour and 15 minutes, but some were as short as ten minutes and some ran well over two hours. In 2012 I recorded 39 interviews, most of them between one and two hours. Most of the interviews were transcribed by four different research assistants (including the two who accompanied me in 2011) and a few were transcribed by me. A dozen people who were the key personnel of the campaign were interviewed several times.

¹¹ The lecture earned me the designation of community volunteer and my name is now displayed on a plaque in the lecture hall at the community office building Red Harbor (红色港湾).

residents on a daily basis. The fieldwork data that I draw on in the subsequent analytical chapters is composed of this mixture of written and spoken, formal and informal sources of information.¹²



Interview with an informant at the office of Dongping Lane Community (photo: Xiao Li)

Many of the practices of low-carbon life are inconspicuous and take place in private. This makes them difficult to observe. In some cases low-carbon life consists of abstaining from doing things making it even trickier to observe. It is possible that some residents were better at presenting low-carbon life than practicing it,¹³ but rather than treat this as a source of bias and distortion of findings that must be overcome I suggest it is best seen as a condition of life underlying not just ethnographic interviews, but all human communication. In their study of the "life-nurturing"

¹² Following conventional anthropological practice, rather than a more sociological approach, I do not number interviews or write dates in brackets after quotes from informants, but attempt instead to integrate the specific information supplied by informants into the text while providing the necessary contextualization to make it clear which points are theirs and which are my own.

¹³ Campaigners were aware that some were better preachers than practitioners. One resident referred to this as "saying nice words" or paying lip-service (说漂亮话).

yangsheng (养生) activities in the parks of Beijing, Farquhar and Zhang remarked that, "[w]hen they give us advice about diet or exercise, this may not be advice that they themselves follow. We can be fairly certain, however, that they are at least trying to make sense (Farquhar & Zhang 2012: p. 174). This assertion informs my approach to the interview material. As parts of a collective project of sense-making statements about low-carbon life made by individual campaigners are not interesting first and foremost as potentially true or false statements about their own low-carbon life practices, but rather as words, which contribute, through sense-making, to the emerging understandings of the concept and practices of low-carbon life.

Description of Dongping Lane

The small residential community Dongping Lane lies about ten minutes walk from West Lake, the scenic spot that is Hangzhou's main claim to fame. The community is circumscribed by an elevated road and a canal to the east, a road with heavy traffic to the south, a narrow, tree-lined one way street with convenience stores, cafés, hotels and small restaurants to the west and a bustling shopping street with high-rise buildings, fashion stores and banks to the north. Despite its location in the middle of the busy downtown area the community has the atmosphere of a quiet urban village. Most of the buildings in the community are residential blocks, many of them housing barbershops, greengrocers and restaurants on the ground floor. In the western part of the community there are two indoor markets, one for electronics and one for traditional Chinese medicine. The 5522 people living in Dongping Lane are registered in 2004 households (DPX 2009). The defining characteristic of the population is the large proportion of relatively old people. Two thirds of the residents are retired. I did not inquire directly into questions of people's income or general wealth. However, observation of household items in informants' homes as well as their talk about such things as car use and international travel suggests that most of them are neither very wealthy nor very poor. Air conditioners and large television sets are found in most of their homes, and domestic or international leisure travel was sometimes a reason that I could not get hold of informants. Most of my informants were married couples living in two-person households and a few were widows. In most cases their children lived elsewhere in Hangzhou, some of them in newly built high-rise communities. There was a lot of talk about the rising number of migrants moving into the community, but the people I got to know were mostly long-time residents. There were four other

foreigners living there at the time: a couple from Israel studying traditional Chinese medicine, their son who attended primary school and a young Frenchman married to a local resident.¹⁴



Apartment blocks in Dongping Lane (photo: Ane Cecilie Vendelbo Blichfeldt)

Dongping Lane is an old community in the sense that its layout and some of its buildings predate the urban reform of the 1990s when the former residential units (小区) associated with work units (单位) were merged into larger communities (社区). The primary connotation of this designation as old, is that the community is unlike the many newly built high-rise communities, populated by younger people with higher incomes and more dealings with housing companies than with the representatives of the party-state, who maintain a fairly prominent position in Dongping Lane. The housing in the community used to belong to state owned enterprises but the apartments are privately owned today. Many buildings in the community were built or renovated in the mid-1990s. In the eastern part of the community there are older two-storey houses with white-washed walls and black tiled roofs, renovated and preserved. These buildings date back to pre-revolutionary times and have

¹⁴ I got to know the Israeli couple and their son, but never actually met the Frenchman. The local official responsible for household registration told me about him.

been designated as cultural heritage, some of them marked with plaques providing information about famous past residents.

At the center of the community lies a small square lined with trees and bushes. Its official name is Dongping Lane Community Fitness and Recreation Center (东平巷社区健身休闲中心). Residents refer to it simply as "the little park" (小公园). People meet there to walk their dogs, exercise, play, chat and relax in the shade. Sometimes there are farmers selling their produce or health workers offering services such as blood pressure checkups. There are benches, brightly colored machines and racks for light exercises, and small pavilion-like covered sections providing shade and shelter from sun and rain. There is also a ping pong table which is often in use for its original purpose as well as for card games or for washing clothes. Most of the apartment buildings in the community are seven stories high, the grey concrete facades punctuated by blue-toned windows and laundry hanging from bamboo poles. There are a few cars parked here and there, but the alleys are narrow and most people enter and leave the community on foot through one of its ten entrances. None of the entrances are gated or formally guarded, but the watchful eyes of idle old residents register most comings and goings, and there is an organized group of volunteer neighborhood watchmen patrolling in the evenings. On virtually all corners there are pairs of green and yellow garbage bins. The community is generously staffed with street sweepers in orange uniforms keeping everything neat and tidy and it is nearly impossible to walk around for more than a few minutes without meeting one of them. The square and the alleys are remarkably clean. Many of the buildings have creeping vines on the walls or on racks.

On walls around the community posters advertise garbage sorting and describe the work of the local officials. In a little alley behind the park lies Dongping Lane Community Work Station (东平巷社区工作站). Here a couple of handfuls of community officials work to administer the community and provide services for the residents. Opposite the office lies Red Harbor (红色港湾), a building with offices and a lecture hall shared by the local Communist Party branch¹⁵ and Hubin Street Office (湖滨街道), the administrative unit immediately above Dongping Lane Community. These descriptions represent the ethnographic present of this study which is the period from 2011 to 2012,

¹⁵ Nine of the low-carbon life campaigners that I interviewed are members of the local party-branch which has a total of 15 members (http://www.shangcheng.gov.cn/xxgk_template/content_template/article_display.jsp?messageID=20110630000009)

when I visited and stayed in the community.¹⁶ Around the time I was leaving, the officials were preparing to move into larger, newly renovated and better equipped premises nearby.



One of the entrances to Dongping Lane Community (photo: Zhang Liyan)

Led by the tandem of Party Secretary Zhu and Director Du, both middle aged women, the community office is a lively place. In terms of administration and public service it is at the heart of Dongping Lane Community. Humble and somewhat messy by northern European standards, the office has a friendly, often loud, almost homely atmosphere as a steady trickle of citizens and colleagues in and out of the open doors keeps the staff busy in the early day. After a two-hour siesta around noon when the office is closed, the workload tends to ease off and I found this a good time to hang around the office chatting with the officials and getting a more rounded impression of the place than that conveyed by brief to-the-point visits and formal interviews. In the beginning of the

¹⁶ The campaign began in late 2009 and is still running.

fieldwork period our main contact in the community was Director Du, who was enthusiastic about presenting the low-carbon life campaign, but also very busy with other things. Gradually over the first couple of weeks in the community the center of gravity shifted and Little Zheng, a young official responsible for environment and hygiene became our primary contact in the community. In the early stages of fieldwork we drew attention from the leaders of the community office as well as officials from Hubin Street Office, the administrative unit directly above Dongping Lane Community in the municipal administrative hierarchy, but in later stages we had more contact with the ordinary community officials. This reflects a transformation in local perceptions of our roles in the community as we went from being seen as visitors representing Zhejiang University to being familiar faces that had become associated with their campaign efforts. It also reflects a development in my role as a person of general interest and novelty value as a foreigner to someone associated with low-carbon life.

The world in a drop of water

"I don't want to talk to those two little devils!" Mr. Lü apparently did not like my research assistants very much. Occurring a few weeks after our first visit to the community his refusal to give an interview represented our first significant experience of resistance towards our fieldwork effort. Mr. Lü works as garbage inspector in the community, a special position established in connection with the garbage sorting competition that is part of the low-carbon life campaign. He seemed like someone who could be a key informant, but he refused our request for an interview. Sensing that the outnumbering of three to one in our advantage may have contributed to his dismissive attitude, I stayed in the community and approached him one day after the two research assistants had gone back to the university campus. I had an idea that what infuriated Lü was the combination of brashness and abstract social science parlance that had characterized their attempt to approach him. Arguing that we could just start out by having a casual talk, I managed to talk to him despite his argument that we could not communicate because I was an intellectual (*知识分子*) and he was a common person (*老百姓*) and the gap between our ways of talking was too wide. The difference between common people and intellectuals, he explained, is that whereas in a drop of water common people see just that: a drop of water, intellectuals seeing a drop of water will see in it the whole world.

Reactions such as that of Mr. Lü are best treated not as problems getting in the way of fieldwork, but as fieldwork material in itself, and interesting material at that. With his old-fashioned light grey

Zhongsan suit (中山装) and his wide brimmed straw hat, Mr. Lü looked like a rather stereotypical textbook depiction of a representative of "the common people", but his attempts to project an image of distance to intellectuals was betrayed by the eagerness with which he ended up sharing his personal theories about modern Chinese history and by his willingness to tutor me on "how the world really works". His image of the world in a drop of water can be taken as a metaphor for the whole enterprise of carrying out a locally-based ethnographic study. Lü became a key informant and I will return to his accounts of things in subsequent chapters as they became helpful in the analysis of low-carbon life. Here the main point is that our encounter with him encapsulates a number of the main methodological issues of the study.



Mr. Lü, garbage inspector in Dongping Lane (photo: Chen Lo)

Despite his key position in the campaign, Lü was a relatively marginal person socially. He did not live in the community and campaigners who were well aware of his presence as garbage inspector did not know his name. My friendship with Lü represented a minority alliance in which the ethnographer develops ties with people who are also in a position as relative outsiders. I was,

however, not entirely an outsider to the community. Living in an apartment there technically made me a resident of Dongping Lane and officials would often talk to me in a way that implied that I could be categorized alongside visiting journalists and experts as a partner in the wider project of community-building in urban China. Close connections with community officials and the small core of well-known volunteers known as low-carbon doyens (低碳达人) served to project an image of me as a partial insider.

Mr. Lü's drop of water can be read as a suggestion that the interpretive work of determining relevant contexts of social action and meaning, belongs to intellectuals. It can also be read as a warning against arrogance. For common people the world simply is what it is. Lü is performing what amounts to a criticism of anthropological holism, which runs parallel to that offered by Anna Tsing, who argues that worlding understood as the art of placing things in context is what anthropologists do, but that others do it too and accordingly anthropologists must perform their worldings in a reflected manner that takes into account the implicit worldings performed by those whose social lives they propose to study (Tsing 2010). The contexts that I propose for low-carbon life in Dongping Lane emerge from the encounter between the contexts that I assumed would be relevant for understanding the campaign and the contexts the people of Dongping Lane place it in when they practice low-carbon life or explain it to curious outsiders. One effective method of contextualization is the use of examples. Examples tend to take the form of narratives rather than abstract analyses and as such require informants to establish figures that act and a backdrop against which things happen. During interviews I have been trying to heed the following piece of advice offered by Kevin O'Brien: "In my experience, the most important statement to interject when speaking with Chinese officials or ordinary citizens is 'please give me an example' (*qing ju yige lizi*)" (O'Brien 2006: p. 31). Often informants offered examples of the points they were making without me having to ask and these examples can serve as indicators of the contexts that campaigners find relevant to their understanding of low-carbon life.

Mr. Lü's image of the world in a drop of water captures the ethnographic trope of the village or local community as a microcosm. It is always tempting but also problematic to view events in a locality as specific instantiations of a general process. Campaigners have managed to gain status of exemplary individuals and campaign has generated an image of the community as an exemplary place. This does not mean, however, that individuals and communities all over Hangzhou are following their example. The campaign is conceived as a pilot project. It does not embody an

existing norm or average, but is instead meant to show and examine possibilities. As such it offers a view of how climate change can be engaged through applying the concept of low-carbon life to everyday life practices. The campaign is explorative in nature and may represent the early beginning of a more general development, but that is by no means a certain outcome. The informants were in a situation that to some extent paralleled mine. They were in a process of trying to understand and operationalize the concept of low-carbon life. It was not always clear to informants what the point of the campaign was. Rather than asking the right questions to make the informants initiate me into a mysterious world they could serve as guides to, then, the objective was to some extent to explore the concept of low-carbon life together with them to find out what it could mean and how it could inform their everyday life practices.

Much of the scholarly writing on climate change and society that has been produced so far focuses on such topics as people's knowledge and understanding of climate science, the communication and popularization of climate science, the ongoing battle between mainstream climate scientists and climate skeptics, and international climate politics (See for example: Oreskes & Conway 2010; Reynolds et al. 2010; Fløttum & Dahl 2012). These themes played miniscule roles in the fieldwork situation. A review of the emerging literature on climate change and society had sensitized me to some questions that came up in the field, but most of what the campaigners found relevant in their presentations and discussions of the campaign concerned other issues than the ones outlined above. Mr. Lü's image of the world in a drop of water reflects the idea that our agenda as academics is different from that of the local residents in Dongping Lane; that we are interested in getting to know about their everyday lives not just for its own sake, but for the purpose of illuminating larger public issues.

Relevant contexts for the low-carbon life campaign cannot be established through a priori reasoning but must emerge from the meaning-making acts of imagination that came about in the many encounters between us as fieldworkers and the residents and officials as informants. As Kevin O'Brien points out, flexibility is the key to letting informants rather than pre-conceived ideas show us what matters most in local people's lives. What informants keep talking about will sometimes be unexpected phenomena or topics that could not have been foreseen by research design (O'Brien 2006: p. 29). Looking at the patterns that emerged from our interviews in the first round of fieldwork in Dongping Lane one of the things that seemed to matter to informants was the

connectedness of low-carbon life; the idea that it tied together many concerns and could not be seen as an isolated environmental or climate change related concept.

Getting access

Getting access to Dongping Lane as a fieldwork site was fairly easy. Our affiliation with Zhejiang University as well as our status as students was instrumental in defining an identity that made our visits and the questions we asked legitimate and unthreatening to the officials at the community office. Our experience of easily gaining access was most likely, at least partly, due to the fact that many people in China are familiar with the concept of fieldwork-like social investigations (Hansen 2006: p. 82). After a phone call from one of my research assistants who explained that we were interested in interviewing residents and community officials about the low-carbon life campaign, the community director invited us to come to the community to conduct research. After we had gained access to the community the next questions regarding access emerged: what documents and other written material regarding the campaign would local officials be willing to share with us? Who in the community would be willing to speak with us?

In contrast with younger people who are busy with their work, pensioners are often at home or in local public spaces during the day and they have time to talk to such people as visiting anthropologists. In this regard we were facing a situation similar to that of the local officials at the community office. Just like us, they find that those who are most willing to interact with them are pensioners. In terms of social groups the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is first and foremost a campaign among pensioners. This striking parallel in the reach of the foreign researcher and the reach of the local representatives of the party-state means that while the informants we met through our contacts at the community office were clearly not a random sample of the population, they could be expected to be campaign participants who had interesting and informative things to say about the concept and practices of low-carbon life. The community officials were gatekeepers in the sense that we needed their consent and cooperation in order to carry out research in the community. The primary restraining factor regarding access to interviewees was that Little Zheng was a very busy man and could not always find the time to help facilitate interviews. Most informants were unwilling to help us with "snowball sampling" by establishing contact with friends and neighbors involved in low-carbon life, insisting instead that we rely on the community office for finding interviewees. Our formal interviews were supplemented with many informal talks with

various people in the community. Through "guerilla interviewing"¹⁷ in the community park in the beginning of the fieldwork period we established that many people in the community related little to climate change and that many of the people who used the park for recreational purposes had never heard about the concept of low-carbon life. Since the object of our study was the campaign rather than the community, we focused mostly on the people who participated in the campaign.

The community officials and the retired residents participating in the campaign work together, but form two distinct social groups. The community officials are younger and better educated than most residents and they live outside the community in other parts of Hangzhou. The two groups come together in their shared identity as campaigners agreeing to focus on the same global topic and "talk across difference" (Tsing 2005). Their different positions mean that they can answer different questions regarding the low-carbon life campaign. The retired low-carbon life campaigners have many decades of experience and this opens up the possibility of drawing their memories of everyday life as well as political mobilization in earlier times into the analysis. In contrast to the officials who are mostly too young to appreciate the full vastness of the difference produced by China's decades of rapid development, the retired residents can generate meaning by juxtaposing their life in present day urban China with their experiences of the High Socialist era of the mid-20th century.

My position in the field

During my first stay in Hangzhou in the autumn of 2011 I lived in an apartment near Zhejiang University and commuted to Dongping Lane. This was an advantage in terms of being near colleagues at the School of International Studies, but had obvious drawbacks as it imposed limits on the time I could spend in the community. The rationale behind this choice was that I had not yet settled on doing single-sited fieldwork and did not know if Dongping Lane would become my primary fieldwork site. As a consequence of the distance – it was a one- to two-hour bus ride depending on traffic conditions – appointments and formal interviews to a large extent came to structure those first three months. My second stay in the summer and autumn of 2012 was different. I rented an apartment in Dongping Lane, three minutes' walk from the community office. This allowed for more immersion in community life and for more frequent visits to the office. The second stay made me a familiar face in the community, making it easier to strike up conversation and to hang out without rousing suspicion. My third visit in the autumn of 2013 was brief and I

¹⁷ The term 'guerilla interviewing, coined by Thomas Gold, denotes the method of selecting people for interviews by approaching them in public spaces and engaging in idle conversation. Gold (1989) cited in Solinger 2006.

didn't conduct much fieldwork apart from checking up on a few facts and getting updates about the changes that had occurred while I was away. In the period from my first to my third visit there were a handful of changes in the office staff, one key informant passed away and another retired and moved out of the community. When I visited in 2013, Director Du had moved on to a new position in the Hubin Street Office administration (湖滨街道), and she had been replaced as director by Little Zheng. Hanging out at the office allowed me to observe much of their daily work, little of which had to do with the low-carbon life campaign. Local events were also important in structuring some of my observations. I attended neighborhood day festivities, lectures at Red Harbor and excursions. I was interviewed by local reporters and got the opportunity to interview visiting officials and experts cooperating with the community office.¹⁸

The first three months of fieldwork in 2011 were to some extent collaborative work. The two research assistants from Zhejiang University who accompanied me were a great help in contacting people and contributing to interviews with their own questions. Bringing along the research assistants brought with it a great opportunity to reflect on the fieldwork with academic colleagues, who had witnessed the same situations as me in the community. Among the drawbacks of being a group of three visitors were the effect of crowding the interviewees and the difficulty of engaging in casual observation and conversation. In 2012 when I lived in Dongping Lane and conducted fieldwork without assistants it was much easier to engage in more informal forms of observation and interviewing.

Part of the sense-making around the low-carbon life campaign can be read as a form of cultural critique in the sense that the familiarity of taken-for-granted practices is unsettled by the juxtaposition of ideas and practices not usually encountered together. My presence in the community could serve to highlight cultural differences. Foreigners or strangers in any country or community are catalysts of conversations about local characteristics. In my case reflections about difference did not only have to do with a generic notion of "Chinese characteristics" but also with the development of the concept of low-carbon life. During interviews and informal conversation I became someone who could provide examples of difference which could be used for cross-cultural juxtapositions meant to inspire change by unsettling local images of normality (Marcus & Fischer

¹⁸ I also witnessed more singular events, most notably the only open political protest I saw in my time in Hangzhou. During a ceremony to honor and thank the street sweepers of Hubin Street District around 50 or 60 street sweepers in orange uniforms were gathered in the park listening to speeches by local officials, when a man in a white undershirt ran towards the journalists who were filming the event and shouted loudly: "*The communist party is bad!*" He was led away peacefully and without protest by Party Secretary Zhu who seemed to know him well.

1999). One campaigner that I interviewed several times often claimed that my presence in the community deepened their understanding of low-carbon life because my questions forced them to think more about the campaign than they had before. Some of the contexts into which informants placed low-carbon life seemed to gain increased relevance to them in their encounter with me. It is tempting to read informants' explanations of Chinese cultural traditions as an ambiguous heritage that engenders contradiction as it simultaneously furthering wastefulness and thrift as being, at least partially, the products of informants' encounters with a foreign researcher perceived to be in need of understanding Chinese culture. While their analyses of culture are likely to be precipitated by my presence, there are indications that the practice of cross-cultural comparison was already latent in the early conceptualization of low-carbon life. The concept is a foreign import and the written material produced at the outset of the campaign contains references to environmental practices of other countries (DPX 2009).

Language

Language proficiency is a key issue for most foreign scholars doing research in China. This regards the level of proficiency in spoken and written Chinese as well as knowledge about different registers and language codes that may be relevant to the fieldwork situation. Arriving in China trained in standard Mandarin, foreign researchers often encounter variants of Chinese that are if not incomprehensible to them then at least more difficult to understand than Mandarin (See for example Thøgersen 2006, Ho 2010). Hangzhounese is very different from standard Mandarin. While officials like Little Zheng are bilingual and switch to Mandarin when talking to me, some of the very old residents speak only this local dialect of which I could decipher very little. Here the help of a research assistant who was a native speaker of Hangzhounese was invaluable. In the vast majority of all interview situations people could speak Mandarin and did so most of the time. When those who were bilingual drifted from Mandarin into Hangzhounese because they got excited or lost concentration, a question from me in Mandarin would usually be enough to remind them to switch back. There were variations in the degree to which people spoke with dialects that were difficult for me to understand.¹⁹

When asking for permission to record interviews I explained that recordings were useful to me because I might not understand everything informants told me the first time because of limitations

¹⁹ I assume that at least a few of the officials I talked to had some level of proficiency in English but we always stuck to Chinese, allowing them to express themselves with more ease (and for me to feel more like a proper China anthropologist). I interviewed the Israeli couple in English and their son in Chinese.

to my Chinese listening skills. Recordings allowed me to go back and listen again. This argument did not only serve to make recordings more acceptable but also gave informants a realistic idea about my language proficiency, allowing them to adjust the speed and complexity of discourse. People often kept talking after we had turned off the recorder, but I seldom got a sense that they switched into a different, more frank register.

In terms of language use, Mr. Lü's argument about the drop of water sets up a dichotomy similar to the distinction between 'Baixingese' as the language of ordinary people, and 'Ganbunese' as the language of governing agents suggested as a heuristic device by Stig Thøgersen, and Lü's own eloquent analyses of social issues illustrate the point that some people can switch between such language codes (Thøgersen 2006: p. 112). The conceptualization of the campaign as a series of popular activities involving both officials and citizens leads to a situation where the two registers meet. The information material of the campaign is written in plain everyday-language, but explanations of the campaign offered by officials both written and orally are marked by frequent use of official standard terminology. Many of the volunteers are connected with the world of officialdom through party-membership or pre-retirement working experience. Most informants in Dongping Lane made use of both registers in different situations or combined them. Rather than seeing language use that recycles the slogans and terminology as "empty" propaganda discourse serving the interests of governing agents, I see in the language use of informants expressions of the observation by Farquhar and Zhang that people and government are not necessarily experienced as different modes of being (Farquhar & Zhang 2005: p. 308).

The question of anonymity

Just as I tried to make it clear to people in the community why I was there and why I was interested in talking to them and observing their work, they sometimes made clear their reasons for welcoming me and being willing to talk to me. The low-carbon life campaign is promoted as exemplary and the potential contribution of my work to the public image of the campaign is a major factor in their acceptance and welcoming of me into the community. This has implications for how to approach the question of anonymity. I have chosen a middle path between the traditional practice of changing all names including that of the fieldwork location, and an approach stressing the importance of the accountability of the researcher (May 2010). Dongping Lane is the real name of the place I conducted fieldwork. The campaign has been described several times by journalists who have used the real names of various officials and residents, some of whom have become figureheads of the

campaign. It would not be possible to conceal the identity of the community as it is the only one in Hangzhou with a low-carbon model household competition, and it would not be desirable as the officials and residents are trying to promote the image of Dongping Lane as an exemplary community and have approached me as someone who could be instrumental in spreading the word about the campaign to audiences they would not normally reach.

When referring to people who are already known locally through media reports or their status as exemplary volunteers, I use surnames combined with titles or forms of address such as "Auntie" or "Mr." I asked informants for permission to use their real names and all consented. This does not mean, however, that I use real names for all people in all situations. In some cases people may not have fully realized in what contexts their names might appear, and for this reason I restrict the use of real names to the informants with whom I had prolonged contact giving them sufficient opportunity to get a deeper understanding of my research agenda. Some of the names of people who appear in descriptions of fieldwork situations have been changed either because I did not ask for consent to use names in the situation or because what they said or did could generate conflict. For statements that may be controversial and thus potentially harmful to the speaker I either generalize and refer to the speaker as "an official" or "a resident", or change the name. Using this strategy, instead of assuming that anything could be controversial and accordingly making all statements anonymous, allows for my research to become part of the publicity about the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane.

As Shannon May has argued, it is more often the anthropologist than it is the informant, who gets protection from anonymity, because it means that people cannot speak back when you misconstrue their social worlds (May 2010). This of course presupposes that you confront the informants with your analysis, which I tried on several occasions. Despite many attempts to discuss my findings with the informants I got very few responses to overall analytical statements whereas most people were more than happy to engage in discussion about my interpretations of various specific points regarding low-carbon life. Most attempts to discuss my analysis with residents produced responses expressing a general sense of pride that I took the pains to come all the way to Hangzhou to talk to them. In 2012 I commissioned a Chinese translation of an article I had written based on my fieldwork in Dongping Lane (Blichfeldt 2014). I provided Little Zheng with an electronic copy of the translation and asked him to disseminate it among those volunteers and officials who would be interested in reading it and possibly responding with criticism before it was published. Nobody got

back to me with feedback. There are several possible explanations for this besides the most likely one which is that very few of them, if anybody at all, read it. The academic language could have been too challenging, they could have no criticism, or they could feel awkward about contradicting a "foreign expert". In retrospect, sending copies directly to informants may have been a better choice, but this was difficult as I was in Denmark at the time and did not have email addresses, and many of the retired residents do not have computers or use email. One way in which I managed to disseminate my interpretations of what was going on in the campaign was by giving interviews to local newspapers and propaganda workers from Hubin Street Office (See for example: Huang 2011; HSO 2012; Xu 2013).

In the footsteps of the local press

In addition to the condition of walking "in the footsteps of the Communist Party, as Mette Halskov Hansen aptly characterizes the situation of carrying out research in China among people used to social investigations (Hansen 2006), we quickly discovered that we were faced with the effects of walking in the footsteps of the local press. Our first interviews with local residents yielded many formulaic, slogan-like statements that I could recognize from news reports about the campaign. Most of them featured the same examples of what low-carbon life was, which had appeared in the articles that were available online.²⁰ What we were getting during the initial interviews, then, was the view of a discourse that seemed to have entered a process of ossification into an official version. The campaigners were telling us the same stories they had already told to reporters. As soon as we moved beyond the initial questions about what they understood low-carbon life to include, informants offered reflections on the practices of low-carbon life and the concern with which they could be connected that transcended the schematic formulaic representations of the campaign offered by the written campaign material and by articles about the campaign written by journalists.

When we arrived in Dongping Lane, the local officials immediately began facilitating interviews with residents. Director Du and Little Zheng were both interested in helping us. Our presence presented them with a number of opportunities. The local press was interested in reporting on our fieldwork and this provided the officials with a new angle in the propagation of the campaign. Furthermore the possibility that I could spread the word about their work to an English speaking audience was mentioned as an interesting opportunity. There were often journalists in the community and the officials connected with us for the same reason as they did with the journalists:

²⁰ For example: Liu 2010; Mao 2010

to disseminate their message. The fact that a foreign researcher was studying the campaign could also contribute to its legitimacy and exemplarity. The local officials seldom failed to mention my nationality and my affiliation with the University of Copenhagen when they introduced me to community residents. Although Denmark is not very well-known in China and mostly associated with dairy products, fairy tales and badminton, those interested in climate change mitigation were sometimes aware of Denmark's reputation as a country on the forefront of clean energy production. As a "foreign expert" I could take up a position not already occupied by visiting officials and the experts from the local Science Popularization Association (科普协会) which works to disseminate information about various issues, among them global climate change, to the officials and residents of urban communities.

An episode that occurred in the autumn of 2012 may illustrate how my position in the field was connected with local propaganda. Little Zhang,²¹ a young community official who had recently joined the staff at Dongping Lane Community Office offered to take me to the community where he used to work to interview staff and see how they approached environmental issues in their day-to-day work. When he called to make arrangements the request was turned down. The reason that his old community was not interested in receiving me, he explained, was that I did not have "propaganda value" (宣传价值) to them as I did to Dongping Lane. This statement points to at least two things regarding my position in the field: firstly that the perceived propaganda value of having a researcher doing fieldwork is part of the consideration when deciding whether or not to accept such a request, and secondly that I was now considered someone who in some sense belonged to Dongping Lane.

A couple of the campaign volunteers that I spent the most time with sometimes suggested that my presence and my questions had made them think much more about low-carbon life than they otherwise would have. Besides pointing out an element of reflexivity of the fieldwork situation; namely that my presence as a researcher changed the local situation because I contributed to the sense-making of the campaign, their statements were expressions of acceptance and perhaps even gratitude. Whenever I heard statements to the effect that they had learned from my studies of their campaign, I inquired into the details of what they believed they had learned from my probing. Instead of examples and specificity, these questions produced vague answers about low-carbon life as something deep that requires a lot of thinking. Rather than representing purely and simply an

²¹ Not to be confused with the vice-director, Little Zheng.

evasion of my questions this vagueness can represent a way of doing justice to what they thought my contribution was. Instead of a clearly defined and demarcated addition to the campaign, my contribution could be seen as a strengthening of the notion that low-carbon life is a complex thing related to many domains of life that merits further study.

Conclusion

Dongping Lane is simultaneously a model community and a pilot community. Its status as a low-carbon model community reflects how municipal government agents perceive the problem of engaging citizens in climate change mitigation initiatives. As such the campaign represents an attempt to grapple with a major issue in wider society. Tales of exemplary individuals and their work can be read as articulations of concern about the relative rarity of such practices. The community's status as a pilot community underscores the experimental approach to development in China. Rather than viewing Dongping Lane as first and foremost a model to be emulated by other communities, the municipal government of Hangzhou can use it as a test site for a new approach to climate change mitigation among citizens. The campaign's status as an experiment also applies to the local practitioners of low-carbon life, who are in the process of making sense of new developments. As a fieldwork site this model and pilot offers articulations of local perceptions of potential. It can show how local officials and residents envision converting their concern over global climate change into changes of everyday life practices.

When viewed from the perspective of life experience, the residents and officials of Dongping Lane form two distinct social groups primarily divided by age. Their social backgrounds are different. In terms of institutional position, however, the difference is not as great. The campaign is conceived as a collaborative effort and the high level of interaction between officials and residents means that what is at stake is not the encounter between two different social groups with different interests as much as it is the establishment of common ground. Rather than embodying the roles of dependent clients or resisting subalterns, the retired volunteers enter the campaign as "partners of the party-state" (Luova 2011). I do not wish to project an image of urban China as a conflict-free zone where the party-state and the people stand united, but in the specific situation of the campaign the two distinct groups of residents and officials appear to be united in a common purpose. Here I follow Farquhar and Zhang, who argue that resistance is not the only way of occupying a position in society that is relevant to study (Farquhar & Zhang 2005: p. 310). I use the term campaigners to

refer to the group of people comprising both officials and residents involved in the low-carbon life campaign.

Fieldwork in the community offered the opportunity to study the process of sense-making, which underpins the practices that the low-carbon life campaign is promoting. Interviews are an important source of information as campaigners not only describe their activities but also reason about them. The possibility of recording interviews and hanging out at the community office provided many opportunities for observing how campaigners were connecting various concerns through their way of discussing the campaign and the concept of low-carbon life. Dividing the fieldwork into two separate periods gave the possibility of having a partial analysis developed after the first round of fieldwork serve as guideline for the second round of fieldwork. A discourse of connectedness, a focus on health and the use of the concept of low-carbon life as a tool for cultural critique emerged as themes from the first round of fieldwork and informed the interviews of the second round of fieldwork. The focus on common ground rather than conflict in the relationship between officials and residents also emerged from the analysis of the material from first round of fieldwork, as informants were much more preoccupied with making sense of the connections between climate change and everyday life than they were with discussing state-society relations and campaign methods. Accordingly, this study takes an ethnographic approach to community-based climate campaigning that focuses on the explorative sense-making of local actors by staying with concerns over climate change rather than interpreting them as proxies for other issues.

3. First Encounters with Low-Carbon Life

With local officials and a handful of volunteers as the main catalysts, the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is the product of a political environment conducive to the development of community-based campaigning. Singling out climate change as an issue of concern, the community officials have set up low-carbon life as specialty of Dongping Lane, projecting an image of being at the forefront of recent developments in urban China. The participating residents describe the early stages of campaigning as a transformative experience that moved them from a state of not understanding to a state of understanding the linkages between global climate change and everyday life consumer practices.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the scene for the subsequent analysis of the low-carbon life campaign by outlining the basic ideas of the campaign through a presentation and preliminary analysis of three texts produced by the community office in Dongping Lane: a diary entry written by a campaigner, a list of energy-saving tips and a standard for low-carbon life. These texts as well as informants' narratives of how they first encountered the concept of low-carbon life show the contours of the campaign at the outset. Some of the themes and ideas that were presented and discussed at the early stage of campaigning in the autumn of 2009 have come to be central to the conceptualization and practice of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane while others have been sidelined. Early local approaches to climate change such as instructions for how to calculate "carbon footprints" and a rhetoric casting low-carbon life as fashionable were not carried forward into the later stages of campaigning, while other approaches such as focusing on exemplary individuals and drawing together a wide range of practices and framing them as commensurable through quantification has characterized the overall campaign strategy. The texts that came out of the early stage of campaigning reflect a delineation of low-carbon life as a series of activities in the household and in the community rather than for example political protest or criticism of ecologically unsustainable business practices. Through the various physical objects and substances that they touch on, these descriptions place low-carbon life in the context of the "consumer revolution" in China which has made high-carbon lifestyles not only possible but increasingly normal among China's urban population (Davis 2000; Hooper 2005; Croll 2006; Griffiths 2013).

The campaign initiative

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is a local initiative. Focusing on climate change and facilitating voluntary participation of community residents, the campaign is in line with official policy agendas in Hangzhou, but it has not been imposed on Dongping Lane in any direct sense. The campaign initiative came from the community official Little Zheng, who had noticed how the concept of low-carbon life had arrived on the Chinese internet, in national media and in official statements about climate policy. According to Zheng the idea for the campaign came when he heard about Premier Wen Jiabao's upcoming visit to Copenhagen for the climate summit in late 2009. Realizing that climate change was an issue of the highest importance to the country's top leaders Zheng made a connection between the news and his own work as he began thinking about how efforts to address climate change might be made part of the day-to-day governing of everyday life in Dongping Lane Community. The central government in Beijing as well as the municipal government of Hangzhou had laid out a framework in which it made sense for Zheng to initiate the campaign (Delman 2014). Stressing environmental issues as a priority and promoting initiative and entrepreneurship among local officials, the dominant discourse among governing agents made an initiative like Zheng's possible as well as likely. The news coverage of the run up to the climate summit in Copenhagen, paired with the growing general presence of low-carbon discourse in Chinese media, meant that the connection between community governance and climate change was easy to make for Zheng. He knew that as a local official he was expected to be enterprising and creative, and he learned that climate change was a growing concern. His contribution was putting those two pieces together.

Having seen climate change mitigation conceptualized through the yet unfamiliar term low-carbon life, Zheng's first impulse was to look for standards of this low-carbon life, schematic renderings of how other communities had approached it before. Finding none, he embraced the role as entrepreneur and initiated the development of a new campaign. The idea that there should be a standard in the first place speaks to the repertoire of local governance tools that were at his disposal, and to his way of imagining his role as an official. One of these tools is that of staging competitions among the residents to promote new ideas and values (Zhang & Li 2011). But before a standard was developed, the campaigners attempted to become more familiar with concept idea of low-carbon life.



Little Zheng at his desk in the office of Dongping Lane Community (Photo: Chen Lo)

Following an established schema for community-based campaigns in urban China, Zheng and a handful of other officials at the community office arranged a series of meetings where residents were invited to learn about and discuss the new concept of low-carbon life and together with the officials work out how it could be promoted through a campaign. The participants in these meetings were mostly retired residents. During this early stage of the campaign group of core campaigners, who have organizational experience and know people in their apartment buildings, began to form. The initiative was received positively at Hubin Street Office, the unit immediately above Dongping Lane in the administrative hierarchy in Hangzhou. Classifying the campaign as a series of popular activities (民间活动), the vice-director of Hubin Street Office emphasized that this is the invention and specialty of Dongping Lane, no other communities in Hangzhou had staged this kind of campaign before. This idea of the campaign as a series of popular activities promotes an image of grassroots development in which community offices function as intermediaries between the party-state and the people facilitating public participation in environmental protection (Boland & Zhu 2012).

The early stages of campaigning

Residents' narratives of how the concept of low-carbon life emerged in Dongping Lane are strikingly similar. Over and over I was told that low-carbon life started out as an alien concept that people could not relate to or make sense of. Then expert lectures and community meetings helped clear up the confusion and they began to embrace the concept. This narrative casts low-carbon life as a collective endeavor that calls for community campaigning rather than individual action. In the beginning, low-carbon life was approached as a concept that was new and unfamiliar yet at the same time similar to or overlapping with other concepts. During meetings lecturers and community officials tried to make sense of the concept by stressing its similarity with older and more well-known concepts such as the idea of saving resources (节约) or the idea of environmental protection (环境保护). Through lectures and meetings the concept of low-carbon life was fit into these conceptual categories, but also presented as something new that to some extent transcended them and required movement forward into new and uncharted conceptual areas.²²

A series of meetings held in the community in the autumn of 2009 under the heading "low-carbon life can also be fashionable"²³ (低碳生活也时尚), led to the production of a 9-page leaflet intended as a handbook for low-carbon life for distribution among the residents. Written and designed by the community officials at Dongping Lane Community Office and campaign volunteer Sun Xinbao, known locally as Auntie Sun, the handbook represents the first attempt at fixing in writing some of the ideas and practices of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane. Titled Hubin Street Dongping Lane Residents' Low-Carbon Life Handbook 湖滨街道东平巷社区居民低碳生活实用手册 (HSDL 2009), the handbook was conceived as a trial version (试行版) to be used in the early stages of campaigning and replaced with a final version when early experiences had been evaluated. The leaflet can be read as a representation of a "beta-version" of low-carbon life. It contains three sections: first a list of practical tips for carbon emissions reduction through changes to everyday life consumption, second an introduction to the concept of "carbon footprint" and finally an entry in a "low-carbon life diary". The list of tips was reproduced unchanged in subsequent written material in the campaign, but the section on carbon footprint and the diary entry were omitted from the final version of the handbook for low-carbon life which was included in the comprehensive resident handbook produced by the community office (DPX 2009).

²² Since my fieldwork took place from 2011, I did not have the opportunity to participate in these meetings. My references to them are based on the way officials and residents have recounted them during interviews and conversations with me.

²³ The slogan has also been the topic of essays in middle school. (<http://www.czzww.com/a/huanbaozuowen/2011/0817/147457.html>)

Graphically illustrating the volume of CO2 emitted by the producer and consumer practices of such entities as individuals, organizations and countries by showing different sizes of footprints that can be easily and intuitively compared, the carbon footprint has become a globally recognizable device for calculating and visualizing emissions. Carbon footprint calculation has been promoted by community officials in Dongping Lane and by a visiting expert from the local Science Popularization Association (科普协会), a public organization which assists the community office in promoting the campaign. Those residents who have attended lectures in Red Harbor (红色港湾) have been shown how to calculate it, but not many have picked up on it. Although the image of the carbon footprint plays a limited role in the low-carbon life campaign, it may be suggestive of the logic at work in the early schematized version of low-carbon life. It represents a calculative approach to engaging with climate change which depends on simplified quantifications that illustrate connections between everyday life consumption and the chemical composition of the atmosphere by treating as equivalent such qualitatively different practices as eating, using air conditioners and driving cars. The carbon footprint represents a wider set of popularized techniques for "taming greenhouse gases" that takes place through production of commensurability (May 2011). This type of production of commensurability through quantification appears in the standard for low-carbon life which was produced as a rulebook for the competition to become model household.

<p>If you don't know how to write a low-carbon life diary, the community introduces the 'carbon-reduction diary' of community resident Sun Xinbao for your reference</p>
<p>Low-carbon life can also be fashionable (低碳生活也时尚)</p>
<p>When the "low-carbon life can also be fashionable" activities were first launched, I honestly did not understand what low-carbon life was, I knew that it meant to reduce the emission of carbon-dioxide, but I only had a vague concept of how to actually reduce emissions. Through popular scientific lectures, training and activities in the community, continually deepening my understanding, I discovered that not paying attention to the little detail of daily life leads not only to invisible consumption expenditures, but also to serious carbon dioxide emissions. Although the amount is tiny the accumulated harm cannot be overlooked. Who would have thought that electrical appliances, even tiny cell phone batteries when plugged in, emit scary carbon dioxide? As soon as a battery is fully charged the charger should be removed from the socket. Originally I only associated carbon dioxide with car exhaust and burning of coal, I didn't think that in all areas of life "weak and tiny carbon" would invade our lives and our Earth.</p>

After one week I have thought of many DIY ideas for implementing carbon reduction at home.
The cosmetic paper masks that my daughter uses shouldn't be thrown out, I use them for polishing jewelry, polishing the surface of furniture and for polishing leather belts, it not only makes them shiny but also leaves the pleasant fragrance of the face masks; I dried leftover tea leaves and made a tea leaf pillow. It is pleasant and can help improve the quality of sleep. Place used soap boxes, perfume bottles, shampoo and shower gel bottles open in corners of the home or in wardrobes and closets and the home will have a natural fragrance. Ashtrays can be made from ice cream boxes; this saves resources and is convenient, it is also a good way of reusing materials. These are all good ways of reducing carbon. You can reap unexpected joy from implementing this. It is a formula for maintaining health and vitality.
After one week of carbon reducing life I discovered that carbon reducing life is fashionable and that we old people - just like young people - can be fashionable!
Sun Xinbao – 2009-09-16
Weather: overcast

FIGURE 1 - (Translation by the author)

The diary entry reprinted in the last section of the leaflet appears next to a page left blank for the readers to write their own "low-carbon diary" entries. In the text Auntie Sun recounts her early encounters with the concept and low-carbon life, describes how she gained understanding through meetings and lectures, and finally offers a number of tips for carbon reduction. The text represents a formalization of the narrative of the newness of low-carbon life found among campaigners as well as a formal representation of the basic ideas and examples that the conception of low-carbon life revolved around in the early stages of campaigning. Some of the points she makes were repeated often by informants while others appear nowhere outside the diary entry. This text represents an embryonic form of low-carbon life, holding clues to the way the campaign came to be conceptualized in subsequent stages. Sun is presented as a resident with no mention of her status as party-member, core campaigner and former official. This conveys an image of a "popular" (民间) campaign. Through the juxtaposition of her entry and the blank page for the reader Sun is set up as an exemplar inspiring emulation. Instrumental use of exemplarity in moral education and public administration has been central to governing in China for centuries (Bakken 2000). Exemplary traits that can be discerned from the text include: reflection, invention, willingness to take in new ideas, voluntary participation in environmental protection and involvement in community affairs. Sun's narrative of her involvement as an intellectual journey highlights the problem of connecting theoretical knowledge with specific practices.

Through references to her own material conditions Sun projects an image not only of her own lifestyle but also of other imaginary practitioners of low-carbon life. Mentioning of jewelry, mobile phone, furniture in need of polishing, and perfume casts low-carbon life practitioners as fairly well-off members of the new middle class.²⁴ The casual mentioning in passing of economic incentives signals that these are people ready to move beyond purely economical motivations for saving energy and resources. The diary entry touches briefly on several themes which are developed further in the campaign. The inconspicuousness of carbon dioxide and the opportunity to gain joy, health and vitality from low-carbon life practices represent ideas that have informed the conceptualization and implementation of the campaign. A focus on electrical appliances represented by the example of the cell phone battery is found in subsequent formal as well as informal descriptions of low-carbon life. Other elements of the diary entry represent ideas that have not been made part of the campaign. The alarmist image of carbon as a scary invader of lives and of the Earth is rare among campaigners as is the evocation of low-carbon life as something fashionable, except among those who specifically work with reusing fabric for making clothes. Of the specific practical tips for reusing materials, only the tealeaf pillow has made its way into later presentations of low-carbon life. Whereas the instructions on how to calculate carbon footprints as well as some of the themes and ideas in Auntie Sun's diary entry were not reproduced in later campaign material, the list of specific energy saving tips in the first section of the leaflet was reprinted in the comprehensive residents handbook produced by Dongping Lane Community Office.

Low-carbon life golden points

It has become customary for community offices in urban China to print and distribute resident handbooks containing practical information about the community, maps, telephone numbers of various offices and service providers, moralizing guidelines for "civilized community life", and "residents pacts" describing the obligations of officials and residents respectively (Bray 2006: pp. 541-542). In the Dongping Lane Residents Handbook four of the 45 pages are dedicated to low-carbon life (DPX 2009). The first two pages contain a short introduction to low-carbon life and a list of 14 tips titled Low-Carbon Life Golden Points, and the last two pages consist of a chart titled Dongping Lane Community Low-Carbon Household Standard (东平巷社区低碳家庭标准).

²⁴ I am not addressing the rise of the new middle class in China in this thesis, but many of the low-carbon life campaigners that I interviewed made reference to consumer goods and consumer practices, which would indicate that some members of their families are making enough money to secure a "moderately prosperous" life.

"What is low-carbon life?"

It means reducing energy consumption in daily life so as to reduce carbon (especially carbon dioxide) emissions. For us ordinary people, low-carbon life is an attitude, not an ability. We should actively promote and practice low-carbon life, paying attention to saving electricity, oil and gas, bit by little bit." – Dongping Lane Residents Handbook (DPX 2009)

This brief introduction, preceding the list of tips for reducing emissions, is instructive of the approaches taken to climate action in the community campaign as it touches on some of the themes that guide discussions about low-carbon life among the campaign participants. The resident's handbook introduction suggests that low-carbon life can be seen as a series of small adjustments and replacements in day-to-day life of ordinary people. It means doing some things a little less often, a little less intensely, or a little more efficiently. It can also mean substituting materials or practices with others that lead to lower levels of emissions.

Highlighting connections between everyday life consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, the text can be read as an attempt to instill a sense of empowerment in the reader. By stressing that low-carbon life depends on displaying a certain attitude rather than having abilities, people are encouraged to participate regardless of their self-perceived power, or lack of it, to affect the trajectory of social development in urban China. This echoes the importance attached to revolutionary consciousness, consciousness-raising and "thought-reform in the political rhetoric of the Mao era (Croll 1994: p. 8-9).

The coupling of promotion and practice in the text points to the importance of exemplarity in the campaign. Low-carbon life is not only to be practiced in order to reduce emissions, but also to have an impact on the attitude and behavior of other people. It is thus conceived as a civilizing campaign and simultaneously a propaganda effort. The final reminder 'bit by little bit' touches on the image of the individual as one among many. Combined with the mentioning of 1.2 billion light bulbs in the list of tips, a number close enough to the official figure of the Chinese population to evoke the image of a nation united in one purpose, the practices of low-carbon life becomes conceptualized as small beginnings which will be amplified by the power of exemplarity.

Low-Carbon Life Golden Points (低碳生活金点子)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lamps, computers, air conditioners ... any electrical appliances should be turned off when you are not using them
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobile phones should be unplugged when fully charged
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose an energy saving air conditioner and don't turn it up too high or down too low. This is not just energy consuming, it is also uncomfortable and weakens the body's ability to adjust to temperatures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use energy saving light bulbs. The light from an 11 watt energy saving bulb is equivalent to that of a 60 watt normal bulb. An energy saving bulb saves 80% electricity compared to a normal bulb. If the country's 1.2 billion bulbs were replaced with energy saving bulbs the energy saved would be the equivalent of the annual output from the Three Gorges Dam Hydropower Station.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you drive when shopping, please plan your shopping trip so it can all be done in one go. If it is not too far you can also walk instead of driving.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drivers can also save gas; avoid cold starting the car; avoid abruptly changing speed; avoid idle running; choose the right gear, avoid low gear at high speeds; use low-viscosity lubricating oil; change motor oil regularly; don't open the windows at high speeds; keep a proper tire pressure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buy a low-priced, low-consuming, low-polluting and safe low-emissions vehicle, it is also convenient to park
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Walk, bike and take public transport
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don't set TV screen brightness too high, but to medium brightness, it saves power and is better for the eyes, especially for children whose eyes are developing. There are 300 million TV sets in China. The small action of adjusting the brightness can save five billion kilowatt hours per year.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shorten the time it takes before your computer screen goes to sleeping mode
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal refrigerators can also save energy, for example by defrosting in time, reducing the amount of time the door is open, take out things from the freezer that you need to thaw well in advance and put them in the refrigerator. This will lower the temperature in the refrigerator.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use a toilet with two flushing volumes and use the small volume button as much as possible. All kinds of waste water from daily chores can also be used to flush the toilet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use email, MSN and other instant messaging tools, avoid using printer and fax
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Around half the energy loss of a building happens at the windows. Double glazed windows not only keeps heat waves and cold spells out, it cuts off noise and dramatically reduces the amount of energy needed to heat the building. They are already common in Western countries.

FIGURE 2 - (Dongping Lane Community Residents Handbook, DPX 2009: p. 31-32 – translation by the author)

Taken as a whole, the "Golden Points" paint a portrait of an imaginary modern urban citizen who uses the latest technology in the effort to save energy, buys efficient products to reduce pollution, and prioritizes energy saving when renovating the house. Low-carbon life can thus be seen to entail embracing a certain material modernity. It addresses a newly established high-carbon lifestyle that differs dramatically from the material lifestyles available to Chinese people in earlier times. Many informants recounted childhood or youth memories of living entirely without the material conveniences low-carbon life now asks them to modify, but crucially not to forsake. Mixed in with the tips focusing on items associated with recent lifestyle changes toward modernity and consumerism are simple practical tips more closely associated with older and familiar notions of thrift, most notably the idea of reusing water in the home, which was among the most frequently mentioned low-carbon life practices among informants in Dongping Lane. The campaigners take care to dissociate low-carbon life from notions of deprivation. There is no attempt to portray earlier times with less material comforts as a "low-carbon era" in the campaign. When the middle-aged and elderly campaign participants, nearly all of whom have experienced some degree of poverty, talk about the past they emphasize the bitterness of being poor rather than the fact that their energy consumption was much smaller than today.

The general approach of focusing on reduction, which is also reflected in the name "low-carbon" with its implied contrast to "high-carbon", suggests that low-carbon life has a certain affinity with the kind of environmentalisms often bundled together under the heading "sustainable development". It is about making the human impact on the global climate smaller. Low-carbon life does not represent a radical criticism of economic growth and mainstream consumer lifestyle. Instead, it represents an attempt to modify present conditions rather than turning them upside down.²⁵ As an approach to climate change, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane fits into the type of understanding of and approach to climate change, which Levy and Spicer call the "sustainable lifestyles imaginary", and characterize as espousing stronger community and a materially simpler life (Levy and Spicer 2013: p. 665). The low-carbon life campaigners are careful not to make low-carbon life smack of asceticism, stressing that the required changes are small and fit into a modern urban lifestyle and into the post-ascetic political environment of the late reform era.

²⁵ The slogans that are thrown around in the campaign by both officials and residents stress citizen action sometimes taking the individual (从我做起), sometimes the household (从家庭做起), and sometimes a more vaguely generalized collective (从你我做起) as starting point.

A standard for low-carbon life

On two of the last pages in the Dongping Lane Community Residents Handbook (东平巷社区居民手册) there is a table under the heading Dongping Lane Community Low-Carbon Household Standard (东平巷社区低碳家庭标准). It serves a rulebook and score sheet for the low-carbon life competition that was to form the backbone of campaigning in the early stages.

Dongping Lane Community Low-Carbon Household Standard (东平巷社区低碳家庭标准)	
Life (33 points)	The household must participate in garbage sorting scheme (4-10)
	Bring your own bag when shopping, don't use plastic bags (5 points)
	Eat less meat, eat more vegetables; eat vegetarian food once a week (5 points)
	Keep more than 10 potted plants in the home (5 points)
	Bring your own cup when you go out, don't use disposable paper cups, doggy bags or disposable chopsticks (5 points)
	Exercise more outside, go less to the gym (3 points)
Electrical appliances (33 points)	All light bulbs in the home must be energy saving bulbs (10 points)
	70% of electricity consumption must come from electricity saving appliances – for old people above the age of 70 this may be adjusted to 60% (7 points)
	Unplug electrical appliances when they are not in use (5 points)
	Open the windows in summer to cut in half the time using air conditioning (5 points)
	Set air conditioners to 26 or above in summer and 18 or below in winter (5 points)
Water and gas (28 points)	Use piped gas instead of buying gas cylinders – if installed in the building (3 points)
	Use 10% less gas (10 points)
	Don't drink bottled water (5 points)
	Reuse water – 15% of water must be reused (10 points)
Transportation (16 points)	Use public transport for 60% of all trips (10 points)
	If the household has a car, reduce the number of days you take it to work by two and take public transport instead (6 points)

Extra points (25 points)	Keep a low-carbon journal and write in it once a week (5 points)
	Come up with 5 new carbon reduction tips every 3 months (5 points)
	Set the air conditioner above 28 in summer and below 16 in winter (5 points)
	Use renewable energy, e.g. solar water heaters (5 points)
	Increase the number of plants in the home by 50%, keep plants in the home all year (5 points)
Remarks: maximum score: 110 points, the maximum amount of extra points is 25, households scoring 95 points are awarded the status of first-level model households, households scoring 90 points are second-level model households, and households scoring 85 points are third-level model households	

FIGURE 3 - (Translation by the author)

The first 15 model households were selected from 50 self-nominated households (Xie & Luo 2010). Later all residents had the opportunity to participate and around 200 households attained the designation of Low-Carbon Model Household. There are of course vast differences between a schematized, simplified and ideal version of low-carbon life organized neatly in a table and the more complex set of ideas and practices that emerged as the campaign was conducted. Nonetheless, a reading of the standard can provide a starting point by showing the contours of how low-carbon life was imagined at the outset of the campaign. In the Low-Carbon Household Standard (figure 3) a list of practices are classified as being low-carbon, and for easily quantifiable practices minimum requirements are set for when they are to be considered low-carbon.

The standard is a product of the cultural interpretive work of cutting up life into a series of practices and relating these to climate change, what we might call, following Descola and Tsing, the worlding of low-carbon life (Descola 2010; Tsing 2010). As such the standard reflects an image of expected everyday life in the community. Here it is important to note that the standard was not imposed from the outside, but was developed with participation from the people thought to live the everyday lives that it brought to affect. The standard serves an inventory of what the participants in the meetings where the campaign was planned, thought made up the greenhouse gas emitting parts of ordinary everyday lives in Dongping Lane. By drawing in certain things and places rather than others the standard represents one of the first defining junctures in the process of making sense of low-carbon life by placing it in context. As such, it is a written documentation of the process of establishing what parts of experience are made to count as significant (Descola 2010).

While the standard is descriptive in the sense of invoking imagined citizens and their lives, it is prescriptive in the sense of awarding points for specific changes. In the prescriptions of the standard, the material comforts that have come to be considered normal and essential can be distinguished from those that may be there but are thought of as relative luxuries that can be dispensed with for the sake of the global climate. Contours of the arrivals of elements of high-carbon lifestyles of the reform period appear in the standard through the things that are addressed. Bottled water, soft drinks, paper cups, disposable chopsticks and gym memberships stand as representatives of high-carbon lifestyles, and are targeted for reduction or elimination. Air conditioners, private cars and a diet including meat every day are examples of high-carbon lifestyle things and practices that have come to be seen as normal and are targeted for reduction rather than elimination. The campaign's approaches to these practices are examined in more detail in chapter 5, Campaigning in the Material World.

Delineating low-carbon life

The standard represents an understanding of low-carbon life as having to do with everyday life. In spatial terms low-carbon life is something that takes place in the home, the community and in public spaces. Temporally, low-carbon life is something that takes place in people's free time. Electricity consumption plays a large role in the campaign. There are points for using energy saving appliances, for unplugging, for making do with high or low room temperatures and for saving in general. This reflects a focus on the home. Practitioners of low-carbon life are imagined as people spending a fair amount of time in the home. Consumer choices in the shape of purchases are mentioned in the introductory text and they appear a few places in the standard such as in the point about using energy saving light bulbs, but it is not so much what people buy as it is how they use what they already have that is targeted by the standard. The standard takes for granted that residents will have a wide range of electrical appliances among which a primary target of the campaign is the air conditioner. Residents are not asked to stop using air conditioners altogether, but rather to set them at less energy consuming temperatures and to use them less often than they might have without a standard as guidance. It is also worth noting that elderly residents above the age of 70 are not required to have as large a proportion of energy saving ones among all their electrical appliances, reflecting assumptions that different people will surround themselves with different things.

The conceptualization of low-carbon life embodied in the standard makes a cut that leads to inclusion of some places and people while excluding others. The standard depicts low-carbon life as everyday life in the home and the community. Politics, business and formal education are domains of life conceived as lying outside the areas covered by the Low-Carbon Household Standard. The campaigners do not interfere with how businesses or schools engage with low-carbon life or fail to do so, neither do they lobby for or stage protests against political decisions. The standard targets people in their roles as members of private households. Children and other busy people seem to fall under other moral jurisdictions and are excused for not participating in low-carbon life. This somewhat odd and seemingly arbitrary omission of large parts of the urban population is connected with conceptualization of the campaign as a series of voluntary activities among community residents. The conceptualization of low-carbon life as a community-based campaign is dealt with in more detail in the next chapter, *Building a Low-Carbon Community*.

The image of low-carbon life as something that takes place in the home means that those who are hardly there and seldom engage in many of the practices included in the standard become to some extent excused. The demographics of Dongping Lane also hold a vital clue. With a population where two thirds are retired it makes a lot of sense to target people who spend time in the home and the community, rather than at work or at school. While it is not apparent from an isolated reading of the standard, even the smallest amount of time spent among the campaigners will reveal that the typical low-carbon life campaigner is a pensioner and in many cases a woman. Heberer's studies of communities in Shenyang and Chengdu reveal a similar situation, where voluntary work in communities is dominated by retired women (Heberer 2009: p. 500).

With its focus on the home and the community the campaign tends to exclude some people, especially those who are mobile and less attached to the community such as students, migrants, businesspeople and young professionals. There are exceptions from this framing of low-carbon life in the practical running of the campaign. The community office cooperates with a local hotel that has introduced measures to reduce energy consumption. The community office also organizes field trips with environmental education content for school children during holidays. Despite these notable exceptions businesses and schools are generally not drawn into the campaign. When it

comes to environmentalism as political action, the campaign steers clear of protests. Neither specific policies or incidents nor general developments are criticized directly.²⁶

The text introducing the low-carbon standard includes an assertion that "*for us common people [low-carbon life] is an attitude, it is not an ability*" (DPX 2009: p. 31). Rather than focusing on who has the ability to bring about the largest reductions, and pressuring those people to affect change, the imperative is turned toward the individual who is being asked to contribute by engaging in this change of attitude.²⁷ The written introductory guidelines as well as the standard function as a framing of low-carbon life. By invoking the common people and turning the spotlight on attitude rather than ability, low-carbon life is framed as something citizens can engage in by changing their own everyday lives. There is very little confrontation over low-carbon life. It is not envisioned as a protest against mainstream consumerist lifestyle but as a series of practical suggestions to how it can be adjusted. Low-carbon life as portrayed in the standard is a series of small changes and as such it represents reform, not revolution. A moderate political consumer approach to buying, using and consuming products is quietly and inconspicuously made part of low-carbon life, but the focus is clearly on the actions of the individual or the household rather than on business and government.

While idea of low-carbon life as inward imperative rather than political action is dominant, there is resistance to this framing. The following excerpt from an interview with a 52-year old electrical engineer who participates in the low-carbon life campaign demonstrates that this delineation of low-carbon life as something that is only a community matter does not go unnoticed or unquestioned:

"I think they [some of the other campaign participants] have misunderstood low-carbon life. As I just said, low-carbon is everywhere. It is wrong to see low-carbon life as restricted within certain boundaries. You have to look at the specific history to understand low-carbon life. Suppose I were a 40 year old business leader, then because of who I were I would not limit myself to owning just one car. I would invite people to banquets and people would invite me to banquets. I would live at luxurious hotels. I would emit more carbon than other people. But you cannot make this comparison. You can only compare what he does now with what he did before as well as what other people used to do, and see if the company lowers carbon emissions and saves energy. Doing

²⁶ One of the only exceptions to this non-confrontational style that I came across during my fieldwork was a private, informal campaign to protest the plans to cut down trees along Yan'an Road near the community in connection with the construction of the Hangzhou subway. While a forceful, popular and well-connected individual may sometimes turn to confrontational tactics, the low-carbon life campaign remains moderate and inward oriented.

²⁷ In this regard the campaign embodies the "authoritarian environmentalism" identified by Bruce Gilley, in which inward imperatives rather than pressure on politicians or others is the expected response of citizens (Gilley 2013).

company business you also have to pay attention to low-carbon. When old people in the community talk about low-carbon life they mainly focus on themselves. Business leaders have to guide the whole company in a low-carbon direction so it doesn't produce polluting things. So you see, you shouldn't narrow down your context too much".

When low-carbon life is framed as everyday life in the home and the community it does not automatically follow that everything outside that frame becomes invisible to the practitioners of low-carbon life. This story of an imaginary business leader pinpoints the problem of defining meaningful contexts, which is inherent to the conceptual work of making definitions of ideas such as that of low-carbon life. By resisting the notion that low-carbon life is more about attitude than it is about ability, it reminds us that depoliticizing climate change is itself a political act (Swyngedouw 2010). Defining low-carbon life as part of community life is a way of circumscribing it, but the boundaries are sometimes transcended by its proponents and practitioners.

Conclusion

In sum, what arrived in Dongping Lane in late 2009 under the heading "low-carbon life" was much less than the versatile concept that has developed during the half decade of campaigning in the community that followed. Neither fully developed nor fully understood at the outset, the concept of low-carbon life proved open to local interpretation and these interpretations gave rise to a series of engagements with the connections between global climate change and everyday life consumer practices that in time came together as a coherent yet multifaceted set of material practices and acts of imagination. While the texts produced for the resident handbooks are not descriptive of a reality but rather the idealized depiction of an emerging social imaginary, they can serve as illuminating starting points, showing various routes into the realm of ideas, values and practices that makes up low-carbon life. These original outlines of the campaign contain seeds that have flowered and others that have fallen on barren ground. The texts set the stage for campaigning by proposing contexts and connections. Some of the contexts that the campaigners have focused on are presented here: a focus on how to relate to specific physical objects and substances, how to consume in certain ways, and reusing things rather than throwing them out, has been carried forward and developed by campaigners. Furthermore, the texts introduce a focus on health and well-being, which has become characteristic of the way campaigners make sense of low-carbon life practices. Casting low-carbon life practices as potentially pleasant and fun Auntie Sun's diary entry represents an approach that characterizes low-carbon life as a series of hobby-like activities in the home and the community.

The use of Sun's diary entry as a model for emulation, and the designation of model households that is the outcome of competition according to the Low-Carbon Household Standard embody the idea of promoting exemplarity as a central campaign tool.

The narrative of newness and mental transformation offered by informants recounting their early encounters with the concept of low-carbon life projects an image of the community officials as agents of empowerment, who enable residents to engage in climate change mitigation practices through the provision of expert knowledge and the facilitation of voluntary activities. Rather than presenting their engagements with climate change as part of a process of becoming members of a general public sphere in urban China, the residents and community officials in Dongping Lane place low-carbon life in the context of developing social relations and promoting meaningful free time activities in the residential community. This association of campaigning with the local residential community as a collective, rather than individual citizens in the city at large, places the campaign in the context of the many civilizing campaigns that are part of the party-state-sponsored urban reform project of community building (社区建设), in which urban communities have been envisioned and enacted as replacements for Danwei (单位) as the units of organization and sense of belonging in urban life (Bray 2006). The next chapter places the campaign in the context of this urban reform and examines the role that climate change mitigation comes to play locally as community officials and residents address changing notions of citizenship in discussions of their campaign activities.

4. Building a Low-Carbon Community

This chapter places the low-carbon life campaign in an institutional context as it deals with the ways the campaign becomes entangled in the party-state-sponsored reform endeavor of community building (社区建设) in urban China. The construction and development of the residential community, as a viable replacement for the fading institution of Danwei (单位) in contemporary China, has been the focus of scholarship concerned with modes of governing and notions of citizenship in reform era China (Derleth & Koldyk 2004; Tomba 2008; Heberer 2009; Heberer & Göbel 2011, Parris 2012). Conceived as a series of voluntary activities to be undertaken by those who have sufficient time, knowledge and sense of belonging to the residential community, the low-carbon life campaign is embedded in an underlying social imaginary of "civilized community life" (文明的社区生活) which is explicitly promoted in the propaganda material produced by the community office (DPX 2009).

The low-carbon life campaign is a product of interaction between local officials and residents. Through a series of encounters, representatives of these two different social groups have developed a collaborative response to the issue of global climate change. By including climate change mitigation among the moral concerns of daily life for responsible citizens, the campaigners simultaneously respond and contribute to the processes of change in state-society relations in China, which are addressed by the literature on community building and civilizing projects (See for example Tomba 2009; Jacka 2009). For the community officials organizing and facilitating campaigning among the residents is part of their work. Through this aspect of their work they emerge as more than administrators in the sense that they contribute to the state-sponsored project of community building by bringing about place-making and subject-making (Appadurai 1996; Lambek 2011) through their facilitation of moral action among residents. For the residents who participate in the campaign, low-carbon life becomes a defining part of what it means to be a proper and civilized urban citizen. Community building emerges as the main institutional context of low-carbon life through the ways in which both officials and residents connect their efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions with their efforts to make contributions to the party-state-sponsored project of generating a sense of belonging to residential communities among the urban population. In Dongping Lane, climate change mitigation and notions of citizenship become entangled for the campaign participants, as low-carbon life comes to stand as an expression of proper citizenship in early 21st century urban China.

Community building

Dongping Lane is a community in the formal sense of being an administrative unit. China's cities are divided into districts (区), streets (街道) and communities (社区). Communities as administrative units in urban China are a product of fairly recent developments.²⁸ One of the most fundamental and far-reaching institutional changes of urban life in the reform era, has been the eroding of the previously all-pervasive Danwei system, which had defined and shaped urban life in China since its inception. The introduction in the 1990s of residence rather than work-place as defining principle of administration of the lives of citizens marks a major shift away from urban life as Danwei life, which for decades had characterized China's cities. As work-life in urban China became increasingly privatized, administrative structure came to be organized around residence (Lu 2006: p. 385; Tomba 2008: p. 52; Heberer 2009: p. 492). The effort to build urban communities has been viewed as an attempt to replace Danwei with new units of social organization and affiliation in urban life (Bray 2005; Tomba 2008; Xu 2008: p. 24; Heberer and Göbel 2011). In addition to the practical and administrative aspects of this change, community comes to be imagined as a replacement in terms of the kinds of place-making that is generated by direct and conscious attempts at fostering a sense of belonging.

As part of this urban reform in the 1990s, the administrative structure of urban residential areas was changed. Pre-existing micro-districts (小区) were merged into larger units called communities (社区) (Bray 2005). Dongping Lane Community is assembled from four former micro-districts, which used to be separated by walls. In the mid-1990s both the physical and administrative boundaries were reconfigured as the walls were knocked down. When the new community was established, a little park was built in a space that had previously been occupied by a water reservoir and some bushes. In spatial terms, and in terms of life in public spaces, the park is the heart of the community. No matter which entrance people take into Dongping Lane Community they will come upon the park. It is here people come to practice tai chi and calisthenics in the morning or relax in the evening, and it is here they sometimes gather to watch theatrical performances in the evening.

²⁸ Residential communities as units of organization of urban life have precedents in Chinese history. Duanfang Lu has traced the history of the neighborhood unit in China and argues that although it can be seen as a "travelling urban form" modeled on the experiences of other countries, it should not be interpreted as an instantiation of globalization as repetition (Lu 2006: p. 386). The residential community as urban form has a long history both before and after its various arrivals in China. Lu shows how American city planning and Soviet models are part of the background. On the other hand Lu as well as Heberer and Göbel show that in China there is a predecessor to the present system in the shape of the *baojia* system established during the Ming dynasty (Lu 2006; Heberer & Göbel 2011)

Urban communities in China are administered by locally elected community residents' committees²⁹ (社区居民委员会) and officials at work stations (工作站). Officially community residents' committees do not belong to the government apparatus, but are considered public organizations (Heberer & Göbel 2011: p. 34-35). In practice, however, things are often not that simple, as people occupy multiple positions and organizations overlap. Some people serve simultaneously as members of the community committee, the work station and the party. In Dongping Lane the party secretary is work station manager, and the community committee director is work station vice-manager. From residents' point of view, the community office staff is experienced as a group of governing party-state agents.³⁰ This is reflected in the way residents talk about the office and it is similar to the way residents in China's urban communities generally approach the community offices (Tomba 2008: p. 54). Residents most often simply refer to community committee and work station staff as "the community" (社区) or "those from the community" (社区他们).

Local experience thus invalidates the official split between government and mass organizations expressed in the two separate terms community committee and work station. Through residents' expectations, conceptualizations and perceptions of those who are supposed to govern them, the community administration emerges as one coherent entity. Rather than distinguishing between community residents' committee (社区居民委员会) and work station staff (工作站工作人员), I refer to the practical assemblage of the two as the community office, and I refer to all of the staff as community officials to highlight their attachment to party-state structures. There are at least two distinct local meanings of the word community (社区): 1) the place Dongping Lane and by association all people who live in it, and 2) the community office and its staff. In the community handbook, the community committee and the work station staff are displayed on one of the first pages in a diagram of the hierarchy of administrative structure. Here the community committee and the work station staff are shown in one single diagram, with captions explaining who serves as what, which shows that there is considerable overlap in personnel as five of them, including the party

²⁹ Despite the name these bodies are staffed by salaried public servants and as such quite different from the Residents' Committees (居民委员会) of earlier times (Heberer & Göbel 2011: p.34)

³⁰ In his studies of urban communities, Luigi Tomba found different forms of governing in different Chinese communities with real estate agencies playing more active roles in newly built middle class communities and community offices being more influential and present in older, more working-class dominated communities suggesting that the modes of governing may be different depending on who is being governed and who is doing the governing (Tomba 2009). Zhang Jing has noted that there is a potential for conflict between community offices and real estate agencies as they both attempt to position themselves as relevant to people's lives (Zhang 2004).

secretary and the director, serve in both bodies. The heading of the diagram designates the staff as Dongping Lane Community Staff (东平巷社区工作人员) (DPX 2009).

A view of the low-carbon life campaign as a collaborative effort is actively promoted by campaigners as they generate a willful blurring of the line between the contributions of officials and residents. Little Zheng and some of the other community officials refer to the campaign as a series of "popular carbon reduction activities" (民间减碳活动). In doing so they draw the conception of the campaign in a direction that de-emphasizes the governing agent roles they themselves play and frame the campaign as a co-production, or even to some extent as something produced by the citizens. This is reflected in the way the vice-director of Hubin Street Office (湖滨街道), the administrative unit immediately above Dongping Lane, refers to the community official and residents as one group pioneering low-carbon activities and campaign elements such as the Residents Handbook (DPX 2009) and the Low-Carbon Household Standard (figure 3) as a "popular handbook" (民间手册) and a "popular standard" (民间标准). The emphasis on the influence and participation of private citizens could be seen as an attempt to imbue the campaign with legitimacy associated with being a grassroots movement. It could also be seen as a reflection of a more general perception and experience among governing agents such as community officials of being connected with rather than separated from the citizens in everyday life interactions in the communities they administer. To the residents, the community officials are neither an alien Other against which they must position themselves, nor a part of a local "we" that they are allied with, except when it comes to campaigning. The overall organization and execution of voluntary activities such as the low-carbon life campaign serves to generate a sense of a collective that includes both the community officials and the residents.

The homely atmosphere at the community office and the slogans invoking the community as residents' home may promote an experience of connection and unity. This is not to say that all people in Dongping Lane are equally involved or equally well positioned to influence the development of the low-carbon life campaign or community building in general. Distinctions are made between categories of people as officials talk about people collectively as residents and residents refer to the officials as "the community". It is, however, to say that the power to influence the social construction of low-carbon life is not divided up neatly along lines of identity as official or resident. Seeing the campaign as neither an imposition from above nor an accommodation from below involves paying attention to the particular people who have constructed and enacted it. In this

particular case, two very different social groups, young community officials and old community residents have come together agreeing to "talk across difference" (Tsing 2005) generating a new local understanding of climate change as the universalizing claims of the schematic version of low-carbon life have encountered the materialities and cultural interpretations in the particular locality.

As in other residential communities, the walls of public spaces are full of posters with photos and text about the work and structure of the local community office and the local communist party branch. As David Bray points out, this abundance of pictures and text informs citizens about the presence of local administrative structures and highlights the authority of the local community office (Bray 2006: p. 542). The posters alert residents to the priorities of the current campaign promoted by the community office, making the political environment increasingly legible. By looking at the walls the residents can get an overview of the local representatives of the party-state and of what is expected from the residents in terms of living up to the locally specific standards of civilized community life. Campaign events such as the installation of "talking garbage bins"³¹ are documented by photos displayed on the walls alerting all passers-by to the visits of prominent politicians or the introduction of various parts of the campaign.

As reflected in the term "community building" (社区建设), party-state conceptions of social life in China are of a notoriously social constructivist ilk. Policies often involve conscious attempts at altering social life through projects of social engineering. According to the logic of the state-sponsored endeavor of community building in urban China, communities must be more than administrative units. Transcending the administrative meaning of community, the residential community is to become a "human community with shared ethos and values" (Tomba 2008: p. 601). In order to enact them as communities in this social sense, the officials and residents must come together and conduct meaningful activities that connect a sense of purpose with a sense of belonging. The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is a series of such activities.

This conception of community building bears out a view of social life as something that has the potential for place-making. Adopting Michael Lambek's perspective of seeing the local not as that which is already there, but as a product of moral action, community construction can be seen to depend on the organization of activities, that are not only embraced by officials and residents, but are also targeting social and moral issues (Lambek 2011). Calls for deliberate and active efforts

³¹ The "talking garbage bins" are fitted with motion sensors that trigger a loudspeaker reminding people approaching the bins of the importance of sorting garbage.

such as that of community construction can be read as attempts to address worries over lack of social cohesion and sense of belonging. In addition to being the product of moral action, locality can be seen as a "fragile achievement" connected with the making of local subjects, in the sense that residents' potential failure to subscribe to the social imaginary associated with a place-making project always threatens to undo the locality as meaningful place (Appadurai 1996: p. 179). In the promotion of community building in urban China, morality is connected with a sense of belonging in the idea that for residents, community building involves enacting a citizen role that contributes to making the community a good place to live through voluntary action and proper "civilized" behavior (Heberer 2009; Tomba 2009). Practical everyday acts of inhabiting such as disposing of garbage, keeping plants in the stairways, using the park and visiting local shops are supplemented with propaganda-like place-invocations on posters and other written material produced by officials and propaganda workers (DPX 2009; HSO 2011). Appeals to a sense of belonging to residential communities, cast the community as a family and this rhetoric is reproduced in the discourse of campaigners, most notably through frequent recycling of variants of the slogan "the community is my home" (社区是我家) which is found on posters in the community. Although many of the retired residents of Dongping Lane have lived in the same place for many decades, their experiences in youth did not necessarily foster a sense of belonging to Dongping Lane. They have been attached to different work units and different micro-districts. In addition to the non-existence of the imagined community of Dongping Lane before urban reform,³² the imagined community of the nation took precedence. In the revolutionary period appeals to nation building and loyalty to the party and Chairman Mao overrode expressions of place-attachment preventing strong local sense of belonging to such intermediary entities as neighborhoods (Whyte & Parish 1984: p. 367). Despite the difference in scale, there are indications that nation building to some extent serves as a mental model for community building. Andrew Kipnis argues that the mimetic approaches to urban forms that make so much of urban China look alike to foreign eyes are part of nation building (Kipnis 2012). This can also be applied to community building. Communities are conceived as the "cells" of society in the propagation of the project of community building (Wang 2005). Besides the obvious parallel use of the term "building", the two projects share the language of family relations. Mimicking the use of national anthems, the community officials have promoted "The Dongping Lane Song", which is printed with musical notation on the last page of the Residents Handbook.

³² At that time Dongping Lane was just the name of a street and a micro-district (小区).

The song ends with the line "*you and I meet in Dongping Lane, our home*" (DPX 2009), echoing the sentiments found in patriotic songs.

Changing notions of citizenship

Recent academic analyses of changes in the relationship between the Chinese party-state and the Chinese population stress that in some fields of governing, such as urban communities, there has been a move from direct control and regulation of the population to a more indirect approach where citizens are to be trained to be responsible and self-governing, which is supposed to make it possible to "govern from a distance" (Bray 2006; Tomba 2009; Heberer & Göbel 2011, Hoffman 2011). In their study of the construction of communities as administrative units in China, Heberer and Göbel conclude that one of the goals in governing the communities is to develop new ways of thinking; to let social control be replaced by cultural control in the sense that residents internalize a community ethos. The work carried out in relation to public participation thus becomes part of a greater political project aimed at fostering new notions of citizenship in China (Heberer & Göbel 2011: p. 63). In Dongping Lane these notions come to involve an engagement with climate change.

The overall trend in the changing notions of citizenship in reform era China is caught in the title of Merle Goldman's 2005 volume "*From Comrade to Citizen*" (Goldman 2005). Citizenship has to do with the quality of the relationship between individual and political community (Goldman & Perry 2002: pp. 1-2). Whereas being a comrade is associated with belonging to the people, being a citizen is associated with having your own interests. The party-state-sponsored project of urban community building can be viewed as an expression of a fundamental shift in the logic of state-society relations and the formation of what Kristen Parris refers to as "new, modernized, postcommunist citizenship that accepts both the authority of the party-state, the legitimacy of the market, and responsibility for self and community" (Parris 2012: p. 190). Evocations of the importance of volunteering as well as references to use of coercion as a non-option, yet something worth mentioning, among community officials in Dongping Lane points to a primary change in the relationship between individual and political community: a move from direct to indirect ways of exerting power. This change has not escaped the attention of observers of Chinese society and politics. Feng Xu characterizes the shift as one from micro-management to macro-management (Xu 2008: p. 24). Elaine Jeffreys and Gary Sigley describe the development as a move from Maoist mass-mobilization to "governing from a

distance" (Jeffreys & Sigley 2009: p. 2). Aihwa Ong and Zhang Li use the term "socialism from afar" to denote similar developments (Ong & Zhang 2008: p. 2).³³

The notion of voluntarism, which was central to Maoist mass-mobilization, but arguably not necessarily free of coercion, has taken on new meanings in the light of a move toward an increasing sense of privacy and relative freedom not to participate (Heberer 2009: p. 508). Campaigners risk being seen as infringing upon this freedom when their work is seen as an effort to inject public morality back into household affairs that have become more private in the late reform era after being open to public scrutiny in earlier times. Their efforts to educate other residents may be interpreted as an attempted return to what Michael Dutton calls "*an affective community of 'comradeship'*", which was characterized by a strong focus on conflict, reducing all questions to the question of identifying friends and enemies (Dutton 2009: pp. 34-35). When the state projects an image of being more distant through a less hands-on approach to governing, citizens may adopt similarly less directly involved attitudes.

"Not everybody is like that [participating voluntarily in low-carbon life]. There was an incident when a man who was throwing out garbage was corrected by the garbage sorting guide.³⁴ When she tried to correct him, he simply said: I'm a taxpayer!"

Mr. Rao, dressed in his orange garbage collector uniform and always eloquently analyzing society and politics, peppering his informal lectures with illustrative anecdotes, was a source of many such stories. The implication of this particular story, that there are people out there with a minimalist approach to citizenship, who do not want the community to interfere with them, was – according to Rao – due to the fact that the campaign had not been running for very long. Given a few years this could be remedied. Apart from raising the issue of what level of participation in community affairs it takes to be a proper citizen, the story points to the dominant way of viewing both the importance of (and the natural path towards) higher levels of voluntary participation in community affairs and particularly in the low-carbon life campaign. Under the new regime of governing from a distance, being a proper citizen entails more than the independent attitude promoted to counter the sense of dependence associated with the former Danwei, it also entails taking responsibility for communal

³³ This literature can to some extent be viewed as the product of Western academia's coming to terms with the resilience of the communist party state as economic reform has not transformed China into a democracy. Here, coming to terms both denotes the sense of accepting this non-transformation and the unlikelihood of its imminent appearance as a fact, and the sense of finding adequate words for analyses of the developments that have in fact taken place.

³⁴ Garbage sorting guides are volunteers who take turns to stand by the community garbage bins giving instructions in garbage sorting to the people who approach the bins to throw out garbage.

life (Xu 2008: p. 29). Furthermore, the counter-image of the citizen as merely a taxpayer illustrates the reliance on citizens' recognition of a responsibility to be involved, without which the self-governing approach of community building would not work (Zhang 2010: p. 19). Community building constructs residents as more than atomized individuals, and voluntary work is promoted as one of the primary ways of generating a sense of responsibility for larger collectives than the family (Parris 2012: p. 200).

Officials in Dongping Lane see voluntary participation as necessary if a campaign effort such as theirs is to be effectively sustained. In the words of one official: *"There is only hope [of sustaining the campaign] if participation is voluntary"*. His colleague put it in similar terms: *"It has to be voluntary. Relying on force is no good"*. In addition to the importance of volunteering, taking initiative rather than having to be mobilized is an important part of being a proper community person. The mantra-like status of the idea that activities have to be people's own initiative (自觉), found among campaigners, indicates, that they are acutely aware that their campaign takes place in a changing social and political environment where different people subscribe to different notions of citizenship, and that accordingly their campaign efforts will be taken up by some, ignored by some and resisted by others. Community-based campaigning emerges as an activity primarily directed at retired people.

Volunteering

On a sunny day during one of the first weeks of fieldwork, Auntie Shan, who owns a small shop in the community, and seems to know just about everybody, tries to help me out with my research by accompanying me on a walk through the little alleys, asking everybody we meet to tell me about the low-carbon life campaign. Outside one of the numerous local hair salons we meet Ms. Liu, whom Auntie Shan knows to be a community volunteer. *"I wouldn't exactly say I volunteered, people from the community asked me to do it because I've lived here a long time and know people"*, says Ms. Liu. A bystander joins in: *"It's a task given to her by the party, so she can't..."* Ms Liu cuts him off with a laugh and explains that she feels proud to contribute. Her responsibility as a volunteer is to visit people in their homes to supply them with green plastic bags for kitchen waste and instruct them in how to sort household garbage. She finds the job fine and rewarding as long as people respond positively, which most people do, but there are also those who just stare at her blankly without saying a word, and that makes her feel terrible.

Addressing individualization and anxieties over erosion of social morality in Chinese society, the communist party leadership has promoted residential communities as sites for the work of improving the "moral quality" and civic skills of people in urban China (Luova 2011: p. 785). Voluntary work in urban communities has been framed as part of the promotion of new notions of state-society relations, in which volunteers are addressed as citizens rather than as members of the masses (Luova 2011: p. 792). The idea that a certain level of "quality" (素质) is a prerequisite for embracing new citizen roles permeates local campaign discourse.³⁵ Participating in low-carbon life activities and implementing some of the Low-Carbon Life Golden Points (figure 2) or elements of the Low-Carbon Household Standard (figure 3) in daily life requires a combination of knowledge and subscription to the underlying sense-making claims of the campaign, which would have citizens take responsibility for community building as well as climate change mitigation. Like other community building projects in urban China, the campaign draws on the willingness among those perceived as "high-quality" residents to act as exemplars for others to emulate (Tomba 2009: p. 602). By connecting climate change mitigation with ideas about civilization and "population quality" (人口素质), the community officials posit the campaign as part of a political-cultural project in which the improvement of the "quality" of citizens becomes crucial for the governing of communities in China's cities (Bray 2006: p. 533; DPX 2011). In the project of community building, a focus on environmental quality comes together with a focus on civilization and "population quality" (Hoffman 2011).

The volunteer tasks such as that of Ms. Liu involve a mixture of old and new campaign techniques and also old and new ideas about the relationship between public and private spheres. The house calls made by Ms. Liu and others and the close monitoring of garbage sorting done by Mr. Lü have a degree of affinity with the methods of mass mobilization and surveillance that characterized earlier campaigns (Bennett 1976; Cell 1977). There are, however, large parts of the campaign, both when it comes to ideas and to the practical execution of the campaign, that spring from a radically different approach to campaigning which stresses self-governing and the fostering of responsible citizens. In the campaign propaganda material that has been distributed in the community, as well as in the ways in which officials talk about the campaign, connections are made between low-carbon life and ideas about civility and "population quality". During an interview, the community's party secretary summed up her vision of how citizens need to change: *"I hope people will volunteer in the*

³⁵ One example was provided by Little He, a young female official, who posited "quality" as a prerequisite for participation: *"It depends on 'quality' – if people don't understand, they won't volunteer"*.

future – and that their quality will improve". Through this type of references the campaign contributes to a division of residents into those fit and those unfit to participate in the governing of the community (Bray 2006: p. 545). Low-carbon life campaigners are aware that there can be several different reasons why some people do not participate. Campaigners divide non-participants into two distinct groups, namely those who are too ignorant or unattached to the community to participate, and those who are too busy with their work. The first group, those who are excluded, corresponds to a stereotypical image of migrant workers and the second group, those who are excused, represents the younger generations who are seen to have more important things to do than engaging in the hobby-like activities of low-carbon life. Both groups serve as figures to illustrate the importance of community building through voluntary work.

The low-carbon life campaign is but the latest in a long series of campaigns in Dongping Lane. In recent years, it is preceded by nation-wide campaigns such as the "Five Good" Civilized Households (五好文明家庭) campaign and the "Green Community" (绿色社区) campaign. Plaques announcing the model status of Dongping Lane in these campaigns are displayed on the wall outside the community office. The large number of campaigns that people have been exposed to in China has brought with it the phenomenon of "campaign fatigue" (Boland and Zhu 2012: p. 153). Often there are cynical reactions to official appeals to responsibility and public participation (Heberer and Göbel 2011: p. 5).³⁶ The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane avoids being derailed by these obstacles by being voluntary and by including a core group of retired people as volunteers, some of whom are party members and retired officials who share the values of the campaign and have a positive attitude towards its methods. The large proportion of retired people in the community provides the officials and this core group with opportunities to recruit participants who share the values and cultural perceptions that inform the campaign. The core group can be seen as contributing to the governing of the other residents in the community and thus relieving the officials of a part of their burden³⁷ (Bray 2006: p. 545). Attempts to foster public participation in China's urban communities can be viewed as part of a larger ongoing project in which the communities are seen as building blocks in the construction of responsible citizens and less hands-on local governing practices (Heberer & Göbel 2011: p. 155).

³⁶ The issue of campaign fatigue and cynicism in the Mao era is raised by Gordon Bennett in *Yundong: Mass Movements in Chinese Communist Leadership* (1976). In this period cynicism and participation that amounted to political theatre demanded skill and was risky as genuinely enthusiastic activists would be looking for those who faked sincerity (Bennett 1976: p.86-87)

³⁷ According to the community director in Dongping Lane voluntary work has multiple benefits as it lightens the workload of the officials and brings residents closer together at the same time.

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane addresses community building and climate change mitigation simultaneously. Although the activities are organized around a practical focus on changing everyday life practices in the direction of saving more energy and resources, the community building dimension is important to the participants. In their own accounts of their work, community officials prioritize the task of bringing people together and fostering interaction among them over the actual environmentalist content of the campaign.³⁸ Yet the content has come to play an important role in the particular local flavor that community building takes on in Dongping Lane. If we see locality as a product of moral activity (Lambek 2011) then the campaigners could be seen as attempting to constitute their community as one where climate change related activities matter to the identity of the place and the people who see themselves as belonging to it.

Climate change and citizenship

Paraphrasing climate scientist Mike Hulme, we can say that the growing presence of climate change as a concern of various societal actors around the world has the potential to alter notions of citizenship (Hulme 2009: p. xviii). In the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane, the quality of the relationship between individual and community is coming to be understood, at least in part, in terms of engagements with the idea of climate change. Being a proper citizen, then, means relating not just to agents of state power and to one's fellow citizens, it crucially also means relating to the atmosphere of the Earth. Drawing on Latour's concept of assemblages, Shannon May argues that the ways in which climate change becomes connected with citizenship and the political, institutional and practical shapes that the connections take, are not determined solely by the materiality of the Earth, but should be seen as a complex and contingent assemblage of social and natural processes constructed by human decisions (May 2011: p. 108). The local subjects produced through the local moral action of engaging the claims about civilized citizenship promoted in the community take on an identity shaped to some extent by their engagement with the idea of climate change. As the low-carbon life campaign has grown in scope and significance, it has become increasingly central to the local understanding of citizenship because it is one of the most visible arenas where residents and officials negotiate their relationships.

What the practitioners of low-carbon life are enacting, then, is a citizen role that reflects the assemblage of social life, politics and natural processes that is the idea of climate change. We might refer to this notion of citizenship as "climate citizenship". Like another form of citizenship which is

³⁸ While Little Zheng took very seriously the challenge of addressing climate change mitigation, he was clear about the main priority of his work as a campaign organizer: *"the most important thing is that people volunteer"*.

the product of the incursion of techno-scientific reasoning into the realm of state-society relations, that of biological citizenship (Rose & Novas 2005), climate citizenship can be associated with the obligation to care, but rather than care for bodies and genomes, climate citizenship represents an expectation that people should care about the state and future of the global climate. Whereas biological citizenship entails the right to health and the duty to be well (Rose 2001), climate citizenship can be said to entail the right to a stable, livable climate and the duty to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There are allusions to this kind of social contract mentality, where proper conduct grants access to a desirable future, in the local advertising for garbage sorting. Here, performing the duty of garbage sorting gives access to the shared good of an imagined future life.



The central garbage bin station in Dongping Lane (photo: Zhang Liyan)

A poster by the central garbage bin station in Dongping Lane shows a pastoral scene that one would need at least a golf club membership to witness anywhere around Hangzhou. A smiling little boy is running across a meadow towards a happy, crouching couple, the woman getting ready to embrace

him. The text reads: *"Optimize the garbage treatment process. Share the happy low-carbon life (优化垃圾处理流程. 共享低碳美好生活) "*. The idea of climate citizenship addresses the relations between citizens and their non-human surroundings as well as their relations with the state. It is hardly accidental that a large number of posters in public spaces in Hangzhou, most notably on the temporary fences erected around construction sites, feature this type of trimmed golf course-like meadow. Implied in the poster image is the point that low-carbon life is a form of environmental protection, aiming to preserve pleasant landscapes, and more symbolically a pleasant future.

Low-carbon life as civilized community life

In the context of wider changes in the relationship between citizens and governing agents in urban China, campaigns, such as the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane, can be viewed as one of the civilizing projects aiming at "responsibilization" of the Chinese urban population and creation of exemplars for individual self-improvement (Tomba 2009: pp. 592-593). As a civilizing project, the widening and deepening of the reach of the ideas and practices of low-carbon life are envisioned by its proponents as gradual, long-term processes. The standards for climate citizenship presented in the information material about low-carbon life do not represent an expectation that most people will conform to them here and now, but rather the idea of incremental change projected to last many years.

"You shouldn't take it so seriously. Most people still get it wrong". This was how Mr. Lü, the local garbage inspector, responded when I asked him if he could give me some tips on how to decide whether garbage items such as chicken bones or walnut shells, which are hard to classify because they are organic yet not easily decomposed, should go into the green bin for kitchen waste or the yellow one for other waste. Later he elaborated:

"Although the knowledge is there, it still takes time to change habits. You cannot expect people to do it 100 percent correctly from the beginning. There is a process to it. When I was in school we were taught not to spit on the ground. Today most people don't spit on the ground. To be sure there is still a minority who spit, but the knowledge is there now. In the past maybe 90 percent of all people spat on the ground, now it is only 10 percent. This is a big change. There was a starting point, so there was change. It is the same with garbage sorting. Now there are perhaps 10 percent doing it, 90 percent are still not involved, but as times change, maybe we will have 90 percent who pay attention to garbage sorting and only 10 percent who don't."

It was hardly a coincidence that Mr. Lü chose the habit of spitting on the ground as a comparison for illustrating his ideas about garbage sorting. Bans on spitting have been emblematic of civilizing campaigns in China and it appears as the first on the list of the "Six don'ts (六不)" in the section on civilized community life in the Dongping Lane Residents Handbook (DPX 2009: p. 28). Lü's juxtaposition of spitting and garbage sorting highlights the intersection of environmental concerns, hygiene, and the notion of spiritual civilization, which is also found elsewhere in community-based environmental campaigning in China (Boland and Zhu 2012).



Civilizing message posted on the wall built around a construction site in Hangzhou (photo by the author)

By being associated with civilized community life, low-carbon life becomes embedded in a wider frame of public morality and as such it becomes drawn into more general discussions that have been described as a "quest for meaning" in a rapidly changing society (Kleinman 2011; Yan 2011). Highly visible acts such as spitting and littering may be associated with a lack of care for the

community. In a similar vein, Heberer has noted that community offices are seen as promoters of "moral development" of society (Heberer 2009: p. 510). Officials and residents in Dongping Lane use low-carbon life as a framework for action in relation to climate change, but also as a device for interpreting and debating their place in the world, and for making sense in their lives. Low-carbon life is thus not just a purely practical part of everyday life, it is a morally charged part of "civilized community life" (文明的社区生活) and as such part of the civilizing discourse, which is dominant in official writing about public life (for an example see: Wang 2005) and a ubiquitous part of urban visual culture in China.

The low-carbon life campaign contributes to local understandings of community life. In the Resident's Handbook (DPX 2009) of Dongping Lane Community, the section on low-carbon life is part of a larger section with the heading "Civilized Community Life" (文明的社区生活). This section also contains list of do's and don'ts of Hangzhou citizens and the general rules one must follow to be a good community resident. These kinds of guidelines are omnipresent in public spaces in China. What stands out about the approach in Dongping Lane is that low-carbon life makes up the main part of the prescriptions of civilized community life. Whereas the general rules of civilized conduct for Hangzhou citizens are expressed in one page of slogans and a "community resident's pact" (社区居民公约) of also just one page, low-carbon life takes up four pages in the booklet (DPX 2009). This prominence in the written material is paralleled in the prominence of low-carbon life when the community officials talk about community life. During interviews and informal talks, dispute resolution and efforts to prevent residents from disposing of large garbage items in the community's public spaces were described by community officials as two crucial tasks in the attempt to preserve social and material harmony, but the promotion and implementation of the low-carbon life campaign emerges as a defining community building effort that establishes a distinct identity for Dongping Lane.³⁹ Low-carbon life stands out as the specialty of Dongping Lane. This is the part of civilized community life that is used to make the community stand out as a special place. Rather than just being seen as a civilized community it is seen as civilized because it is a low-carbon community. Climate change mitigation and promotion of a general notion of civilized behavior become entangled as campaign organizers and participants connect their motivations with both these party-state-sponsored projects.

³⁹ The officials knew that I was examining the low-carbon life campaign rather than the overall social life in the community, and this no doubt contributed to the prominence of low-carbon life in their talk about their work, yet it is also prominent in journalistic as well as administrative writing about the community.

Enabling moral action

The role of being a climate citizen merges with the role of being a community person espoused by the state-sponsored attempts to generate a sense of community, which Heberer has labeled "authoritarian communitarianism" and categorized as part of a search for ways to counter social atomization and moral decline (Heberer 2009: p. 512). The social transition characterizing the reform era has been characterized as a movement from utopianism to hedonism by Ci Jiwei (Ci 1994). More recently the notion of a loss of moral compass has been reflected in debates on the internet in China over widespread callousness and extreme cases of antisocial and amoral behavior as proof of a more general state of moral dysfunction among people in China. These debates are reflected in the recent writings of Yan Yunxiang, who argues that individualization in China is accompanied by erosion of social trust and the rise of "uncivil individuals" (Yan 2009; Yan 2012). Balancing out the widespread pessimistic view that China is facing a moral crisis as Chinese citizens are caught in a "moral vacuum" in the wake of a general disillusionment with socialism, Jing Jun has used the case of blood donations to show that there is a widespread willingness to act altruistically among common people in China (Jing 2010).

If this focus on moral dysfunction is turned on its head showing the extent of moral concern among worried citizens in China, it may be read as a sign that outrage outweighs immorality. For each reported case of "extraordinary extortion", in which elderly people who have fallen down in public places falsely accuse helpers of causing the accident, there are scores of people voicing outrage over this phenomenon (Yan 2009). Jing Jun's skepticism towards the idea of a moral crisis is shared by Anna-Lora Wainwright, who argues that rather than being characterized by a lack of morality, the present in China shows ample evidence of efforts to recreate morality (Lora-Wainwright 2013: p. 47). Generally speaking, the residents of Dongping Lane, who participate in the campaign, exhibit very few signs of anxiety about moral decline in the face of social change or indeed about the dangers posed by global climate change. Instead they approach the campaign requirements of changing everyday consumer practices as hobby-like projects they can benefit from and which can add meaning to their lives. Yet, they are also contributions to larger collectives. Engaging in the practices of low-carbon life means contributing to one of the most complicated and difficult endeavors of our time, namely that of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate global climate change. This is moral action in the sense of attempting to bring about changes that are to the benefit of people they will never meet. The low-carbon life standard, the list of tips and the various energy and resource saving practices, which have been subsumed under the label "low-carbon" in

the campaign, form a repertoire of actions one can engage in to embody the role of the proper local moral subject, the climate citizen. As such, climate citizenship is a form of empowerment. The campaign offers community residents a chance to "do the right thing" – that is it casts them in the role of people who can make a difference by engaging in action aimed at a greater good, and it sets up a coherent framework for this engagement. By framing residents as responsible citizens and informing them about the connections between everyday life and greenhouse gas emissions, the information material of the low-carbon life campaign has the effect of promoting and enabling moral action.

In general the descriptions of low-carbon life offered by campaign material and by informants in Dongping Lane focus more on how relatively easy it is to "do the right thing" than on various temptations to "do the wrong thing". Making low-carbon life a part of the moral concerns of those citizens who subscribe to the idea of civilized community life, the campaign enables meaning-making action that is sometimes moral in the sense of being carried out for the benefit of other people (Zigon 2008). At other times the practices of low-carbon life are construed as more self-interested, often by association with being pleasant or healthy. Concerns for self and concerns for larger collectives were routinely connected in the reasoning about low-carbon life practices that campaigners shared with me. Instead of viewing the energy saving practices of low-carbon life as selfless sacrifices, campaigners connected them with self-interest, but also with the interests of others. In their study of "life-nurturing" *yangsheng* (养生) activities in the parks of Beijing, Farquhar and Zhang note that there is a slippage between individual and society in the remarks of their informants, implying that "healthy old folks simply are the substance of a healthy society and a sound nation" (Farquhar & Zhang 2012: p. 198). In the article "The Changing Moral Landscape" (Yan 2011), which summarizes his studies of individualization and morality in China, Yan Yunxiang, presents a remarkable example of connecting the interests of oneself and others. A young woman presented a new interpretation of filial piety, claiming that since her parents' biggest hope was her happiness, she was expressing filial piety by living a happy life with the financial support of her parents (Yan 2011: p. 37). Extreme as this case may seem, there is an affinity with low-carbon life in the collapsing of the interests of daughter and parents. Low-carbon life campaigning as community building is presented as a collapsing of the interests of officials and residents in Dongping Lane, and on a large scale a collapsing of the interests of party-state and population. Both groups of actors construe their actions as good for themselves and for the other part and as such the campaign reads as a contribution towards propagating an image of harmony in urban China.

Conclusion

Together with the residents who have participated in the low-carbon life campaign, the employees at Dongping Lane Community Work Station (东平巷社区工作站) have built a low-carbon community. They have done so not in the sense that the general population in Dongping Lane now shares a sense of both local and global belonging, as well as a commitment to mitigating global climate change, but in the more limited sense of having forged a social collective of volunteers, who enact citizenship with reference to community building and low-carbon life. They have built a community within the community. Within this community of campaigning, notions of citizenship have become connected with confronting personal responsibility for global climate change. By staging the campaign, the community officials and the core group of volunteers with whom they cooperate have established practices directed at climate change mitigation in everyday life as moral and place-making action, which constitutes its practitioners as proper citizens and Dongping Lane as an exemplary community. Low-carbon life as community building represents a dominant worlding of the campaign. The party-state-sponsored projects of climate change mitigation and urban reorganization through community building becomes connected and entangled through the campaign efforts of the officials and residents of Dongping Lane. The campaign was initiated by the community office, and the activities of the campaign are organized collaboratively by officials and residents. As such the campaign serves to foster interaction not only among the residents but also between officials and residents. Low-carbon life thus emerges as a form of social integration in the community, while at the same time engaging its inhabitants and administrators in meaningful action.

As a way of making sense of climate change mitigation efforts, the idea that low-carbon life contributes to community building forges connections between different concerns, which will be shown in subsequent chapters to be a pivotal part of low-carbon life. So far, I have only presented the specific practices of low-carbon life in relatively schematized form. In the next chapter, *Campaigning in the Material World*, some of the practices of low-carbon life are examined in more detail in order to lay the ground work for the subsequent chapters, which deal with the ways campaigners connect their climate change mitigation efforts with their quests for good and meaningful lives and with the ways in which they attempt to make sense of their own place in the world by comparing their present situation with other times and places.

5. Campaigning in the Material World

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is constituted of a wide variety of ways in which people can begin to rework everyday life practices in the light of climate change. This chapter applies the notion of assembling to the analysis of the campaign in two senses of the word: firstly in offering an outline of some of the practices that make up the campaign and secondly in taking account of the role played by materiality in campaigning by focusing on person-thing assemblages such as those of community residents and their electrical appliances. In this perspective low-carbon life represents an attempt to alter the material culture among the pensioners in the community. The campaign can be seen as a response to changing consumption patterns and consumerist values in reform era China.

"We have money now but that doesn't mean we can be wasteful!" Like many of the other volunteers in the community, Mr. Cai is concerned about the waste of resources associated with growing affluence in China. Born in the republican era, he shares with many of his co-campaigners the experience of growing up in times of limited resources. *"After 'reform and opening up' (改革开放) common people got more money in their pockets and began spending extravagantly. Now we have to reduce carbon. When we became aware of this we began to economize more"*. By contrasting the present with two past conditions, firstly a time of scarcity when wasting was unthinkable, and secondly a time before the awareness about environmental problems and climate change had taken root, Mr. Cai's summary of the rationale of low-carbon life encapsulates the idea that in China, living in times of anthropogenic climate change is somehow connected with the reform era. Some proponents of the term the anthropocene date its beginning much earlier than that, namely to the beginning of the industrial revolution or sometimes even to the Neolithic (Crutzen & Stoermer 2010; Sayre 2012). The Mao era saw massive projects to alter natural environments, and these had precedents dating back to antiquity (Elvin & Liu 1998; Shapiro 2001). Nevertheless the campaigners connect the sense that human agency has consequences on a planetary scale with the economic development of recent decades.

The sense that something is out of whack; that things cannot go on as they have, is tied closely to the specific materiality of greenhouse gas emissions. In this regard the campaign is different from many other environmental protection activities in China because it is first and foremost addressing the global issue of climate change rather than the local issues of pollution, which tend to be the

focus of both environmental protest and less conflict-oriented attempts to make local environments less toxic in China. When the rationale for economizing springs from the idea of climate change, economizing practices are more likely to take some forms than others, because of the specific affordances of the materiality of greenhouse gas emissions. The aim of this chapter, then, is to situate the low-carbon life campaign in its material and practical environment and examine it as a response to changing relations between people and their things in early 21st century urban China.

The emergence of a large middle class in China pursuing consumerist lifestyles has occurred at a historical juncture, when the fact that consumption is a source of greenhouse gas emissions is becoming apparent to people committed to sustainability around the world. Awareness of climate change adds a new dimension of moral concern to everyday life consumer practices. This changes notions of responsibility by connecting the practices with greenhouse gas emissions and global climate change. Paul G. Harris uses the term "cosmopolitan justice" to refer to the moral dimension of the global interdependence brought about by climate change, and the obligation that people in a position to lower their greenhouse gas emissions have toward the rest of mankind (Harris 2010: pp. 159-160). Mr. Cai's caution not to respond to relative affluence with wasteful ways echoes the position of Harris, placing individuals and their possibilities, rather than nation states or histories of development, at the moral center of the predicament of the anthropocene (Harris 2010). Low-carbon life addresses a catalogue of everyday life practices, many of which have changed over the past decades, as new categories of consumer goods have become common in urban Chinese households. In that sense the campaign can be seen as a response to material lifestyle changes and as aiming to inject a sense of public morality into private consumption. Yet, it is not a public morality that would hold people accountable for transgressions, since it is based on voluntary participation. The campaign enables, but does not demand, moral action. Rather than shaming those who violate the norms of low-carbon life, the campaign is focused on praising those who follow them.

To develop a specific low-carbon life practice, the campaigners have to establish the connection between a certain everyday life practice and global climate change. The specific materiality of greenhouse gas emissions means that some things and practices are more likely than others to be drawn into the campaign. Taking low-carbon life seriously as a response to climate change thus entails a moment of what Jane Bennett calls "ambitious naiveté", that is, the postponement of constructivist critique for the sake of focusing for a moment on "thing-power" i.e. how non-human configurations such as carbon dioxide, cities, parks, landfills, apartments or electrical appliances

contribute to the shaping of how human lives are understood and lived (Bennett 2010: pp. 17-19). From this perspective the points in the Low-Carbon Model Household Standard (figure 3) of Dongping Lane Community address not so much practices as forms of human agency, as it addresses a wide range of assemblages of people and things, which in turn lead to practices.

This focus on the connections between the social and the non-social takes its cue from writers such as DeLanda and Latour, who employ the term assemblage to show that social construction depends on non-social building materials, and that reserving agency for humans alone hinders analysis of these assemblages (Latour 2005; DeLanda 2006).⁴⁰ The point in adding this "touch of anthropomorphism" is not to blame the air conditioner for emissions of greenhouse gases, but, in the words of Jane Bennett, to "... catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations" (Bennett 2010 p. 99). In this chapter I focus on the person-thing assemblages of everyday life consumer practices. Human bodies emit very small volumes of greenhouse gases. It is in assemblages with things that humans become a geological force on a planetary scale. Humans often to burn things in their pursuit of survival, wealth, comfort and convenience and fire is a consumer par excellence that produces emissions of greenhouse gases. Manufacturing, consumption and disposal all more or less directly involve burning things (Choy 2011: p. 165).

The social construction of climate change entailed in low-carbon life is thus not a purely social process and campaigners in Dongping Lane cannot freely choose what to focus on. Refrigerators and washing machines, for example, are consumers of resources and producers of greenhouse gas emissions and the campaigners know this. Ignoring refrigerators and washing machines in the practice and propagation of low-carbon life would lead to a strong cognitive dissonance. The categorization of things into those which are and those which are not related to low-carbon life must encompass, or try to encompass, all of everyday life, as it presents itself in local common sensibilities, in order to work as an analytical device for navigating the anthropocene.

In this way carbon-dioxide molecules force themselves upon the campaigners. Rather than objects to be manipulated at will, they emerge as problematic and tricky things that take part in the reshaping of the meanings of everyday life practices, making some developments more likely than

⁴⁰ One example is Latour's "Citizen-Gun" argument which holds that both the assertion that "guns kill people" and the assertion that "people kill people" are wrong because it is the assemblage of citizen and gun that leads to the large number of deaths as a result of gun violence in the USA (Latour 1999: p. 179-180, the example is highlighted in Fowles 2010)

others. Low-carbon life is a material campaign as much as it is a social one because it is more focused on changing how people relate to things than it is focused on changing how they relate to other people. In this, the campaign can be seen as mirroring the approach of Jane Bennett and other theorists of thing-power such as Bill Brown and Daniel Miller, paying attention to matter before engaging in social critique (Brown 2001; Miller 2005, Bennett 2010). At the same time, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane may be viewed as a project of social construction, as it represents an attempt to become an exemplar of civilized community life in times of climate change and to foster interactions, which would generate a sense of community around the issue of global climate change. This is what I referred to in the previous chapter as "climate citizenship".

In addition to shaping and administering everyday life consumption of citizens in a way that moves it toward lower emissions of greenhouse gases, the requirements of low-carbon life can be seen as attempts to illustrate and clarify the relationship between everyday life and climate change. Showing the connection between consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, the low-carbon life campaign serves to reveal that waste and extravagance cannot be seen as only connected with issues of social and economic inequality. Consumer practices have of course never been purely social, but their material dimensions become increasingly clear and morally charged through the concept of low-carbon life. Although many older residents of Dongping Lane connect the information they receive about climate change with memories of a time when summers were less menacingly hot and winters sometimes brought snow and ice,⁴¹ there is a realization that it is a creeping and worldwide development that cannot be captured by the senses of any one individual. As one campaigner succinctly put it, *"You cannot see global climate change"*. The campaigners are acutely aware that their effort is not only one of reducing emissions but also of rendering the predicament of the anthropocene visible. In doing so they could be seen as taking on the challenge of unlocking the Giddens paradox (Giddens 2009), i.e. connecting climate change mitigation with things that are immediate, tangible and visible. The concept of low-carbon life as embodied in the campaign in Dongping Lane has already produced numerous changes in local material practices. It has, albeit in a small setting among a specific demographic segment, shown its power to propel action and shape developments.

⁴¹ Historical data from the weather station at Xiaoshan Airport goes back to 1956 (with a gap in the Cultural Revolution years when measurements were apparently not taken) and indicates a rise in average temperatures as well as average maximum temperatures (<http://weatherspark.com/history/34121/1956/Hangzhou-Zhejiang-China>).

This chapter deals first with the materiality of low-carbon life and how it is rendered visible. This is followed by sections addressing how campaign participants in the community have attempted to change how they use two of the power consuming electrical appliances in the home, both of which are related to notions of comfort and regulation of temperature, namely the air conditioner and the refrigerator. The latter part of the chapter deals with the ways in which campaign participants envision and enact garbage sorting, disposal, and creative reuse of materials as low-carbon life practices. This is supplemented with an analysis of the role played by a local landfill in the campaign. Finally the chapter examines the role of plants and animals in the conceptions of low-carbon life and local environmental change through a focus on the project of "greening" the community.

The materiality of low-carbon life

The conception of low-carbon life as a set of practices that relate to everyday life in the community places the campaigner in an environment of things and substances that he or she can approach differently to reach the aim of lowering greenhouse gas emissions: garbage, shopping bags, food, plants, light bulbs, air conditioners, refrigerators, water, gas, TV sets, bicycles and cars are some of the things most commonly addressed. Disaggregating their urban reform era lifestyle into a list of objects and habits, the Low-Carbon Household Standard (figure 3) assists the campaigners as they seek to remake themselves by remaking their relationships with the things that surround them and are a large part of what constitutes their identities and their everyday lives. This way of approaching low-carbon life means that some things are more likely to become part of the campaign than others. In their practical engagements with the prescriptions of the standard the low-carbon life campaigners are confronted with a certain pattern of propensities and affordances in the things that make up their environment in the home and the community. The Low-Carbon Household Standard and the accompanying list of tips offer a preliminary answer to the question of what practices, things and materials are susceptible to the campaign aim of bringing about reductions of greenhouse gas emissions. People's practical responses to the standard are at the centre of my inquiries in this chapter.

Here a note on terminology may be in place. Referring to plants, air conditioners and light bulbs as things rather than objects is meant to reflect the idea of person-thing assemblages, but also a focus on breakdown of order inspired by the "thing theory" of Bill Brown, who asserts that "We begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us" (Brown 2001: p. 4). In this

perspective low-carbon life can be seen as a response to changes in the relation between human subjects and non-human objects brought about by the emergence of climate change. The refrigerators, cars and air conditioners, which were once objects of desire and providers of comfort and convenience enter into different, more problematic relations with humans as the changing composition of the atmosphere threatens to undo the world as we know it leaving the planet unfit for human habitation.⁴²

This predicament of the anthropocene adds to the mounting environmental anxieties that are pervasive in contemporary China. The material world seems to always make chaos of human attempts to make order. Climate change reminds people of their inability to keep the materials of their lives in place. Something keeps seeping, evaporating and oozing out. Countering this tendency towards disorder is what campaigning is about, and the means of reducing this tendency are knowledge, categorization, visualization and ordering of conduct. In the process of reducing carbon, campaigners also attempt to counter the tendency towards chaos represented by environmental destruction, which becomes connected with public morality through speculation about its possible connections with erosion of social trust (Kleinman et al. 2011; Yan 2012). In Dongping Lane, low-carbon life functions as a lens through which this breakdown of order becomes visible, and it is envisioned as a mechanism for making the social consequences of the breakdown manageable.

The reform era in China has been characterized by rapid economic development leading to striking and profound changes in private consumption patterns and volumes. In recent years a number of studies have focused on these changes and on Chinese citizens as consumers, more often than not characterizing the developments as a consumer revolution (Li 1998; Wu 1999; Davis 2000; Hooper 2005; Croll 2006; Gerth 2010; Griffiths 2013). Many new consumer durables became available in the reform era. Epitomized as the "four big items" (四大件), or sometimes the "three big items" (三大件), in the 1980s, typically desired consumer durables included refrigerators, televisions, washing machines and radios. In the Mao era watches, bicycles, radios and sewing machines were typical desirable items (Croll 2006: p. 36).

Like the majority of the urban populace, the residents of Dongping Lane now exhibit consumption patterns that are very different from those of their youth. They own and use a wide range of consumer durables such as air conditioners, television sets, washing machines and refrigerators.

⁴² A similar term has been applied to Beijing in state media news reports about air pollution calling the capital "barely fit for human habitation" (<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/02/13/china-pollution-idUKL3N0LI02320140213>)

Few of the older campaigners own and use computers, but most have mobile phones. In some households generations of electrical appliances of the same type co-exist. An elderly couple I visited own two television sets, one very large flat-screen and one small black-and-white television set. The woman told me that her husband, who was deeply immersed in the world of a historical television series during my visit to their home, would use the old black-and-white television set in the late evening. The reason for this was his tendency to fall asleep in front of the television. Doing so with the old set on rather than the new flat-screen would be much less of a waste of electricity. Distaste for waste is characteristic of the generations that most of the campaigners belong to (Boermel 2006). Here consumption and waste can be viewed as conceptually separate, with the category of waste being reserved for consumption without benefit or beyond reasonable benefit (according to local sensibilities). Another example of this layering of generations of consumer durables is the household of Auntie Sun who have both air conditioners and electric fans and mostly use the much less power-consuming fans except during the most extreme heat spells when the heat is too overpowering.

Consumer durables have taken on new meaning because of climate change, but the campaign is not framed in anti-consumerist terms. Rather than fighting against a lifestyle that leads to a high level of greenhouse gas emissions, the campaigners are trying to temper and modify it. Rather than eradication, the campaign is about reduction. This moderate approach to campaigning is generated through both the social and the non-social construction of climate change that fuels the sense-making, which takes place around the concept of low-carbon life, as well as the thing-power that shapes local material culture. Low-carbon life as a politically moderate and measured response to climate change reflects that consumerism is widely embraced and is not generally conceived of as harmful or undesirable.

Casting their efforts as a struggle against consumerism would place the campaigners outside the mainstream of society. Rather than criticizing the practices of others, they try to change their own. All the same, low-carbon life is meant to change habits and practices that have become commonly accepted and embraced. The uneasy relation of tension with consumerism, in which low-carbon life exists, is rarely addressed explicitly by campaigners, who tend not to talk about consumerism, but it is sometimes reflected on jokingly. A very active campaigner, whom others referred to as one of the community's low-carbon doyens (低碳达人), told me on more than one occasion that she was really

just an old lady being stingy. These assertions were accompanied by a sly smile hinting at the spirit of mild mischief in this ironic rendering of an unfavorable consumerist framing of low-carbon life.

Unlike earlier struggles with targeted enemies, the current engagement with low-carbon life is riddled by the problem that the campaigners are the producers of that which they campaign against. The materiality of greenhouse gas emissions makes climate change a vastly different problem from the exploitation of one social class by another. Far from being categorized as morally wrong and punishable deeds, the practices targeted for change in the campaign are normalized, accepted and habitualized everyday life practices. Their connection with climate change through greenhouse gas emissions prompts changes to them rather than prompting their eradication. Greenhouse gases are non-social sources of the social construction of low-carbon life. Social sources of social construction include the party-state-sponsored project of community building, concerns about health and convenience, the memories of material conditions and political campaigning in the Mao era, and values and reasoning concerning the ability and willingness of different groups of people to engage in climate change mitigation. Everyday life practices in the Mao era involved much lower levels of greenhouse gas emission than present ones. However, the Mao era is never characterized as a low-carbon era among the campaigners. Instead it is associated with bitterness. Any notion of low-carbon life as a return to the lifestyle of earlier times is dispelled with reference to this bitterness.

Low-carbon life is politically moderate. The disavowal of extreme measures both towards others and in one's own life that characterizes low-carbon life can be traced back to what Ci Jiwei calls "the ascetic pursuit of hedonism" (Ci 1994: p. 134). The idea behind this seemingly contradictory term is that asceticism and regimentation of life in the Mao era were conceived as means to an end and that end was a future life of pleasure. However extreme and militant the striving became, the ultimate rationale was always a future paradise free of hardship and the need for striving (Ci 1994). In the narratives of change offered by campaigners reflecting on their life in the past, the present belongs to a post-ascetic era. According to this logic, the time to enjoy life has arrived in both historical and biographical terms. The campaigners have reached retirement, and China – or at least their part of Hangzhou – has reached a level of development where the bare necessities are no longer a serious concern and most of their attention can be directed towards having a good time.

An official from Hubin Street Office (湖滨街道), who has become involved in the low-carbon life campaign and visits Dongping Lane often, explained the rationale for the campaign's moderate

approach to lifestyle changes in a way that resonates with Ci's overall argument. Playing on the idea of avoiding waste he warned against an excessively ascetic version of low-carbon life: *"As a matter of fact, saving too much is also to waste. Reasonable consumption is the most scientific. If you don't consume, life has no flavor, it will lack quality. [...] Consuming too much is to waste, but not consuming also amounts to waste. What you are wasting is your prime, your health, your happiness"*. Contrasting asceticism not just with pleasure, but also with a scientific orientation toward consumption, speaks to a wider project of legitimating present governing practices by distancing them from past ones. Seeing moderate, balanced approaches to campaigning as the most scientific places more extreme approaches centered on mass-mobilization, coercion and asceticism, in an implied category of "unscientific" approaches. Here the term "scientific" does not refer to practices based on scientific evidence, but rather to something like "correct" with connotations of being reasonable, balanced and rational. Auntie Rong, a low-carbon life campaigner who sometimes reflected on campaigning in the past in rather critical ways, described the methods of coercion and mass-mobilization in Mao era campaigning as *"a little feudal"*.⁴³ As Stephan Feuchtwang points out, the rhetorical move by people in the post-Mao era of referring to ideas and practices of the Mao era as superstition echoes the labeling of pre-liberation times as feudal in the time of Maoist campaigning (Feuchtwang 2002: p. 196). In both cases the new era is established as qualitatively different from the old by categorizing the old as irrational or anti-modern. Rong and several of the other campaigners, who had similar criticisms, were objecting to the excessive and unbalanced character of former campaigning. In order to situate low-carbon life as a set of practices belonging to a positive mainstream imaginary of good lives in early 21st century urban China, the campaigners posit the campaigning of the Mao era as an Other, which is contrasted with their present engagements, rather than a series of precursors supplying a tradition to draw on. This theme is developed in more detail in chapter 7, Campaigning in a New Era.

⁴³ In Chinese communist parlance the adjective feudal is often followed by the noun superstition to form the compound feudal superstition (封建迷信) used to denounce ideas and practices as irrational and outdated.

Generating visibility

One of the first things visitors encounter at the Hangzhou Low-Carbon Science and Technology Museum (杭州低碳科技馆)⁴⁴ is an art installation of molecule models hanging from the ceiling of the lobby. This installation can be read as visualization of the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Even without much knowledge of chemistry, it is fairly easy to figure out that the models with one plastic ball of a certain size connected via tubes with two other balls of another certain size represent carbon-dioxide molecules. This piece of art renders the problem of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere visible in a way that also draws attention to the fact that the whole problem is brought forward as a problem through natural scientific studies. Because you cannot see them, greenhouse gases may seem immaterial, both in the sense of being non-material and in the sense of being unimportant. They are invisible not only metaphorically in the sense that they are not noticed and discussed, but literally invisible to the human eye until somehow rendered visible through visualization techniques.

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane draws on similar techniques to let climate change and greenhouse gas emissions be represented by things that are immediately visible and tangible. The campaign and its propaganda can be seen as attempts by the officials and residents to gain the upper hand in the relations with the various things that they come together with in the person-thing assemblages of their everyday life consumption practices. By specifying a concrete series of things and related practices, the standards of low-carbon life serve to break the spell of what Daniel Miller calls "the humility of things", i.e. that unnoticed things derive their power over people from being unseen as they set the scene for social life without being open to challenge (Miller 2005: p. 5). Elizabeth Shove's studies of how expectations of comfort, cleanliness and convenience change through normalization of air conditioning, showering and laundering are an example of the attempt to unravel this "humility of things" (Shove 2003).

Showing how the norms and expectations of a comfortable and good life in contemporary China are tied to specific foods, vehicles and electrical appliances that all generate greenhouse gas emissions, the low-carbon life campaign highlights the roles of things in the social construction of everyday life. The Low-Carbon Model Household competition, which gives points for living up to a specific

⁴⁴ The museum is relatively new. When I first visited the site in September 2011 it was an empty shell in the middle of a dusty construction site and people in Dongping Lane did not know about it. There is no formal collaboration between the museum and Dongping Lane Community, but a handful of the community officials have visited the museum on trips organized by Hangzhou Environmental Protection Bureau (杭州市环保局).

standard for civilized community life through consumer practices, represents a highly stylized rendering of a desirable modern lifestyle, consciously cast as a low-key alternative to the lifestyle of conspicuous consumption embraced by some, desired by others and criticized by many in contemporary China. In both cases the key to fitting successfully in, is surrounding oneself with certain things and using them in a certain way. As an alternative to a luxurious lifestyle of wasteful, conspicuous consumption, low-carbon life is faced with the paradox of trying to stand out as exemplary by doing things that are notoriously unspectacular and mundane.

The series of material practices that make up the low-carbon life campaign are conceived not only as a way of changing consumption patterns among the participants, but also as form of communication with the world beyond the campaign. Through lectures and media reports the campaigners get their messages to the wider public. As Xuefei Ren points out, when environmental protection is drawn into the development strategies of Chinese cities, there is a tendency towards "spectacularization", i.e. focus on highly visible projects such as eco-cities conceived as flagship projects (Ren 2012). The campaign in Dongping Lane could hardly be more different from prestige projects such as Dongtan Eco-City near Shanghai or Tianjin Eco-City, which are emblematic of this development (The World Bank 2009). Although low-carbon life in Dongping Lane is embedded in formal networks of comparison and competition to be recognized as a model community, the local strategy for attaining this exemplary status is to orchestrate what amounts to an unspectacular spectacle. The campaign is not noisy and flamboyant. Its participants do not take to the streets with banners and megaphones and its messages are moderate and modest.

Attempting to stand out by embracing moderation and modesty creates a tension, perhaps best captured by the low-carbon doyen characterizing herself as nothing but a stingy old woman. The campaigners in Dongping Lane are not "going green to be seen" (Griskevicius et al 2010) by engaging in expensive or troublesome consumer practices. Rather than showing off their willingness to sacrifice money or effort, they attempt to show that neither of those sacrifices is necessary. The point they are making is that low-carbon life can be practiced *without* trouble; that you do not need to go out of your way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Embedding responses to climate change in the everyday lives of retired people in an old urban community the campaign posits itself as an alternative to such green modernization projects as eco cities. Low-carbon life, as it is envisioned by most of its practitioners in Dongping Lane, is consciously anti-heroic and mundane. One of the low-carbon doyens I got to know fairly well was sometimes plagued by

apocalyptically framed anxieties about the dangers of global warming.⁴⁵ Her response, when I asked what she could do in the face of the threat of climate disaster may be illustrative of the local approach to climate change mitigation. She responded by showing me a cardboard box with baby clothes she had knitted out of reused yarn. While it may at a surface glance seem comically out of proportion to knit baby clothes in order to ward off climate change disaster, this hobby-like approach to countering climate change may generate attention through the tension between the magnitude and gravity of the problem and the seeming lightness of the proposed solution.

Local as well as national media have showed a great deal of interest in the campaign. While here are other reasons why reporters find the campaign worth writing about, the unspectacular nature of low-carbon life practices is one of the things reporters pick up on (Liu 2010; Mao 2010). To some extent then, media representations of the low-carbon life campaign frame it as a curiosity and while it secures their attention, it also entails the risk that low-carbon life in Dongping Lane comes to be seen as merely a cute and funny story of old people's quaint attempts to fit their everyday life concerns into the agendas of a mainstream Chinese society that has long ago left them behind. Although the image of isolated people out of touch with recent developments is very far from reflecting what is going on in the campaign, some of the media reports on Dongping Lane are tinged with this notion of ignorant and self-contained old people. One example is a piece written by a reporter who speculates that they have probably not heard about the COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen but instead get involved because they care about saving a bit on their electricity bills (Xu 2010).⁴⁶ The paternalistic attitude towards the campaigners that some observers take may indicate a rationale for campaigning among the retired residents: to resist this kind of symbolic marginalization by positioning themselves and their engagements with climate change as relevant to the overall development of society. Little Zheng and the other officials, who have contributed to the design of the low-carbon life campaign, take a less paternalistic approach to campaigning. Stressing initiative, innovation and voluntary participation they draw on the locally situated knowledge and general dispositions of the retired residents rather than seeking to control them or write them off as irrelevant.

⁴⁵ About a handful of the resident I interacted with expressed their responses to the idea of climate change with an anxiety finding expression in apocalyptic scenarios, and all of them connected this imagery to Hollywood disaster movies such as 'The Day After Tomorrow' and '2012'.

⁴⁶ Seeing ignorance and lack of connection with the trends of mainstream society as the a priori assumed state of things among the campaigners was not exclusive to journalists. Chinese academics that I have discussed the campaign with tend to assume that the participants have little or no knowledge about climate change and environmental issues.

The campaigners attempt to reconfigure their relations with certain household items not only through the prescriptions of the low-carbon standard, but also by using them as objects of reflection about what low-carbon life can be made to mean. Air conditioners and refrigerators are drawn into the campaign in ways that are illustrative of the processes of cultural interpretation of everyday life practices that underpin the sense-making associated with low-carbon life. The next two sections of this chapter focus on these two household items respectively.

Setting air conditioners at 26 degrees

Summers in Hangzhou get extremely hot. In July 2013 CCTV News cited a report based on 30 years of meteorological data placing the city in third place among China's hottest cities.⁴⁷ My second period of fieldwork in Dongping Lane began in June 2012 and the hot weather was a common topic of conversation. There is nothing surprising in this since the weather is after all, as Lucian Boia rightly points out, perhaps the most common topic of dialogue between human beings (Boia 2005). What may be instructive, however, of the way the concept of low-carbon life makes its way into these everyday acts of meaning-making, are the directions that these conversations sometimes take in Dongping Lane. One common way of connecting the weather with the low-carbon life campaign found among the residents is to talk about the use of air conditioning.

"We have an air conditioner but we don't use it much because of low-carbon life". This seemingly straightforward explanation by one of the campaigners summarizes the way one of the points in the low-carbon life standard is supposed to work, but in order to arrive at this causal relation between reduced use and campaign work, the practice of using air conditioners must be contextualized. Residents do this in a variety of ways. As noted above, air conditioners are among the new consumer durables that the residents have only begun using relatively recently. People routinely include them when listing the electrical appliances they own, and a walk around the community will reveal outdoor units of air conditioners beside the windows of nearly all apartments. This is a stark contrast to the situation in earlier times recounted by residents who remember using fans or opening windows as the only measures against the heat.⁴⁸ As consumer items air conditioners come to stand for changing material standards in China. Relieving much of the discomfort associated with Hangzhou's hot summers they have changed local expectations and notions of comfortable indoor temperatures. Similar developments have taken place in other countries where air conditioned

⁴⁷ http://www.china.org.cn/video/2013-07/17/content_29450448.htm

⁴⁸ In the preface to "China's Environmental Challenges", Judith Shapiro recounts how she was given the only air conditioner on the campus at the teacher's college in Hunan where she taught English in 1979 only to find that the electricity of the whole college went out when she turned it on (Shapiro 2012: p. xiii).

spaces have become the norm (Shove 2003; Hitchings & Lee 2008). Through the low-carbon life campaign they become ambivalent symbols of the new era as their association with changing notions of comfort clashes with a more problematic reading of them as emitters of greenhouse gases.

A tendency to connect room temperature with health concerns emerges as perhaps the most pronounced theme among the residents when talking about air conditioning. This is addressed in more detail in chapter 6, *Connecting Concerns*, which deals with the various concerns about health, comfort and convenience, which low-carbon life practices become connected with when campaigners reason about them. Here it may suffice to note that in addition to being considered normal and comfortable 26 degrees is also considered a healthy room temperature among the campaigners.

Air conditioners may seem to invite relatively simple practices of setting a temperature and deciding when to turn them on and off, but from the highly diverse way people in Dongping Lane talk about their use of air conditioners, it is clear that the idea of climate change has altered people's approaches to them in ways that are not always entirely straightforward. Air conditioners come to represent multiple dimensions of low-carbon life through people's reflections about them. Some campaigners point to the different notions of comfort of different generations, saying they only use the air conditioner when their children visit,⁴⁹ or that old people use air conditioning for shorter periods than young people do. This view is also reflected in a study from Singapore arguing that there is a growing normalization and valuation among younger generations of what the authors call "human encasement", i.e. a retreat to indoor spaces with air conditioning (Hitchings & Lee 2008).

Some campaigners connect the introduction of air conditioners with local climate change in Hangzhou. With the exception of one man saying that the weather had not changed, all the residents that talked about the weather in Hangzhou in their youth remember it as cooler. Memories of cooler summers in the past are here contrasted with the extreme heat today in the argument that air conditioners were not needed back then.

⁴⁹ In the home of an elderly couple in the community the air conditioner was hidden under a plastic cover. They told me this was to keep it from becoming dusty because it was hardly ever used.



The air conditioner at the home of the Wangs is under a plastic cover (photo Zhang Liyan)

Air conditioning becomes connected not just with global warming but also with local warming as people notice the hot air they blow out, and wonder how that affects the climate and the environment. Being machines, the function of which is to generate highly localized climatic change⁵⁰, air conditioners can prompt people in the campaign to think about connections between local and global change. The tactile experience of walking past a place where hot air is blown out, or the experience of hearing all the air conditioners humming on a summer night, become connected with the idea of climate change as both residents and community officials think about all this cooling, and how the power it requires affects the global climate. The community official responsible for family planning, who was also sometimes involved in low-carbon life activities, characterized the relation between air conditioning and global warming as a vicious circle, in which the hot weather leads people to turn on air conditioners that will in turn contribute to even hotter weather. There is sometimes a confusion of scales in the way people in the community talk about air conditioners and climate change. It is not always clear whether the changes they connect with the use of air conditioners are conceived of as local or global. Either way, the moral of the story is nearly always that it is a good thing to reduce the use of air conditioners. During my time in the community I only heard one resident say openly that he uses air conditioners any way he likes

⁵⁰ While both the English word 'air conditioner' and the Chinese '空气' (short for 空气调节器) refer to air rather than climate, the German word *Klimaanlage* may serve as a very direct reminder of the awkward and sometimes confusing relationship between these machines for artificial localized climatic change and the issues of global climate change.

without paying attention to saving energy. The implied competing imaginary of a new consumer lifestyle as unproblematic and desirable tended to remain exactly that: implied, suggesting that the moral implications of the concept of low-carbon life rendered it somewhat illegitimate despite the non-confrontational campaign style.

Air conditioners are among the electrical appliances that have the largest impact on people's electricity bills, and the campaigners have not failed to notice this. One campaigner estimated that half of his electricity bill was due to use of air conditioners, and another noted how much higher her bills were in summer. The particular way that the official version of the low-carbon life campaign addresses air conditioning draws on the nationwide NGO-led "26 degrees campaign" initiated in 2004, asking companies, public institutions and private citizens to set air conditioners no lower than 26 degrees (Schroeder 2008: p. 517). This is reflected in the Low-Carbon Household Standard prescribing 26 degrees as standard temperature and awarding extra points for setting the temperature to 28 degrees. After air conditioning has become normalized as inconspicuous everyday consumption, the campaign and its focus on specific degrees reinvests the use of air conditioners with a deliberate dimension that could be conceived as moral. Morality is, however, not reflected directly in talk about air conditioners. Reminded that their expectations about comfort were very different relatively recently the older residents of Dongping Lane do not seem to see acceptance of indoor temperatures of 26 or 28 degrees in summer as sacrifices of comfort in the name of climate change mitigation. Rather, they tend to talk about 26 degrees as the most comfortable temperature. This reflects on the one hand a receptive response to the "26 degrees campaign" which is underscored by residents referring to the information given by the local Science Popularization Association (科普协会) as a reason for choosing 26 degrees, and on the other a resistance toward the normalization of "human encasement" embodied in the widespread practice of setting indoor temperatures far below outdoor temperatures in places such as restaurants and shopping malls, which is widely embraced among young people (Hitchings & Lee 2008).

Improvised experimenting with refrigerators

Since the beginning of the low-carbon life campaign, a group of women led by Auntie Sun have been meeting up to conduct experiments in everyday life energy saving. The most well-known and widely discussed experiment was focused on refrigerators. The group carried out an experiment to determine the relative energy efficiency of filling up refrigerators to different degrees. Staying up all night to count the startup frequency of the cooling elements each woman filled her refrigerator to

an agreed degree. Afterwards they compared the startup frequencies and overnight meter readings and determined that a refrigerator that is 70 percent full is the most energy efficient. This experiment was described in local media reports as an example how the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane works (Mao 2010; Xu 2010) and campaigners that had not participated in the experiments knew about them and directed my attention to them in our discussions. This practical experimental approach to learning about energy saving has also been applied to the use of other households appliances such as rice cookers and microwave ovens. In setting up these experiments the residents connect with expert knowledge, but only to a limited extent. They knew that the energy use of a refrigerator is affected most strongly by the volume of stuff in it, but instead of consulting refrigerator manuals or contacting the manufacturer to inquire about the details of this technical question, Auntie Sun and the group of women set to work generating their own data.

Not necessarily reflecting ignorance about the availability of technical information, or a self centered mindset of unwillingness to learn from others, this approach embodies an attitude toward learning that favors hands-on experience. The high likelihood that the information they sought to extract from the experiment was readily available was ignored, since the overall aim was not merely to determine the "golden ratio" of refrigerator fullness efficiency, but rather to foster a sense of self as experimenting and innovative. The experiment was one of many local improvisations on the theme of economizing with resources. Rather than importing solutions wholesale from outside sources, the residents apply Low-Carbon Life Golden Points (figure 2) and similar ideas for saving to the material conditions and the common sense knowledge that is already at hand. This bricolage-style approach to low-carbon life allows them to act relatively independently but sits in an awkward relationship of tension with approaches more oriented toward technology and expert knowledge adopted by outside observers of the campaign.

A few examples may clarify this point. In a toilet break during an interview with one of the expert lecturers who helped with the design of the campaign, I noticed that he was using a wide variety of plastic basins and buckets to collect waste water in the bathroom in order to reuse it as prescribed in the Low-Carbon Household Standard. This practice is also widespread among the retired residents. After the interview, a Korean student I had brought along, who had also visited the bathroom, expressed disappointment that this water recycling was not handled in a more efficient and standardized manner directly integrated in the plumbing facilities. Auntie Wang, one of the low-carbon life campaigners, has made a name for herself by converting a creeping vine into a "green

curtain" by guiding its growth back and forth across a window in her apartment. During a lecture I gave about the campaign to an international audience in Hangzhou, I used her curtain as an example of the way the residents draw the materials around them into the campaign. In the questions and answers section a Romanian architect who was in the audience pointed out that the cooling effect of the "green curtain" would have been much greater had the plant been on the outside of the window. A Chinese-American researcher investigating product life-cycles at Zhejiang factories came to interview Little Zheng about the low-carbon life campaign and immediately set about giving advice for improving the low-carbon life campaign. He pointed out that its focus on avoiding plastic bags was informed by a flawed premise as the production of shopping bags of paper, cloth or canvas makes the use of these a less sustainable practice than the use of plastic bags unless they are reused several hundred times.⁵¹ These three examples of criticism underscore the contrast between an expected technological orientation and top-down approach and the consequences of the actual approach in Dongping Lane, which Little Zheng characterizes as "popular carbon reduction activities" (民间减碳活动).

Most of the practices of low-carbon life are small ad hoc solutions to the problem of saving energy and resources. Residents proceed from materials and ideas that are already available in the community and try to combine them in energy efficient ways rather than introducing wholly new materials. The campaign is not as much about surrounding yourself with resource efficient things as it is about using the things you already happen to have in efficient ways. The community officials, especially Little Zheng often talked about adding that dimension of consumption, buying energy and resource efficient things, to the campaign through a planned sub-campaign under the heading "green consumption", but when I left Dongping Lane it had yet to be implemented. The idea of buying efficient versions of various consumer items is reflected in the low-carbon life standard, but most residents focus more on how to use what they already have. The bricolage style of assembling low-carbon life from existing things and practices rather than going for complete overhaul and replacement also reflects a focus on attitude over ability in the campaign. Rather than going for an imposition of practices based on centralized calculations of efficiency, the design of the campaign draws on local understandings and sensibilities and as such it takes place in a relatively wide interpretive space.

⁵¹ For an overview of his research project see Zhang 2013.

Aiming to foster an attitude that combines the willingness to save resources with an innovative and enterprising outlook on one's own everyday life practices, the campaigners interpret the energy saving practices as examples of the power of a changed mindset and of the practical engagements with material things that are necessary for fostering this attitude. As such, the attitude underpinning the practices of low-carbon life can be read as an attempt to highlight and remake parts of the material culture of the residents. The campaign addresses the "thing-power" of household appliances, i.e. their way of "setting the scene" and normalizing certain practices (Miller 2005: p. 5). As campaigners enter into person-thing assemblages with household appliances, the appliances take on an identity less as passive objects to be manipulated and more as things that "speak back" and become something like teachers, infusing their users with a changed attitude they may carry with them to other person-thing assemblages they enter into. In Auntie Sun's experience, the refrigerator experiment, as well as similar engagements with the things in her material environment, has changed her. According to this logic the experimental part of low-carbon life has become a transformative experience endowing her with a new mindset. She told me specifically that it was only after conducting the experiments, that she realized what low-carbon life was really about, and that the experiments gave her a more scientific attitude.⁵²

Garbage sorting

When the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane had been running for about a year and the idea of low-carbon life as a comprehensive set of practices had been propagated widely in the community, the main focus of the campaign work shifted to garbage sorting. A competitive approach to garbage sorting called "the real name system" was introduced (Cheng 2010). The households who volunteer to participate in the competition have to use little stickers specifying the number of their apartment to label all garbage that they dispose of in the green and yellow garbage bins outside the apartment buildings. All labeled garbage bags are opened and checked by a garbage inspector and the participating households are awarded points according to how correctly they have sorted their garbage into the two categories of (biodegradable) "kitchen waste" in green bags distributed from the community office and "other waste" in any other kind of bag. Winners of the competition earn the designation of "model household" (示范户) and are rewarded with small, pedal-operated garbage bins for the home. To spread the word about the garbage sorting campaign,

⁵² As part of a social imaginary of urban modernity, specifically embodied in its association with slogans such as "Scientific outlook on development", "scientific" is something of a buzzword and may be taken as meaning something close to "correct". In this case however, Sun clearly connects it with the experience of engaging in science-like experimental practice.

the officials at the community office have recruited residents to make house calls handing out the prescribed green bags for kitchen waste and instructing people in sorting. Some of the garbage bins in the community were fitted with speakers and motion sensors so that people approaching them to throw things out receive a recorded reminder to sort garbage. The campaign's embedding in a wider social imaginary of civilized community life is underscored in the recorded message of the "speaking" garbage bins. A child's voice accompanied by piano music tells the approaching person to "take good care of the homeland" (爱护家园) by putting kitchen waste into the designated green bags and disposing of them in the green bin.

东平巷社区垃圾分类实名制积分公示表

2011年9月 地址：羊血弄14号

户名	日期	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
102		10		10	10	10	10	10
201		10	8		10	10	10	10
202		10	10	10	10	10	10	10
302		10	10	10	10	10	10	10
402		10	8	10		10	10	
501		10	10	10	10	10	10	10
502		10	10	10	10	10	10	10
601		10	10	10	10	10	10	10

垃圾分类督察员：吕会平

备注：1、垃圾分类实名制评分采用积分制，内容包括厨房垃圾袋的使用，投放正确率，分类正确率；

2、垃圾分类实名制评分范围：以一个楼道的居民为单位进行评分，对于积分排名前20%的居民进行表扬鼓励。

3、评分细则：正确使用厨房垃圾袋计3分，将厨房垃圾袋正确投放进厨房垃圾桶计3分，厨房垃圾袋内分类正确率50%以下计0分，分类正确率达到50%—70%计2分，分类正确率达到70%—80%计3分，分类正确率达到80%以上计4分，满分10分；

A score sheet from the garbage sorting competition (photo: Xiao Li)

The garbage sorting campaign depends on acts of classification that constitute four different categories of garbage⁵³. As Mary Douglas reminds us in her seminal book "Purity and Danger", classification that orders elements of the material world is intimately connected with social order, famously encapsulated in the idea of dirt as "matter out of place" (Douglas 1984[1966]). While some recent approaches to garbage take the analysis in "Purity and Danger" as their starting point, they depart from it by focusing more on materiality than on symbolic order, as well as attempting to contribute to the move from social order to social process as focus point, which was set into motion by the generation of anthropologists that Douglas belonged to (Douny 2007; Hetherington 2004; Hawkins 2001). Kevin Hetherington has argued that focusing on disposal, as a part of the process of consuming, entails treating it as more than a final act. Disposal makes things appear to be absent but can only ever move them along (Hetherington 2004: p. 162). Throwing things out and closing the lid of the garbage bin is a first step, but from there the garbage must be moved on to the landfill and given a proper burial lest it come back to haunt people much in the same way that dead bodies improperly disposed of are believed to return in the shape of ghosts in many parts of the world, but with the crucial difference that this haunting can do more than scare people; it can exacerbate local pollution and global warming. Garbage improperly disposed represents a kind of debt (Hetherington 2004: p. 170). Hetherington's argument resonates with Jane Bennett's view of garbage as a kind of vibrant matter that can never really be thrown away nor reduced to objects of symbolic meaning (Bennett 2010: pp. 5-6). The speaking garbage bin evokes a double notion of vulnerability, firstly in placing garbage disposing people in a position as caretakers of the environment, and secondly in delivering the message through the voice of a child representing the future generations that may be haunted by the improper disposals by the present generations. The campaign focus on the materiality of garbage connects garbage disposal, as a domain of moral concern, with the notion of garbage as something that is not a mere collection of passive objects, but as something that forces itself upon you unless properly handled.

The garbage sorting campaign in Dongping Lane represents an ordering of things that is different from that of the public spaces out in the city. On the streets of Hangzhou most garbage bins come in pairs, one for recyclable and one for non-recyclable garbage, but as even a cursory glance into one of them will reveal, many people have no idea which items go in which bin or do not care about it. The carefully organized and widely propagated system of garbage sorting and disposal in Dongping Lane and other communities contributes towards setting communities apart from the city at large as

⁵³ Recyclable waste (blue bin), harmful waste (red bin), kitchen waste (green bin) and other waste (yellow bin)

places where people know how to dispose of garbage and care about doing the right thing. That garbage disposal is a moral concern informing how some residents conceive of environmental protection and low-carbon life, is reflected in the fact that littering is a common topic of discussion across generations.

The garbage sorting campaign is illustrative of material flows, and the learning experience is similar to that of the refrigerator experiments. Through the connection with climate change, everyday objects acquire new meanings and force themselves upon people. On the lids of the green and yellow garbage bins in the community there are cartoon style images of anthropomorphized garbage bins with arms, legs and smiling faces. They have names: the yellow bin is called Dongdong (东东) and the green bin is called Pingping (平平). Through these names they signal their status as mascots not only of garbage sorting but of Dongping Lane. In this way they underscore that the environmentalist agenda of low-carbon life is entangled in the community building project of engendering a sense of citizenship and belonging. A resident of Dongping Lane has written a garbage sorting song that reflects similar themes of connecting garbage sorting with community building and sense of belonging. The lyrics are printed along with musical notation on the back of leaflets about garbage sorting, which have been handed out in the community. In addition to practical instructions about how to sort garbage the lyrics contain references to the importance of raising environmental awareness and describes garbage sorting as good for the country, the people and all of humanity (DPX 2011).

Like most human endeavors, the campaign exists in a tension between positive and negative rationales. Garbage sorting can be viewed as a project of ordering not only the world but also the self (Hawkins 2001: p. 8). In this perspective people and their garbage are person-thing assemblages that require acts of physical and imaginary separation. It is the ongoing work of maintaining spatial as well as conceptual boundaries between people and things and thus keeping chaos at bay. The residents have experienced radical change in their immediate physical environment as the community has become increasingly ordered. Garbage sorting has contributed to this ordering by reducing the smell of rotting food from the bins. In addition to reducing the smell, the containment of edible kitchen waste has contributed towards changing the local fauna, removing or reducing some undesired species such as rats and flies.⁵⁴ The implementation of the garbage sorting system is

⁵⁴ There seems to be a tendency to exaggerate these reductions among some campaigners. There were those who went as far as to insist that there are no more rats in Dongping Lane, but I spotted several (big ones) during my stay.

part of wider efforts at making the community cleaner and tidier, most visibly represented by the omnipresent street sweepers and garbage collectors in orange uniforms. The garbage sorting system with the green and yellow bins and the bags for kitchen waste is designed for domestic waste, but Dongping Lane also has public spaces, most notably the park where things are consumed and waste is produced accordingly.

The immediate impression, shared by many in the community, that the garbage sorting system has made the local environment cleaner, can be tempered by paying attention to the work of the garbage collectors. The garbage sorting campaign does not solve the problem of keeping the community clean and tidy. Voluntary participation from residents is not enough and the more than generous staffing with refuse collectors seems to be the decisive factor in maintaining the tidy appearance of Dongping Lane. The idea of outsourcing part of the garbage disposal process to the citizens through garbage sorting draws attention from media and politicians, but it is the unremarkable work of the refuse collectors that makes the difference. Although there are, at least in theory, punitive measures in the shape of fines for incorrect garbage disposal, such as dumping kitchen waste directly in the bin instead of putting it in the green bag, there is no indication that they are implemented. Nearly every time I looked in the green bin there was kitchen waste that had been thrown directly in and there was non-organic matter that should have been thrown in the yellow bin.

At the central garbage sorting station next to the small community park there is a blue bin for recyclable waste. This bin is nearly always empty, not because nobody throws out recyclable materials such as plastic, glass, metal, paper or cardboard, but because there are people making money from collecting and selling anything from used plastic bottles to washing machines. Slowly cruising through the neighborhood on carrier bikes, calling out for people to come and sell their used things, they are a constant reminder that the new approaches to garbage propagated in the low-carbon life campaign co-exist with older, more commercial engagements with the materials that circulate through the community. Cardboard and used electronics are among the most commonly collected items. I was confronted more directly with this aspect of the material metabolism of the community when my washing machine broke down and I placed it in the corridor outside the apartment as instructed by the property management agency, which was responsible for installing a new one. After only a few hours an informal collector of used materials rang the doorbell and offered me 80 yuan for the broken washing machine. Like the careful material practices in the home that many residents already practice and now can label as low-carbon life practices, this form of

recycling is already a customary practice that blends seamlessly into day-to-day life in the community.

Low-carbon handicrafts

The garbage sorting campaign and the focus on garbage disposal can be read as an attempt to change the ways some things move in and out of the community as well as in and out of the homes of the campaign participants. In this perspective a household is not a fixed entity but rather something that is always in the process of becoming. This becoming is enacted in the human engagements with material things that can both serve to make people who they are and threaten to unmake order if not handled properly. In a study of domestic waste among the Dogon of Mali, Laurence Douny notes that one particular category of waste in the local terminology, *logo*, which denotes inorganic litter such as medicine packages, bottle tops, flip flops and broken plastic containers, is generative of new world-views as it is recycled in creative ways (Douny 2007: p. 324). There are also people in Dongping Lane who approach a certain category of waste, namely recyclable waste (mostly the kind of things that would go into the blue bin, but not exclusively) creatively, incorporating it into the low-carbon life campaign. A group of retired women produce and stage exhibitions of "low-carbon handicrafts" (低碳手工艺品). Soap, fabric, cardboard, yarn, tea leaves and fruit peel are among the materials used in the production of these items. These handicrafts may also be viewed as potentially generative of new world-views in the sense that they become part of how low-carbon life is understood.

There is a conspicuous overlap in personnel between the most active producers of these low-carbon handicrafts and the most vocal proponents of the overall campaign that are familiar to many people in the community and are singled out for media attention. The person first and foremost associated with this project is Auntie Sun, who has given a number of interviews to both TV and newspapers about her low-carbon handicrafts and the staging of exhibitions (See for example Liu 2010; Xu 2010). She has conducted workshops about making fragrant soap bars from leftover scraps of soap, and she has produced and exhibited bowls made out of dried pomelo peel and a pillow stuffed with dried tea leaves. Among the other handicrafts producers, Auntie Rong and Auntie Wang stand out as the most well-known, both being vocal proponents of the campaign and objects of local media attention as well as the ones other people in the community refer to on that topic. Auntie Rong's most well-known low-carbon handicrafts include a bag made out of a pair of jeans and a medicine cupboard made from a moon cake box. Auntie Wang is known for her "green curtain", a creeping

vine guided across the window to provide shade, but she is also a very prolific producer of clothes made from recycled fabric and yarn. These low-carbon life handicrafts are central to local perceptions of low-carbon life and they are used as showcases of low-carbon life. As tangible objects they represent low-carbon life in a way that is easier to grasp, photograph and report than for example the various electricity saving practices. From the first interview we conducted in September 2011 until the last low-carbon life event we witnessed, a lecture by Auntie Sun in October 2013, the practice of producing these handicrafts items was brought forward time and again by the campaigners as examples of what low-carbon life could be.



Auntie Wang beside her "green curtain" (photo: Chen Lo)

Auntie Wang, a short haired, thin woman in her seventies, is fond of plants. She keeps more than a hundred potted plants in the stairwell of her building, and in her apartment she has the "green curtain" made out of a creeper that has attracted media attention and contributed to earning her the informal distinction of being regarded as a low-carbon doyen (Liu 2010). She has turned the plant into a curtain by guiding its growth back and forth across the window for several years. Apart from

saving materials for a curtain, Auntie Wang argues, having plants is a part of low-carbon life because they capture carbon dioxide. The inspiration for the curtain came from thinking about plants outside in the public spaces of the community. There, one of their most crucial functions is to provide shade, and her contribution is to apply this shading function to a plant inside the home. Auntie Wang also makes new clothes out of reused fabric and yarn. During one of my interviews with her she brought along a box full of baby clothes made from recycled materials. They are not made for a particular child but kept in store for having gifts ready to give people with small children. Wang also makes little silk bags stuffed with an herbal mixture for repelling mosquitoes.



Auntie Rong with her moon cake box medicinal cupboard (photo: Chen Lo)

Auntie Rong was among the first people the community director recommended that I interview. Soft-spoken and gentle, she could hardly be any more different in personality from the forceful and outgoing campaign leader Auntie Sun. Yet she too, has claimed a role as low-carbon doyen and appears in media reports about low-carbon life in Dongping Lane (Mao 2010; Liu 2010; Li 2011). Two of her, low-carbon handicrafts have received quite an amount of attention and can be included

on a short list of items that have come to stand for the campaign as icons of low-carbon life. The first one is a medicine cupboard. It is made out of a box for the moon cakes given as gifts at the Mid-Autumn Festival. In recent years these boxes have become increasingly elaborate. By turning the packaging into a piece of furniture Auntie Rong changes its status from something as temporary and garbage-like as packaging into another class of object that is to be used for years.⁵⁵

Her husband found the box too good to throw out, and Rong came up with the idea of storing medicine in it. This object differs somewhat from the others that are highlighted by the campaigners, because the labor that went into its conversion to low-carbon handicraft was strictly intellectual. Rong did not need to make any changes to the object, only to re-categorize it as a chest of drawers rather than a moon cake box. It is possible to read this conversion as a criticism of excessive consumption and perhaps also a criticism of growing commercialization of traditional festivals and holidays, but this misses the point that Auntie Rong is first and foremost making the objects for her own enjoyment. The second object is a handbag made from a pair of jeans. An article about low-carbon life is illustrated with a photo of Rong posing with the bag and she reports that people have asked her if she bought it abroad (Liu 2010). The feeling of unspectacular everydayness that permeated local approaches to even these material icons of low-carbon life may be illustrated by the attitude Rong takes to her own creation. On a hot summer day in 2012 I visited Rong together with a photographer who had agreed to come along and help me take better photos of things and people in Dongping Lane than I had managed by myself. Rong knew we were coming and that we were interested in taking pictures of her low-carbon handicrafts. She had already shown me the moon cake medicine cupboard the year before but since the pictures I took then were not very good, she brought it out again. When I asked about her jeans bag, however, she was not sure where it was and she rummaged through the house for a long time before finally finding it, which suggests that it was not among her most important possessions despite its status as one of her main claims to low-carbon "fame".

Auntie Sun is the main icon of the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane. Her low-carbon handicrafts have been described in a number of media reports and this work of hers was the first thing that the community director directed our attention to on the first day of fieldwork. In a series of workshops she has shown people in the community how to make fragrant, colored bars of soap out of the leftover last bits of soap that were normally thrown out. The adding of something extra, in

⁵⁵ It is of course perfectly possible that this intention of reuse is already part of the design when the company selling the moon cakes chooses to package the cakes in a small chest of drawers with metal handles.

this case fragrance and color, which is not strictly connected to an environmentalist agenda of saving resources and avoiding waste, is characteristic of the practice of producing low-carbon handicrafts. The makers of the handicrafts connect their concern about climate change with their desire for comfort, convenience, health and general well-being. Auntie Sun also makes bowls out of dried pomelo peel. She cuts the fruits in half and removes the pulp. Left in the sun to dry, the peel becomes as hard as wood and the bowls that result from this are used for keeping nuts and sweets. Testifying to the durability of the bowls Auntie Sun claims that they can be washed with soap and water without becoming softened. They have effectively been turned into bowls for long-term use.⁵⁶ Perhaps her most curious and interesting object is the tea leaf pillow. The practice of stuffing pillows with various things such as dried beans is well known in China, but her use of tea leaves for this function has been noticed and singled out by the propagators of the campaign, such as Little Zheng and Director Du, as an innovative take on this practice. By drying her used tea leaves and recycling them as pillow stuffing, Aunties Sun has found a practical way of reusing material that would otherwise have been classified as waste. Sun's reasoning about the pillow exemplifies the connections people in the campaign make between saving resources and living good, pleasant lives. According to Sun, the good thing about the pillow is not just that it is made of recycled material and thus can be seen as a contribution to the reduction of organic waste in her household, but also that it has a nice fragrance that helps against insomnia. The pillow then becomes an example of how low-carbon life practices often are seen as good for the fortification or protection of the body against various risks of both old age and modern city life and as nice and enjoyable. Being both useful and nice the pillow points to a transcendence of any notion of single-mindedness or asceticism that outside observers may associate with the practices of low-carbon life. At the same time it is an example of the way campaigners take their own knowledge embodied in everyday life practices as a point of departure when thinking about and acting on issues of waste and recycling.⁵⁷ As with her refrigerator experiment, Sun did not to any wide extent consult outside sources before commencing with the low-carbon life practice of making the pillow.

Far from being the most efficient way of saving large amounts of energy, and far from being typical practice in the community, the production of low-carbon handicrafts is first and foremost a part of the propagation of the low-carbon life campaign. Providing opportunities to represent practices

⁵⁶ Sun offered to teach me how to make the pomelo bowls, but when we got round to it the fruits were not in season and she argued that using imported pomelos would defeat the purpose of making low-carbon handicrafts since importing them was not low-carbon.

⁵⁷ Commenting on the pillow, another resident in the community remarked that it would have taken him several years to get enough dried tea leaves to make even a small pillow, adding that he did not really get what all the fuss about the locally produced *longjing* (龙井) tea was and that he preferred to drink coffee.

through photographs and descriptions, the objects embody the spectacularization of the unspectacular as well as the embedding of concerns about climate change in the material culture of everyday life that the campaign aims to bring about.

The landfill at Tianziling

"Tianziling (天子岭) is between Linping and Banshan. It is a really good location. The opening of the mountain pass faces south and there are mountains on the three other sides. According to the old fengshui masters it would be a place to bury emperors. It is like a chair; it has mountains on three sides and opens on one side. This has the advantage that if you dump garbage there, the wind will not get to it. Southerly winds are normally rare so the choice of location is very scientific". Instead of simply saying that it goes to a landfill, Mr. Lü, the garbage sorting inspector, responded to our question about where the sorted garbage from the community was taken to, by launching into an enthusiastic description of the particular landfill at Tianziling (天子岭垃圾填埋场). Mr. Lü was not the first person in Dongping Lane to sing the praises of Tianziling. Over the course of my stay in the community both residents and officials mentioned the landfill many times. Talk about Tianziling usually revolved around one or more of three dominant themes. Firstly the impression of the place as efficient, neat and scientific was contrasted with traditional images of landfills as dirty, smelly, messy places best avoided. Secondly the idea that visiting the landfill was a powerful learning experience in the process of comprehending the importance of garbage sorting. Finally and closely connected with the second theme, the landfill was held up by local officials as well as residents as a symbol of finitude since its capacity to hold garbage was projected to be exhausted in seven or eight years time.

The community office in Dongping Lane organizes field trips to the landfill at Tianziling which lies on the northern outskirts of Hangzhou. At a visitors' center located at a section of the landfill site, which has already been filled up and sealed and now resembles a park-like hill, visitors can get information about garbage disposal, and from the ridge above the part of the landfill that is still in use they can witness where garbage from the city is dumped. An official from Hubin Street Office, who coordinates environmental activities with Dongping Lane and other communities, explained that the field trips were conceived as part of the effort to promote garbage sorting. *"We take [the residents] to Tianziling landfill to let them experience the benefits of generating electricity from burning garbage after it has been sorted, and to let them get a feeling for the volume of garbage that can be held by the landfill as well as the consequences if we don't sort garbage. Their sense of*

place is significantly enhanced". The officials at the community office gave similar accounts of the rationale for organizing field trips to Tianziling, stressing the point about only having seven or eight years of storage capacity left as a powerful illustration of the importance of reducing and sorting garbage. Director Du vividly described her impression of visiting the site saying that the guides explain very clearly what garbage sorting is all about and that she got a feeling that Hangzhou is under siege from garbage.

Many of the residents also made references to Tianziling when talking about garbage sorting and several of them have been there. There is something paradoxical about visiting a landfill since it is after all a place for things which people do not want to be in contact with. If the purpose of garbage disposal is to separate people from undesirable objects and materials, then the effect of a trip to the landfill is to negate that separation temporarily and in a controlled fashion in which it is people and not garbage that have the upper hand. Tianziling is clearly perceived by the low-carbon life campaigners as a powerful place in terms of experiencing the importance of garbage sorting rather than learning about it in more detached or abstract ways. The trip to the landfill renders garbage visible after the disposal process has temporarily hid it from view in bags, under lids and in garbage trucks, reminding people that disposal is never final. As Hetherington points out, things are only ever moved along and never disposed of in an absolute sense (Hetherington 2004: p. 162).

On a warm morning that promised to turn into a hot summer day in July 2012, my request to join a community trip to the landfill paid off. Together with a group of school children, and a handful of parents and community officials, as well as the two research assistants who had accompanied me in 2011 and now wanted to see the landfill, I got on a bus just outside of Dongping Lane and made the one and a half hour ride to Tianziling. On the way to the landfill there was a planned stop at a garage of the "Clean and Direct" (清洁直运) electrical garbage trucks of the Hangzhou Environmental Group (杭州环境集团) which is responsible for the disposal of around half of the garbage in Hangzhou (Shi 2011). At the garage there is an exhibition of sculptures made from recycled materials by school children and posters describing garbage disposal in various countries around the world. At the visitors' center at Tianziling there are similar exhibitions. The atmosphere on the bus and during the visit to the landfill was light, and the children were not paying much attention to the lectures offered by the guides. The pilgrimage-like status as transformative journey that propagators of low-carbon life project onto visiting Tianziling may seem to be somewhat unsettled by the rather touristic approach of making a day of good fun and entertainment out of the

visit. However, a light-hearted approach to the confrontation with garbage as the signifier of limits to development fits well into the overall direction in the sense-making of low-carbon life, stressing that doing the right thing, in this case confronting the materiality of garbage rather than turning away from it, can be fun, comfortable and convenient. There is a parallel here to the way tourism and worship are connected almost seamlessly at temples in China as people slip effortlessly from one into the other. Tourism and pilgrimage share many similarities and in many cases the former could be viewed as a secular form of the latter.⁵⁸ Several of the visitors to the landfill that I talked to expressed surprise and delight in finding out that the part that has been turned into the visitors' center was neatly kept and resembled a park and that the smell in the air was not strong. At the landfill we visited a control center where the garbage trucks of Hangzhou Environmental Group (杭州环境集团) were monitored on a myriad of screens that put together amounted to a "garbage truck panopticon", allowing the managers at the landfill to oversee the disposal process in detail.

A visit to Tianziling stands apart from everyday low-carbon life practices as a onetime event arresting the everydayness of everyday life garbage sorting and disposal. Both Director Du and Little He emphasized that it is enough to go there once to understand the importance of garbage sorting. As the expenses for the trips to Tianziling have to be covered by the budget for the garbage sorting campaign this insistence on a single trip as enough could be interpreted as a concern over expenses. But it can also be read as an expression of the pilgrimage-like quality of the visit. If the confrontation with the materiality of waste is a kind of awakening or initiation, it may only need to take place once for each resident. As a symbol of finitude the landfill posits garbage as a figure that has a certain similarity with greenhouse gases. Garbage threatens with disruption by ending the necessary emptiness that is the function of the landfill. When matter begins to overflow it threatens to generate chaos.

This cautionary tale of limits and the necessity of respecting them can also be applied to greenhouse gas emissions and the atmosphere where the necessary emptiness embodied in low concentrations of certain chemical compounds is about to be offset by emissions. In the arena of international climate politics, calls for decisive action are sometimes framed in terms that are similar to the argument about finitude at Tianziling in fixing a certain future date as the deadline for action before the cost of inaction becomes too high (See for example Hedegaard 2013). Both garbage disposal

⁵⁸ In the words of Victor Turner & Edith Turner: "A tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist" (Turner & Turner 1978: p. 20)

and greenhouse gas emissions, then, represent a state of being haunted by the future (Wood 2005). A visit to Tianziling becomes a way of facing rather than repressing the knowledge that there are limits to the possible consumption and disposal of materials and thus contributes towards undoing the hypocrisy of the everyday consumerist practice of pretending that negative consequences come as surprises. There is a parallel hypocrisy in the alarm over environmental crisis in China today in which people pretend that the disastrous environmental consequences of rapid economic development were unforeseen. Rather than unforeseen they were collectively repressed, and not taken anywhere near as seriously as they merited, until a series of crises, most notably the smog crisis of Beijing, pushed them into public view. Sometimes referred to as "pollute now, clean up later" (Larson 2007) this attitude is disturbed by the growing awareness of the consequences of climate change.

A landfill that resembles a park and is the site of tourism-like excursions fits well into the green urban imaginary of Hangzhou and lends it credibility through offering direct confrontation with the problem of garbage disposal. But as a symbol of finitude and a possible metaphor for the earth and its atmosphere Tianziling has negative connotations that sit in a relationship of tension with the promise of environmental protection as nice and free of trouble, as expressed in the image of the landfill as a park in a spectacular setting and the promise of neatness and order through management and science that it represents. The project of greening the community sits in a similar tension between positive and negative connotations; between the promise of a nice oasis-like urban environment and the connotations of unruliness that greening may also carry.

Greening the community

The official project of "greening" Dongping Lane has resulted in the establishment of the small park at the centre of the community as well as the planting of trees and bushes in public spaces. On some buildings there are racks designed for creeper plants to grow on and some of the walls are covered with ivy. Through the low-carbon life campaign residents have been encouraged to keep plants in the homes and on stairways and balconies thus contributing to the greening of the community. Greening is perceived by residents as a process of positive environmental change that makes Dongping Lane a better place to live. This is reflected in the narratives of change presented by residents that present the recent history of the community as a story of increased order, in which the planting of flowers, trees and bushes represent this ordering. This resonates with the tendency to describe earlier urban life as grey, and present life as more green, which Zhang Li finds among

middle class people in Kunming (Zhang 2010: p. 95). But there is also some ambiguity as greening may imply a certain wildness that must be controlled in order for the urban flora and fauna to fit into the urban imaginary of civilized community life.

"In the past there were no trees here [in Dongping Lane], it was all bare. But now there are many trees. There are even snakes now. This testifies to the ecological improvement. In the last couple of days people have caught a lot of snakes here. The local ecology is getting better. [...] There are also small lizards, purple and blue ones". Little He is the only community official in Dongping Lane who lives in the community. Being the happy owner of a pet python, her appreciation of snakes may be more pronounced than that of the majority of people. However, seeing snakes as signifiers of improved ecological conditions speaks to a narrative method adopted by some residents to illustrate their accounts of the changing local environment with references to various species of plants and animals, the decrease or increase of which come to stand for ecological improvement. Auntie Shan, the shop owner, who took an interest in my research and sometimes shanghaied prospective interviewees for me, provided a succinct account of local environmental change as seen through local fauna: *"The environment has become better. There are many birds; there are also many butterflies, and quite a lot of dragonflies. The environment is good, the air is good.⁵⁹ Everything is good, so they came. There are also fewer flies now, fewer rats, in the past there were lots of rats, quite a lot of them. They are filthy critters, right? Now the environment is better and there are fewer of them. We keep a cat".* While the prominence of small dogs and caged birds seems to suggest that companionship is the primary motivation for owning animals in the community, there are also more practical reasons, perhaps more commonly associated with rural life, for keeping animals among the residents. Like Auntie Shan, some of the other shopkeepers in the community had cats that combined the role of pet with that of exterminator, and on a large terrace outside the apartment building where I lived, a family kept a hen that walked around freely among the greenery.

It is not only animals that are drawn into explanations of local environmental change. Some residents focus more on plants as providers and signifiers of improved environmental conditions. Keeping house plants is part of the Low-Carbon Household Standard. Auntie Wang with the green curtain and a love for plants was not the only person supplying a stairwell with hundreds of potted

⁵⁹ The claim that Hangzhou has good air was not uncommon among the campaigners as well as among the wider population. Here good can be qualified by interpreting it as "less visibly polluted than before" or "better than Beijing". Measurements of dangerous particulate matter made by Zhejiang Environmental Protection Bureau indicate that the air in Hangzhou is very unhealthy (<http://aqicn.org/city/hangzhou/>).

plants. In another building, Grandma Wang,⁶⁰ also a designated low-carbon model citizen, keeps even more plants than Auntie Wang. Both women's work has earned their stairways the distinction "green stairway" (绿色楼道) which is now written in golden characters on their buildings. Grandma Li, an 80-year old former factory worker and former government official connects low-carbon life very directly with flowers: *"We're surrounded by flowers. In our home there is a fragrance of flowers in the air. Sometimes you can smell osmanthus flowers. There are a lot of trees and bushes around here. The environment is really good. All of this is low-carbon life"*. Mr. Cai also highlights the osmanthus flower, which is depicted on the official emblem of Hangzhou, in his account of local environmental change: *"Greening is a part of environmental protection. A few days ago the osmanthus flowers bloomed. In the past there were no osmanthus trees in the city. For osmanthus you'd have to go to the osmanthus garden. There is an osmanthus garden on Nanshan Road by West Lake; you'd have to go there. Everybody went there to smell the fragrance in the air and pick some osmanthus flowers. Now there is nothing special about it, there are osmanthus trees everywhere. As soon as you open your window there are osmanthus flowers, you just reach out and you have them. So the environment is quite good. There are flowers all year round now in Hangzhou, all year round"*.

As the community official directly responsible for the continuous development of the project of greening Dongping Lane, Little Zheng can draw on his education as a landscape designer. Encouraged by the director of Hubin Street Office (湖滨街道), who stresses the importance of greening as part of developing a low-carbon community, Zheng involves the residents in greening projects and tries to think about new ways to improve the local environment by introducing more plants. Together with his colleague Little Zhang he has looked into the possibility of trying out rooftop gardening in Dongping Lane. As young people with an eye on things going on in other countries, Zheng and Zhang noticed that this was becoming fashionable in western metropolises. Unregulated and informal small-scale rooftop gardening is commonplace in urban China and the two young men did not have to look far for local examples.⁶¹ Zhang was skeptical about the idea and argued that the gardens might damage the roofs. Justifying this skepticism with examples of how creepers sometimes damaged walls and attracted insects, he connected rooftop gardening with the wider idea of greening in a way that signaled a careful avoidance of allowing "excessive

⁶⁰ The two women were not related and their surnames were not the same (王 and 汪).

⁶¹ Small rooftop gardens seem to be common in Hangzhou. In 2012 I had a view of a small, rather messy rooftop garden in Qingnian Road Community from the window of my apartment in Dongping Lane. In 2011 I also had a view of a small rooftop garden from my apartment outside Zhejiang University's Zijingang Campus.

greening", understood as allowing the local flora and fauna to become too wild or unruly.⁶² The tendency of the vines on buildings to attract insects was the most widely stated example of greening taking on an undesired life of its own. One resident brought up the fairly new park area West Lake World (西湖天地) near the community as an example of the negative consequences of greening. Apart from the social consequences of the demolitions needed to pave the way for the park the relatively dense and wild greenery is sprayed daily with insecticide to preserve its neatness damaging the local environment in the process.

Conclusion

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is conceived as an attempt to change a certain set of consumption practices. As such it is tied to the specific material conditions and the specific material culture of urban community life in early 21st century urban China. The campaign is assembled from a wide range of practices relating to various parts of the immediate physical environment of the campaigners. Conceived as a set of person-thing assemblages, in which humans and non-humans are brought together in ways that lead to lower emissions of greenhouse gases than previously, low-carbon life informs the material culture in Dongping Lane. The campaigners place themselves in a mostly unspoken opposition to consumerism and conspicuous consumption by conceiving of consumption in practical terms rather than associating it with desire. There is a distinction between consuming and wasting among campaigners. Balanced and moderate approaches to consumption and campaigning are labeled "scientific" by organizers and participants, thus casting more politicized, extreme or conflict-oriented approaches as backward and unreasonable. Through media reports, low-carbon life becomes an "unspectacular spectacle" in the sense that the campaigners get attention while maintaining a modest and low-key approach to their own activities. Low-carbon life is cast as something that does not make trouble for the participants or other people around them. This everydayness combined with the identities of campaigners as ordinary pensioners leads some outside observers to frame them as ignorant and marginal even among the journalists that are drawn into the campaign as partners.

Of the electrical appliances that have become part of the campaign, air conditioners are the most prevalent in residents' reasoning about the rationales of low-carbon life. Air conditioners become

⁶² The idea that greening must be balanced since too much greenery makes urban spaces too wild by attracting undesired elements was common among campaigners. In 2012 things took a sinister turn as the problem of attracting unwanted elements moved from non-human to human visitors. One night a karaoke hostess was robbed and murdered on Kaiyuan Road that runs along the community. The residents were visibly alarmed, telling me to stay away from places with much greenery at night and cited the dense greenery on Kaiyuan Road as a reason why the murderer had gotten away with his crime unseen.

ambivalent symbols of a new era as they stand for better life through the comfort they provide as well as for climate change through their high consumption of electricity. The moral dimension of electricity consumption as a source of greenhouse gas emissions becomes embedded in a practical reasoning about health and comfort casting 26 degrees as a normal and desirable room temperature. This places the campaigners in opposition to the tendency towards "human encasement" that can be observed and felt in restaurants and shopping malls where the temperatures are much lower than outside in summer. The campaign includes improvised experiments in which participants use the materials and social connections at hand to come up with new ways of understanding their consumption practices and reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. One of the aims of experiments such as the refrigerator experiment is to foster a changed mindset by unsettling the unseen and unfelt thing-power of the things around the campaigners such as electrical appliances and household garbage. Through the garbage sorting scheme as well as trips to the landfill at Tianziling, the campaigners establish categories and connections that cast garbage as good to think about low-carbon life with, in the sense that it can alert people to their relationships with things and thus to the person-thing assemblages they enter into and the greenhouse gas emissions potentials of those assemblages. Reusing materials to make handicrafts, some of the exemplary individuals that are singled out as the *primi inter pares* of low-carbon campaigning, have received media attention that focuses on the objects they make. Low-carbon handicrafts function as symbolic representations of the campaigners that make them and cast the campaign as a partly symbolic endeavor that aims to show low-carbon life as a series of hobby-like activities that are easy to engage in. The things that carry the potential to be part of the assemblages of low-carbon life are not limited to inanimate objects, but also include key species of plants and animals. Greening of the community in the shape of planting trees, flower and bushes is not formally a part of the low-carbon life campaign, but both residents and officials draw it into their reasoning about low-carbon life as a part of civilized community life. In residents' narratives of how the community has changed during their time there, the plants and animals that come with the greening of Dongping Lane represent positive change and an overall transformation from chaos to order, while also carrying connotations of unruliness. In this perspective the low-carbon life campaign can be read as part of a more general process of civilizing the community that goes beyond person-centered notions of citizenship to include the physical environment.

6. Connecting Concerns

In the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane there are many different interpretations of the general idea of a need for climate change mitigation. Some of these lead to concrete local actions others become connected with more abstract concerns. These interpretations are characterized by connections. The campaigners attempt to make sense of their low-carbon life practices with reference to concerns about the global climate but also concerns about local, immediate and tangible effects of engaging with the idea of climate change. As climate change mitigation becomes embedded in the material culture of everyday life among the campaigners, the art of caring about climate change becomes an art of making connections between local everyday life practices in the community and global climate change, by showing how the concern about the need for climate change mitigation, which is posited as the original motivation for low-carbon life, is not the only concern that the various low-carbon practices address. When the residents of Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life, they talk about various actions having multiple effects or being good for several things. While global and local concerns coexist, reasoning about low-carbon life is patterned in a way that emphasizes the local. References to immediate or long-term effects on personal health, comfort, convenience, economy and general well-being are the rule, and references to climate science are the exception.

This chapter shows how the participants in the low-carbon life campaign envision their local social and physical environment as a world of connections through an examination of the ways in which they connect different motivations and outcomes when attempting to make sense of their low-carbon life practices. To illustrate this and to begin unpacking the specific local processes of connecting concerns, I return briefly to Mr. Zhu's warning against eating roasted lamb skewers that opened the thesis. *"Lamb kebabs have to be roasted, right? For this you need charcoal. It comes from wood that has been burned. You shouldn't eat that stuff! [...] It also has a bad influence on your body. And it isn't low-carbon"*. In addition to pointing toward the burning of charcoal as a resource problem, Mr. Zhu combines the concept of low-carbon with health by raising the issue of how the roasted meat influences the body. This connection introduces the idea of low-carbon life being in close proximity to and heavily influenced by a dominant part of the mental and moral landscape in urban China, that of a multitude of environmental pollution sources as threats to human health. The aim of the chapter, then, is to show how Mr. Zhu's way of casting a specific low-carbon life practice, avoiding barbecued food, as simultaneously an environmentalist practice, a

climate change mitigation practice and a health practice, is representative of a general tendency to combine motivations for engaging in low-carbon life. Health concerns, expressed in terms of considerations as to how the body may be nurtured and protected from an increasingly toxic or in other ways unhealthy environment, emerge as prominent motivations for engaging in low-carbon life practices. Rather than displacing climate change mitigation as a motivation for the practices, health concerns combine with climate concerns to generate a conception of low-carbon life, which amounts to the envisioning of a world of connections. This sense-making practice of making connections emerges as a pivotal part of low-carbon life.

Viewing low-carbon life practices as actions in a drama and the practitioners of low-carbon life as the actors of the drama calls for one more element to complete the drama: the set. The worlding of a phenomenon such as low-carbon life is the cultural interpretive work of negotiating and establishing relevant contexts (Tsing 2010). As exemplified in connections with the social imaginary of civilized community life in chapter 4 and with the material affordances of a changing social world in chapter 5, the sense-making processes of low-carbon life depend on and are simultaneously constitutive of contexts. The experience of aging in an increasingly toxic environment emerges as a relevant context for low-carbon life through the various ways its practitioners connect their practices with concerns for health. The argument here is not, however, that low-carbon life becomes another term for healthy life or that health concerns supplant other concerns. Rather than seeing issues and motivations as separate problems to be tackled separately, the campaigners avoid any notion of a clear-cut hierarchy of competing agendas, which might have been a result of framing the campaign as climate action, and address low-carbon life as a connected set of practices addressing many things at the same time. The schematized forms of low-carbon life outlined in chapter 3 and the practices outlined in chapter 5 do not amount to a narrowly defined, correct, party-sanctioned interpretation. Rather they are the outcome of exploration and negotiation in an interpretive space, which has been widened dramatically compared to that which characterized the campaigns the residents experienced in their youths. In the absence of a clearly demarcated and strictly enforced party-line on the question of the meaning of low-carbon life, the campaigners ascribe to it a multiplicity of meanings that are allowed to co-exist. This process establishes low-carbon life as a set of holistic practices, not in the sense of having to do with New Age mystique, but in the sense of being informed by an overall connected imaginary rather than by isolated theories. Low-carbon life can be viewed as holistic in the following sense outlined by Bubandt & Otto: "holism should perhaps [...] be understood as part and parcel of human practice in general. When human beings act,

they imagine – implicitly and explicitly – contexts in which their actions make sense and in which they and others figure as agents" (Bubandt & Otto 2010: p11). The connections of concerns presented in this chapter represent a local form of holism that draws on the cultural understandings that campaigners carry with them from their previous engagements with complicated problems in the past, and from their understanding of how others deal with issues they consider to be similar.

As low-carbon life becomes part of everyday life, people's way of practicing and talking about it come to reflect their ideas about how to reach their goal of living good lives. Their representations of the benefits of practicing low-carbon life become part of the catalogue of what they desire in life. Telling the stories of their engagements with the campaign, they express not only their desires but also their experiences of living in a rapidly changing world. In this perspective low-carbon life can be interpreted as a way of engaging with the social and material changes that on the one hand offer new comforts and pleasures and on the other hand threaten with impending crisis, meaninglessness and social marginalization. Low-carbon life can be conceived of as one of the many ways in which people embark on quests for meaning in reform era China (Kleinman et al. 2011). They do so in an increasingly individualized manner, striving first and foremost to improve their own lives and their immediate social environments rather than focusing on benefits to larger and more abstract collectives such as the nation. Yet there is a recognition that climate change mitigation is for the benefit of a planetary collective. And they do so not in regimented and ascetic ways but rather in a way that turns saving energy and resources into something resembling an enjoyable hobby, not unlike the life-nurturing *yangsheng* (养生) activities taken up by many older people in urban China (Farquhar & Zhang 2012).

If the overall social imaginary of 21st century urban modernity is so riddled with contradiction and social pressure to compete with others, that it generates the kind of stress that retirement is supposed to free people from, low-carbon life, with its more narrow focus on greenhouse gas emissions, offers a way of "doing the right thing" that links everyday life practices with dreams of a better world not only for the practitioner, but for the residential community and for the human race without signaling a return to regimented collectivism. Low-carbon life can be categorized as belonging to the "sustainable lifestyles" type of imaginary in the typology of climate imaginaries presented by Levy & Spicer (2013). This type of imaginary characteristically focuses on small scales and includes ideas about the importance of stronger communities (Levy & Spicer 2013). As a way of avoiding absorption into a mainstream material culture that is developing in an increasingly

consumerist direction, the ideological thrust of low-carbon life can be seen as similar to Kate Soper's concept of an "alternative hedonism" which is an approach to life focused on the kinds of joys beyond materialism that can give people good lives without causing irreparable environmental damage and catastrophic global climate change (Soper 2007).

There are campaigners argue that low-carbon life is about fostering good habits (培养好习惯). In the particular case of climate change mitigation among retired residents of an urban community in China, those habits are often reinventions or resumptions of older habits, which have been in hibernation or at least out of public view buried under new habits associated with the materialities of the late reform era. As an approach to ordering some of the conduct of everyday life, low-carbon life emerges as a set of practices in the sense of actions that are more reasoned, ordered and deliberate than habits, yet not as regimented as Mao era campaigning. As a variant of the art of leading practicing lives, low-carbon life is also brought to make sense by standing together with other such systems of practice as religion, education or *yangsheng* in opposition to the notion of giving in to the force of habit. Rather than being seen as something that takes control of the individual reducing its autonomous agency, then, habits are to be treated as forces that can be engaged deliberately and harnessed in favor of the aim of climate change mitigation.

Omitting climate change

In a study of responses to climate change in Alaska, Marino and Schweitzer found that using the word climate change when talking to informants was detrimental to their attempts at examining local knowledge of the environment (Marino & Schweitzer 2009). Focusing on locally salient terms, I attempted to avoid imposing terms like climate change on informants and discussion partners. When officials and residents in Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life they rarely talk about climate change. This discursive absence of what might be expected to be the fundamental rationale for conducting the campaign is not necessarily an expression of denial or ignorance of anthropogenic climate change. It can be read as a positioning of this rationale as something that "goes without saying". During interviews and more informal conversations with me people in Dongping Lane hardly ever took the initiative to talk about climate change. Sometimes this omission provoked me to probe into their reactions to the term. They responded to these direct questions about climate change by talking about it in ways that sometimes did reflect some confusion or misunderstanding of climate science, but crucially also a high level of awareness and focus on how it was relevant to their lives.

This is a question of terminology. While the term low-carbon life does not say anything about why levels of carbon emission should be low, it is perfectly sensible to read it as *implying* a connection between anthropogenic climate change and everyday life. Low-carbon life has emerged as a broad and versatile term, which is sometimes understood so generally and abstractly that it amounts to something akin to "doing the right thing", but at other times it is understood concretely and specifically as reducing the level of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the consumer practices of a household.⁶³ In most cases omission of climate change is not the same as ignoring it, but rather taking it as something that "goes without saying". Although it does sometimes lead to misunderstandings, the most striking thing that the discursive absence of climate change produces is reflection about all the other things that low-carbon life becomes connected with when climate change steps down, as it were, making room for all manner of other considerations.

The conception of low-carbon life as a way of "doing the right thing" is not always the product of a realization of the dangers of climate change; sometimes it can be the product of ignorance, naïveté or lack of reasoning as people uncritically reproduce official propaganda without connecting it meaningfully with practice. Conflating the concept of low-carbon life with the concept of "harmonious society", a discursive connection I came across several times when talking to people in Dongping Lane, does not necessarily stem from a careful analysis of the relations between environment and society, but may as well be an uncritical and crude reproduction of official propaganda. When the people who engage with low-carbon life omit climate change from their reasoning, there is a possibility that climate change is not what the campaign is about for them. Reading low-carbon life as a form of governance or as a form of self-fashioning or health practice may be ways of highlighting such re-casting, but it need not exclude the possibility that people are genuinely and meaningfully engaging with climate change.

In addition to the problem that statements about low-carbon life may be empty sloganeering comes the issue of getting the scientific facts right. Some of the practitioners of low-carbon life misunderstand the implications of climate science for their practices, or misrepresent (sometimes grossly so) the most basic scientific facts of climate change. Examples are the mistakes of confusing global warming with ozone layer depletion or assuming that ozone layer depletion is the cause of

⁶³ To any rule there are exceptions and I did come across a resident who claimed that low-carbon life and climate change had nothing to do with each other.

global warming.⁶⁴ There is a great variation in the climate literacy of the campaigners in Dongping Lane. At the extreme end of the spectrum one resident claims that the earth might explode from the heat if we do not manage to stop global warming and another speculates that recent earthquakes may be the result of climate change. These extreme cases are rare and most campaigners focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, rather than speculating about consequences of global warming.

Another issue is that of the wording of the issue of climate change. Climate scientists engage in debates about what terminology is the most suitable for disseminating knowledge about climate science. There is research focusing on the different impacts the terms 'climate change' and 'global warming' have on public perceptions (Whitmarsh 2009). James Lovelock who pioneered the "Gaia theory" has argued that heating is a more suitable term than warming, because it sounds less attractive and he believes people need to be alarmed (Revkin 2006).⁶⁵ Other writers prefer climate change over global warming precisely because it sounds less alarming, but there seems to be agreement that linguistic framing of climate science is important (Lakoff 2010: p. 71). The Maoist style of campaigning, which makes up a considerable part of the experience of dealing with social and political issues for the retired residents, favored a mentality of valuing change over continuity. This experience of being part of a revolution striving to change things rather than preserve, may lead residents to conceive of the climate as being in a negative present state and thus in need of change. In residents' narratives of their lives in Dongping Lane the word change (变化) is associated with positive changes in the living standard and the local environment as a result of the concerted effort of the party-state and the people. Explicitly thanking the communist party for these changes is not uncommon among the older generation. These positive connotations associated with the word 'change' may affect perceptions of the term 'climate change'. An example from a campaigner may clarify this point: *"If everybody rises to the occasion together, then there will certainly be change. If not only our district, and not only Hangzhou, but all of China, your country Denmark, and also the USA, France, Germany reduce carbon in all kinds of ways, then the climate will certainly change"*. This resident is obviously not praising climate change as a good thing but rather just muddling things linguistically, and from his other statements and his actions it is clear that his aim is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

⁶⁴ The latter mistake has been shown to exist but also to be in decline in a study in the United States, comparing the climate change knowledge of educated laypeople in 1992 and 2009 (Reynolds et al 2010).

⁶⁵ Lovelock: "Warming is something that's kind of cozy and comfortable. You think of a nice duvet on a cold winter's day. Heating is something you want to get away from" (Revkin 2006).

Confronted with misrepresentations, misunderstandings and other lacunae in local climate literacy it is tempting to assume that the conception of low-carbon life as something that is fuelled by many other concerns than that of the need for climate change mitigation is a discursive ploy built into the campaign by the community officials as a way of getting people to contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions without necessarily having to understand or even be aware of climate change. This is, however not the case. Directing attention away from climate science is not necessary as there are no indications that climate skepticisms exists as anything but a marginal phenomenon among those who are or would potentially be involved in the campaign. There was only one among the many people I encountered in and around Dongping Lane, who openly expressed the opinion that humans cannot influence the global climate,⁶⁶ but there are deniers and skeptics of climate change in China as there are in other countries. In China climate skeptical arguments are sometimes tied to nationalistic conspiracy theories about western countries trying to hinder the rise of large developing countries such as India and China (Chen 2011). The idea of a climate conspiracy flourishes online but the campaigners in Dongping Lane do not seem to take it into serious consideration. Mr. Hou, a young resident who is a vocal proponent of the campaign responded to my probing about climate skepticism by saying that there will always be this kind of stupid people (无聊的人). The community official Little He offered a similar explanation arguing that it is part of human nature for people to divide themselves into camps, so that no matter what the topic is and how self-evidently right a cause is, there will always be proponents and opponents.

Information about global climate change figures in the lessons that campaign participants take. Making the concept their own, the campaign participants are moving beyond official discourse but not against it. Recall the connections with health included in the list of tips in the Low-Carbon Life Golden Points (figure 2). Here setting a low level of brightness on the television set becomes a matter not just of saving electricity but also of protecting the eyes of those who watch, and excessive use of air conditioning is seen as threatening bodily adjustment abilities (DPX 2009). These two tips represent an embryonic form of the worlding of low-carbon life as underpinned by the connection of concerns. Here it may also be worth recalling that the tips were not imposed on the residents by the community officials, but developed in a dialogue between the involved parties through a series of meetings. Conceiving of low-carbon life as related to much more than climate change is common among both officials and residents in the community.

⁶⁶ He did believe that catastrophic global climate change was imminent but not that it was anthropogenic ascribing it instead to solar flares.

Most parts of low-carbon life happen as if it does not actually matter much what the basic scientific facts of climate change are. In principle, even if no connection could be established between carbon emissions and global climate change, people would benefit from most low-carbon life practices as they are conceived in the campaign in Dongping Lane. When residents focus on their own daily lives instead of melting poles and extreme weather phenomena it is not because of a lack of knowledge about climate change, but rather because their interpretation of their role in relation to climate change is primarily anchored in their experience of local everyday life.

Connecting the near and the far

One way of trying to make analytical sense of the ways low-carbon life is practiced and discussed in the community is to distinguish between immediate and more distant concerns. This kind of distinction, which is inspired by the Giddens paradox and its valorization of proximity in space and time, reflects an expectation that the body, the home and the community are perceived as more pressing and relevant than the global climate and the lives of future generations. Through the connections made between various different concerns, the campaign addresses the problem formulated in the Giddens paradox: "[...] since the dangers posed by global warming aren't tangible, immediate or visible in the course of day-to-day life, however awesome they appear, many will sit on their hands and do nothing of a concrete nature about them. Yet waiting until they become visible and acute before being stirred to serious action will, by definition, be too late" (Giddens 2009: p. 2). According to surveys of environmental attitudes in China analyzed by Paul G. Harris, many people lack systematic understanding of environmental issues and base their opinions on personal experience of local problems and tend to connect environment with immediate concerns of sanitation and health (Harris 2008: p. 174).

The campaign in Dongping Lane is conducted not so much as an information campaign to raise awareness through the provision of knowledge about climate change, but rather as an effort to render visible the idea that – in the final analysis – global or systemic issues are closely connected with local concerns, and as such the campaign does represent a small step in the direction Harris advocates for of prioritizing the provision of basic knowledge about environmental issues, but it is done in a way that does not set systematic knowledge and personal experience apart as two distinct and opposed ways of relating to environmental problems. It is entirely possible that there are people among the proponents of the low-carbon life campaign, who view the focus on immediate concerns as a practical measure prompted by the assumption that immediate concerns are stronger motivators

for action than distant ones, but the overall narrative of both official and more informal presentations of the campaign is one of connection and not having to choose between the local or the global as the main priority. Approaching low-carbon life as a health concern does not necessarily displace or hide concern for the global climate. Focusing on the near does not have to mean forgetting about the far away. The two kinds of concern can be connected. This move of connecting the near and the far stands at the center of the sense-making carried out by the participants in the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane.

Campaign participants interpret the requirements of the low-carbon life campaign through the lens of their own life experience and life situation. Teacher Yang, a tall woman in her 60s, who has moved out of Dongping Lane but still participates in the promotion of the campaign, embodies this way of interpreting low-carbon life as she connects her main low-carbon life practice, which is to sew clothes out of reused fabric, to her experience in youth of having to learn to sew at an early age because she was too tall for the clothes that were available. As I will show in chapter 8, Comparison and Cultural Critique, experiences and images of distant others are intellectual resources in the quest for crafting low-carbon life. Here the focus is on the way people refer to their own personal experience and their own particular skills and abilities as they reason about the virtues of low-carbon life practices. There is a wide range of interpretations of low-carbon life practices. For some campaigners low-carbon life is a fairly straightforward set of requirements to save energy, and resources and for others it leads into reasoning about motivations for saving that produce the ideas and practices that make up low-carbon life as a way of envisioning and enacting a world of connections.

Just how far into unexpected conceptual territory discussions of low-carbon life may move, when they are based on people's own personal experiences, can be illustrated with the example of a campaigner, who is a former employee of the State Grid Corporation of China (国家电网公司). He argued that wasting electricity amounted to disrespecting the State Grid employees, who had spent their time and effort providing it. This appeal to an imagined community tying together the consumers and producers of electricity was atypical of the campaign, but the reasoning has some degree of affinity with the focus on the infrastructure of garbage disposal, rendering visible and comprehensible the unseen parts of everyday life consumption practices brought about by visiting the landfill at Tianziling. Reminding people that the provision of electricity and the disposal of

garbage require labor, these examples show that low-carbon life can be read as a caution not to take the comforts of the modern world for granted.

Sometimes personal experience is that of mobility and as such it can draw images and stories of faraway places into the interpretation of low-carbon life through accounts of travel. In his capacity as factory manager, Mr. Zhu travelled all over China for decades and also visited Japan. These travels become a context for his reasoning about low-carbon life because the environmental practices he has seen abroad inform his ideas about how to save energy and resources. Mr. Zhu is not the only campaigner who relates his thoughts about low-carbon life to practices he has witnessed elsewhere, but most accounts of distant places are second-hand as residents use the travel experience of especially their children as food for thought in the process of making sense of low-carbon life.

Connecting concerns about food

An important aspect of the changing lifestyles in reform era China is the change in diet. Along with the changes in material culture embodied in people's acquisition and use of various electrical appliances outlined in chapter 5, Campaigning in the Material World, people have begun to eat differently and in more individualized ways. In her analysis of eating as a kind of "technology of the self", Judith Farquhar argues that changing preferences represent an embodied rejection of the politics of the egalitarian Maoist past (Farquhar 2002: pp. 49-55). In this view eating becomes a form of cultivating one's power of well-being and enjoyment instead of focusing on struggle. Here individualized eating choices can be seen as part of a more general abandonment of collective striving for utopia in favor of aiming to live good lives here and now (Ci 1994). With its focus on moderate steps and connections between individual well-being and sustainability, low-carbon life emerges as both post-utopian and post-ascetic.

For the older residents of Dongping Lane, present day dietary habits and practices represent a vast difference from conditions of scarcity and periods of hunger in the Republican and Mao eras. Hunger is, as Farquhar notes, associated with specific periods of the past (Farquhar 2002: p. 82). For some campaigners hunger becomes one of the markers of vast difference setting apart the past from the new era. Reflecting on the topic of eating and how it has changed, one resident recounted memories of starvation in his childhood when his family fled the Japanese invasion. Another remembers jumping on a freight train to get out to the mountains to search for wild herbs during the great famine of the late 1950s. Foods that used to be considered the stuff of luxurious feasts have

now come to be seen as normal. During one of our conversations Auntie Rong summed up the changes in diet saying that nowadays every day is New Year.⁶⁷ Reflections about the connections between food and low-carbon life among campaigners constitute low-carbon life as a thing of the present by contrasting with earlier times when eating one's fill was the overriding concern about food since it could not be taken for granted.

Meat represents one of the most salient markers of progress when changes are narrated through dietary change. Having the option of eating lots of meat and discarding it in favor of a more vegetable-based diet, marks for the campaigners not the necessity of the past but rather a conscious choice that reflects the improved living conditions as well as the new imperative to reduce carbon emissions. By connecting consumption of meat with climate change, the campaign marks a diet rich in meat as something that can be seen as wasteful. Livestock production has been identified as a major source of greenhouse gas emissions (See for example McMichael et al. 2007, Goodland & Anhang 2009). This establishes meat consumption as one of the most important connections between climate change and everyday life consumption patterns. The requirements in the Low-Carbon Household Standard are moderate, calling for one meatless day per week. The most commonly embraced rule of thumb among the campaign participants is to eat two vegetable dishes per meat dish (一荤两素).

When residents talk about this dietary choice of favoring vegetables over meat they do so first and foremost with reference to health. Here the mandates of low-carbon life represent a reintroduction of moderation in the face of new and potentially unhealthy eating habits. Campaigners associate excessive meat eating with the lifestyle induced ailments of high blood pressure, high blood sugar and high cholesterol, summarized as "the three highs" (三高). Eating more vegetables and less meat is thus seen as one way of countering a risk that comes with the comforts and joys of a lifestyle the residents did not previously have access to. But not everyone agrees on seeing consumption of meat as something in need of reduction. There are arguments both for and against eating less meat among the campaigners.⁶⁸ Auntie Wang uses the rule of "one meat dish per two vegetable dishes" and the requirement of the meatless day of the Low-Carbon Household Standard as an example to support the argument that it is problematic to impose standards on people saying

⁶⁷ This echoes a similar saying noted by Lora-Wainwright in her fieldwork in rural Sichuan: "to eat meat at every meal, as if it was New Year" (Lora-Wainwright 2007: p. 11).

⁶⁸ A few campaigners mentioned Buddhist beliefs as a motivation for a vegetarian diet, but never about themselves and always about very old people.

that she would not be able to do without meat and that she wants her diet to consist of all kinds of things from vegetables and fruit to chicken, duck, pork and fish.

The community office in Dongping Lane offers a wide range of different lectures for the residents at the lecture hall in Red Harbor. Some of these address food and health issues. When I discussed food and health with residents they sometimes referred to these lectures.⁶⁹ First and foremost food is debated as a matter of personal health. Eating good food is seen as a way of protecting the body from harm and nurturing life in old age. Several of the residents I interviewed argue that eating more vegetables and less meat is especially important for old people. It was not only meat that was seen as potentially problematic. The risks associated with fake, contaminated or low-quality products are a major concern among Chinese citizens. The most widely reported and debated incidents involve infant formula and led to severe illness and deaths (Delman & Yang 2012) but many other cases of adulterated foods have drawn headlines in recent years. Yan Yunxiang argues that food safety has become such a critical social issue in China that it is threatening to undermine the generalized social trust that is crucial to well-function interactions among strangers in modern societies (Yan 2012). In Dongping Lane the topic of food safety, or more accurately the lack of it, leads to otherwise rare expressions of despair among the campaigners. One campaigner's reaction to a lecture on food safety encapsulates this feeling of despair: *"Nothing is safe to eat, the water we drink is also polluted, the rice is polluted, and the vegetables are polluted. Sometimes I think that there is nothing left for us to eat"*.

A farmer interviewed by Yan Yunxiang in his study of food safety and social trust reported that he had no qualms about selling contaminated food since he did not personally know the people who were going to eat them (Yan 2012: p. 724). Such extreme expressions of particularism may be part of the reason why direct ties between companies or other communities of consumers and specific producers are being forged in China (Yan 2012). The community office in Dongping Lane has taken the initiative to forge such a connection through a weekly vegetable market where farmers from one particular village sell their produce to the residents in the community park. It does not replace the small local greengrocer's stalls in the community, but rather supplements them. Arrangements like this market may be read as attempts to establish trust between producers and consumers of food by establishing direct ties between specific localities. Read in connection with

⁶⁹ I attended one of these lectures at Red Harbor. The topic was how to match foods, i.e. which foods go well together and which foods should not be combined. The lecturer made point of admonishing people not to buy street snacks and to especially avoid highly artificial products such as the ubiquitous "milk tea" sold in plastic cups from small stalls all over the city, arguing that "it contains neither milk nor tea".

Yan Yunxiang's argument about the risk of eroding an already weak sense of generalized social trust (Yan 2012), the establishment of ties to a particular village can be seen as a way of addressing particularism by embracing it rather than promoting universalistic claims about the need for generalized social trust.

Excessive use of oil in restaurants is an often cited reason to cook and eat at home in China. For the retired residents of Dongping Lane eating at home is the norm, but younger people, who may more frequently go out to eat, also make similar arguments for cooking at home. Over the years I have often heard Chinese friends make the argument that cooking at home is better because it allows you to control the amount of oil, and for them the widespread use of "sewage cooking oil" (地沟油)⁷⁰ is one more reason to cook at home more often. The changes in diet induced by low-carbon life as well as more directly health oriented interventions sometimes target what is perceived as "especially Chinese" eating habits that are unhealthy. Here the use of oil plays a central role. *"We older people usually eat a lot of vegetables. Before our cholesterol levels were high, but now it's better because we eat less oil. Less oil, less salt is good for the body. In the past we fried our food in a lot of oil. This is a Chinese habit, we find that the food tastes good when there is a lot of oil, but now we use less oil. We try to learn from your place. Where you're from people may be fat but they have low levels of cholesterol. The food we eat has a lot of oil in it. Now it's less than before"*. The idea of learning from the culinary cultures of other places is closely tied to the sense of crisis surrounding food safety, health and environment. When staff from a nearby hospital offered free testing of heart rate and blood pressure in the community park most of the people taking the tests were, as one might expect, elderly residents. However, Mr. Rao, the eloquent refuse collector, a man in his 40s, also sat down and rolled up the sleeve of his orange uniform. Wincing at hearing his less than ideal levels he suggested I also give it a try. When the nurse declared my numbers to be well within the normal range Mr. Rao commented that it was no surprise that my levels were good because foreigners eat better food than Chinese people do.

Arguments about the health benefits of various dietary changes are not left to stand alone. In addition to health concerns connected with food, practitioners of low-carbon life connect eating with a concern about waste. Although it is not a formal part of the campaign, the idea of preparing only as much food as you are going to eat rather than making an abundance and then throwing out

⁷⁰ One of the examples used by Yan Yunxiang to illustrate the point about the connections between food safety and social trust is the widespread use of "sewage cooking oil" (地沟油) extracted from oil in sewage pipes or from leftover foods (Yan 2012: p. 710). I do not recommend reading this part of his article just before going to eat at a restaurant in China.

the leftovers, is embraced by some as a part of low-carbon life. Auntie Shan connects this practice as well as other low-carbon life practices with her Buddhist beliefs, but more commonly residents frame the idea as a change to more frugal ways and away from unreasonably wasteful habits that have become possible only in recent years.

The reflections among campaigners that connect eating and economizing address both overall issues and highly specific practices. At one end of the spectrum Auntie Rong cites Chairman Mao: *"Economizing is glorious, wasting is shameful"*, pointing out that for younger people the requirements of low-carbon life may be new, but for older people like her, the idea of avoiding waste represents well-known values. At the other end of the spectrum Mr. Zhu praises a relatively new development at the local greengrocers as well as at the weekly farmers market, which is to sell vegetables that have already had inedible parts removed as opposed to the customary practice of selling relatively "whole" vegetables. Although this practice shortens the time the vegetables stay fresh, he argues that it is in alignment with low-carbon life because the amount of kitchen waste is reduced as the parts that are going to be thrown out anyway stay in the countryside instead of being transported twice: to the market and to the landfill. Here matter out of place is more than dirt as it may pollute in a more concrete way than that analyzed by Mary Douglas in "Purity and Danger" (1984[1966]). In Mr. Zhu's analysis matter out of place is waste since transportation leads to greenhouse gas emissions that could have been avoided.

Concern over waste is challenged in the encounter with two other concerns: hygiene and hospitality. Being the topic of multiple government sponsored campaigns before and after the founding of the People's Republic and occupying a central position in the social imaginary of modernity in China (Rogaski 2004), hygiene is a fundamental value to people in the community and it seems to trump environmental concern whenever the two values clash. The fact that they sometimes clash becomes object of some self-scrutiny among campaigners. Associated with the ubiquitous Styrofoam lunchboxes the phenomenon of disposable food containers and utensils is referred to critically in China with the term "white pollution" (白色污染). This term is also commonly used among the campaigners. While the convenience of using disposable containers and utensils cannot legitimately override environmental concerns, hygiene is a serious matter to the campaigners who have grown up in a time when hygiene was a central topic of government propaganda and campaigning. The disposable chopsticks wrapped in plastic used in many restaurants may be referred to as "hygienic chopsticks" (卫生筷子) or "disposable chopsticks" (一次性筷子) depending on what issue is in

focus. Campaigners I interviewed who brought up eating utensils referred to these chopsticks as "disposable chopsticks" (一次性筷子) rather than "hygienic chopsticks" thus stressing the environmental agenda over hygiene.

Hospitality is construed by some campaigners as a Chinese virtue that inevitably leads to practices that run counter to the aim of saving resources and reducing waste. The examples that are brought up involve lavish and luxurious dinners that are far removed from their normal meals and are meant to illustrate that while people may embrace thrift in everyday life, the arrival of guests cancels most considerations of low-carbon life. Meat must be served, many dishes are obligatory and more food than will be eaten is prepared, paper cups and bottled soft drinks normally banned by the prescriptions of low-carbon life are on the table. The campaigners bring these examples up not merely to show that there are exceptions to the requirements of low-carbon life, but rather to argue that cultural values generate contradictions that they cannot easily overcome.

An example that may illustrate these contradictions is provided by a campaigner who explains that although she knows that using paper cups is wasteful, she still gives them to visitors because it somehow feels wrong to give them the cups the family normally uses. This is a new development. In the past she had no qualms about serving guests using the cups in the house, but the times have changed and her habits have changed with them. Here it seems that hygiene and hospitality blend together as concerns. This kind of tension between a practice perceived as problematic in the light of low-carbon life but necessary for reasons of hospitality or hygiene is also reproduced at the community office where the staff provide all visitors with bottles of water despite the campaign's explicit targeting of drinking bottled water as a non-low-carbon (不低碳) practice. Associating bottled water with outsiders, the officials in Dongping Lane always keep a supply but they drink boiled tap water themselves.⁷¹ Visits are envisioned as states of exception even when they are very frequent and concerns about hospitality override the requirements of low-carbon life. Expensive banquets among Chinese officialdom have recently been targeted by government campaigns labeling them a waste of public funds (Liu 2013). Officials in Dongping Lane also reflect on this policy arguing that official meals should not be wasteful.⁷² Here the requirements of low-carbon life are reinforced by a more directly political motivation for economizing.

⁷¹ In her study of the materiality of garbage among the Dogon in Mali, Laurence Douny notes that the local children use old plastic bottles when they play to mimic foreigners who are perceived as people that always carry plastic bottles (Douny 2007: p. 326).

⁷² I dined more formally with the community officials in Dongping Lane and some of their superiors on a couple of occasions when leaving or returning to the community. At the last one in late 2013 the topic of food and waste was addressed jokingly but also in a

Connecting concerns about air conditioning

As noted in chapter 5, regulation of the use of air conditioners takes up a central place in both the schematized forms of low-carbon life and the practices of low-carbon life that emerges among campaigners. In addition to a connection with changing notions of comfort, air conditioning becomes connected with health concerns. In the Low-Carbon Life Golden Points (figure 2) the tip about air conditioners stresses both comfort and health: *"Choose an energy saving air conditioner and don't turn it up too high or down too low. This is not just energy consuming, it is also uncomfortable and weakens the body's ability to adjust to temperatures"* (DPX 2009). The Low-Carbon Household Standard specifies 26 degrees in summer and 18 degrees in winter as suitable room temperatures (DPX 2009). Some campaigners have changed their use of air conditioners as a result of the introduction of low-carbon life but most of them find that the temperature of the standard aligns with habits they already had before the campaign. Some set their air conditioners higher than the required 26 degrees arguing that the difference between outside and inside temperatures must be limited. The requirement of 18 degrees in winter is irrelevant to many of the residents as they have never used air conditioners as heating and prefer to bundle up and use blankets instead, but everybody uses air conditioners in the summer. There is no universal agreement about the best temperature, but somewhere between 5 and 10 degrees below the extreme outside temperatures of summer seems to approach being a norm.

In addition to saving energy and feeling comfortable, the motivation for this temperature setting is to avoid "air conditioner sickness" (空调病). In local parlance this term covers at least two different conditions. One is the problem of not sweating and the body not learning to adjust and the other is caused by the air becoming bad from germs spread by the air conditioner, requiring frequent ventilation by opening windows. While the campaigners themselves mostly express willingness to conform to the 26 degrees requirement of the campaign, there is some degree of disagreement within the families as children are keener to use air conditioning than their parents and grandparents. Some of the younger officials and campaigners who have school age children make rules for their children, restricting the use of air conditioning to certain times of the day and certain durations of time. Auntie Wang makes a direct connection between air conditioning and age groups, which does not refer to different preferences but to different bodily dispositions, arguing that air conditioning is for young people because the cold is not good for old people's joints.

more serious manner by officials pointing out that our dinners were considerably less luxurious than in the past because of government imposed requirements.

Another campaigner told me that she uses air conditioner but that her husband is so afraid of getting cold that he always tells her to turn it off. Most campaigners in Dongping Lane belong to generations that have not been born into air conditioned spaces. Compared with younger people, who are often drawn to air conditioned spaces (Hitchings and Lee 2008), they seem to have a remarkable tolerance of heat.

Connecting concerns about transportation

The number of cars on the streets of Hangzhou has grown dramatically in the last decades to reach a point where the formerly simple operation of moving from one place to another in the city by car has become difficult. During peak hours pedestrians can often move faster than people in cars in the city centre. The municipal government is addressing the issue in a number of ways. In late 2012 the city's first subway line opened and Hangzhou is home to one of the world's most extensive public bicycle share schemes. All the same, the city's traffic remains desperately congested. Car ownership in Dongping Lane is relatively sparse. According to Little Zheng only around 100 of the community's 5522 residents own cars. Nevertheless the low-carbon life campaign addresses transportation through the requirement to limit driving private cars by walking, biking or taking public transport (DPX 2009). Regardless of the low percentage of car owners among them, the low-carbon life campaigners conceive of driving as an everyday life practice, which low-carbon life has the potential to alter. Climate change, economic issues, safety, health, convenience in daily life and the mounting air pollution crisis become connected in the ways the campaigners discuss and practice transportation as an aspect of low-carbon life.

Along with the changes in material culture in the home represented by new electrical appliances and growing meat consumption, patterns and perceptions of transportation have become altered by the dramatic rise in private car ownership (Gerth 2010). For many residents of Dongping Lane, the cars in question belong to their children. The car culture that has developed, and in most cities has supplanted China's world famous bicycle culture, has mostly been embraced by people who are younger than the typical low-carbon life campaigner. A study on car culture in China concludes that social and cultural considerations influenced by consumerist values are more important than practical considerations in the ways younger people relate to cars (Zhu et al 2012). Among the campaigners in Dongping Lane the opposite is true. Arguments for and against driving revolve around practical considerations rather than notions of prestige or desire. The campaigners belong to generations that have not been socialized to want cars. The development of a car culture in China is

a recent phenomenon. As late as in the mid-1990s, textbooks in Chinese schools warned that an American-style car culture was unsafe, polluting and wasteful, but his attitude was soon swept aside by concerted government efforts to generate a domestic demand for cars to help develop the Chinese car industry (Gerth 2010: pp. 22-23). One campaigner points to the contradiction inherent in promoting a large car industry and at the same time promoting environmental sustainability by arguing that people should ride bicycles rather than drive cars while at the same time recognizing that cars are vital to the Chinese economy.

As a low-carbon life practice, taking a bicycle instead of a car becomes a way of addressing the issues of traffic congestion and air pollution. Many of the retired residents of Dongping Lane worry about the health consequences of the heavy pollution from car exhaust, and mention bicycles as part of the solution. Many own bicycles and a few of them use the public bicycle scheme. There are several docking stations just outside of Dongping Lane.⁷³ While mostly being seen as a form of transport there are also people in the community who use bicycles for recreational purposes.⁷⁴

The list of low-carbon life tips in the Resident's Handbook (DPX 2009) contains detailed information about how to drive in a fuel efficient way. A handful of the campaigners I interviewed connected driving and low-carbon life by making reference to their own experience as drivers. One has worked many years in public sanitation as a sweeper driver and has noted the gradual change as traffic has become so congested that one may have to wait two or three green lights before it is possible to cross at an intersection. Another resident emphasized the importance of driving smartly to save gas in a way that resembled the tip in the handbook. One of the few young campaigners, Mr. Hou, who describes himself as a car-lover, participates in a car pooling scheme with his colleagues. Most campaigners, however, apply the requirement of driving less and taking more public transport to other people than themselves as they put pressure on younger family members to leave the car and take public transport more often. To them, low-carbon life becomes not just what they can do personally, but also what they can persuade family members to do. Auntie Sun proudly told me that she controls the use of four cars through her influence on her children and their spouses. This ability

⁷³ One resident saw using the public bicycles as a way of avoiding the widespread problem of bicycle theft because the heavy red bicycles of the public sharing scheme were unattractive to thieves, saying that when, not if, her bicycle was stolen she would not replace it with a new one but rather just use the public ones.

⁷⁴ Another popular form of transport in Hangzhou, sometimes promoted as an alternative to the car, is the electric bicycle (电瓶车). I did not see many of them in Dongping Lane, but a few people have bought them. One resident told me that she owns one and feels safer riding it late at night and early in the morning than she would riding a bicycle because she believes its speed can protect her from potential assailants.

to influence family is discussed and enacted among the retired campaigners and may be applied to other everyday life practices besides driving.

Toxic China

Everyday life in urban China is lived in the shadow of a mounting environmental crisis. Air pollution is a pressing, increasingly visible and much debated aspect of the crisis. The smog crisis that engulfed both metropolises and media in late 2012 and early 2013 had been underway for a long time. Along with polluted food and polluted water, the heavily polluted air has transformed cities into dangerous environments where basic human functions of eating, drinking and even breathing exposes citizen's bodies to serious health risks as they are permeated by various kinds of toxic or otherwise harmful matter (Economy 2010; Kassiola & Guo 2010; Shapiro 2012).

As implied in the name, low-carbon life is conceived as a response to the problem of a growing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere leading to global climatic changes, rather than a response to local air pollution in the shape of dangerous particulate matter. It may seem paradoxical or strange to stage a campaign aiming at climate change mitigation, which is known to be an elusive target that is difficult to mobilize around, when a much more immediate threat in the shape of air pollution has become a prime focus of many people's environmental preoccupations. Why target carbon when it is dangerous particulate matter that threatens the health of millions of Chinese citizens in the short term? Here the notion of connecting concerns may be helpful. Many of the processes of burning that lead to emissions of greenhouse gases also lead to emissions of dangerous particulate matter. When the campaigners in Dongping Lane address transportation they make a link between climate change mitigation and efforts to reduce local pollution. Walking or biking instead of driving is not only a way to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases but also a way to reduce the emission of dangerous particulate matter from cars. Informants often used the phrase "low-carbon life is *also...*" indicating that many campaigners are aware that reducing carbon does not necessarily have to be something they focus on *instead of* focusing on reducing local pollution. The two are connected. Climate change and local pollution can be connected by focusing on the fact that the processes that lead to greenhouse gas emissions also typically lead to emissions of dangerous particulate matter and other pollutants.⁷⁵ One resident illustrated this particularly poignantly when he pointed out that children who are biking are right next to the exhaust pipes of cars and because of

⁷⁵ This logic is pursued in studies of climate policy referring to this connection of concerns as "issue-bundling" or referring to health related outcomes of climate policies as "co-benefits" (Chiu et al. 2007; Koehn 2007; Kan et al. 2012)

this, the increasing use of cars happens at the health expense of some of those who are most vulnerable to air pollution.

Part of the interpretation of how low-carbon life can address more than climate change, is made by the organizing officials and the lecturers from the Science Popularization Association, but much of it happens when residents carry the interpretation forward in their own ways, applying the reasoning of the campaign to their own everyday life concerns. The introduction to low-carbon life in the Resident's Handbook (DPX 2009) explains that low-carbon means reduction of emissions of carbon, especially carbon dioxide. In the Chinese term *ditan* 低碳, like the English 'low-carbon', carbon (碳) stands for carbon dioxide and it can be read as standing in for greenhouse gases in general, although other greenhouse gases such as methane are not explicitly mentioned. Referring to carbon dioxide, it is in the outset meant to encompass only greenhouse gases. However, the residents also use it to address the emission of dangerous particulate matter. In connection with local pollution, the abbreviation PM 2.5 (particles of 2.5 microns or less in width) seems to play a role parallel to that of carbon, coming to stand for all kinds of particulate matter no matter the size of the particles. The term is nowhere near as entrenched and ubiquitous as that of carbon and some get the term wrong calling it MP 2.5 or simply "PM-something" (PM 什么什么).

Applied to air pollution, low-carbon life becomes a way of unsettling rather than normalizing. Instead of learning to live with high levels of ambient air pollution, the residents apply the new conceptual device of low-carbon life to their attempts at contributing towards mitigating it. In the last couple of decades, Hangzhou has become less brown and grey in the sense that in the air there is of the less highly visible smog from coal, and that on the ground the uniformity of the cityscape of concrete and stone is broken by trees, flowers and grass. These highly visual changes, resulting from the relocation of industry and a priority on green spaces, are compounded by an officially promoted green urban imaginary (Delman 2014). Focusing on environmental protection policies and the city's reputation as a city of leisure, this highly deceptive representation of Hangzhou as green, has to some extent masked the environmental problems, which are as grave as those of most major Chinese cities. According to the real-time air quality index provided by the Chinese Ministry of Environmental Protection the air in Hangzhou is as polluted as that of Beijing and Shanghai.⁷⁶ Among the people with whom I discussed air pollution and the PM 2.5 measurements, the officials took a more pessimistic and critical view than the residents. The new focus on dangerous particulate

⁷⁶ <http://aqicn.org/city/hangzhou/>

matter as a measurable indicator of air quality can serve to counter this image of a green and environmentally friendly Hangzhou. Since 2008 the American Embassy in Beijing has been releasing air quality data from measurements taken by embassy staff and as of early 2013, 74 cities all across China release air quality data.⁷⁷ One of the residents mentioned the data from the American embassy as a reason why embracing the practices of low-carbon life was important. Among the campaigners in Dongping Lane there is no clear consensus as to whether the present environmental conditions represent a step forward or backward compared with earlier times. On the surface things are neater and seem cleaner, but food scandals and the focus on dangerous particulate matter generate awareness that a closer look may reveal serious environmental problems despite the city's green image.

Cultivating good habits

Calls to action from climate scientists are often structured around notions of urgency. Stressing the price of delaying action and setting deadlines for reductions is central to international climate science communication and politics (Clover & Berger 2007). In contrast to this tendency to attempt to impart a sense of urgency, the community officials in Dongping Lane take great care to avoid notions of haste when discussing low-carbon life. A typical expression of this tendency is the insistence that the implementation of low-carbon life involving the dissemination of information as well as practices must take place over time as there is a certain process to it (有过程的). Both officials and residents contrasted the present efforts with earlier campaigning to illustrate the need for slow and patient work. The argument of one resident captures this use of the past as a contrast: *"In the past we had the Cultural Revolution. For a long time one campaign followed the other and people were full of enthusiasm but achieved very little"*. Cautioned by past experiences of campaigning both residents and officials insisted on the need for a processual and patient approach to campaigning. Past approaches were sometimes described as "unscientific" and this term was also applied to the idea of expecting change overnight. Here the meaning of "unscientific" is something akin to unreasonable.

Besides this stress on the importance of recognizing that a process such as the change of many everyday life practices necessarily takes time, descriptions of the present day campaign style also focus on the difference between large scale coercive mobilization and voluntary individualized action. The idea of small beginnings is caught in expressions such as the slogan found on posters in

⁷⁷ http://english.mep.gov.cn/News_service/news_release/201310/t20131024_262189.htm

the community: "low-carbon life begins with me" (低碳生活从我做起) or the term "bit by bit" (点点滴滴) which is used in the Resident's Handbook to describe campaign efforts hinting at the effect of multiplication inherent in the view of campaigners as exemplars. The idea that the unfolding of low-carbon life is a gradual process is connected with thoughts about the force of habit in the sense-making that the campaigners apply to their practices. Habits can be viewed as both positive and negative forces in connection with low-carbon life. One campaigner summarized the connections between a processual approach, small beginnings and the ambiguous legacy of the past as follows: *"Now we have begun. That is a big difference. One thing is that we have gone from not understanding to understanding, we have gone from not acting to beginning to act. So you can say there is a process to it all. Chinese civilization has 5000 years of history. 5000 years of feudal tradition have left us with some things which are, well... difficult to change"*.

The worlding of low-carbon life as something that is closely related with everyday life in the household and the community creates an opposition between on the one hand habit, understood here as embodied and not very reflexive actions and on the other hand practice, understood as more deliberate and systematic actions. The idea that low-carbon life is a matter of changing habits by becoming aware of their connection with climate change and other concerns posits low-carbon life in a relation of tension with everyday life. It is addressing things that people do all the time in a way that aims to lift them out of the realm of the taken-for-granted and into a space of transformation where they can become the stuff that makes up a part of the moral world of the community residents. However, not all focus on habits has to do with the ambition to bring about change. Habits also play a positive role as resources in the campaign in the sense that some habits, that the older residents already have are highlighted as low-carbon habits and made part of low-carbon life by being included in the Low-Carbon Household Standard, various tips to reduce emissions as well as the general local discourse of low-carbon life. Indeed, the frugal habits of older residents who have experienced times of scarcity are brought forward by officials as a reason why Dongping Lane with its many retired residents is a suitable place for a low-carbon life campaign. The general idea is that many of their habits that were formed in times of scarcity and a political climate conducive to asceticism can be transformed into low-carbon life habits to address the current predicament of the anthropocene.

Viewed as a collection of habits, the implied high-carbon life, which low-carbon life is envisioned as a replacement of, is a relatively recent phenomenon. Although the reform era in China has now

lasted longer than the Mao era did, the majority of campaigners in Dongping Lane have only had access to a high-consumption lifestyle for a relatively limited part of their lives. Consumerist habits targeted for change are in most cases recent replacements for older more frugal habits among the retired campaigners. This could be expected to mean that the practices of low-carbon life meet little resistance from the force of habit. Rather than being new, many low-carbon life practices represent a revival of old habits. A case in point is the practice of reusing water for various purposes in the home. Improvised systems for collecting water from showering, washing hands, washing vegetables etc. in buckets and wash basins are common in the homes of the campaigners. The water is reused for different purposes depending on how dirty or clean it is. Water used for cleaning vegetables is later used for watering plants, and water used for showering or washing can be used for washing the floor. The final use of reused water in the household is the flushing of toilets. Campaigners carry this practice with them from earlier times when it was part of an overall thrifty approach to consumption.

Low-carbon life as hobby-like activities

As described in the preceding sections some of the requirements of low-carbon life prompt campaigners to change everyday life practices while other requirements function more like propagation and celebration of things they are already doing. The most immediately obvious example of this is the requirement in the Low-Carbon Household Standard (DPX 2009) of exercising outdoors rather than joining a gym. As anyone who has spent a minimum of time in urban China can testify to, exercising outdoors is widely embraced by pensioners, who flock to parks with their badminton racquets, kites, oversize calligraphy brushes, caged birds and often surprisingly agile bodies. In their recent book "Ten Thousand Things", Judith Farquhar and Zhang Qicheng reflect on these activities practiced in the parks of Beijing and labeled by their informants as belonging to the domain of *yangsheng* 养生 (nurturing life). One of their general findings is that the range of activities that can be labeled as *yangsheng* is very wide (Farquhar & Zhang 2012). The same is true for low-carbon life. There is some overlap between *yangsheng* and low-carbon life – some of the activities highlighted by the informants of Farquhar and Zhang were also mentioned by my informants – which is perhaps not surprising given that both are practiced among the urban elderly in China and both are conceived of in relatively holistic terms.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Several of my informants said they enjoy taking walks, doing gymnastics, dancing, and writing calligraphy, and sometimes they would connect these activities with low-carbon life. The practice of keeping a caged bird and bringing it to the park is part of the long list of *yangsheng* activities observed by Farquhar and Zhang, and as a low-carbon activity by one of my informants (Farquhar &

The people who practice *yangsheng* activities in the parks of urban China do so not only to achieve instrumental physical and mental health effects, but also to enjoy life (Farquhar & Zhang 2005). In this respect their practices are similar to the practices of low-carbon life. Conceiving of low-carbon life as hobby-like activities that are sources of joy rather than trouble, the campaigners in Dongping Lane occupy a position, which is closer to that of the ballroom dancers of public squares in contemporary China, than it is to that of their own participation in state-sponsored campaigns in the Mao era. Rather than activism, then, low-carbon life can, like *yangsheng*, be viewed as a form of self-cultivation and as a way of taking up a space in the cultural life of the community and the city (Farquhar & Zhang 2005).

While low-carbon life represents more individualized efforts than the mass-mobilization campaigns of the past, it is conceived of as a way of contributing towards community building. Through low-carbon handicrafts exhibitions, neighborhood day propaganda activities and frequent interaction with journalists the campaigners are contributing to the liveliness of the community much in the same way that practitioners of *yangsheng* are shaping the cultural life of parks. *Yangsheng* activities and the practices of low-carbon life are both conceived as constructive and deliberate. They are conceived as separate from habits by being deliberately chosen and developed, and they are conceived as separate from empty entertainment by being constructive. Some of the specific delimitations of the domains of both *yangsheng* and low-carbon life that practitioners offer may illustrate these requirements. Two of the most popular leisure activities in China: playing mahjong and watching TV are mentioned by both *yangsheng* practitioners in Beijing and low-carbon life campaigners in Dongping Lane as examples of that which what cannot be meaningfully included in these otherwise broad categories (Farquhar & Zhang 2012: p. 236).

While China's consumer revolution offers people many opportunities to pursue material pleasures that were unthinkable in the Mao era, the pleasures of low-carbon life are of a different kind. Distancing themselves from both the Mao era asceticism of their youth and the reform era consumerism taken up by younger generations today, the campaigners in Dongping Lane are involved in an attempt to re-think what it means to lead good lives that resonates not only with *yangsheng*, but also with the positive coding of values in direct opposition to consumerism, such as the enjoyment found in slowness, silence, and enactment of civic culture, that Kate Soper refers to

Zhang 2005: p.307). The inclusion of this specific practice which on the surface seems to have no obvious direct impact on health or the environment demonstrates that both categories are conceived of relatively holistically addressing the notion of well-being in a way that connects things.

as alternative hedonism (Soper 2007). This has the potential to generate new conceptions of consumption and citizenship in which seeking a good life becomes aligned with, not opposed to, environmental sustainability. Embracing the joys of nurturing plants, reusing materials and paying attention to the materiality of hitherto unquestioned daily practices the campaigners seek to make a good time of embedding climate change mitigation in everyday life.

Conclusion

When the campaigners in Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life they rarely talk about climate change. Discussions of healthy diets or transportation habits are far more common among the community campaigners than discussions of the future of the planet or of humanity. Yet they envision low-carbon life as a response to global climate change. By connecting everyday life with global climate change and local pollution, low-carbon life constitutes everyday life in the community as problematic in two ways. The environmental crisis as a threat to personal health casts everyday life in the community as riddled by the problem of protecting and preserving the life of the individual, and the connection with global climate change casts everyday life in the community as implicated in the problem of preserving the human species, as low-carbon life becomes a contribution towards keeping the Earth inhabitable for humans in the near and distant future. In this sense the connection-forging sense-making processes of low-carbon life bring together the two figures of the self and the species. The self receives more attention than the species from the practitioners of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane, who approach many aspects of low-carbon life as something akin to self-cultivation. This does not mean that concerns about global climate change and all of humanity are not part of the sense-making processes that contribute to the constitution of low-carbon life. But it does set up a state of tension between the far and the near, the mundane and the epic, which characterizes the way residents of Dongping Lane make sense of low-carbon life, and in turn use low-carbon life as one of the conceptual devices at their disposal in their quest to make sense of their place in a rapidly changing social and physical environment.

The retired residents in the community offer a wide range of reflections about the low-carbon life practices they embrace, both as a continuation of older lifestyle patterns and as direct results of the campaign. Their specific material practices are informed by concerns over health, comfort and convenience that become connected with concerns over climate change through the campaign. Air conditioners, cars and food become involved in low-carbon life as vehicles of carbon reduction as well as vehicles of reflection about leading good lives in a world of connections where issues

cannot be meaningfully separated but must be viewed holistically to make sense. As a response to global climate change, low-carbon life becomes entangled in another, closely related issue, namely that of local pollution. The processes that lead to emission of greenhouse gases are often the same that lead to the emission of dangerous particulate matter or other pollutants that contribute to the acute and increasing environmental crisis in China. This means that when campaigners address practices that lead to emission of greenhouse gases they are also addressing local pollution.

The campaigners in Dongping Lane place many different activities in the inclusive category of low-carbon life practices. Being open to interpretation part of the attraction of low-carbon life is that people can read their concerns and aspirations into its meaning. Concerns about waste, hygiene, hospitality, enjoyment, community, meaningful lives, health, comfort and convenience become connected through the concept of low-carbon life. The cultural work of interpreting low-carbon life carried out by the residents becomes a way that they can weave the world more tightly together by showing connections between practices and concerns that make their social and material world meaningful. These sense-making processes offer them ways to pursue what they conceive as good lives, which place them within, rather than outside, the mainstream of society in times of rapid social, economic and environmental change that might otherwise leave them marginalized from an increasingly consumerist culture. Connecting concerns, then, becomes a crucial sense-making practice among the practitioners of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane, which serves to keep the concept of low-carbon life meaningful, versatile and open to interpretation.

7. Campaigning in a New Era

The present is lived in constant and often implicit comparison with the past. In Dongping Lane, as in China in general, life in the Mao era was vastly different from life in the present. Memories of the Mao era are used in many different ways by various groups in China today for a wide array of purposes and with connotations ranging from nostalgia to trauma, as the revolutionary past remains an encumbrance as well as a source of inspiration (Perry 2012: p. 14; Lee & Yang 2007: p. 2). The low-carbon life campaign was conceived in 2009 and as such it is a new development in the community and is connected to political developments and social imaginaries of the early 21st century. The people who participate, however, have most of their life experience from the middle and latter parts of the 20th century. Many campaigners are born before the founding of the People's Republic and for them, the Mao era figures as prominently as the reform era in their memories. During my stay in Dongping Lane memories of the past often came up as residents talked about the ways that living conditions as well as the political and physical environment had changed over the years. Many of the residents have lived in the community for decades and some have lived there their entire lives. Memories of the threat of starvation, persecution of class enemies and other unpleasant parts of their past experience came up as small fragments in interviews now and then, but generally memories of the past were of everyday life and associated with material conditions of poverty compared with their conditions today.

The aim of this chapter is to examine how past experiences, especially of the Mao era, inform campaign activities and the way officials and residents attempt to make sense of low-carbon life as a campaign. Most campaign participants are in their 60s and 70s and their experiences of everyday life as well as of campaigning in times when life was vastly different figure as important resources for the sense-making processes of low-carbon life. Biography and history combine to make up the experiential background that campaigners draw on, as some of the experiences that inform the campaign are personal and highly specific to the individual, and other experiences are of a more general nature and shared by most of them. The chapter examines what the residents focus on when they talk about the past to tackle the future and what they find relevant for their present engagement with climate change. The past viewed as simultaneously a burden and a source of inspiration becomes one important context for sense-making in relation to low-carbon life along with the contexts of community building, material culture and concerns over health, comfort and convenience, examined in previous chapters.

Officials and residents alike sometimes resort to comparing their present activities with campaigning in earlier eras when reasoning about the ways they campaign. The ages of the campaign participants range from early twenties to late eighties but most of them are in their sixties and seventies. Growing up under similar historical conditions these campaigners have similar experiences of the various historical eras and junctures that inform the ways they think about their lives today (Jing 1996). In residents' narratives of their lives in the community and in officials' conceptions of their role vis-à-vis the residents, the Mao era figures as a time vastly different from the present in two ways.⁷⁹ Firstly the Mao era was characterized by simple material living conditions compared with today. This is addressed by campaigners, primarily among the residents, who remember simple food, dilapidated houses and hard work. These recollections are not critical of the communist party but rather framed as narratives of progress brought about by the diligent work of the party. In these narratives there is an echo of the state orchestrated practice of the Mao era of "recalling past bitterness, in order to savor the sweetness of the present" (忆苦思甜) (Ho 2004: p. 380). Secondly the Mao era, or at least part of it, was characterized by mass-mobilization, coercion and political extremism. This is addressed by residents celebrating the vastly enhanced scope of the right to be left alone by authorities, and by officials who argue that they must use different governing methods than in the past because the new era calls for a more hands-off approach of fostering voluntary participation.

Remembering Dongping Lane as a dirty and disorderly place and their own lives as frugal to the point of bitterness, the campaigners set up the Mao era as a time of vast difference from the present, which becomes a context for making sense of low-carbon life. References to life in the Mao era are made for the purpose of comparison with life today. Through moments of trans-historical juxtaposition, the frugal ways of the past, that were the result of relative poverty, throw into relief the proposed frugal ways of the present and the near future suggested by the campaign. This juxtaposition sets up the past selves of the campaigners as Others that may function as cultural critical mirrors casting reflections through which present day interactions and concerns may be understood and through which the taken for granted may be destabilized or defamiliarized (Marcus and Fischer 1999: p. 138). Faced with their own past selves, the campaigners are reminded that things have been different and could become different again.

⁷⁹ A similar notion of vast difference is captured by the Chinese author Yu Hua: "For the first twenty years of my life, I was living in a time of poverty and oppression; the next twenty years were spent in a time of increasing wealth and freedom. The two periods are radically different. The gap between the two is like the gap between Europe in the Middle Ages and Europe now" (Standaert 2004).

Some of the methods employed in the campaign are recycled from campaigning in earlier times. The house calls to propagate the garbage sorting competition as well as the close monitoring of its participants are examples of this. A core feature of the campaign is the designation of role models to be propagated and learned from. The use of role models draws on the historical experience of earlier campaigning, but the values the role models are thought to embody represent the new era. Life in the reform era has been characterized by individualization (Yan 2010; Hansen & Svarverud 2010). New ideas about state-society relations have provided citizens with a new and wider interpretive space in which to understand collective undertakings such as community based campaigns. The freedom to opt out means that only those who are interested in the issues that the campaign addresses are likely to participate in low-carbon life campaigning. In lieu of political pressure there can of course be a degree of social pressure to participate especially among neighbors who know each other well.

From the perspective of local officials the campaign effort can be viewed as propaganda in two ways, one that has to do primarily with prestige and another that has to do primarily with attempts to change people's ideas and practices. As a whole, the campaign can promote the image of the community, and on an individual level participants can stand out as exemplary practitioners of low-carbon life. In this respect, the sense-making of the campaign can be read as part of a larger green urban imaginary of Hangzhou (Delman 2014). The campaign has attracted media attention, and the local officials interact on a regular basis with journalists who visit the community and write reports about the latest developments in the campaign. The relationship between the officials and the journalists reflects changes in the role of the media in China and its connections to officialdom. In the sense of being a collection of messages to the local residents about how they can change specific everyday life consumption practices, low-carbon life is less ideologically charged than much other propaganda. Reflecting recent changes in the translations of the Chinese term *xuanchuan* (宣传) from propaganda to information (Wang 2010: p. 15), the dissemination of information to the residents is conceived as less struggle-oriented than propaganda which is conceived as being in constant struggle with counter-propaganda. The consumerist messages of mainstream commercial advertising could be construed as counter-propaganda that the campaign must struggle against, but this is not how things are put into words in the community. Instead of a friends-and-enemies model of propaganda, the campaigners seem to have adopted a more neutral concept of information dissemination focused on what they themselves are doing rather than what they want others to do.

The campaign is represented in media reports by exemplary individuals, who embody the person-thing assemblages of low-carbon life in ways that are spectacular enough to be the focus of reports. The low-carbon doyens, who experiment with the power consumption of household appliances and produce low-carbon handicrafts, stand out as the primary exemplars of the campaign. The use of role models to promote the campaign and inspire others to change their everyday life consumer practices draws on a long history of using role models (Reed 1995; Bakken 2000; Cheng 2009). In contrast with earlier role models who embodied the more struggle-oriented values of their times, the low-carbon doyens are singled out as exemplary because of their initiative and their ability to come up with new ideas. Rather than promoting the ascetic pursuit of utopian goals, the role models are held up as examples to show that the lifestyle changes proposed by the low-carbon life campaign, can be enjoyable and bring gains of a different sort than the material pleasures of a consumerist lifestyle. As we saw in the previous chapter, this approach to consumption, holding that low-key consumption can be healthier and more pleasant than conspicuous consumption, referred to as "alternative hedonism" by Kate Soper who proposes that it may be crucial to the search for viable and effective responses to climate change (Soper 2007), is characteristic of the general low-carbon life campaigning efforts in Dongping Lane.

The competition to become Low-Carbon Model Household was an important part of the early propagation of the campaign. Local and national media reported on it and it made many residents familiar with the idea of climate change as well as the concept of low-carbon life. As a long-term approach to climate change mitigation, however, it is not taken entirely seriously by the campaigners. I argue in this chapter that the competition is not meant to be taken seriously as a vision of how to live low-carbon lives. Rather, the highly stylized, simplified and quantified nature makes it more akin to a ritual-like space that stands apart from normal life. This space of exception allows for people to engage with the idea of climate change in ways that provoke thoughts and open up new ways of viewing local everyday life practices and how they fit into larger global developments. The competition was a temporary phenomenon but after it has ended, the logic of the campaign dictates that the participants keep up some of the low-carbon life practices and develop new ones based on their participation. The first general campaign to save energy and resources in 2010 was replaced by the competition to sort garbage in 2011 and 2012. In 2013 there was a competition to compost kitchen waste. More competitions may follow as the community officials plan to launch new campaign initiatives.

Officials and residents in Dongping Lane share a concern that the entire low-carbon life campaign may prove to be a temporary effort to be replaced by other concerns. To counter this negative vision of abandoned campaigning, the organizers of the campaign have a vision of transformation in which low-carbon life ceases to be a campaign that must be constantly promoted and becomes something more mainstreamed and permanent that is a part of how people live their lives. Official information material as well as the accounts of the intentions of the campaign organizers offered by such people as the party secretary and the community director introduces the concept of low-carbon culture. Similar to low-carbon life in scope, it is a broad concept that draws together many activities. The concept of low-carbon culture reflects a hope for the future, shared by residents and officials, that the efforts of the low-carbon life campaign will not be lost. Low-carbon culture is imagined as the shape that climate change mitigation in the community will take in a post-campaigning era.

Living in a new era

In the preface to his 1977 book "Revolution at Work", Charles P. Cell correctly predicted that "*[i]n the years to come sinologists will undoubtedly speak of China's Mao and post-Mao eras*" (Cell 1977: p. xi). The sense that a period of history was over and that a significant move into a new era took place brought about by Mao's death as well as Deng's reform program, has been reflected in a variety of periodizing terms used to describe the years following that particular leadership change. Cell was correct that the term "post-Mao era" was taken up by sinologists, but it has been accompanied by a range of other terms to characterize China's post-condition: post-Maoist, post-revolutionary, post-socialist, and post-totalitarian to name a few (O'Brien 1998; Amin 1999; Dirlik 2002; Hann 2002; Ho & Ng 2008). Generally the terms used to characterize the era from the late 1970s to the present display different variations of the same theme, namely that Mao Zedong's revolution is – in one way or another – over, and has been replaced by something different.

Residents and officials in Dongping Lane who talk about the differences between the past and the present generally use two different ways to cut up time. Sometimes people simply refer to a generalized past (以前) without recourse to specific periodization, while the term Mao era (毛时代) is sometimes used to signify the radically different time some residents experienced in their youth. A common characteristic of nearly all references to life in the past made by campaigners was that they served to illustrate the vast difference in environment and living conditions that they have experienced. These various differences are used by the residents and officials to highlight aspects of the low-carbon life campaign. For residents the most commonly stressed difference is the contrast

between a poor past and a relatively well-off present. While this difference is also stressed by officials, their focus tends to be on political difference, stressing that the methods of governing have changed with the times. The time after 1978 is often referred to as the reform era in academic as well as popular literature on China. The two periods differ in that the first is associated with a man (Mao) and the second with a political process (reform). It may of course be argued that the reform era, or at least the early part of it, is strongly associated with Deng Xiaoping, but the overall project of reform has been carried forward by subsequent leadership generations. Deng's death in 1997 was much less of a watershed event than Mao's death two decades earlier. Another way of contrasting the two periods is to characterize the former as a period of revolution and the latter as a period of reform. Emphasizing the necessity of a relatively slow pace of changes in individuals as well as society at large, the campaigners in Dongping Lane embrace a reformist rather than a revolutionary perspective on the idea of a national as well as global low-carbon transition that is a context of the sense-making work in their campaign.

Most of the campaigners in Dongping Lane are old enough to have experienced several of the major changes in modern Chinese history that have held promises of new beginnings. Some are old enough to remember the sense of a new beginning at the founding of the People's Republic of China, all but a few remember the new beginning represented by Reform and Opening-Up (改革开放), and many are familiar with the idea that the fading of Danwei (单位) and the introduction of community building (社区建设) represents a new beginning. The low-carbon life campaign represents yet another new beginning as it introduces the new era of the anthropocene in the shape of arguments about the connections between everyday life and climate change. Experienced in rethinking former ideas and practices in the light of epochal change, many campaign participants divide time into a period before and a period after becoming aware of climate change and hearing about low-carbon life. In the words of a campaigner the beginning of the low-carbon life campaign represents a movement *"from not understanding to understanding and from not acting to acting"*. These moments of cutting up of time into a binary of "before and after" set up a series of pasts as objects of comparison with the present.

The leading campaign organizers argue that low-carbon life is a good community-building project for Dongping Lane, because a community with many older people is well suited for popular climate change mitigation activities. This could be interpreted as referring to the free time retired people have on their hands to get involved, but it could also be interpreted as referring to the experiences

they have with living in vastly different times when consumption patterns were different. Both rationales came up in my discussions with officials and residents. The latter interpretation implies that the consumption patterns of the Mao era can serve as inspiration for the practices of low-carbon life. To follow this implication through and to provoke discussion among the residents, I sometimes resorted to explicit trans-historical juxtaposition of concepts by asking residents if they thought people in the Mao era lived low-carbon lives or if that time could be said to be a low-carbon era.

This invitation to comparison invariably led to arguments that the past was first and foremost a time of poverty. While living standards in the Mao era meant that emissions of greenhouse gases were very low, according to the logic of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane that does not mean that the Mao era was a low-carbon era. The Mao era cannot meaningfully be characterized as a low-carbon era firstly because people were not aware of anthropogenic climate change and secondly because material living conditions and ascetic ideals prevented consumer lifestyle from becoming a possibility. Awareness of the predicament of the anthropocene and the practical possibility of embracing a high-carbon lifestyle, then, are preconditions for making sense of low-carbon life. Campaigners made frequent reference to the simple living conditions of the past, sometimes thanking the Communist Party for relegating those conditions to the past. In addition to the experience of simple living caused by poverty, the campaigners have also been subjected to propaganda making a virtue of this necessity (Bakken 2000: p. 103). Low-carbon life is closely linked with the possibility of leading consumerist, high-carbon lives. While residents readily acknowledged that greenhouse gas emissions were lower in their youth this could not be interpreted as the result of intentional action but rather as a side effect of poverty. Back then, I was reminded time and time again, people did not know about carbon and climate change. Low-carbon life thus requires knowledge about the consequences of one's actions. Neither the common people nor the representatives of the party-state focused on environmental protection in the Mao era (Lee 2005: p. 36). In earlier times hygiene and thrift rather than environment were dominant themes of campaigning (Bakken 2000; Rogaski 2004; Zhang & Li 2011). One informant juxtaposed the campaign to "eradicate the four pests" (*chusihai* 除四害) with the present day low-carbon life campaign, stressing the different concepts of different times: *"When I was a child the school would engage in health campaigns, for example "Eradicate the four pests". In the schools, students were required to go out with rags and clean. [...] But the only thing we thought about was to do cleaning work or eradicate the four pests. But regarding whether or not this was low-carbon... we didn't have that kind of concept"*. The frugal habits of older people that present day campaign organizers

attempt to harness in service of climate change mitigation, have not only been formed through direct experience of poverty but are also the products of concerted ideological efforts. In addition to the experience of living in times of scarcity, the residents have witnessed massive propagation of thrift in a series of campaigns (Bakken 2000: p. 103). To the residents of Dongping Lane frugal habits and regimented campaigning do not in themselves equal low-carbon life. Instead of nostalgic longing for simpler times without waste the focus of campaigners talking about their youth was the notion of the past as a time of bitterness. Low-carbon life does not represent a universal approach to climate change; it only makes sense as a localized, urban response to the high-carbon life embodied in China's consumer revolution of the reform period (Li 1998; Wu 1999; Croll 2006).

If taken to begin in the late 1970s, the new era is not so new anymore. It has already lasted longer than the period from 1949 to 1976 when Mao Zedong was China's paramount leader, and the dominant political keyword was revolution. The retired residents of Dongping Lane have experienced many post-Mao campaigns. There has been no break from campaigning as a steady flow of efforts to collectively improve anything from dental hygiene to the overall level of civilization has been the target of concerted efforts to change people's lives over the years (Bennett 1976; Cell 1978; Bakken 2000; Boland & Zhu 2012). As campaign has followed campaign, an inversion has taken place in which socialist campaigning has been transformed from a radical way of changing society, into more of a conservative element in public life, ensuring that in times of rapid and far-reaching change at least some things are done in the way they used to be. Taking the party-state with its language and methods as the taken-for-granted actor that initiates and directs activities, has become both norm and habit for many of the people participating in low-carbon life in Dongping Lane. Their experience of campaigning in the past has left them with a script for participating in campaigns. All they need to do is make some changes to it so that it fits with the changing times. Although there is a focus on voluntary participation in urban communities in China, activities are to some extent organized along the lines of socialist campaigning of earlier times (Luova 2011: p. 788). What has emerged is a socialist, activist tradition.

Low-carbon life as a campaign

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is conducted and propagated in ways that suggest that the organizers and participants draw on experiences from earlier political campaigns. When talking about their past experiences, the older residents often refer to the Mao era and characterize it as being, first and foremost, vastly different from the present era. In our discussions of low-carbon

life, campaigning in the Mao era became a contrast against which some of the features and peculiarities of campaigning in the 21st century became visible and meaningful.

Campaigning as way of bringing about change has been central to the way the Chinese Communist Party has operated since the time of the Jiangxi Soviet and the Yan'an base area (Bennett 1976: p. 28). It may sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether a series of actions constitute a campaign or not. People in Dongping Lane do not refer to their low-carbon life activities as a *yundong* (运动). Little Zheng uses the expression "popular carbon reduction activities" (民间的减碳活动). Most campaigners simply talk about low-carbon life without formally categorizing it. Being a sustained series of efforts under the same heading, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane matches the definition of the word campaign in Oxford English Dictionary: "*a series of planned activities that are intended to achieve a particular social, commercial or political aim*". When held up against definitions more specifically aimed at Chinese politics, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane differs from the campaigns of the Mao era. In his 1976 book on campaigning in China, Gordon Bennett cautions against assuming that a campaigning in China parallels activities in America that Americans would refer to as campaigning (such as fundraising campaigns or election campaigns). Instead he emphasizes the distinctly socialist nature of campaigning in China: "a Chinese *yundong* is a government-sponsored effort to storm and eventually overwhelm strong but vulnerable barriers to the progress of socialism through intensive mass mobilization of active personal commitment" (Bennett 1976: p. 18). Charles P. Cell characterizes campaigns as phenomena involving "an increased intensity of activity beyond what is expected in regular work and living routines", and identifies three kinds of campaigns: 1) economic campaigns, 2) ideological campaigns, and 3) struggle campaigns (Cell 1977: p. 7).

Campaigning has been a fixture of life for the people of China since the communist takeover in 1949. Transcending the role of a straightforward political tool, campaigning has for longer or shorter periods been a way of life in the People's Republic as participation was mandatory and reflected on people's social and political positions. Various aspects of life have been subject to campaigns as the party has sought to transform the country and its people (See for example Bennett 1976; Cell 1978; Bakken 2000). When residents talked about campaigns of the past it was not to argue that earlier efforts such as the Patriotic Hygiene Campaign (爱国卫生运动) held valuable lessons for the low-carbon life campaign. There was a pronounced skepticism about learning from past campaigns in a direct sense. The taboo-like status of the notion of return implied in talk about

the bitterness of the past as a reason why the Mao era cannot be meaningfully understood as a low-carbon era also appears in talk about earlier campaigns. In addition to being a time of poverty, the fact that the Mao era was a time before knowledge about climate change, was an issue people were aware of. This makes it difficult to connect past and present engagements.⁸⁰

Remembering class struggle

The threat of civilizational collapse as a result of global climate change has prompted some climate scientists and social scientists writing about climate change to propose radical political or technological measures (geo-engineering) or to deplore the absence of a general disavowal of growth oriented consumer capitalism as a reaction to climate change (Hansen 2009; Lovelock 2010; Swyngedouw 2010; Hamilton 2013; Wright et al. 2013). Noting that radical political approaches to climate change have not materialized, Ulrich Beck poses a question, which the generation that many residents of Dongping Lane belong to may be in a good position to answer: "Why is there no storming of the Bastille because of the environmental destruction threatening mankind, why no Red October of ecology?" (Beck 2010: p. 254). Their generation has seen radical responses to the greatest issues of their youth: poverty and inequality, which proved so calamitous that the notion of a return to revolution makes no sense to them even in the face of the climate change crisis.

A recent government slogan calling for a "war on pollution" in response to the smog crisis could be interpreted to have a connotation of revolution, but present Chinese policies do not reflect the radical measures called for by international climate science writers (Cai 2014). Here the idea of a "war on pollution" seems to be inspired by the idea championed by George W. Bush of a "war on terror" rather than by notions such as "Mao's war against nature" (Shapiro 2001). There is no call for a low-carbon revolution among the campaign participants in Dongping Lane, although the fear of civilizational collapse that would prompt radical measures is present among the campaigners.⁸¹ The only person involved in the campaign that I heard use the term revolution to denote something positive and desirable was an official from Hubin Street Office who referred to changing approaches to ecology as a revolution, and called the introduction of garbage sorting a revolution. Here the word seems to denote far-reaching change without any specific political connotations. The campaigners do not take to the streets with banners denouncing the enemies of low-carbon life. As

⁸⁰ While one campaigner remembered the Patriotic Hygiene Campaign she rejected its value as a source of inspiration for the low-carbon life campaign with reference to the difference in subject matter between the two. Since the former was about germs and the latter about carbon she did not find it meaningful to compare them.

⁸¹ One campaigner expressed a strong techno-pessimism saying that humanity has become so technologically advanced that it may wipe itself out and that humans are "too smart for our own good". Others take a more local approach worrying about water rising in the streets of Hangzhou.

we saw in chapter 6, Connecting Concerns, when low-carbon life is connected with concerns over health, comfort and convenience, and conceived as belonging to the domain of everyday life it does not become associated with political protest. Urgency and extreme measures as responses to the threat of climate change are out of the question, not just because low-carbon life is associated with everyday life, but also because the very notion of employing politically radical measures has been tainted by their own experiences of radicalism and struggle in the Mao era, as well as by the repression of protest movements in the reform era. Similarly to the hobby-like ways of occupying a place in the world that Farquhar and Zhang found among practitioners of *yangsheng* in Beijing, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane may owe its non-confrontational character partly to fear of chaos associated with public demonstrations of opposition in China (Farquhar and Zhang 2005: p. 310). As Kleinman et al remind us; one consequence of the dramatic and violent history of the People's Republic is that memories of painful experiences in periods of radicalism and turmoil must live on among the elderly in China although most of the elderly do not speak openly about these memories (Kleinman et al 2011: p. 7). Instead of speaking about painful memories, low-carbon life campaigners set up their present day campaigning in contrast to a generalized past.

The friends-and-enemies mentality associated with some forms of Maoist campaigning, especially the third category in Cell's typology: struggle campaigns (Cell 1977: p. 7), belongs to the undesirable and tainted part of the past experience of the retired residents. When describing the low-carbon life campaign, the community officials in Dongping Lane stress the voluntary nature of participation. They are neither able to nor interested in coercing people in the community into participating in the campaign. Their role is that of initiating, guiding and facilitating, but not leading and controlling the residents. Participation is voluntary and non-participation is not normally interpreted as resistance, but rather explained with reference to lack of knowledge in the case of migrant workers, and lack of time in the case of young middle-class professionals.

From the perspective of the residents, the non-application of a friends and enemies mentality to low-carbon life means that the campaign is not threatening the stability of their everyday lives. In an interview, Auntie Rong illustrated this point by contrasting with the Mao era, saying that methods had, with a current buzzword, become "humanized" (人性化). In earlier times, she pointed out, non-participation in campaigns equaled being a counterrevolutionary. Today you can choose not to participate without risking political persecution. Rong's statement underscores the vast difference between past and present campaign methods as well as the vastly different political

contexts in which campaigning took place in the past.⁸² Here the past becomes an Other for reflecting about present state-society relations and at the same time the current campaign can be used to "tame" the past by relegating political extremism to a category of fundamental otherness.

The absence of abject poverty in present day Dongping Lane places the campaign in an economic environment where the bare necessities of being fed and keeping warm (饱暖) are met and activism does not entail asceticism.⁸³ In addition to this, the absence of open political conflict organized around class difference places the campaign in a political context where moral exemplars are not oriented towards struggle. In the present era it can easily be forgotten how paramount class struggle was to earlier exemplars of campaigning. In his famous diary, the model soldier Lei Feng writes that one must treat the enemy *"as relentlessly as the harshest winter"* referring to class enemies within China, rather than to the armed forces of a foreign country (Cheng 2009: p. 114). Hatred against various enemies was not only part of campaigning; it was nurtured very consciously by the Chinese government (Ci 1994: p. 236).

In the exemplary story from the early 1960s of the "Two Little Sisters of the Grassland", in which two young girls from Inner Mongolia were put forward as revolutionary role models for trying to protect their sheep against eagles and a blizzard, a villain in the shape of a Mongol pastoral lord, trying to steal from the girls rather than helping them, was inserted into the story. 30 years later the man who was portrayed as the villain of the story managed to persuade local media that he had actually helped the girls. In an analysis of this exemplary story and the subsequent events, Uradyn Bulag argues that the villain was needed because the representation of class struggle required an Other (Bulag 1999: p. 30). For the purpose of comparing with the low-carbon life campaign and the exemplarity of its role models, the interesting part of the story is how nature in the shape of eagles and a blizzard were not sufficient antagonists for the official propaganda version of the story (Bulag 1999: p. 32). In comparison, the tales of moral exemplars in the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane are conspicuously non-confrontational. Low-carbon life seems to have no explicitly targeted enemies. The low-carbon life practices that exemplary individuals are known for are peaceful and hobby-like. Instead of criticizing or shaming other people their most commonly

⁸² Residents who talked about actions that were not in accordance with the standards of low-carbon life did not use conflict oriented terms akin to "counterrevolutionary" to characterize enemies of low-carbon life. They used the term "not low-carbon" (不低碳) rather than "high-carbon" (高碳). The latter term was used sporadically by officials and by an expert from the Science Popularization association. There was no category labeled anti-low-carbon (反低碳).

⁸³ Poverty was not entirely absent as there was a small group of homeless people sleeping on the pavement of Qingnian Road, but among the regular residents in the area being fed and keeping warm are no longer the pressing issues.

embraced and valued tactic for influencing others is the provision of inspiration. They promote low-carbon life through lectures, exhibitions, experiments, workshops and media interviews.

From propaganda to information

For the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane to have an impact beyond the community, the messages about climate change mitigation in everyday life must reach wider audiences. Reporters frequently visit the community office in Dongping Lane. In this section I outline the respective roles of officials, residents and reporters, and relate their work of disseminating information about the campaign to the characteristics of the experience of campaigning in a new era that especially local officials but also residents expressed in interviews.

Information about low-carbon life moves in and out of Dongping Lane through various channels. Many residents supplement the information they get from community officials and lecturers with information from the media, especially newspapers and television. Only a few of my informants reported using the Internet to find information about climate change related issues. Experts from the local Science Popularization Association (科普协会) have given lectures about low-carbon life in the community. Campaign propaganda takes a wide range of physical forms. There are posters, garbage bags with written instructions on them, and plaques announcing model status over the doors of households. The little alley outside the community office as well as the hallway at Red Harbor (红色港湾) is often full of mobile exhibitions of photos and text about party history, new campaigns or the visits of politicians. Red banners with yellow characters announcing the latest political slogans hang in the community park. Photos of prominent visitors inspecting various parts of the campaign are displayed on walls in the public spaces of the community. In Dongping Lane the omnipresent system of loudspeakers propagating revolutionary messages in earlier times has been replaced by loudspeakers that are activated by motion sensors next to garbage bins.⁸⁴ The anthropomorphized garbage bins Dongdong (东东) and Pingping (平平) have attracted media attention (Hangzhou Daily 2011). Close to the community office there is a photo of the community officials and visitors from Hangzhou Municipality where Little He is seen showing Mayor Shao Zhanwei⁸⁵ how the bins work. Extending the argument made by David Bray that an abundance of photos and posters about the work of community officials manifests and legitimizes their work,

⁸⁴ This technological change reflects the change in campaigning from addressing everyone and demanding everyone's attention and participation to targeting certain groups thought to be in need of propaganda or to be responsive to propaganda.

⁸⁵ Shao Zhanwei was mayor of Hangzhou from February 2011 until March 2013 when he died of a heart attack in Beijing at a National People's Congress session. South China Morning Post: <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1182850/hangzhou-mayor-shao-zhanwei-dies-during-npc-session>

photos and texts showing important visitors can be seen as a manifestations of the connections of the community and the ability of the local campaigners to project knowledge about their work to higher levels of administration and government (Bray 2006: p. 542). The importance of being noticed by people at higher levels was also reflected in the way officials talked about how the low-carbon life campaign has been received. Director Du and Party Secretary Zhu, perhaps not surprisingly, describe the reception of the campaign among their superiors as positive. News of the local engagements has also made their way to China's top leadership. According to a representative of the Science Popularization Association (科普协会) Premier Li Keqiang has expressed his endorsement of the "real name system" garbage sorting campaign.

The word propaganda has a negative ring to it in Western political contexts invariably conjuring up images of the totalitarian movements of the 20th century. In China, however, propaganda (宣传) is not necessarily a negatively loaded word (Shambaugh 2007: p. 29; Brady 2011: p.1). The Chinese word *xuanchuan* (宣传) which used to be translated as "propaganda" is now translated as "information" or "communication" (Wang 2010: p. 15). This change could be interpreted as an attempt to align language use with the general move away from conflict-oriented revolutionary politics and mass mobilization campaigns, in which propaganda was imagined as always being involved in a struggle with counterpropaganda. While it is perfectly possible to conceive of the consumerist messages of the private industry as a form of propaganda in implied opposition to the message of conservation and sustainability, the information about low-carbon life is never framed as being in a struggle against consumerist messages. Rather than trying to persuade people that climate change is a threat they need to deal with, the general tone is one of providing information and inspiring people to try out the practices of low-carbon life.

Many informants in Dongping Lane argue that what is needed in order to effectively counter climate change is more *xuanchuan* (宣传). Whether this word is translated as "propaganda" or "information" in the particular context of the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane then becomes key to the understanding of the role it is believed to play. As we have seen in previous chapters the relationship between officials and residents in the campaign is generally envisioned as one of being allied in a common effort to contribute to climate change mitigation. The campaign was developed through meetings, lectures and practical activities, and the local officials portray themselves as facilitators rather than leaders of the campaigners. This would suggest that information is the better translation in this case, reflecting a relatively harmony-oriented approach

to sharing and spreading knowledge, different from the image of propaganda in constant battle with counter-propaganda. The spreading of information about climate change within the community is one important aspect of the campaign. Another problem that campaigners attend to is that of spreading the messages of the campaign beyond the community to let people outside of Dongping Lane become aware of their efforts. Here propaganda may still be the best translation since the aim is to promote the community as an exemplary unit. The community officials propagate the campaign on the community website and on their micro-blogging profile. They also connect with national and local media. I often ran into journalists and photographers when I visited Red Harbor or the community office.

The role of the media

The competition to become Low-Carbon Model Household has generated media attention. Articles about it began to appear on the online platforms of Zhejiang media in late 2009 and since then various aspects of the low-carbon life campaign have been reported on locally and nationally in print, online and on television (Li 2009; Liu 2010; Mao 2010; Xu 2010). When I asked the community director why the initial activity of the low-carbon life campaign had taken the shape of a competition, she told me that she sees the competition as a "propaganda method" or a "communication method" (宣传手段) and proceeded to explain that the main purposes of the competition were to get people together and to generate interest in the idea of saving energy and resources as well as the idea of running a campaign about it. The low-carbon life competition is conceived primarily as a way of generating attention. What may at first glance seem like an approach to climate change mitigation strongly based on scientism as represented by the attempt to systematize and quantify everyday life morality through applying a standard, is primarily a form of advertising. The very rigid approach to lifestyle changes that a standard and a competition seem to suggest only applies to a very limited part of what is going on in Dongping Lane. The formalized version of campaigning represented by the competition, is not considered to be the total campaign or to represent the way the total campaign should be carried out by its participants. More akin to a tentative roadmap of low-carbon life than the actual landscape of it, the competition represents a form of communication that the campaigners hope can help spread the word about their campaign.

The community officials in Dongping Lane work together with the media to propagate the campaign. All members of the Chinese Communist Party are in principle propagandists (Brady 2009: p. 782). The idea of the paramount importance of propaganda permeates community

governance, and just about everyone involved in low-carbon life in Dongping Lane is a propagandist in one way or another. The community officials sometimes cooperate very directly with reporters by co-writing the articles. Both Party Secretary Zhu and Little Zheng are credited as contributors to local media reports on the low-carbon life campaign (Mao 2010; Meng 2010). This does not mean, however, that they all agree on the rationale for low-carbon life, or on where its centre of gravity should be. Summarizing the relationship between the community officials and the media, the community director explained that the community officials keep local media informed about what is going on in the campaign, and if the media find the activities interesting they come and report, but sometimes they do not find the activities interesting or important enough to send a reporter to the community. The importance that local officials attach to media attention is illustrated in a leaflet about garbage sorting that the community has published. Here a full page is dedicated to documenting the instances of print media reports as well as television broadcasts about the garbage sorting campaign (DPX 2011).

The role of the press in the campaign is not that of a propaganda organ working for the officials. The reporters are self-interested actors that may or may not see reasons to report on the various parts of the low-carbon life campaign and its key participants. Characterizing typical Chinese reporters as neither mouthpieces for the communist party nor American style independent professionals, Jonathan Hassid argues that the Chinese media can be seen as a microcosm for changes in Chinese society, and that the self-perceived role of journalists is often that of intellectuals in a privileged position to critique government by representing the people while at the same time educating people as to how they should think (Hassid 2011). Overall, the media reports on the campaign reflect an image of the campaign that is similar to summaries of the campaign that I was offered by informants. Most visiting journalists produce pieces that promote the campaign. One reporter from Shanghai Daily's Hangzhou section differed somewhat from this by focusing more on money as a motivation than campaigners tend to do, describing them as a "cost-conscious public" who have been able to lower their bills. Overlooking the explicit connections that campaigners make between global climate change and their local efforts, the reporter speculates that although people in Dongping Lane are engaged in climate change mitigation practices, they probably do not know about the COP15 climate summit (Xu 2010). In fact many of the residents do know about the climate summit, and the basic facts of climate change, because lectures about climate change are part of the general learning process of low-carbon life. Generally the reporters did not make this mistake, but the "we-know-better" attitude of assuming that people in the

community do not really know why they are doing the things they are doing, or that they are only participating out of economic motives, was common among the Chinese colleagues to whom I presented my study of the campaign. This generates an image of "unwitting environmentalists" who may act in ways that are environmentally friendly or conducive to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, but do so not because of a conscious engagement with these problems but rather out of habits grounded in experiences of poverty in earlier times.

The role of the local officials is that of facilitating and guiding the activities of the residents, ensuring that people get together to discuss how to practice and propagate low-carbon life. Most of the participating residents simply play the part of quietly and inconspicuously applying the various energy saving tips to their everyday lives, but a handful of them are part of the more direct propaganda effort of the campaign. Auntie Sun, Auntie Rong and Auntie Wang are central to the campaign by being present in many of the local activities but also by being the objects of media reports. Part of the role they play as low-carbon doyens is to spread the word about low-carbon life via workshops, exhibitions and contact with the media. As Børge Bakken has noted, visibility is important to strategically practiced socialization in China (Bakken 2000: p. 129). The low-carbon doyens are not simply trying to gain personal prestige and prestige for the community, they are also trying to foster emulation of their practices. The information about low-carbon life that officials and residents seek to spread via the media, is propaganda in the sense of being information to the people about party-state policies, but the whole project is also in itself propaganda in the sense that community exemplarity generated in Dongping Lane can help accumulate prestige for officials at other levels, primarily in the Hubin Street Office but also in Hangzhou Municipality.

Exemplars of low-carbon life

The importance of exemplarity in moral education in China has been stressed in a number of studies (Humphrey 1996; Bulag 1999; Bakken 2000; Cheng 2009; Kipnis 2012). A community based campaign such as the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane which aims to change everyday life practices in the light of new knowledge about the world, is similar to moral education, and its methods can be expected to draw on exemplarity. My focus on the role of exemplarity in the campaign is not meant to show that past approaches to exemplarity become cultural determinants of how the campaign is structured. The intention is rather to highlight exemplarity as something which is used strategically in certain situations and with varying results as part of the sense-making processes associated with low-carbon life. Furthermore the image of desirable qualities of

exemplary individuals has changed with the times. The differences between exemplary individuals of low-carbon life and earlier role models reflect some of the changes in the notions of citizenship dealt with in chapter 4, such as the importance of initiative and innovation. To the community officials the existence of exemplary individuals can be used to signal that there are still people who take the requirements of campaigning seriously.



A low-carbon life campaigner with a record of his electricity consumption (photo: Xiao Li)

In her work on morality in Mongolia, Caroline Humphrey has drawn attention to the difference between rules and exemplars as sources of learning about norms, and shown that they are contrasting means of orienting oneself morally (Humphrey 1996). This distinction can also be applied to the campaign in Dongping Lane. Rules and exemplars combine to provide a framework for practice in the campaign. There is a clear and simple set of rules laid out in the Low-Carbon Household Standard (DPX 2009), which simplifies and quantifies practice, and this is supplemented

with various texts and lectures further explaining how low-carbon life is supposed to work. Following these rules can be a way of learning how to practice low-carbon life. Yet they are not exactly rules in the sense that there are no sanctions for breaking them and only modest, mostly symbolic, rewards for sticking to them.⁸⁶ The rules are supplemented with references to people who are especially good at following them and possess the ability to contribute towards developing them further by providing new ways of saving energy that may be included in future lists of tips. In an article published by Hubin Street Office the households who have participated in the Low-Carbon Model Household competition in Dongping Lane are credited for contributing more than 700 ideas for saving resources and energy in everyday life (HSO 2013).

In his book "The Exemplary Society" (2000), Børge Bakken shows how the basic assumption that people are born with the ability to learn from role models, has shaped Chinese approaches to moral questions and public administration. According to Bakken, competition is a necessary element in the exercising of the power of the example in China (Bakken 2000: pp. 60-61). Quantification of correct behavior is a well-known administrative technique that can be found in grading in school or in various forms of audits. Bakken calls this "the mathematics of morality" (Bakken 2000: p. 258). The standardization of practice and quantification of morality suggested by the Low-Carbon Model Household competition is, however, primarily a form of propaganda. This rigid simplification and quantification of low-carbon life should not be confused with the complex phenomenon that has developed in response to the initial schematized form of the campaign. The encounter between the low-carbon life campaign in this initial shape and the complex reality of the community in which it has been implemented has resulted in a proliferation of meaning in which climate change mitigation becomes connected with many other concerns and projects. This process is similar to that described by Taylor in his definition of social imaginaries, although it takes place on a much smaller scale than that of entire societies as envisioned by Taylor: "what is originally just an idealization grows into a complex imaginary through being taken up and associated with social practices, in part traditional ones but ones often transformed by the contact" (Taylor 2004: pp. 28-29).

The function of enabling officials to "see like governing agents" may, as Andrew Kipnis (borrowing and modifying the terminology of James C. Scott) has shown, make rigid simplification and quantification attractive to some officials (Kipnis 2008: p. 286; Scott 1998). But what happens in the competitions in Dongping Lane is far removed from audits or grades in schools and it is also

⁸⁶ The prize for those who performed well in the Low-Carbon Model Household competition was a plaque announcing model status and the prize in the garbage sorting competition was a small pedal-operated garbage bin.

different from formal evaluations of the work of officials. Both officials and residents in Dongping Lane recognize that despite the numbers and points on various score sheets, the campaign targets that really matter are soft ones, and they know that the immediate stakes are low in the sense that there are neither significant rewards nor sanctions involved. Rather than serve as a rulebook per se, then, the Low-Carbon Household Standard and the other written information materials serve as reminders of the possibility of engaging in low-carbon life practices. Residents in Dongping Lane who have participated in the competition are aware of the existence of the standard, but their knowledge is more like a rough and approximate sketch than it is a precise and clear set of rules. As a reminder of the connections between everyday life and climate change, the written material of the campaign functions as a catalogue of the various practices one can change in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This catalogue combines with stories of local role models in the social production of low-carbon life. Every participant in the campaign knows Auntie Sun and most of them also know a few more of the low-carbon doyens. Rather than simply being portrayed as people who are especially good at practicing low-carbon life according to the available guidelines, the doyens are characterized by the ability to further develop low-carbon life by adding their own ideas to the campaign. The practical as well as moral messages of the campaign in Dongping Lane are thus produced in interplay between rule-like guidelines and exemplars (Humphrey 1996). One example of this interplay is the low-carbon diary. In the Low-Carbon Household Standard (DPX 2009) keeping a diary of one's energy- and resource saving actions is listed among the activities that are rewarded with extra points in the competition. As described in chapter 3, the community office has published and distributed a small leaflet containing a reproduction of one page in Auntie Sun's low-carbon diary to serve as a model for other residents who might take up writing a low-carbon diary (HSDP 2009). That the points in the standard are not rules is illustrated by the rather relaxed reaction some campaigners take to the idea of writing a low-carbon diary. Although the low-carbon diary is conceived as an opportunity to reflect about new ideas its appeal may be tainted by memories of writing self-criticisms as punishment during the Cultural Revolution (Kleinman & Kleinman 1994). The fact that Auntie Sun, the figurehead of the campaign keeps a low-carbon life diary and shares her way of writing it with the other campaigners does not mean they have to follow her example. Sun's text (figure 1) resembles a carefully crafted essay more than a spontaneous reflection on her recent experiences, and its high standards may be difficult for other residents to follow. One of the other low-carbon doyens who is a very active contributor to the campaign told me she does not keep a

low-carbon diary, explaining that she does not feel a need for self-monitoring as she is convinced she is doing all the right things. Other campaigners expressed skepticism towards the idea of emulating exemplary individuals and stressed individualism with statements such as "everyone has their own standards" (大家都有自己的标准).

The work of role models may point to small beginnings for other people, but the work of Auntie Sun and the other exemplary individuals does not necessarily appeal to everyone. Finding exemplars entails more than simply copying other people; it is a process of self-discovery and self-cultivation. The exemplars themselves depend on people following them for their status to matter (Humphrey 1996: pp. 36). To people that are not involved in the campaign, Auntie Sun is just another old lady in the community who happens to spend her retirement campaigning instead of playing Mahjong, but to the ordinary campaign participants, Sun and the other exemplary individuals play a role similar to that of a teacher. Through the practical information they convey, as well as the example of an overall disposition they embody, they provide inspiration for action in others and as such the process of learning from these role models represents a form of empowerment in the community. Around ten percent of the households in Dongping Lane have attained the status of Low-Carbon Model Household (低碳家庭示范户) in the competition to save energy and resources. Among the campaigners that I interviewed and visited there was little tendency to attach importance to this status. The formalized concept of exemplarity embodied in the status of Low-Carbon Model Households may have been watered down by being attained by more than 200 households as well as by the many other designations of model status that accompany campaigns such as the 'Five Good' Household campaign (五好家庭).⁸⁷ For the officials the production of model status is a way to quantify and document their activities, but to the residents the notion of exemplarity that matters is the one attached to the small handful of people singled out as low-carbon doyens.

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the practices of low-carbon life are generally understood as good for both individuals and collectives, rather than as sacrifices individuals make for a greater good. When improvement of health, comfort, economy and convenience are the central concerns that become connected with climate change mitigation, there is very little tendency towards the ideas of heroic self-sacrifice that characterized earlier role models of Chinese communist

⁸⁷ Several campaign participants reported also participating in the Five Good Households campaign.

propaganda (Cheng 2009). Instead moments of inspiration and the idea of getting enjoyment out of the practices are focus points for the campaigners.

Role models for a New Era

Through the many campaigns they have participated in and through the constant flow of party-state propaganda, people in the community have grown accustomed to the awarding of model status to an extent where it is no longer seen as something special. Many of the people I interviewed and visited in the community belong to designated low-carbon model households. For most of the time I spent in Dongping Lane, Little Zheng was responsible for facilitating my contact with informants and he often selected low-carbon models as prospective interviewees, but in general neither the community officials nor the models themselves present model status as a primary concern. In a couple of cases I only became aware of informants' model status by asking them directly or by noticing the plaques over their doors announcing that they belonged to a low-carbon model household. It seems that the long history of campaigning has left exemplarity as a routinized phenomenon that blends seamlessly into normal everyday life, leaving actually experienced and socially efficacious model status to the handful of individuals in the community who are known as low-carbon doyens (低碳达人). They are involved in most aspects of the low-carbon life campaign.



Low-carbon doyens and visiting researchers (photo Zheng Xin)

An important part of their work relates to the propaganda aspects of low-carbon life. When there are reports about the campaign in the media the focus is typically on one or more of these people, and their status as low-carbon doyens is often mentioned. One article introduces a typology of doyens, labeling Auntie Sun as the energy saving doyen because of her refrigerator experiment, Auntie Rong as the handicrafts doyen because of her jeans bag and her moon cake box cupboard, and Auntie Wang as the green doyen because of her "green curtain" (Liu 2010). Auntie Sun's husband Mr. Zhu is involved in many campaign activities and is also referred to by others as a low-carbon doyen. The same goes for Teacher Yang, who has moved out of Dongping Lane but still contributes to the campaign. There are more core members of the campaign, such as Mr. Zhou and Mr. Cai who participate in most of the activities and are members of the local communist party branch, but they have received less media attention and are not the ones people in the community typically mention when they are asked who is knowledgeable in the field of low-carbon life.

Auntie Sun is by far the most prominent of the exemplary individuals of the low-carbon life campaign. A former PE teacher who has also served as community official, she is now retired and spends much of her time on volunteering in the community. Her activities are focused on various aspects of the low-carbon life campaign. Sun is member of the local communist party branch and she is often featured in articles about Dongping Lane. Through her appearance in interviews, reports and articles since the inception of the campaign, Sun has become the face of the low-carbon life campaign. Whenever I asked people in the community to identify the key personnel of the campaign, she would be the first and sometimes the only one they mentioned. Some of the characteristics that are focused on in people's descriptions of her are: her high level of energy, the handicrafts objects she produces by reusing materials, her ability to get ideas, as well as the fact that she knows a lot of people in the community and is well-connected to local officials. Sun and the other low-carbon doyens cooperate very closely with the community office.

Among the community officials, community director Du Juan also stands out as an exemplary individual with a status akin to that of the low-carbon doyens. On the website of Hubin Street Office, an article praises her tireless effort to improve Dongping Lane Community and describes her as a "*Lei Feng in the hearts of the common people*" (HSO 2011). Like the status as model household, being compared with the model soldier Lei Feng has become routinized and does not

hold as strong connotations of virtue as it did in earlier days.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Du's status as a well-liked person making a difference in the community is not solely a fabrication of party-state propaganda. Residents speak highly of her on their own initiative. A rumor that began circulating in late 2011 may illustrate both her popularity, the reasons for it and part of the way residents evaluate local officials. Gossiping can be a way of building up knowledge and value judgments that allow one to orient oneself in the local moral world and consequently rumors about local people can be good sources of information about Chinese residential communities such as Dongping Lane where many people know each other (Farrer 1999). In late 2011 the rumor in Dongping Lane was that Director Du was planning to retire when she turned 50 in 2013.⁸⁹ Having a good reputation for being friendly, energetic and very active, Du's possible plans for retirement were seen by some as giving up on the community and compromising her fit with a model status that, among other qualities, demands persistence. For those spreading and discussing the rumor, her right to retirement was not what counted. Her potential contribution by keeping on serving was seen as more important. It was argued that it had taken her many years to become as good a director as she was now, and it would be a waste of effort and talent if she simply retired when she had accumulated important skills that could benefit the community, as it was obvious to all that she was still full of energy. The rumor, and discussions of it, painted an ambiguous portrait of Du as a valuable asset worthy of praise, but also someone about to embrace individualist notions too readily.

The kind of gossip that establishes local moral worlds is often framed negatively around feelings of envy and criticism of moral behavior (Farrer 1999). Discussions of role models such as Director Du or Auntie Sun work slightly differently because of the focus on positive characteristics. When the moral dimensions of low-carbon life and some of its local protagonists become part of what is discussed in the day-to-day conversations of everyday life in the community, it contributes to making the world meaningful and navigable (Farrer 1999). In that sense the actions and general disposition of the role models contributes not only by inspiring change in individual habits related to greenhouse gas emissions, but also by shaping ideas about community building and how low-carbon life fits into that project.

The media image of Auntie Sun and the other low-carbon doyens differs from the image of Mao era propaganda heroes in a number of ways. They stand out not by being exceptional to an extent that

⁸⁸ References to the model soldier are still common. On example among the campaigners appears in a local newspaper where Auntie Sun and other volunteers are characterized as "modern day Lei Fengs" by Mr. Cai who is interviewed (Liu 2013).

⁸⁹ In the end Director Du decided not to retire. Instead she was promoted to a position in Hubin Street Office. Little Zheng took over her position as Community Director in Dongping Lane.

would place them in a position above the domain of normal people, but by being more knowledgeable and active than most people. They come across as real people rather than idealized heroes. The values they exemplify are also different from the values of earlier models. First and foremost the difference has to do with a fundamental shift from public morality to practical knowledge as the main focus points of exemplarity, but also with the notions of self and the ideas about what is important in life that the role models embody.

Auntie Sun does not offer inspiration in how to be a selfless hero, and learning from her does not entail sacrifice and asceticism. Instead she offers tips for energy saving in everyday life and inspiration for those who would seek to emulate her spirit of initiative and innovation as well as her focus on enjoying life. In this idea of promoting a mindset there is a degree of continuity with the past, although the mindset promoted differs from past ideals. Rather than simply representing a particular catalogue of available actions, then, role models – past and present – represent a spirit understood as a general disposition toward certain kinds of practices. The low-carbon doyens of Dongping Lane generally seek low-tech solutions to the problem of energy saving, and their favored method of developing new low-carbon life practices is a combination of personal reflection and more or less formal group discussions sometimes supplemented with expert knowledge from people outside the community. The pronounced everydayness of many of the activities points to a defining characteristic of low-carbon life: it is imagined and promoted as easy and convenient, and as something that does not require much skill or specialized technical knowledge.

Competition as ritual-like space

Most low-carbon life practices are hidden from public view unless people participate in the competitions and formal events of the community. The propaganda value of the Low-Carbon Model Household competition, which Director Du underscores when she characterizes the competition as a method of generating awareness, is only one aspect of the competition. The function of getting people together and fostering a sense of community around a common cause is another. A third, and also crucial, aspect of the competition is its status as an experimental space in which participants can develop and learn to understand new ways of approaching the new challenge of climate change mitigation. This is the aspect I focus on here. I draw on the idea presented by Lin Wei-Ping, that ritual-like acts of imagination that open up spaces of exception can tell people "not so much what they are but rather what they want to be" (Lin 2014: p. 134).

When I have presented my study of the campaign in Dongping Lane at workshops and conferences the reaction of the audience has sometimes been mild amusement at the idea of engaging climate change mitigation through competitions to save energy and sort garbage. Part of the fault no doubt lies with me because much of my fascination with Dongping Lane derives from its use of competitions, but if we suspend this amusement and take the competitions seriously on the campaigners' own terms, the competitions emerge as meaningful and efficacious practices. The idea of standardizing, simplifying and quantifying everyday life practices very rigidly and addressing the vastly complex issue of climate change in that way, may on the surface read as so absurdly improbable a solution that it becomes something like a parody of the high modernist projects of generating legibility through simplification, which are criticized by James C. Scott in his seminal work "Seeing Like a State" (Scott 1998). By extension this could then be read as a parody of campaigning in the Mao era. But rather than read the competitions as a comic genre, namely parody, it may be more fruitful to read them as something transformative that is more akin to rituals or states of liminality (Lin 2014).

Climate change is often described as a threat that is so serious that it prompts a transition to a new kind of economy and society. Nicholas Stern's influential work "The Economics of Climate Change: the Stern Review" describes recommended changes as a low-carbon transition (Stern 2007). In the outset the concept of low-carbon life was connected with the "transition town" movement in Great Britain promoting local communities as sites of social and economic change in response to climate change (See for example Middlemiss & Parrish 2010; Bulkeley et al 2011). The idea that facing up to climate change requires people and institutions to become transformed is also reflected in the connections made between low-carbon life and community building in the campaign in Dongping Lane.⁹⁰ In this perspective participation in the competition can serve as a highly stylized but also accessible and practical way to experience and reflect about the idea of transition. Following the classical anthropological approach of Victor Turner of focusing on the transformative and imagination-generating qualities of rituals, Lin Wei-Ping analyzes maritime pilgrimages of Mazu islanders, meant to reconfigure mental maps of the sea between Taiwan and Mainland China, as liminal phenomena that not only change people and places but also show possibilities (Lin 2014: p. 132). Viewing the competitions in Dongping Lane as transformative, imagination-generating events

⁹⁰ I found no references to the Transition Town movement among the campaigners in Dongping Lane or in the written material of the campaign, but their work is informed by ideas that are similar to those of the Transition Town movement, most notably the idea of seeing low-carbon life as enjoyable rather than a burden.

focused on potentiality I propose that they should not be taken at face value but are best understood as ways to generate new insights.

I never heard anyone in Dongping Lane mocking the competitions or characterizing them as absurd or ridiculous.⁹¹ What frequently occurred, however, were instances of people not taking them entirely seriously. This did not take the form of cynicism or resistance but rather materialized as a relaxed, individualized approach to participation. The tension that generates wonder and amusement in outside observers springs from the contradiction inherent in providing seemingly easy answers to difficult problems. On the surface the competitions contradict the widespread belief that climate change is a "wicked problem"⁹² embodied in the overall thrust of the work of Mike Hulme on the idea of climate change, which is the assertion that climate change is not a problem to be solved, but rather a condition to be understood and lived with as well as sought to be mitigated (Hulme 2009). By framing decision making around consumer practices as practical rather than desire-driven, the competitions effectively dodges one of the main reasons why low-carbon life is not likely to be widely embraced in urban China.

There is an air of make-believe about the competitions of low-carbon life. This may be a key to the significance of the competitions for the overall campaign. The Low-Carbon Model Household competition and the garbage sorting competition set up a space of exception generating an "as if world" in which it is as if climate change is a simple problem that the campaign can solve. In this reading, the competitions are make-believe rituals in which the residents of Dongping Lane get an opportunity to see themselves as people who matter to the overall development of Chinese society and as people who can meaningfully contribute to the gargantuan task of preventing the world from heading for climate disaster. The work performed by this kind of ritual is to alter their relationships on the basis of experiencing the harmony of a make-belief world free of contradictions and "wicked problems". The point of the competitions seen as something akin to rituals is, crucially, not to believe in them as actual solutions. They work exactly *because of* the disjunction between the overwhelming challenges posed by the arrival of the anthropocene and the simple solutions they

⁹¹ The only strong criticism of the competitions came from the party secretary of another community in Hangzhou who characterized the garbage sorting competition as absurd because it gives the garbage inspector detailed insight into people's everyday life consumption (China Daily 2011), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-05/26/content_12586613.htm

⁹² "Wicked problems" are (among other things) in essence problems that are new, unique, without known solutions and only offer decision-makers one chance to make the right decision (Rittel & Webber 1973). Mike Hulme applies the term to climate change to illustrate his point about climate change being a condition to be faced rather than a problem to be solved (Hulme 2009).

offer.⁹³ Listening to campaigners talking about their ideas it seemed to me that the campaigners in Dongping Lane, like most people in contemporary China, are seasoned disbelievers who can recognize party-state propaganda when they hear it, rather than blind followers of doctrine. The experience of idealizations far removed from or bracketing harsh realities does not necessarily lead to the kind of transition envisioned by the propagators of low-carbon life. As Hans Steinmüller reminds us, irony is a frequent response to government propaganda in China. A mismatch between ideals and realities generates tensions that are handled with recourse to irony (Steinmüller 2013: p. 134) because it is an accepted, often un-censorable form of criticism. The only time I encountered ironic statements among the campaigners was when they made reference to Mao era slogans or the slogans of central government policy. One example of this occurred when Little He alluded to the problem of overpopulation as a reason for high levels of greenhouse gas emissions by quoting Mao's dictum about strength in numbers "人多力量大" followed by a laugh. It is as if the make-belief quality of the low-carbon life competitions and the careful bracketing of the campaign as experimental are accepted by the participants. Apart from considerations about making a good impression on a foreign researcher, the fact that participants did not talk about low-carbon life with recourse to irony may be explained by its novelty and the general consensus that it is something not yet fully understood. The standardization of low-carbon life is taken lightly not because residents see it as an unwelcome imposition and attempt to resist it, but rather because it was never meant to be taken entirely seriously in the first place. As such the competitions can be read as marking the end of campaigning as genuinely efficacious social mobilization and signal that relations between officials and residents have changed. This change is encapsulated in the statement "everybody has their own standards" (大家都有自己的标准) made by campaigners on several occasions. One of the people making the statement, made it as a direct response to being handed a copy of the Low-Carbon Household Standard (DPX 2009).

Low-carbon culture

Low-carbon life as it is conceived locally in Dongping Lane, is a very broad concept encompassing many different ideas, things, people and practices. Underlying the ways campaign participants make sense of their everyday life consumer practices, low-carbon life can be seen as something akin to an emerging social imaginary (Appadurai 1996; Taylor 2005). As such it provides a sense of coherence and continuity that may contribute to the stabilization of social life in the community. My

⁹³ I owe this particular point to Michael Puett who acted as discussant for a panel I participated in at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Chicago, November 2013.

suggestion that low-carbon life be read as something like an emerging social imaginary informing a set of practices many of which are similar to the life-cultivating activities of *yangsheng*, is paralleled by the analyses of some of the campaigners who understand low-carbon life as a kind of culture. The concept of social imaginaries has come under justifiable criticism in anthropology, where critics see it as a thinly veiled revival of abandoned concepts of culture (Strauss 2006; Sneath et al. 2009). For the present purposes of illustrating the idea of low-carbon culture among officials and campaigners in Dongping Lane, however, the concept seems to the point. The term low-carbon culture (低碳文化) is used by the officials of Hubin Street Office (湖滨街道) as well as the officials at Dongping Lane Community Office to denote a deeper penetration of low-carbon values and habits than that of low-carbon life (HSO 2013). This is not a description of the state of things in the community but rather a vision of the future.

From my conversations with community officials, the concept of low-carbon culture emerged as a vision of a time when campaigning and propaganda is unnecessary because the ideas and habits of low-carbon life have become second nature among the residents. Low-carbon culture is an imaginary self-propelling future version of low-carbon life. As such it emerges as an imaginary of a post-campaign era. In the realm of climate change mitigation, the ultimate aim of the local officials, then, is to make their own contributions unnecessary. Community Director Du argued that there is a need to take culture seriously. This may further clarify what community officials mean by low-carbon culture. According to Du, the community must promote local street culture because every place has its own history and culture that must be taken seriously. There is a profound difference here between the more universalistic claims of earlier campaigning, which would orchestrate units to form a homogenous whole, and the present activities that take local specificity not just into account but as the main thing to be aware of. In order to govern well using this approach, the community officials must understand the specific history of the place and not treat it like a generic unit in a universal grid. The community officials promote an image of local specificity as cultural heritage by highlighting the former residences of famous people and drawing attention to the historical sources of street names and the various places of the past.⁹⁴ In this view there is a potential for modeling low-carbon life not so much on ideas and structures found in politics and governance as on culture. In addition to promoting local specificity as something positive to be embraced and developed, Director Du and her colleagues draw on the concept of culture to

⁹⁴ Director Du used the example of a famous fan workshop that had been located in one of the streets inside the community. Several residents spoke of the small local traditional theatres that had been popular in their youth to illustrate that Dongping Lane was a place of history and culture.

emphasize, that changes to everyday life such as those proposed by the low-carbon life campaign cannot happen overnight but must follow a certain process. In this view the period from late 2009 to 2013, which encompasses the ethnographic present of this study, represents an early stage of propagation and experimentation. The present state of the campaign is not how it is envisioned to be in the long run.

The residents who participate in the campaign have only to a limited degree picked up on the notion of low-carbon culture by directly embracing and circulating the term when discussing their activities. Residents connected low-carbon life and culture in two different ways, the first being similar to the vision of a post-campaigning era which is brought forward by officials, and the second being cultural activities and products in the sense of art that deals with environmental issues such as garbage sorting or with climate change. Often these two senses of the word culture blend together in the explanations of low-carbon life as a kind of culture. One campaigner argued that low-carbon life and low-carbon culture can be seen as more or less synonymous and that because low-carbon life encompasses so many things it makes sense to see it as a kind of culture. Later the same campaigner argued that just like there is tea culture connected with the consumption of tea, there can be a low-carbon culture connected with saving resources. Another campaigner, who also viewed low-carbon life as a kind of culture because it is a broad concept that draws things together, took the example of garbage handling and sorting to illustrate what low-carbon culture could be. Describing an exhibition at the landfill at Tianziling, he referred to the art created by writers and calligraphers around the theme of garbage sorting as low-carbon culture.

These views of low-carbon life as a kind of culture speak to the political dimension of the social imaginary of low-carbon culture. Seen as something that is an integrated part of how people make sense of their individual actions as well as their lives in general, rather than as a limited and orchestrated, government-led campaign, the social imaginary of low-carbon culture is not only a way of addressing sustainability in an ecological sense, but also a way of addressing the sustainability of collectively organized community activities. The view of the future of low-carbon life as culture rather than as campaigning is an expression of hope. Prompted by our discussions of the low-carbon life campaign, many residents shared their hopes for the future with me. In talking about the future they consistently connected hope with the sustainability of low-carbon life. The retired residents have seen many other campaigns come and go. The idea of low-carbon culture as a post-campaigning condition can be read as a response to the temporary nature of many of the

campaigns residents have experienced in the past. In addition to the "campaign fatigue" noted by Boland & Zhu in their study of green communities (Boland & Zhu 2012), there is a widespread concern that low-carbon life may just be another temporary "fever" or fad that will soon be forgotten and replaced by the next slogan. This concern is expressed in pessimistic references to earlier campaigns that are all but forgotten, but also sometimes in positive references to the hope that low-carbon life will persist.

Conclusion

The retired residents of Dongping Lane who are involved with the low-carbon life campaign have grown up under material and political conditions that are vastly different from those of early 21st century China. Scarcity and even hunger are part of their childhood memories. They have experienced many campaigns in their lifetime from the highly ideologically charged mass-mobilization of the Mao era, to the most recent competitions for model status among voluntary participants. The past plays an ambiguous role as inspiration and burden as they remember many ways of saving resources that have been recycled in the present campaign, but also elements of class-struggle that are unthinkable in connection with community mobilization in the present era. Through generalization and a consistent emphasis on the vast difference between past and present conditions the campaigners set up the past as an Other. Residents tend to focus on poverty, and officials tend to focus on mass-mobilization when they point out what was significantly different in the past. Instead of elaborating and exemplifying, campaigners tend to summarize the past in keywords and slogans. This generalized and homogenized past becomes a context for the sense-making work in their present engagements with climate change. According to the low-carbon life campaigners, past campaigns are not taken directly as inspiration. The community officials in Dongping Lane emphasize the importance of implementing changes through a step-by-step approach. Insisting on the necessity of letting things go through an incremental process instead of rapid and radical change, they reproduce and underpin the general narrative of the present era as an era of reform in contrast to the Mao era as an era of revolution.

The excesses and the suffering of the Mao era appear rarely and in small fragments when campaigners talk about the past. Like the more generalized descriptions of life in the past these fragments perform the operation of showing the wide gap between past and present. The low-carbon life campaign is politically moderate. Campaigners do not attempt to pressure businesses or the local government or to directly criticize or shame other citizens. Remembering the costs of the

radicalism of earlier campaigning, the residents name no enemies of low-carbon life. Rather than serve as inspiration, most memories of the past become arguments why things must be done differently today.

This general waning of a friends-and-enemies mentality in the campaign style of recent decades is also reflected in the approach that the officials organizing the campaign take to propaganda. Rather than conceiving of their task as one of attempting to persuade and pressure residents, they focus on disseminating information that people are free to absorb or ignore. This dissemination taking place through such channels as lectures, meetings and publication of leaflets is one side of the information work of the officials. Another side is their communication with the world beyond the community. Connecting with journalists from national as well as local media, the officials work to spread the word about their campaign to the general public and to cement the image of Dongping Lane as an exemplary community specializing in climate change mitigation. The journalists who frequent the community office are not co-workers of the campaigners but rather self-interested actors attaching news value to some campaign events and to some remarkable people in the community while ignoring others deemed less interesting.

As shown in previous chapters, the rule-like guidelines laid out in the Low-Carbon Household Standard are interpreted by the residents in ways that have generated a complex and holistic understanding of low-carbon life by setting up community building, late reform era consumer practices, and concerns over health as contexts for the campaign. In addition to reasoning about the campaign guidelines, campaign participants share and reflect on stories about moral exemplars. Residents are so familiar with competition for model status that the formal designation as model household has been watered down. Actually experienced exemplarity is reserved for a handful of core campaigners who are involved in most parts of the campaign. They embody a notion of exemplarity that is different from the ideals attached to role models of earlier times. Rather than being praised for asceticism and self-sacrifice they are admired for initiative and creativity. Unlike propaganda heroes of the past they are seen as normal people, who approach climate change mitigation as a hobby-like activity they can engage in to spend their time meaningfully in old age.

The competitions of the campaign offer the possibility of engaging with the requirements of low-carbon life in a clearly circumscribed domain that allows participants to think through and experiment with various aspects of low-carbon life in a highly stylized way. Affirming the importance of low-carbon life and allowing people to engage with them in visible ways, the element

of comparison inherent in the point systems of the competitions allows for the work of exemplarity to enter into the potentially transforming experience of the ritualized competitions. The competitions are not taken entirely seriously. Treating the Low-Carbon Household Standard as an inspirational list of tips rather than a rulebook, the participants focus little on who wins the competitions. At the same time the idea of competing for model status is not rejected or mocked. The competitions reflect the experimental approach to low-carbon life taken by campaigners. Focusing on potentiality, the competitions are viewed as small beginnings showing the possibility of transition. The idea of competing according to fixed standards does not reflect the ideal version of low-carbon life, which community office leaders and campaigners hope will come about. Instead they embrace a vision of a post-campaigning era in which citizens take initiative to get involved in environmental protection and alter their everyday life consumer practices to lower greenhouse gas emissions without having to be reminded and guided by official propaganda.

8. Comparison and Cultural Critique

The low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is on the one hand the object of processes in which people try to make sense of it by placing it in a range of contexts such as community life, material culture, health and memories. On the other hand it is also a means of sense-making as reflections and discussions focused on climate change mitigation in everyday life become part of how local people conceive of their role in society and their overall place in the world. In order to understand this latter aspect of low-carbon life, the analysis presented in this chapter moves beyond the campaign's focus on individuals and households to examine a set of messages conveyed by the practitioners and propagators of low-carbon life, which in various ways assert that low-carbon life is good for other collectives or individuals, and that it must be understood in relation to people far beyond the boundaries of a particular residential community in urban China.

In a way that parallels the juxtaposition of certain aspects of low-carbon life campaigning in present day China with campaigning in the past, various parts and points of the campaign are juxtaposed with ideas and practices from other places. Campaigners who present these moves toward an understanding of low-carbon life that emphasizes its relations with ideas of other places sometimes produce unidirectional critiques of contemporary Chinese society based on observation or imagination about other places believed to be better in various ways. More often, however, the forms of critique are ambiguous and may entail elements of criticisms of both places or draw them together in ways that are sometimes constructive, other times contradictory or awkward. Taken together as a polyphony of voices the comparisons with other places present low-carbon life as a set of practices predicated on acts of imagination that reach out of the here and now. Reaching back in time, the campaign has probed the potential for individual and collective past experiences to serve as intellectual resources in the current predicament of the anthropocene and found it limited. Reaching to the future some of the campaign participants consider what low-carbon life, as they conceive and practice it, could come to mean for their own lives as well as for the trajectory of China's development. Some campaigners reach outward to other places as they compare their own understandings of low-carbon life with ideas and practices from other places that they have learned about via media, conversations with friends and family abroad or from their own travel experiences. A number of campaigners have embraced international travel as part of their lifestyle and visits to foreign countries are rich sources of cross-cultural comparison in their sense-making work related to low-carbon life.

Besides comparisons with other times and places, understandings of low-carbon life in Dongping Lane are developed through critical comparisons of people within the community. First and foremost the campaign divides the residents into those who participate and those who do not. While the non-confrontational style of the campaign precludes harsh and direct criticism of non-participation, the campaigners do have some relatively fixed ideas about non-participants and the reasons why they do not join the campaign. There are no official numbers recording the participation levels of the various parts of the campaign, but one indication of the participation level is the number of households that have been designated as low-carbon models. According to the community officials they number around 200 households, which is about 10 percent of the total number of households in the community. Several of the people I interviewed reported participation in some campaign activities while not having earned the distinction of being members of model households. According to community officials up to a third of the residents participate in the "Real Name System" garbage sorting competition.

Discussions of participation among campaigners in Dongping Lane tend to divide the residents up along two temporal axes: one axis stressing time of birth divides into younger and older people and one axis stressing time of arrival divides into locals and migrants. Gender issues are not explicitly addressed in the information materials about low-carbon life, and they are rarely brought up by officials and residents in connection with the campaign. Confronted with the fact that the majority of participants are women and that among the exemplary leaders of the campaign nearly all are women, some informants offered their analyses of the gendering of low-carbon life with reference to the material culture of everyday life consumer practices.

The approach in this chapter of examining comparisons made by my informants (rather than comparing their campaign with climate change mitigation campaigns in other places) takes its cue from "Ecologies of Comparison" by Tim Choy who writes: "[...] the environmental marks a space of transcendence – a transcendence of prior ways of thinking and a transcendence of the local" (Choy 2011: p. 134). The emerging understanding of low-carbon life that the campaigners in Dongping Lane are engaged in the production of is, as we have seen in previous chapters, closely connected with the transcendence of prior ways of thinking both in terms of moving beyond the political extremism and sense of urgency of the Mao era, and the consumerism and sense of moral crisis of the reform era. Most of the campaigners are much older and less mobile than the environmentalists Tim Choy got to know in Hong Kong (Choy 2011). For them transcendence of

the local is not necessarily connected with a desire to emigrate, but their contributions to the local campaign may engage them in acts of imagination that draw on environmental ideas and practices in ways that suggest an emerging cosmopolitan orientation in the community.

Conceiving campaign participation as a way of taking on the responsibility of being citizens and consumers in the anthropocene by making a contribution to climate change mitigation is a form of sense-making. Like many other people in China today, the campaigners are involved in the processes of rethinking their values and their place in the world that Arthur Kleinman refers to as quests for meaning (Kleinman et al 2011). Low-carbon life becomes part of their attempts to navigate what Yan Yunxiang refers to as the "changing moral landscape" (Yan 2011). The participating residents can use the vocabulary and forms of action of the campaign to add a renewed sense of purpose to their everyday lives that accompanies, but also moves beyond enjoying their newfound relative prosperity and spending their free time on the multitude of more or less systematized activities such as tai chi, outdoor ballroom dancing and big-brush water calligraphy associated with *yangsheng* 养生 (nurturing life) among the middle aged and elderly in China (Farquhar and Zhang 2012).

Ethnographic accounts of faraway places have been important intellectual resources for anthropological variants of cultural critique (Kurasawa 1996; Marcus and Fischer 1999). As Kurasawa demonstrates, theorists of the social from Rousseau to Foucault have employed various versions of ethnological sensibility to the problem of challenging established notions of social order as unproblematic and self-evident (Kurasawa 1996). A similar process is at work in the low-carbon life campaign. By looking to foreign places for practices and ideas of inspiration, the campaigners in Dongping Lane bring about a certain degree of relativization of their own formerly taken-for-granted views of everyday life. With low-carbon life as a lens to focus comparisons they reinterpret and reevaluate cultural practices such as the ways they eat, shop and travel as well as the social imaginaries that may turn their hopes and dreams for the future into fuel for action. Learning or imagining how things are done elsewhere the residents engage in what Marcus and Fischer refer to as "defamiliarization by cross-cultural juxtapositions (Marcus and Fischer 1999: p. 138). Other places and their people become mirrors of critique that may be held up in front of their own lives in the community to cast reflections that may shake up hitherto imponderable qualities of their everydayness. The comparative cultural critique, which the process of making sense of low-carbon life entails for some, implies two simultaneous and intertwined processes. The first is the

interpretation and evaluation of the here and now through critical juxtaposition outlined above. The second is a process of interpretation and evaluation of wider tendencies in Chinese society by using the low-carbon life campaign to shed new light on social issues. Low-carbon life can be seen as a normative project, and in this perspective its employment of an ethnological imagination is tied to the possibility of a cosmopolitan imagination. The recognition of global connections and the attention to conditions of distant places are necessary preconditions for the self-problematizing transformations in self-understanding through *"engagements with others over issues of global significance"* that Gerard Delanty refer to as cosmopolitanism (Delanty 2008: p. 218). In Dongping Lane these others are mostly engaged with indirectly through acts of imagination becoming capital letter Others, but there are examples of more direct engagements as well. The last part of the chapter examines how campaigners draw distant others into the meaning-making processes of low-carbon life as they focus on vulnerability and responsibility in connection with global climate change.

Age groups

The most prominent categorization of people informing local conceptions of low-carbon life is a binary distinction between old people and young people. This is only one among several ways that campaigners divide people into groups and ascribe characteristics to the members of those groups, seeing these as important for the likelihood that someone will engage in climate change mitigation practices, but it is shared by most campaigners. While not being explicitly stated and not being tied to specific years of birth, the dominant definitions of young and old that underlie the age-related reflections and valuations seem to revolve around a distinction between student life or work life on the one hand and retirement on the other. The vast majority of campaigners are retired and many of the ones who are still working are approaching retirement age. This, to some extent, reflects the general demographic composition of the community where two thirds of all residents are retired, but the proportion of retired people in the campaign is even higher than their age group's proportion of the whole community. This does not escape the attention of the campaigners themselves who reflect on the age of participants and theorize about the reasons why so few younger people take part in the campaign. Explanations that relate to connections between low-carbon life and availability of free time are dominant. This reflects the tendency to view low-carbon life practices as hobby-like activities, something which is much more strongly associated with older people than it is with younger people. This position is summarized by a campaigner who claims that *"old people pay more attention to low-carbon. Young people are too busy for that"*, but there are other

explanations in play, and not everyone agrees that older people are more conscious about the need for everyday life climate change mitigation practices. Some campaigners actually deplored not being more in contact with young people and one explicitly speculated that more contact with young people could yield insight into new and interesting ideas that might be applied to low-carbon life.

From the perspective of the community officials, the campaign methods appear to be an important factor in shaping campaign demographics. According to Little Zheng the campaign methods of getting people together by staging meetings, exhibitions and competitions are only effective with older residents. The younger people, his reasoning goes, want to have information available online instead of engaging in social events that they often do not have time to attend. His analysis reflects that community work to a large extent has become the work of connecting with older residents. Older people spend much of their time in the home and in the public spaces of the community whereas younger people spend more time away from the community studying and working. This makes the younger people much less likely to encounter and interact with the community officials and the campaign volunteers.⁹⁵ The focus on time and the idea that younger people have more important things to do with their time reflects a valuation of economic issues as more important than environmental issues such as that of climate change mitigation.

Associating low-carbon life with everyday life in the community rather than work life, student life, business life or political life, the campaign produces a conceptual division of the world into separate spheres where different logics apply. The older people who spend more time in the community and the home could then be seen as belonging to a social world where the prominence of low-carbon life means that an environmentalist logic focusing on saving resources prevails. The younger people who spend more time at work could be seen as belonging to a social world where a capitalist logic of accumulating wealth is the order of the day. Such a rigid distinction, casting older people as more likely to engage with environmentalism, can be criticized on a number of grounds and some of the campaigners in Dongping Lane do exactly that. Free time on their hands is not the only important resource for people engaging in low-carbon life. Knowledge may be even more important, and some of the analyses presented by older residents, present the younger people as better educated and more informed about what goes on in society than they themselves are, deploring a perceived lack of communication between the generations. One campaigner speculated that young people might

⁹⁵ Unless the interaction can take place online.

make better campaigners because they know more about science, and found that the lack of young people and the resulting lack of new inspiration for the retired residents was a weakness of the campaign. Many of the campaigners place hope in the younger generations, especially in the children who receive education about environmental protection in school. Auntie Rong criticized the tendency to divide young and old into distinct social worlds seen as unable to meet. She suggests that companies introduce measures to implement low-carbon life practices since the young spend most of their time at work. *"The general atmosphere in society ought to be low-carbon. They can learn at work and bring their knowledge home. I haven't heard of any companies involving their employees in low-carbon life"*. Another resident saw the fact that the young spend a lot of time away from the community as an obstacle to involving them in low-carbon life, but argued that they could wait with living low-carbon lives until they had founded families of their own. The recurring argument that young people are too busy to get involved can be read as recognition that there are concerns that to most people override concerns over global climate change.

Among the campaigners there were those who made criticisms to the effect that younger people are too lazy or too materialistic to care about saving resources. However, the analyses that divide people up into the old and the young tend to ignore the fact that there is interaction among the generations. The most commonly cited example of intergenerational interaction related to low-carbon life is that of school children coming home and telling their parents to save energy and pay attention to environmental protection and climate change mitigation. In families where the grandparents are involved in the low-carbon life campaign and the children learn about environmental protection in school, members of the middle generation may find themselves caught between two other generations, who act as sources of admonishment calling for resource saving and a tempering of consumerist habits.

In recent decades private car ownership has become increasingly common in China. This has transformed the experience of moving around in urban China as traffic jams and elevated highways respectively slow down and speed up transport. Cars have become desirable status symbol to the extent that refraining from buying one out of environmental concerns can lead to speculation that one has financial problems (Gerth 2010: p. 29). Two different informants' thoughts and feelings about cars may illustrate how the generations are differently placed vis-à-vis the consumer revolution in China as well as how people are connected across generational divides. 24-year old Mr. Hou is the youngest campaign participant. He is an enthusiastic defender of low-carbon life but

also an openly declared car lover. His interest in cars and desire for a new, bigger and better car is clearly at odds with his campaign engagement not just because driving is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, but also on a more symbolic level because his car love represents a consumerist sentiment emphasizing desire and love of exclusive products and famous brands far removed from the orientation towards more practical aspects of consumption taken by the majority of campaigners. Older residents present cars as something that may be needed for practical reasons rather than something connected with desire for a certain lifestyle. For older residents, stories of cars and driving are more practically oriented and focus on drawbacks compared with bicycling or public transport. To them, Hangzhou's traffic congestion and parking fees, which they find too expensive, may make cars seem impractical and undesirable. Cars can also illustrate connections between generations. During one of our many conversations, Auntie Sun declared, with no little pride, that while her family owns no less than four cars, they rarely use them because she keeps reminding her husband, children and children-in-law that low-carbon life entails cutting down on driving. Disassembling the carbon emitting person-car assemblages of her family she imposes the standards of low-carbon life on people not participating in the campaign demonstrating that the material aspects of low-carbon life are closely connected with its social aspects.

Gender

The information material about the campaign contains no references to gender, and the campaigners I interviewed did not take initiative to address gender issues when explaining their understanding of the aim and rationale of the campaign. Noticing that there was a majority of women among the campaigners, and that this female predominance was even more pronounced among the residents singled out as role models, I began confronting informants with this fact during interviews to elicit their opinions about it and their analyses of its causes. As I began to ask these questions about gender and climate change, my interviews with campaigners began to include reflections on the predominance of women in the campaign that were to the effect that it was perhaps not entirely arbitrary. Local analyses of the question of why there was a significant majority of female campaigners followed different strands of explanation. Some stressed connections between women and housework especially in older generations and some associated women with a more careful and detail-oriented approach to everyday life consumer practices. The explanations focus on institutions, attitudes and material culture.

Institutional explanations have to be understood in the context of urban reform in the 1990s when many state-owned enterprises closed down, leading to a massive reorientation of urban life from being organized and imagined as work unit life, to being organized and imagined as life in the residential community (Bray 2005). Organizational work in the residential communities of urban China has traditionally been dominated by middle-aged and older women (Heberer 2009: 500). At the household level women, especially among the older generations, are often the main decision makers regarding energy and resource consumption in the household. People in Dongping Lane sometimes summarized this in the popular saying "*The man manages the outside, the woman manages the inside*" (男主外女主内) meaning that the man goes out to work while the woman looks after the house. Several informants made it clear that the situation in their household was not always as clear-cut as the saying suggests, and the fact that many campaigners are retired means that many of the male participants spend more time at home and participate more in domestic work than they did in their youth.

Explanations emphasizing material culture point to the fact that as most domestic work is carried out by women, the resource consumption of the utilities and various electrical appliances of the home are most strongly influenced by women. The household becomes a gendered and gendering assemblage as women more often than men enter into the person-thing assemblages of everyday life consumption practices in the home. Apart from a quantitative argument about more women than men doing domestic work, some residents of Dongping Lane also pointed to the idea that women have a qualitatively different approach to domestic work compared with men. A young woman remarked that her husband sometimes cooks but that he is much less conscious about sorting the kitchen waste in the process than she is. She ascribed this to his gender, speculating that men perhaps pay less attention to the materials they use in the home. Some of the older men in the community use the term *popomama* (婆婆妈妈), which can mean both "old-womanly" and "overly careful", and carries connotations of sentimentality, to label some low-carbon life practices as less suitable and less appealing to men. Some of the older men associate the tendency to pay close attention to materials with *popomama*. This point was illustrated by a woman who connected the point from the Low-Carbon Household Standard (DPX 2009) about bringing your own bag when shopping to gender, saying that most men would find it unmanly to bring a bag from home. She went on to relate shopping bags to age, pointing out that some of the older women in the community do not use bags at all when shopping but prefer to use woven baskets.

A material practice associated with low-carbon life that is only embraced by women is the production of "low-carbon life handicrafts" made from reused materials. Because these handicrafts are central to the image of the campaign and its exemplary practitioners, the fact that only women make them contributes to a gendering of low-carbon life. Rather than unreflected habits or doctrinal allegiance to the notion of thrift, the production of low-carbon handicrafts depends on embodied skills learned in earlier times and recycled in the present campaign. Here the older women can draw on skills that the older men either do not have or do not find it desirable to recycle because of the associational links made between careful material practice and older women encapsulated in the expression *popomama*. Many of the hobby-like activities of the older men such as calligraphy, keeping birds and playing mahjong lie beyond the boundaries of what is likely to be categorized as low-carbon life practices, because they are not strongly linked with production and consumption of material things that lead to greenhouse gas emissions. This does not prevent men from becoming involved in the campaign. A number of core campaigners are men, but their activities are less conspicuous and receive less attention than those of the producers of low-carbon handicrafts.

Locals and migrant workers

In Dongping Lane migrants do not take part in the voluntary community activities such as the low-carbon life campaign. As part of the sense-making processes associated with low-carbon life, however, they play a role. Most participants in the low-carbon life campaign have lived in Dongping Lane for many years and the ones who have not, have typically moved there from other parts of Hangzhou. The working language in the community office is Hangzhounese and nearly all conversations between residents that I overheard, which didn't directly involve me, were conducted in Hangzhounese. There are, however, a number of migrants living in the community. Some of the apartments, like the one I stayed in, are owned by locals who rent them out to people who have come from other provinces in China to work in Hangzhou as part of the massive waves of labor migration from the country to the city that China has witnessed in the last three decades. During my stays in Hangzhou I heard many negative stories and generalizations about migrant workers, who are viewed as inferior and suspect by many urban citizens. The necessity for a voluntary neighborhood watch in the community was explained to me with reference to the growing presence of migrants: *"There are people who have come here from poor villages in the countryside. They don't understand. If you put your stuff somewhere they may think you don't want it anymore. If you leave the window open they may climb in and steal your things. Now this is not very peaceful is it?"* The pronounced impulse to suspect migrants also came to the fore when a bicycle I was borrowing

from my supervisor was stolen from the stairwell of my apartment building and the replacement I bought was also stolen a few days later. The thefts happened, I was told by more than one informant, because there are many migrants in the area.

Apart from being seen as suspect, migrants are sometimes presented as uncivilized in discussions in the community as well as in broader discourses in Chinese society. A resident mentioned the ban on spitting in public in Singapore as an example of better environmental policies elsewhere. When I protested that a similar ban, stipulating a 50 yuan fine for spitting in public places, had been in effect in Shanghai when I lived there around the turn of the millennium, he replied that the large presence of migrants in Shanghai and Hangzhou makes such a ban impossible to enforce. Connecting bodily dispositions with notions of population quality, this kind of talk codes migrants as lacking understanding of what it means to be a civilized citizen.

As we have seen in the section on age groups, the question of why some people do not participate in community activities such as the low-carbon life campaign is sometimes explained with reference to lack of time for those busy at work. When it comes to migrant workers, who we can presume also spend a lot of time working, the explanations offered are different, namely that migrants lack the knowledge, sense of belonging or the general level of civilization needed to engage with the campaign.⁹⁶ This type of explanation draws on the population quality discourse analyzed by scholars of Chinese reform era approaches to citizenship (Anagnost 2004; Murphy 2004; Jacka 2009). In her studies of the application of the concept of population quality to issues of migration in China, Ann Anagnost persuasively argues that the coding of migrants as lacking quality legitimates regimes of social differentiation (Anagnost 2004). A theatrical sketch during a neighborhood festival in the little community park in Dongping Lane drew heavily on notions of population quality in the depiction of a migrant woman from northern Jiangsu who learned from city people in Hangzhou about proper disposal of garbage and about how to properly cross the road. Reflecting the potential for improvement inherent in the concept of population quality, the woman learned her lesson and ended up as a defender of civilized urban life by correcting a city girl who was throwing pistachio shells on the street. The sketch was followed by a quiz about garbage sorting in which children were the most enthusiastic participants. Unlike the fictional world of the sketch, the campaign has not so far reached out to the migrant population in the community.

⁹⁶ One resident argued that migrant workers do not know how to save resources; otherwise they wouldn't be so poor that they have to leave their villages and come to Hangzhou and look for work.

Belonging to a model community

Dongping Lane is an old community in the sense that it is comprised of old residential units that were merged as a result of the urban reform that introduced residential communities as units of organization. In contrast, a new community is one (usually comprised of high-rise buildings) constructed in recent years. This distinction between old and new communities is central to the sense of place, which informs the opinions that residents have about the community. Most of the residents that I interacted with conveyed a very positive image of Dongping Lane stressing various factors that made it a good place to live and especially suitable for older people. The park and the overall greening of the public spaces of the community are central to this image. Many of the residents have lived in the community for several decades and have witnessed tremendous changes in the local environment. In the past, the dominant narrative goes, the streets were narrow and crooked, there was more dirt, houses were of poorer quality, there were no green spaces and unsorted garbage emitted strong smells and attracted flies and rats. Today order has replaced chaos in the sense that the streets are tidy, there are more plants, the smell is gone and birds and butterflies have (to some extent) replaced the rats and flies.

The location is another important reason why people find Dongping Lane a good place to live. For some of the older residents, the choice to stay in the community, rather than moving into the high-rise communities further away from the city center, is partly motivated by the community's proximity to two hospitals. There are people both among the residents and among the community officials who argue that the long distance to hospitals is a major drawback of living in the new communities. Another reason to choose an old community is that more people know each other there, making it easier to enjoy some of the advantages of the more communal forms of living they have grown up under. The park, the Mahjong rooms, and the highly active and fine grained social organization of voluntary activities makes it possible to retain a way of life that preserves many of the elements of Danwei life for those who are not prepared to embrace the more atomized social life of the new era.

For the officials at the community office, comparison with other communities is formalized in various networks of comparison in which communities vie for distinction. In the alley between the community office and Red Harbor one wall is lined with plaques signifying model status of various kinds. Environmentalism and climate change mitigation only take up a fraction of the many areas of community governance that is subjected to evaluation and comparison. The Five Good Households

(五好家庭) campaign is an example of more general campaigning. Other communities also have various environmental campaigns that may earn them exemplary status. Garbage sorting is spreading over large parts of the city, and environmentalist slogans of various kinds can be found on the walls of residential communities all over the city.⁹⁷ Before low-carbon became the key concept for the campaign efforts in Dongping Lane, the community was involved in the more general environmental campaign to construct "green communities" (绿色社区). This campaign covered greening of public spaces and encouraged residents to keep more houseplants.



Grandma Wang keeps many different plants in the stairwell of her building (photo: Zhang Liyan)

Plaques outside the community office announce that Dongping Lane qualified to be designated a "green community of Hangzhou" as well as a "green community of Zhejiang". The fact that the

⁹⁷ In the community where one of the officials from the Dongping Lane Community office lives there is a mural stretching for hundreds of meters on a fence along the Qiantang River, depicting environmental destruction as experienced from the perspective of a family of cartoon pandas.

whole wall is full of other plaques announcing model status in various domains testifies to the routinization of this type of model status. Where Dongping Lane stands out as more than just nominally exemplary is in the low-carbon life framework and its focus on climate change. Community officials are quick to point out that this was the first place in Hangzhou to focus campaign activities on climate change and that they have attained the status of a pilot community where low-carbon life as a framework for campaigning in everyday life is tested.

The image of being a community at the forefront of climate change mitigation reflects positively on Little Zheng and the other officials involved in the campaign. They have found a way to stand out by capitalizing on the local resources in the shape of volunteers to project a positive image of the community. Officials from other cities come to Dongping Lane to learn about the campaign. As with the media reports on low-carbon life, the community officials keep tally with prominent visits that reflect positively on the image of the community. In addition to promoting the careers of the community officials, the positive image of Dongping Lane may help to strengthen and protect both the social and physical environment of the community. We saw in chapter 4, *Building a Low-Carbon Community*, that the low-carbon life campaign becomes embedded in the broader project of community building in the sense that it is interpreted as a way of promoting social interaction as well as fostering new notions of citizenship. In addition to this, the exemplary status generated by the campaign may serve as protection against a threat that looms over many of Hangzhou's old communities, namely demolition to make space for new high-rise buildings.⁹⁸

Dongping Lane is located in Hangzhou's city center. As a showcase of low-carbon life and community campaigning, it offers an alternative to the busy city life in the area. There are other old residential communities nearby, but much of the surrounding area consists of shopping streets with brand stores, big air conditioned shopping malls, and areas developed for tourism focused on Hangzhou's history as capital of China during the Southern Song Dynasty such as Zhongshan Road (中山路), Hefang Street (河坊街), Wushan Square (吴山广场) and West Lake (西湖). This location among centers of consumerism is similar to that of another exemplary collective that was used in party propaganda in the 1950s, namely "the Exemplary Eighth Company on Nanjing Road" (南京路上好八连). This unit of the People's Liberation Army was held up as a model unit for its ability to resist the "sugar coated bullets" of consumerist luxury of the surrounding upscale stores

⁹⁸ I raised the question of demolition in a conversation with Party Secretary Zhu asking her if she was concerned that the apartment buildings in Dongping Lane might be condemned to make way for a high-rise complex. She answered in the negative, arguing that ongoing renovations had made sure the buildings were good enough to keep for a long time.

(Cheng 2009: p. 107). There is a striking similarity in one of the highlighted material practices of the "Exemplary Eighth" and some of the low-carbon life practices in Dongping Lane. Mending their worn-out socks and shirts by hand rather than purchasing new ones, while surrounded by fancy clothes stores, was part of what made the PLA company exemplary (Cheng 2009: p. 107).

Environmental concerns may have replaced bare necessity or utopian socialism as the rationale for frugality but some of the practices remain strikingly similar. While changes in material culture and general living standard may have limited the mending of socks as a common practice in places like Dongping Lane, the practice of reusing fabric for making new clothes is promoted and practiced by low-carbon life campaigners. Some of the older men that participate in the campaign wear used clothes that are obviously older and more worn than what they could afford. One campaigner explicitly connected his old clothes to the campaign effort. They used to belong to his son and were quite obviously too big for him. The exemplary status of Dongping Lane departs from that of the Exemplary Eighth in terms of the relationship between the model unit and its city. The PLA unit's exemplarity was generated and propagated in opposition to one of the most widely known urban images of China, namely that of Shanghai as a den of sin and decadence. In contrast, the exemplarity of Dongping Lane is in alignment with the image of Hangzhou as a green city of leisure and quality of life.

The green urban imaginary of Hangzhou

Hangzhou municipality has been pursuing a branding strategy of promoting the city as a happy place of leisure where people have a high quality of life. The branding is materialized in images on bus shelters, billboards, and posters on walls around construction sites. The images are of steaming teacups, West Lake scenery, green meadows, trees, bushes, flowers and wind turbines. This branding of Hangzhou can be understood as a process of worlding⁹⁹ as conceptualized by Aihwa Ong, who writes that "worlding practices are constitutive, spatializing and signifying gestures that variously conjure up worlds beyond current conditions of urban living (Ong 2011: p. 13). The emphasis on greenness and green spaces is reminiscent of the image of the garden city, which is an essential part of the branding strategy of Dalian, another often mentioned Chinese city associated with environmental quality (Hoffman 2011). Urban imaginaries are projects of city-making that involve multiple actors on multiple levels in acts of imagination that contribute to the shaping of city identities and position cities vis-à-vis other cities (Çinar & Bender 2007). Local comparison of

⁹⁹ Note that Ong uses the term "worlding" slightly differently from Tsing, who uses the term to denote more general acts of contextualization (Tsing 2010). Ong's focus is on urban imaginaries or city-making processes (Ong 2011).

communities becomes connected via campaigns, formal distinctions, and media coverage to the many comparisons between Asian cities which are an important part of their self-images and development (Ong 2011).

The campaign in Dongping Lane thus fits into larger political developments in China. Promotion of "civilized cities" and "quality of life" has been central to official Chinese propaganda in recent years (Brady & Wang 2009: p. 781). An image of Hangzhou as a green and pleasant city of leisure and quality of life is emerging and developing into a dominant urban imaginary that informs the ways various groups of people make sense of and attach value to developments in the city (Delman 2014). The image of Hangzhou as a green city with a high quality of life is reproduced in a wide variety of ways. One is found on fences around construction sites in the city. Surrounding the places where the city is being built and rebuilt they are screens onto which the imaginary city of steaming tea cups, beautiful lakeside pavilions and a life of quiet leisure is projected. Transcending their role of keeping people out of the construction sites, these fences constitute a massive advertising campaign for a green leisure city at places that are so full of noise and dust that they would otherwise seem to negate the green imaginary. The fences convey a vague promise that larger parts of the city may soon become similar to the famous areas developed for tourism around West Lake.

Urban imaginaries are not necessarily hegemonic but can be questioned and challenged. The idea of the green urban imaginary of Hangzhou as something that reflects positively on local officials in the city can be tempered by criticisms of "taking credit for fate". Differences between cities do not necessarily translate into differences between better or worse human agency. One campaigner expressed this kind of criticism of the tendency to make connections between the work of officials and the environmental quality in the city saying: "*Heaven has given us a good place*" (老天给了好地方) and pointing out that politicians and administrators in Hangzhou cannot take credit for the good environment as they have not made the hills, the river and the lake.

Another criticism of the green urban imaginary of Hangzhou is that it distorts facts and covers up environmental problems that are no less serious than in other cities that do not happen to have a famous lake next to the city center. Some residents in Dongping Lane recognize that the air quality in Hangzhou is not good and that it is often much better outside the city, but this does not lead to

generally unfavorable comparisons with the countryside. Instead lack of environmental knowledge and education are used as arguments why things are not better in rural areas.¹⁰⁰

Campaigns such as the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane may reinforce the city branding of Hangzhou as a green city of leisure, and the green urban imaginary may reflect on the way the campaigners make sense of their own efforts and of their place in the world. Generally speaking, the campaigners in Dongping Lane do not concern themselves much with the climate change mitigation efforts of other places in China, but they have ideas about which cities they expect to be doing well in environmental protection and climate change mitigation. Comparison with other cities is central to the green urban imaginary of Hangzhou. Environmentally focused comparisons of cities in China among the campaigners favor two groups of cities; the first consists of some of the biggest and most economically developed cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou. The second group consists of cities associated with being livable because of good climate, environmental standards, cultural heritage sites or natural beauty. The cities in this group include Dalian, Xiamen, Kunming and Qingdao among others. When my informants in Dongping Lane compared cities, visions of development and livability were expressed in vague and general terms. In nearly all cases informants had a favorable view of Hangzhou in comparison with other places.

Party Secretary Zhu reads the efforts of community officials into the urban imaginary of Hangzhou, stressing the connection between community building and city making: *"Hangzhou is a civilized city. I hope Hangzhou can become an internationalized civilized city and that many foreign friends will come to Hangzhou and feel that it is very good. That would be great because at present Hangzhou is not very well-known abroad, right? This is the goal of us who work for the community"*. When telling more ambiguous or critical stories the residents break the images into smaller parts. One example of this is the often heard observation that Hangzhou is indeed beautiful and calm if one stays close to West Lake where most streets are lined with old trees, but just a few blocks away it is like any other big city in China: grey and full of dust and noise.¹⁰¹ Something akin to the Marxian/Lacanian idea of imaginary as fantasy or illusion (Strauss 2006: pp. 326-327) is addressed by campaigners who have become aware of the discrepancy inherent in branding a heavily polluted city as green, but generally campaigners perceive Hangzhou as a good place to live and read their campaign efforts into a larger project of maintaining a good local environment.

¹⁰⁰ One campaigner argued against unfavorable comparisons by pointing to bad practice of rural areas: *"villagers have cleaner air, but they throw garbage directly into the river"*.

¹⁰¹ Among the campaigners who complained about the bad air quality, one reported spending many weekends taking her son to the mountains in Anji County (安吉县) where the air is better.

Low-carbon life and Chinese culture

While references to their identities as residents of Dongping Lane or citizens of Hangzhou were fairly common among campaigners discussing low-carbon life, China as a frame of reference appeared more sporadically when I interviewed, chatted with or observed my informants in the community. Nationalist sentiments were highly visible in the media and public spaces during my second round of fieldwork due to a heightening of tension in the territorial dispute with Japan over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands (钓鱼岛/尖閣諸島), but among the campaigners in the community the only often recurring reference to the nation was the argument made by the officials that the practices of low-carbon life are good for both the individual and for the country. This reference to the nation is often reinterpreted and transformed by residents into a reference to all of mankind. Although the nation was not often explicitly referred to as an important context for making sense of low-carbon life, various notions of what it means to be Chinese did inform discussions of the campaign, especially with regards to notions of morality or virtue.

The involved officials connect low-carbon life with morality (道德) and a notion of civilization (文明) associated with the discourse of population quality (人口素质), thus framing morality as a social issue having to do with state-society relations and educational development. Some of the older residents presented the practice of saving resources as an expression of a Chinese virtue (中国的一个美德) or as having to do with traditional education (传统教育). It is important to note that here saving resources is conceived not as a personal strategy for economizing but as a contribution to a larger collective. A statement that Auntie Sun made with reference to saving resources may illustrate this point: *“People in our generation, quite a lot of us have received a traditional Chinese education. Among people in their 70s and 80s many subscribe to traditional Chinese education. You can also do some good. Do a lot of good things”*. Sun and other campaigners make no clear-cut distinction between the messages of Mao era campaigns such as those propagating thrift and a more general notion of traditional values. These references to virtue and tradition should not be interpreted as anti-modern disavowals of socialism as the provider of a moral compass, but rather as interpretations of the legacy of the past that posit socialist activist attitudes as normal and part of a general moral tradition.

Along with this positive expression of virtue in the valuation of saving comes its negative expression as a distinct distaste for waste. As noted by Anna Boermel in her study on old age in Beijing, the phrase "don't waste it" (不要浪费) is common among retired people in urban China and

represents a valuation of careful consumption in times when it is not immediately obvious that such care needs to be taken (Boermel 2006: p. 409). The campaigners in Dongping Lane are no exception to this and the connection with climate change that their subscription to the concept of low-carbon life represents adds a layer of meaning to the valuation of saving resources. The informant who brought up the Mao era most frequently was Auntie Rong. She connected the notion of waste with a slogan attributed to Mao Zedong: *"We didn't just start doing these things now. In the past, Chairman Mao taught us that 'saving is glorious and wasting is shameful'. Our generation of old people all have this habit"*. Another campaigner, Ms. Ma, also brought up the slogan: *"'Wasting is shameful'. We haven't heard this sentence much since the end of the Cultural Revolution. We have to promote this: wasting is shameful, thrift is a Chinese virtue"*. The sense that saving is something that comes with being Chinese is countered by criticisms of wasteful practices that are also viewed as quintessentially Chinese.

Another phenomenon sometimes attributed to Chinese culture is the desire to own things. While it may seem more intuitive to connect the desire to own things with capitalism or ideas about human nature rather than Chinese culture, campaigners who otherwise rarely frame their activities in national terms, sometimes criticize what they perceive as characteristically Chinese forms of consumerist desire that lead to social rules about what consumer items one must own in order to be eligible for marriage. The big three (or four) consumer items of various eras are also connected with marriage eligibility. One campaigner, Ms. Shen, was impressed by the public bicycle sharing scheme in Hangzhou, but it also led her to a cultural analysis of specifically Chinese obstacles to low-carbon life: *"Maybe you think this bicycle thing [the public bicycle sharing scheme] is simple. It has to do with Chinese folk concepts. Chinese people have had this idea that they must own things. For example when you got married you had to have a certain number of 'legs' [alluding to furniture] and the 'three big items'. A bicycle was one of the three big items. And a sewing machine was a big item representing your affluence. All households had their own bicycles. It's different now. You don't have to want a bicycle or a car. People's concepts change. It is not a result of my diligence, but rather the hard work of the government. When there are public bicycles you don't have to buy one yourself. It is more efficient than everybody owning their own bicycles because a lot of people use one bicycle. It saves a lot of resources; it is convenient and low-carbon"*. In her account, Shen places the low-carbon life campaign into the long series of party-state efforts to reform the country and its people. Here Chinese culture comes to stand for inertia and resistance to the High Modernist

drive of socialism, contradicting the interpretations offered by Sun and other campaigners that cast Mao era campaign messages and traditional moral virtues in the same category.

Another example of people in the community reading practices into a matrix of campaigning in conflict with traditional culture occurred during a group discussion when Mr. Cai brought up the traditional practice of burning the clothes of the deceased as part of the rites on the 35th day after the death (五七). He had recently been responsible for handling the practicalities around the death of a relative and did not want to burn the clothes, because he found it unscientific and wasteful. He ended up donating them to a local charity.¹⁰² Auntie Sun joined in the conversation, commenting that this was an unfortunate aspect of the 35th day rites, since a lot of the clothes were good as new. Both Cai and Sun focused on the aspect waste, and the reference to science did not lead to criticism of the tradition for being irrational. On the contrary, Auntie Sun went on to explain that according to traditional customs woolen clothes are not burned on the 35th day because the deceased is not able to bring wool neither to hell nor to heaven, thus treating the tradition more like cultural heritage to be explained than superstition to be rooted out.¹⁰³

In addition to taking into account various kinds of culturally formed habits, the campaigners who reason about specifically Chinese dynamics of low-carbon life also consider demographics. In this perspective the habits of saving resources is construed as a response to the situation in the past when most families had many children. Some of the residents in Dongping Lane remember the time when children wore the cast-off clothes of their older siblings.¹⁰⁴ The notion that the country has too many people is present in many discussions of social and economic issues in contemporary China and low-carbon life is no exception to this. Little Zheng and his colleague Little Zhang at the community office were quick to point to population size as a source of problems both with environmental issues and the level of civilization among citizens. Among the residents the blame for the environmental problems of China is also placed on the population size. Unfavorable comparisons with the environmental conditions of other countries often lead to the argument that China has too many people.

¹⁰² One night the following year I witnessed this ritual burning of clothes in the street outside my apartment building as a group of men with bamboo poles dropped the clothes of a deceased into a fire. When I related the incident to one of the campaigners the next day he immediately launched into the same argument as Mr. Cai the year before, pointing out that it was a waste of resources, and adding that the burning process leads to even more unnecessary emissions.

¹⁰³ For an interesting analysis of Chinese popular religious tradition seen as either superstition or cultural heritage, see Chau, Adam Yuet (2005): "The Politics of Legitimation and the Revival of Popular Religion in Shaanbei, North-Central China".

¹⁰⁴ Some campaigners also wear second hand clothes today. Among the core campaigners that I got to know fairly well, especially the men, the clothes tended to be very casual and inconspicuous – especially considering the fairly good financial situations their other lifestyle choices such as international holidays seemed to suggest.

Comparing with other countries

Comparisons with other countries take a number of different shapes and move in various directions in Dongping Lane, as the campaigners draw other places into the process of making sense of low-carbon life and of their own place in the world. Despite the variation in what countries are addressed and what people get out of the comparisons, there are general patterns which may be discerned. The local acts of imagination and comparison tend to involve what Yan Yunxiang refers to as the "unfavorable comparison approach" of using the other place as a mirror to highlight deficiencies at home (Yan 2011). An example of a resident using this approach is Grandma Wang, one of the oldest campaign participants, who draws on her daughter's travels and my presence in the community in the production of unfavorable comparisons: *"Although West Lake is beautiful, the air is not very good. Right when the sun comes out the air is ok. The air in Canada is good. Oh, the sky in Canada is really blue! The air in Denmark is good too"*. This kind of unfavorable comparison is common among campaigners who point to travel experiences or friends and family abroad as sources of knowledge about environmental conditions in other places.

Some of the residents and officials in Dongping Lane use foreign places and their ideas and practices as contrasts that may reveal or highlight the shortcomings of the way environmental issues are handled in China. Stories about other countries are informed by the assumption that those other countries, especially those labeled "western" are more advanced than China when it comes to environmental protection and climate change mitigation. Placing themselves on a lower rung on an imaginary ladder of economic and social development, they view certain other countries as sources of good ideas and practices to learn from. The image of the West as superior or more advanced only appears once in the list of tips accompanying the Low-Carbon Households Standard, namely in the comment that double glazed windows are already the standard in the West (DPX 2009), but it was pervasive in Little Zheng's explanations of the low-carbon life campaign and it also appeared in discussions among the residents. Unfavorable comparisons with western countries are sometimes accompanied by reflections on the fact that people there got into environmentalism earlier than people in China, and can be expected to have more experience with the kind of changes in practices that campaign is promoting.

With their critical use of foreign countries as means of reflection about the ills of Chinese society, the campaigners are inscribing themselves in a long history of comparisons in modern Chinese history. The image of foreign environmental superiority is but one of the most recent variations on

the theme of Occidentalism in China (Chen 2002). Ranging from the discourse of "the century of humiliation", the calls to learn from western countries of the May 4th Movement, the rhetoric of catching up with England and America during the Great Leap Forward, to the regime-controlled as well as more subversive versions of Occidental discourse in the reform era, other places have been held up as examples of otherness that could be used in the process of understanding and improving China (Chen 2002, Landsberger 2008). In many cases the others were construed as enemies but sometimes they were seen as friends as in the case of Albania which in the late 1960s was depicted as the ideal nation in Chinese propaganda (Landsberger 2008: p. 165). In the reform era, images of the western world have become transformed from showing the west as the enemy to a more mixed situation in which the west, while remaining the other, becomes a source of inspiration (Landsberger 2008: p. 150).

Like their predecessors in the history of Occidentalism in China, the campaigners in Dongping Lane invoke images of occidental superiority for specific instrumental reasons that have little to do with a naïve belief that everything is better in the west and must be copied if China is to move along a positive development path. The images and stories of other countries are used in the campaign as intellectual resources along with the prescriptions of party-state propaganda and the personal and social memories of past eras. Comparisons are made with countries commonly understood to be "developed" (发达). The countries that people I interacted with in Dongping Lane drew into their reflections about low-carbon life include: Germany, Denmark, the United States, France, Great Britain, Canada, Russia, New Zealand, South Korea, Japan, Israel, Mexico, the Maldives, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa and Singapore. There were also references to larger or more vague entities such as Europe, Northern Europe, South America, North America, Africa, "the West", "abroad" (国外), and "developed countries" (发达国家). Of the 16 specific countries¹⁰⁵ drawn into discussions by informants, 11 are OECD countries,¹⁰⁶ and the five that are not OECD members (Russia, Maldives, The United Arab Emirates, South Africa and Singapore) can be seen as fairly "developed" countries. The list of countries overlaps to a considerable degree with the desirable destinations found by Vanessa Fong in her study of international migration among students from Dalian. In Fong's analysis the group of desirable countries corresponds to a vision of "the developed world" that the student migrants aspire to be part of (Fong 2011). The high degree of overlap

¹⁰⁵ The list may not be entirely exhaustive of the countries informants mentioned, but represents the countries that I was able to find mention of in fieldnotes and interview transcripts.

¹⁰⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/list-oecd-member-countries.htm>

between the places her informants went to or wanted to go to and the places that my informants drew into comparisons and other kinds of reasoning, seems to have to do with a view of these places as advanced and home to desirable ideas and practices.

Sources of knowledge about consumption, environmental values and climate change mitigation practices in these places range from bits and pieces of information picked up in the media over stories from family members living abroad to their own travel experiences. In terms of their general knowledge about other countries the residents range from the very well-informed to people with an extremely limited and vague view of the outside world. At one extreme were people like the retired doctor, who often hung around Red Harbor and told me stories about his visit to Denmark in the 1980s, and Mr. Zhu, who spoke with great specificity and admiration about the environmental practices he had witnessed in Japan. The other end of the spectrum was represented by people such as an elderly woman I met in the community park, who was puzzled that I could be both a Dane (丹麦人) and a foreigner (外国人) at the same time until her friend explained to her that the outside world is divided into different countries and that one of them is called Denmark.

There is a tension among the campaigners between positive and negative images of foreign countries as on the one hand blessed with advanced technologies and mindsets, and on the other hand cursed with wasteful habits. Overall, the positive images crowd out the negative ones, but there is recognition that in terms of climate change mitigation, rich countries have to deal with high levels of material consumption. The tendency to view foreign practices and values as better was tempered by stories from abroad such as the following: *"I have a friend who lives in the United States who told me about the extraordinary consumption of Americans. The stuff they throw out is better than the new things we have at home. His relatives moved there earlier. When he had just arrived he saw that an American family had put a TV set out with the trash. He took it home and it was quite good. After he had used it for 5 or 6 months it still wasn't broken. After some months he'd made some money and now he wanted to exchange it with a new TV set, so he just put the old one outside the neighbors' door. He told me that the things foreigners throw out are better than new things. When it begins to rain, Americans buy umbrellas and when it stops raining, they just toss them out. And when they eat it is a mess how they waste"*. This tale of American wastefulness can be read as a caution that economic development does not equal positive environmental values and practices, and, more importantly, that use-and-throw-away style consumerism can be a threat to low-carbon life. The thrifty attitude of the relative in America can be seen as having to some extent

become eroded by his stay in America as he ended up discarding a perfectly well-functioning television set despite his ability to reflect about consumer habits of different countries.

Grandma Wang, one of the oldest campaigners, has a granddaughter in Germany, who supplies her with stories about life there including stories about the kind of everyday life practices addressed by the low-carbon life campaign. One of these may illustrate how comparisons focused on imagined superior foreign values and practices not only highlight political culture and material culture, but also draw attention to cultural differences to provoke thought. The story, which reads like an urban legend, involves a Chinese man in Germany who caught a pigeon in a public place and later cooked and ate it. When he threw out the feathers, he put them in the wrong garbage bin and as a result he was expelled from Germany. The point of the story, which sounds rather improbable, or the reason he was expelled, was not that he had taken the pigeon. Grandma Wang made it clear that what we could learn from the story was that Germans are very strict and particular about garbage sorting.

Two countries that campaigners seem to prefer to compare with China are Japan and the United States. Japan is praised for performing well on garbage sorting and for fostering public participation in environmental efforts in general. Little Zhang pointed out that although Japan doesn't have many natural resources, the Japanese are very successful because they treat what they do have as treasures and make sure to recycle whatever can be recycled. One of the residents spoke with admiration about Japanese rechargeable batteries as an example of their good environmental practices. In her descriptions of low-carbon culture, the imaginary future state of high environmental consciousness and good environmental practices, Party Secretary Zhu drew in Japan and the United States as exemplars of the voluntary spirit that would make constant propaganda work unnecessary.

Climate citizens of the world?

Who is responsible for global climate change? This difficult question, which may refer to those who cause greenhouse gas emissions and to those who are in a position to lower them, haunts debates about the connections between climate change and humans. In the case of China, Paul G. Harris points out that although the average emissions levels of Chinese are not high, affluent individuals in all societies have a responsibility for responding to global climate change and many Chinese have begun to live like conspicuous consumers (Harris 2010: p. 157). This notion of a "cosmopolitan challenge" represented by the injustice of wealthy Chinese individuals hiding their environmentally unsustainable behind a national identity as "developing country" has appeared in Chinese public debate in the shape of a proposal that rich Chinese emigrants should pay an environmental levy

when leaving the country to make up for the environmental destruction that their affluent lifestyle leaves behind (Liu 2014). Campaigners in Dongping Lane address the question of a cosmopolitan challenge through their conceptualization of climate change mitigation as an undertaking of all of mankind rather than something divided along national fault lines. Ms. Wang, who works as a cleaner in Red Harbor, offers an analysis of the challenge of climate change mitigation which represents an approach to responsibility also adopted by other contributors to the low-carbon life campaign: *"I think low-carbon life is the responsibility of all of mankind. Everybody, not just one person, it's definitely the whole world. Everybody is doing bad things so the weather gets warmer. It cannot be a natural process. It is only after humans destroyed the climate that it could change this way. And it is not our country alone, we are not that 'capable'. This has happened in every country"*.

Along with the overall societal process of opening up to the outside world that has taken place in reform era China, the personal experiences of citizens – including the residents of Dongping Lane – have become increasingly informed by awareness of global connections. Knowledge of faraway places informs their social imaginaries through media consumption and international travel. These various encounters with different ways of living enhance their contextualization repertoires. Little Zheng and the other officials at the community office are younger than most of the residents and belong to generations that have come of age in the reform period and have no experience of a closed China that did not orient itself toward the world. Convergence of individual and collective interests is invoked by the community officials, sometimes in the form of slogans. In the past, campaigning has sometimes invoked international connections as with the Great Leap Forward drives to catch up with specific countries or the Patriotic Hygiene Movement's discursive connection with the Korean War (Rogaski 2002). These campaigns depended on harnessing nationalism. In the present campaign, an emerging cosmopolitan orientation challenges nationalist framing of climate change mitigation. While the slogans that officials in Dongping Lane use refer to the nation rather than the world as a collective entity (对自己有利对国家有利, 利国利民, 对自己对国家都有用), campaigners discussing notions of vulnerability and responsibility move beyond a national framework to invoke such entities as the whole world or all of mankind.

The notion of sympathy for distant others as something that can inform thinking about low-carbon life takes two forms in Dongping Lane. The first kind of sympathy is extended to others that are temporally distant and refers to the future generations who will experience the consequences of climate change. The concept of intergenerational equity or justice is drawn into discussion of

climate change by scholars of international climate politics (Weston 2008). Some campaigners in Dongping Lane personalize the future commitment of low-carbon life by referring to the good that it will do their descendants (子孙). The second kind of sympathy is extended to others that are spatially distant and refers to people in and outside of China who suffer or are at risk as a consequence of climate change. The two kinds may combine as they do in references to the risk that rising sea levels pose to the Maldives. The inclusive intergenerational solidarity of taking into account the living conditions of future generations was sometimes touched upon but not really elaborated on by the campaigners that I talked to. Auntie Sun cites the possibility of leaving a positive heritage as a motivation for engaging in activism upon retirement. This could be read as a continuation of the state-sponsored mission of building a new and better China, except that now instead of making a big effort to contribute towards the realization of a future utopia, the campaigners are making a small effort to avoid a future dystopia. Sympathy for distant others as a motivation for engaging in climate change mitigation is also present in the community. Mr. Cai told me a story invoking rather than explaining sympathy as part of the rationale for low-carbon life. Some years ago he travelled with a group to Shandong and visited the Yimeng Mountains (沂蒙山区).¹⁰⁷ They drove through barren treeless land. A woman invited them into her home. She looked old and they were surprised to find out she was in her 30s. There was no water near her house so she had to walk very far to fetch it. Mr. Cai remembers hunger and difficulty finding food as a child when his family fled the invading Japanese army, but this woman, he said, had to eat grass. He saw some in the house and asked if it was for pig feed. The woman replied that it was for people. Cai invoked this image of a "Third World China" still existing within the new and booming China to illustrate a point he was making, namely that although Hangzhou has a lot of water, it is important to remember those who are vulnerable to drought in Northern China, so although it seems as if we can consume without being careful, attention to the less fortunate places reminds us that it is not the case. Mr. Cai is the most obviously explicit proponent of this line of argument, but his point about showing the vulnerability of distant others is in line with the general approach of finding ways to visualize the invisible connections that make up the rationale for low-carbon life.

The Maldives have become an icon of climate change after the spectacular underwater cabinet meeting that called attention to the risk posed to the nation by rising sea levels (Ramesh 2009). References to the island nation appeared a couple of times during my time in Dongping Lane. One

¹⁰⁷ The Yimeng Mountains formed an important base area during the Japanese occupation. More recently, it has been developed for "red tourism" (Cai did not mention this directly, instead he just categorized it as a poor mountain region targeted for development by the state).

time Ms. Wang, the cleaner from Red Harbor brought up the Maldives and the underwater meeting as a good example of drawing attention to climate change. Although she could not remember the name of the country she was impressed by the creativity of the media stunt and moved by their plight. Another time a propaganda worker from Hubin District, who visited Dongping Lane and spoke of the risk posed to the Zhoushan Islands near Shanghai by rising sea levels, took a personal approach to the risk of inundation by bringing up the similar threat to the Maldives, adding that she would very much like to visit the Maldives before the whole country is submerged. In their inquiry into the possible emergence of a specifically Chinese cosmopolitanism in connection with low-carbon innovation projects, Tyfield and Urry cite a Chinese researcher who considers a newfound ability to sympathize with others no matter where they are from as the most important thing she got out of living in the UK while at the same time stressing the importance of national development (Tyfield & Urry 2009: p. 805). In a similar fashion, the ethnological imagination at play in Dongping Lane may at times take the shape of a cosmopolitan imagination that sees faraway places and their people not merely as examples to learn from, but also as relevant others to take into consideration when defining the collective that is to benefit from low-carbon life.

Although the emergent cosmopolitan sentiment in Dongping Lane appears sporadic and is only one among several reasons why people choose to engage in the practices of low-carbon life, its presence is a testimony to a tendency that runs counter to the idea that extreme particularism is rampant among older people in China. The situation of young officials at the community office proposing to engage with the global issue of climate change rather than for example local pollution, and the older residents responding positively and taking up the cosmopolitan challenge of climate change mitigation is a remarkable example of a bridging of the generation gap observed by Yan Yunxiang in his analysis of changes in the moral landscape exemplified by cases of what he terms "extraordinary extortion" in which older people who fall down or get ill in public places attempt to extort younger people who come to their aid. Yan sees the phenomenon as arising at least partly out of a condition in which the generations inhabit separate moral worlds, the older people being particularistic and the younger subscribing to a more universalistic morality (Yan 2009). The fact that reasoning about the global connections of climate change takes place among the campaigners in Dongping Lane demonstrates that Chinese pensioners are not incapable of more universalistic thinking and feeling that may extend their sense of responsibility and sympathy far beyond the family and the residential community.

Conclusion

Comparison is an integral part of the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane. Community campaigns in urban China are embedded in networks of comparison in which they vie for model status by performing well in various campaigns. Individual campaigners compare the practices of exemplary individuals with their own, and they compare environmental practices of other places with the environmental practices they know from their own households and from the community. Comparison is a commonly employed means of making sense of the low-carbon life campaign. At the same time the campaign itself becomes a means of making sense of other things by viewing them through the lens of climate change mitigation. Discussions of campaign participation, how it is carried out and what significances can be attached to it, are ways of debating one's place in the world. In this respect comparisons made by individual campaigners situate their local interactions in contexts they believe to be relevant. Comparison thus emerges as a world-making technique among campaigners as it sets up other places, people and practices as contexts for low-carbon life. By means of comparison, then, campaigners are making sense of their practices by showing their differences and similarities vis-à-vis other places. By describing or speculating about waste disposal or consumer practices of others places they situate their own efforts in a world already populated by a myriad of environmentalist and climate change mitigation engagements.

Comparisons depend to varying degrees on the application of imagination. Some of the places, people and practices that are compared with low-carbon life in Dongping Lane are familiar to the campaigners and others are much more partially known. This difference does not necessarily spring from physical distance, as faraway places may be well-known to some (extensive travel experience is a source of comparison for some campaigners) and the everyday life of neighbors may be largely unknown (migrant workers are talked about in general terms and with strong reliance on stereotypes). When campaigners talk about low-carbon life, they invariably try to grasp or define it as an attitude or a set of practices or a combination of the two, while at the same time trying to find ways to improve it. In effect, to ask "what is low-carbon life?" involves asking how it can be improved and what intellectual resources are at hand for understanding and improving it. The main implication of talking about other places when talking about low-carbon life is that looking at them and discussing them can teach us something about our own place.

In addition to the comparisons with the distant others of faraway places, which are common among campaigners, comparisons of various groups of people in the community inform the way

campaigners reason about low-carbon life. Dividing people according to age, gender and household registration (户口), officials and residents sort the population of the community into probable insiders and outsiders of low-carbon life. Being old is associated with having more free time than younger people. The idea of low-carbon life campaigning as an activity suitable for older people places campaigners in an implied opposition with people considered too busy to engage in low-carbon life activities. This notion of having enough time effectively circumscribes the community of campaigners and excuses young people for not taking part as they are believed to have more important things to do such as earning money and raising children. Young people are thus not excluded by being seen as incapable of engaging in low-carbon life practices but are seen as beyond the reach of community campaigning. Low-carbon life, then, is set up, not as a comprehensive and viable alternative to mainstream consumerist lifestyle for the whole urban population, but rather as something people can do when they have time.

The availability or non-availability of free time is not the only variable that campaigners find relevant when discussing the participation of various groups of people. The high proportion of women among the campaign participants is explained with reference to material culture. Deeming some campaign activities more suited for women through imaginary acts of associating women with a careful approach to household practices that distinguishes between different materials, campaigners of both genders locate the gendering of low-carbon life in the assemblages of persons and things. Migrants in the community remain imaginary others that are talked about by the campaigners rather than engaged in campaigning. Although migrants are excluded from the campaign in the sense that none of the organizers assume they might be interested in participating, the idea of a potential for change inherent in the concept of population quality (人口素质) means that migrants can be imagined as future participants given that their "quality" (素质) is improved. Campaign organizers thus refrain from including migrants in the campaign based on a perception of lack in knowledge and understanding. This is compounded by the assumption that migrants lack the sense of belonging that is an important part of the motivation for participation for long-time residents. The organizers and participants thus emerge as a community of campaigning that knows its limits and only attempts to include certain people.

Comparison is institutionalized in a series of campaigns in urban China in which residential communities strive for the exemplary status of "model community" according to standards. As model status has become increasingly routinized through many years of campaigning, it has become

difficult to stand out merely by conforming well to standards. Another way of standing out, embraced by the campaign organizers in Dongping Lane, is to be the first and only community to implement a campaign and earn the designation of pilot community. Simultaneously an experiment and a showcase, the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane is interpreted by community officials as a contribution to the status of Hangzhou as an exemplary city. By being an example that embodies the image of greenness, quality of life and environmental consciousness that characterizes the city branding of Hangzhou, the community supplies the green urban imaginary of Hangzhou with concreteness and specificity that is lacking in the vague and general image conveyed by posters and slogans. The green urban imaginary of Hangzhou informs the sense-making of the campaigners although some campaigners are skeptical of the view of Hangzhou as a green city when they experience chaos and pollution in daily life. Generally campaigners seem to think of Hangzhou as a pleasant place to live and their efforts as part of the conservation of a good environment.

Discussions among campaigners sometimes involve images of Chinese cultural traditions as something that can either foster or constrain low-carbon life practices. As such, Chinese cultural traditions, including both the kind of tradition that Charles Stafford refers to as "the Chinese long term" (Stafford 2009: p. 115) and more recent habits associated with the Mao period, become an ambiguous source of meaning-making for low-carbon life. Some Chinese cultural traditions are held up as positive factors that might support the development of low-carbon life as is the case with labeling thrift a "Chinese virtue", while others are held up as examples of the kind of cultural inertia that reformers have been struggling with all through the modern period in China, as in the case of wastefulness associated with hospitality or a more generalized labeling of certain kinds of consumerism as essentially Chinese. In these accounts, being Chinese means to be the inheritors of a contradictory tradition of good and bad elements that must be sorted before the good ones can be recycled for new purposes such as mitigating climate change.

The idea of Chinese culture as inertia or obstacle echoes a discourse of Occidentalism that has informed attempts to change Chinese society through revolution or reform throughout the 20th century. Accounts of environmentalist ideas, technologies and practices in other countries imply comparisons that are often unfavorable to China. The sense of lack associated with falling short of the standards of foreign countries is meant to generate a pull towards these exemplars. Assumed as well as experienced differences in levels of environmental consciousness are explained with

reference to time. China is seen by campaigners as lagging behind in environmental protection because it got a late start compared with western countries. At the same time images of western consumerism are held up as negative examples. This does not happen in implied contrast to an image of China as free of waste and conspicuous consumption. The examples of wasteful habits deplored by campaigners are drawn mostly from China. As is the case with Chinese cultural tradition, then, foreign countries emerge as ambiguous sources of inspiration for low-carbon life. Being advanced and wasteful at the same time, they remind campaigners that environmental protection hinges on technological and social factors simultaneously.

When the issues of responsibility and vulnerability in connection with climate change appear in the discourse of campaigners, responsibility is attributed to an imagined community of all of mankind, and vulnerability is ascribed to individuals and collectives of varying scale ranging from a stranger encountered during travels to all people living on the planet. While cosmopolitan sentiments are sometimes expressed by campaigners, they remain relatively fragmented and undeveloped in most cases. One implication of ascribing responsibility to all of mankind is that campaigners ascribe responsibility to themselves. Reproducing slogans focused on the idea of small beginnings campaigners talk about low-carbon life campaigning as if they imagine their campaign to be a precursor to greater things to come.

In sum, then, campaigners find themselves caught between particularism and universalism as they attempt to make sense of low-carbon life by means of comparison with near and distant others. On the one hand, groups that live in the neighborhood are excused, as in the case of young people deemed too busy, or excluded, as in the case of migrants deemed too ignorant. The community of campaigning works within boundaries closely associated with the party-state-sponsored project of community building, which in practice tends to cast the purpose of community offices as the work of connecting with retired residents. On the other hand, a sense of global community is reflected in the expressions of sympathy for distant or imaginary others and references to the responsibility of all of mankind.

9. Conclusion

In this thesis I have examined the attempts of a group of community officials and local residents in urban China to work out and engage in meaningful everyday life responses to global climate change. I have explored how the campaigners in Dongping Lane have explored the new concept of low-carbon life and the implications of implementing it in their everyday lives. Focusing on sense-making I have investigated the meanings that their proposed changes to everyday life practices are invested with. The thesis can be read as an examination of what happens when global climate change becomes part of the equation for a group of urban residents trying to figure out how to live good and meaningful lives in a rapidly changing world. It is a climate ethnography in the sense of being an exploration of local engagements with universalizing claims associated with the idea of climate change. In the process of applying the concept of low-carbon life to everyday life practices as a response to global climate change, the campaigners place their proposed changes of practices in a series of contexts. This is part of the cultural work of interpretation and sense-making that transforms low-carbon life from a new and unknown concept into a familiarized and meaningful way of rethinking and refashioning parts of everyday life for the campaign participants.

Stemming from the initiative of a community official, low-carbon life in Dongping Lane is conceived by local officials as a campaign that is part of the party-state-sponsored project of community building. This sets up the residential community as an institutional context for the campaign. Local officials and residents come together to negotiate its meaning from their different positions. To local officials the campaign is part of their work as governing agents of the party-state. It is one of the domains in which they interpret and enact their roles as public servants meant to facilitate and guide rather than monitor and control the activities of the local residents who choose to volunteer. To the participating residents as well as the officials, the campaign is part of a broader project of raising the level of "civilization" among the urban populace, aiming to raise awareness and sense of belonging to residential communities, as well as to promote behavior categorized by the party-state as appropriate for modern urban citizens. As such the campaign is part of an attempt to establish the residential community as a meaningful unit of interaction and identification in urban life.

At the outset of the campaign the concept of low-carbon life was neither fully developed nor fully understood by the campaign participants. Although the practices of low-carbon life were codified in written documents meant to bring about a certain degree of standardization through simplification

and quantification, the meanings of those practices remained relatively open to interpretation. The cultural work of interpretation that has served to contextualize low-carbon life began in the writing of these documents and was subsequently carried forward every time participating residents discussed the meaning of these various new practices or proposed changes to everyday life consumer practices. By bringing a range of their other daily life concerns into the discussions of the meaning of low-carbon life practices, the campaigners move beyond interpretation of the already given into construction of meaning through sense-making. Through their campaign work the community officials have acted not merely as governing agents but also as agents of empowerment, who have enabled residents to engage in climate change mitigation practices in an organized way through the provision of knowledge and the facilitation of campaign activities.

Rather than effecting a profound transformation of the everyday life consumer practices of the general population of the community, the campaign has been embraced by a small group of core campaigners who attempt to inspire others by acting as exemplars. This has led to the creation of a community of campaigners for whom taking their roles as citizens seriously entails confronting global climate change. By tying notions of civilized behavior to global climate change, the campaigners are enacting a form of citizenship which could be called climate citizenship. This entails taking responsibility for the task of lowering greenhouse gas emissions and as such it signals a citizenship role that goes beyond taking care of oneself. From the perspective of the municipal government of Hangzhou the community can be seen as a test site for the new task of promoting and facilitating climate change mitigation among the urban populace. The residents and officials of Dongping Lane form two distinct social groups with different life experiences and different interests, but the campaign is conceived as a collaborative effort and serves to establish common ground between these two groups of actors. By staging the campaign the two groups have connected global climate change with community building and as such they have established climate change mitigation practices as moral and place-making actions, which constitute themselves as climate citizens and Dongping Lane as a low-carbon model community in the sense that climate change mitigation practices become a defining point of reference for conceptions of local identity.

Assembled from a wide range of practices relating to the immediate physical environment of the community residents, the low-carbon life campaign is aimed at changing certain forms of consumption that have become commonplace in contemporary urban China. Global climate change represents a disruption of the hitherto taken for granted meanings of the material things associated

with reform era consumerism. The materiality of greenhouse gas emissions add a new layer of meaning to consumer practices, which challenges the idea that the pursuit of wealth, prestige and material comforts can unproblematically remain the primary preoccupations of urban citizens in reform era China. Through their campaign efforts the participants and propagators of low-carbon life place themselves in implicit opposition to forms of consumerism associated with conspicuous consumption by approaching consumption as mostly practical rather than something associated with desire and prestige. Using the materials and social connections at hand they reinterpret consumer practices with a view to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by unsettling hitherto unseen and unfelt parts of material culture. The low-carbon life campaign emerges as an "unspectacular spectacle" in the sense that the campaigners stage the campaign to get attention while maintaining a modest and low-key approach to the campaign activities and to the meaning of the concept of low-carbon life. Casting low-carbon life as something that is easy to do and makes no trouble, the campaigners highlight its everydayness as well as their own identities as ordinary citizens. Reusing materials to make handicrafts that become symbolic representations of the campaign effort, campaigners cast certain low-carbon life practices as hobby-like activities which provide enjoyment and are easy to engage in.

When the community officials and residents participating in the low-carbon life campaign in Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life, they rarely talk explicitly about climate change. Instead they talk about healthy diets and transportations habits, or share practical tips for reusing materials in everyday life. Despite this focus on things of more immediate concern than melting glaciers or changing patterns of precipitation in faraway places, the campaigners envision the practices of low-carbon life as responses to global climate change and attempts to contribute towards mitigation. Through their attempts to make sense of climate change using the concept of low-carbon life the campaigners are also engaged in a quest to make sense of their own place in a rapidly changing social and physical environment. By connecting everyday life in the community with global climate change, the campaigners join the ranks of environmentalists worldwide who have attempted to show how the consumer practices of everyday life are riddled by the problem of protecting and preserving the human species as greenhouse gas emissions threaten to render environments uninhabitable for humans in the near and distant future.

The standards of low-carbon life as well as the reasoning about those standards performed by campaigners place many different activities in the inclusive category of low-carbon life practices.

Cast as an experiment low-carbon life is open to interpretation and this is part of the attraction of the concept. Participants can read their own concerns and aspirations into the practices of low-carbon life. This interpretive space allows for the material practices to be informed by concerns over comfort, health and community. Through the campaign these concerns become connected with concerns over global climate change. The cultural work of interpreting propositions of the standards of low-carbon life becomes a way that the campaigners can show connections between practices and concerns that make their social and material world meaningful. These sense-making processes enable participants to cast low-carbon life as part of the pursuit of what they see as good lives both in the sense of being morally defensible and in the sense of being enjoyable. The connections of concerns make low-carbon life sensible as more than a response to climate change. Even without their climate change mitigating properties most low-carbon life practices would be attractive to the campaigners as they represent ways to pursue a life of comfort, convenience and health in old age. Accordingly, many things in the campaign happen as if it does not matter whether or not anthropogenic climate change is an established fact. When campaigners talk about low-carbon life they invariably try to grasp or define it, as an attitude or a set of practices or a combination of the two, while at the same time trying to find ways to improve it. Addressing the question of what low-carbon life is, involves examining how it can be improved and what intellectual resources are at hand for understanding and improving it.

For the campaigners in Dongping Lane their experiences in the Mao era play an ambiguous role as inspiration and burden as they remember many ways of saving resources that they have been able to recycle in the present campaign but also radical politics with a focus on class-struggle that cannot meaningfully be applied to community campaigning in contemporary China. Through generalization and an emphasis on the vast differences between past and present conditions, the campaigners set up the campaign style of the past as an Other with which they can compare their present engagements. With recourse to comparisons with the past the leading community officials portray the low-carbon life campaign as a politically moderate project implemented through a step-by-step approach. Campaigners do not attempt to put pressure on companies or the population at large, neither do they attempt to engage in lobbying with the local government. In a similar fashion the community officials conceive of their task as one of disseminating information rather than attempting to persuade or pressure the residents into participation. The journalists who visit the community office as representatives of various local and national media are not propaganda workers for the campaign, but must be viewed as representatives of self-interested media actors

who may or may not be interested in reporting on campaign events. Insisting on letting things go through an incremental process instead of revolutionary change, the community officials and the core campaigners contribute to an image of the present era as an era of reform in contrast to an image of the Mao era as an era of revolution.

Some of the campaign participants are singled out for praise and referred to as low-carbon doyens (低碳达人). In addition to reasoning about the general campaign guidelines and how these may be connected with their daily life concerns; the campaign participants share and reflect on stories about these moral exemplars. They embody notions of exemplarity that are different from those of the roles models of earlier times. Rather than asceticism and self-sacrifice their admirable qualities have to do with initiative and creativity. The exemplars of low-carbon life are seen as normal people who have taken on climate change mitigation as a series of hobby-like activities in old age. The fact that part of the campaign is staged as competitions offers the residents the possibility of engaging with low-carbon life in a circumscribed domain where all relevant practices are named and their moral value is quantified. Built around the formal production of exemplary status for households and individuals, the competitions become ritual-like spaces in which residents can engage with low-carbon life in visible and stylized ways. Taking the competitions neither entirely seriously nor mocking or resisting them, campaign participants treat the standards for low-carbon life, which are provided by the community officials, as inspiration rather than as rules. There is little focus on who wins the competitions. Conceived by the community officials as first and foremost a way of getting people together, the competitions of low-carbon life are temporary manifestations of the ongoing process of finding ways of understanding and practicing low-carbon life.

Comparison is a common means of making sense of the practices of low-carbon life employed by both officials and residents. Community campaigning is embedded in networks of comparison in which various units vie for model status by performing according to standards in campaigns. At the individual level campaigners compare themselves with exemplary individuals, and they compare the ideas and practices of their own household and community with what they see and hear about from other places. Comparison becomes a world-making technique for campaigners as it offers contextualization of the practices of low-carbon life by juxtaposing them with the practices of other places. These comparisons are to some extent acts of imagination in which people and places outside of the community become Others against the contrast of which the characteristics of local ideas and practices become clear.

Labeling thrift a "Chinese virtue" (中国的美德) and praising older women for their ability to reuse materials in creative ways, while at the same time blaming traditional notions of hospitality for waste, the campaigners posit themselves as the inheritors of a contradictory tradition of both good and bad elements which must be sorted before the good ones can be recycled for the purpose of their present responses to climate change. The environmental ideas and practices of foreign countries play a similar role as ambiguous sources of inspiration for low-carbon life in Dongping Lane. Seen as advanced and wasteful at the same time when compared with their own situation, stories of the consumer practices of foreign countries remind campaigners that climate change mitigation is deeply connected with both the social and material worlds of those who seek to engage in it.

Campaigners find themselves caught between particularism and universalism as they attempt to make sense of low-carbon life by comparing themselves with distant others as well as with the people around them. On the one hand, some people in the community are not viewed by campaigners as potential participants because they lack either the knowledge or the time that it takes. Migrants are excluded because of their perceived lack of knowledge and sense of belonging, and younger people are excused because of their perceived lack of free time. In this sense the community of campaigning that has been established works within the boundaries of the party-state-sponsored project of community building, which in practice often only reaches retired residents. On the other hand, the campaigners talk about climate change mitigation as the responsibility of all of mankind and draw on examples from around the world when discussing low-carbon life. Furthermore expressions of sympathy for distant or even imaginary others may reflect an emerging sense of global community which may prompt them to take responsibility for climate change mitigation.

Dividing people along lines of age, gender and geographical origin, the campaign participants sort the population of Dongping Lane into those they see as probable insiders and probable outsiders of low-carbon life. By viewing low-carbon life as a series of activities that are suitable to older people because they have free time to engage in them, the campaigners place themselves in an implied opposition to people whom they consider too busy to participate. The idea of free time as the crucial resource for campaigners circumscribes the community of campaigners by excusing younger people for not taking part as they are seen as too busy with work and with raising children. The community officials reach out to the older part of the population and conceive of the younger people as

practically out of reach of the kinds of community campaigning they are engaged in. Low-carbon life in Dongping Lane emerges as a particular, localized engagement with global climate change rather than one framed primarily around universal claims. It does not emerge as a comprehensive alternative to mainstream consumerism for the whole population, but rather as a series of hobby-like activities that retired people can take up in their free time for enjoyment and for the sake of connecting their lives in meaningful with one of the greatest challenges of our era. In the campaign in Dongping Lane, low-carbon life emerges as an unspectacular yet globally oriented way of being human in times of anthropogenic climate change.

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Summary

The thesis is an ethnographic description of a climate change mitigation campaign among retirees in the urban residential community Dongping Lane in central Hangzhou, and an examination of local understandings of connections between everyday life in the community and global climate change. Conceived under the heading low-carbon life, the campaign brings together community officials and retired residents who volunteer to participate.

Based on eight months of fieldwork, the ethnography takes a series of proposed changes to everyday life consumer practices, introduced by the campaign organizers, as a point of departure for an examination of what happens when a requirement to save energy and resources, as a response to global climate change, encounters local ways of knowing the world.

Developed through meetings, workshops, competitions and the promotion of exemplary individuals, the campaign is conceived as part of wider state-sponsored efforts to foster civilized behavior and a sense of belonging to the residential community among urban citizens in China. The campaigners connect unspectacular everyday consumer practices with climate change and citizenship by showing that among them, making contributions to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is becoming part of what it means to be a good citizen.

When the campaigners in Dongping Lane talk about low-carbon life, they rarely talk explicitly about global climate change. Instead they connect their low-carbon life practices with concerns over health, comfort and convenience. Conceived as pleasurable, easy to approach, and good for the body, low-carbon life comes to be seen as a series of hobby-like activities that residents can engage in as part of their quests for good and meaningful lives in old age.

Campaigners engage in trans-historical and cross-cultural comparisons, contrasting their campaign efforts with the mass-mobilization campaigns of the Mao era as well as with approaches to consumption and climate change in other places and among other groups of people. Through these comparisons they make sense of their own present engagements and of their place in the world.

Focusing on the various ways in which campaigners seek to further their understanding of low-carbon life, the thesis examines how they use comparisons, connections, examples and evaluations as means of making the climate change mitigation practices of the campaign sensible and meaningful to their particular ways of knowing the world.

Resume

Denne afhandling er en etnografisk beskrivelse af en klimakampagne blandt pensionister i boligkvarteret Dongpingxiang i det centrale Hangzhou, og en undersøgelse af lokale forståelser af forbindelserne mellem hverdagslivet i kvarteret og globale klimaforandringer. Kampagnen er udtænkt under overskriften "det CO₂-lette liv", og forener kvarterets embedsfolk og de pensionerede beboere som melder sig frivilligt.

På baggrund af otte måneders feltarbejde tager etnografien udgangspunkt i en række forslag til ændringer i hverdagslivets forbrugspraksisser, introduceret af kampagnens organisatorer, for en undersøgelse af hvad der sker når et krav om at spare på energi og ressourcer, som svar på global klimaforandring, møder lokale måder at forstå verden på.

Kampagnen er udviklet gennem møder, workshops, konkurrencer og promovning af eksemplariske individer og udtænkt som en del af bredere statsstøttede forsøg på at fremme civiliseret adfærd og følelsen af at høre til sit lokale boligkvarter blandt byboere i Kina. Kampagnedeltagerne forbinder hverdagslivets uspektakulære forbrugerpraksisser med klimaforandring og medborgerskab ved at vise at det at bidrage til reduktioner i udledningen af drivhusgasser blandt dem er ved at blive en del af hvad det vil sige at være en god medborger.

Når deltagerne i kampagnen i Dongpingxiang taler om det CO₂-lette liv, taler de sjældent eksplicit om globale klimaforandringer. I stedet forbinder de deres CO₂-lette praksisser med bekymringer vedrørende helbred, komfort og bekvemmelighed. Det CO₂-lette liv er tænkt som behageligt, let at gå til, og godt for kroppen, og det bliver set som en række hobby-lignende aktiviteter, som beboerne kan deltage i som led i deres søgen efter gode og meningsfulde måder at leve på i alderdommen.

Kampagnedeltagerne udøver transhistoriske og tværkulturelle sammenligninger, idet de kontrasterer deres egen kampagneindsats med Mao-periodens massemobiliseringskampagner såvel som med måderne hvorpå man går til forbrug og klimaforandring andre steder og blandet andre sociale grupper. Gennem disse sammenligninger giver de mening til deres egen indsats og plads i verden.

Med fokus på de forskellige måder hvorpå kampagnedeltagerne søger at udbygge deres forståelse af det CO₂-lette liv, undersøger afhandlingen hvordan de bruger sammenligninger, forbindelser, eksempler og vurderinger til at fremstille kampagnens klimapraksisser som fornuftige og meningsfulde i forhold til deres specifikke måder at forstå verden på.