

Mutual Observation and Understanding in “Interpersonal Relationships”: In-depth Interview Report on the Public Life of Beijing in 2015

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Abstract—In order to know better about the common understanding of 30 interviewees about public life, this article analyses the text of the in-depth interview report on the public civilization of Beijing in 2015 by using word frequency analysis technique, and clears up the problems that the 30 interviewees concern the most, including subject and group, attitudes towards public life, the most-concerned public behaviors, and exterior and interior factors with the strongest influence to public civilization, etc. According to these analysis results, this article comes up with the idea that the public life involving interpersonal relationships bears certain responsibility that requires people to “mutual observation” with “understanding”. Only in this way can “you and I in public space” who are isolated like individual atoms become “we in public life” in the sense of community.

Index Terms—Interpersonal relationships, public civilization, word frequency analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

Openness and publicity are the basic features of public life as life space [1]. Arendt explained openness and “publicity” as a life space – it includes de-privatization and de-individualization, exists among common owners, and relates and separates people at the same time. It gathers us together and yet prevents us falling over each other. [2] It belongs to everyone who steps into public life through public space – but not exclusively.

We meet in public space and then separate. Such encounters evoke everyone’s interior public civilization, and then externalize it into the intersection of individual public behaviors. Each public civilization situation has already contained three elements: interior civilization, exterior public behavior, and psychological response in between [3]. However, we cannot infer others’ civilization by certain public behavior of the encounter since exterior behavior could either originate from one’s civilization or arise from the “reminding” of norms, commands or red banners. It’s not rare for people to pretend to be convinced. But the real-time

psychological response stirred by occasional situation is not as orderly as public civilized behaviors. Being instinct and habitual without any hesitation, it has a unique state bound with individual life that reflects civilization level truly and thoroughly.

In order to know better about people’s individual psychological orientation in public life, namely people’s psychological response to civilized or uncivilized phenomena in public life, Beijing public civilized behavior survey of 2015 added structuralized interview, taking simplified “2014 – 2015 Questionnaire Survey of the Civilization Level of Beijing Citizens” as the interviewing questionnaire, so as to explore people’s occasional real-time psychological response in public life. Taking the record of this interview as the target, this article adopts certain data mining techniques to analyse the interview data quantitatively, hoping to reveal the common psychological features of interviewees while coping with civilized behaviors and uncivilized behaviors in public life.

II. BASIC INFORMATION OF INTERVIEWEES

30 interviewees in total accept this interview conducted by 4 PhD candidates in sociology and 1 PhD in sociology respectively. Selected on the principle of random and convenience, the interviewees comprises 14 males and 16 females. Demographic data including vocations, ages and education backgrounds are shown in Fig. 1.

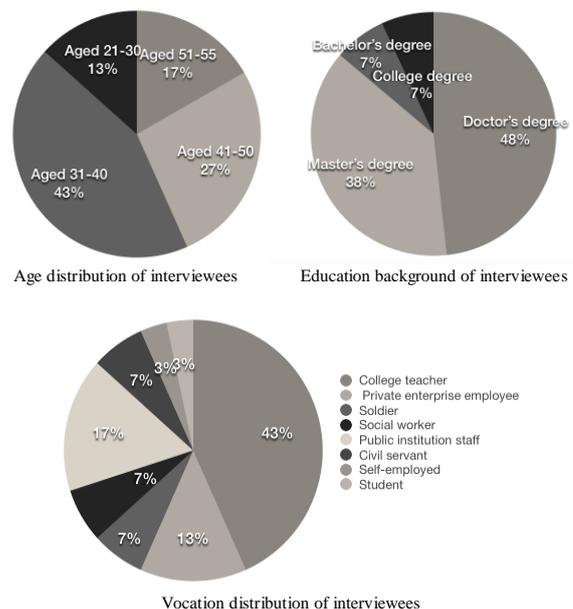


Fig. 1. Basic information of interviewees.

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III. DATA ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW TEXT

A. Analysis Tool and Method

Word frequency analysis, one of data mining methods, aims to count up and analyse the frequencies of important words appeared in the main body of a document. This research adopts word frequency analysis to analyse the text of the interview, aiming to get to know the common concerns and emotional tendencies of interviewees. Using a word frequency analysis tool developed on the basis of SCWS word segmentation engine, Excel word frequency analysis tool can conduct rapid semantic word segmentation to the Chinese and English textual contents in text documents, count up the frequencies of certain words, and make TF-IDF ranking [4]. Taking the textual records of the answers of 30 interviewees (interviewers' query and questions are not included) as analysis target, this research separately inputs them into Excel word frequency analysis tool in two means – either considering the part of speech or not, and meanwhile artificially filters two types of output tables according to the analysis target. Finally a word frequency table sorted by TF-IDF is generated.

B. Data Analysis Result

1) Subject consciousness of interviewees in public life

The frequencies of words indicating “myself” and “others” among top 50 words according to TF-IDF ranking is shown in Table I.

TABLE I: FREQUENCIES OF WORDS INDICATING “MYSELF” AND “OTHERS” (TOP 50 WORDS ACCORDING TO TF-IDF RANKING)

Ranking	Word	Word Frequency
1	myself	343
2	others	246
3	they	172
4	I will	142
5	everybody	125
6	we	104
7	someone	93
8	personally	59
9	other people	57

As we can see from Table I, words indicating subject like “myself” and “I” (including “I will”, “we”, “everybody”, “personally” and other bold words in Table I) have the highest frequencies, suggesting that Beijing citizens have a strong sense of subject in public civilized behavior. It implies the independent consciousness of people's behaviors, and reveals the independence of public civilization. That serves as an interior factor of the continuous improvement of Beijing citizens' public civilization level. Following them are words indicating others like “others” and “other people” (including “they”, “someone” and other words that are not bold), suggesting that interviewees also pay close attention to “others” in the same public space and have obvious requirements to others in public civilization.

2) The groups that interviewees concern the most in public life

Word frequency analysis also brings out the groups that interviewees concern the most in public life. The statistics of groups that interviewees mention the most frequently are

shown in Table II. We can see that interviewees concern the most about children and the aged, suggesting that Beijing citizens, as the subject of public civilization behaviors, pay special attention to children and the aged. This reveals their humanistic compassion facing the destiny – once there is birth, there are children and the aged.

TABLE II: FREQUENCIES OF WORDS INDICATING GROUPS

Type	Word	Word Frequency	Total Word Frequency
The aged	the aged	75	89
	old people	14	
Children	child	48	105
	kid	39	
	little one	18	
Other groups	friend	38	145
	Chinese	32	
	young man	25	
	pedestrian	21	
	colleague	15	
	driver	14	

3) Interviewees' attitudes in public life

TABLE III: FREQUENCIES OF WORDS INDICATING ATTITUDES

Ranking	Word	Word Frequency
1	disgusted	361
2	regret	232
3	should	209
4	understand	199
5	maybe	199
6	gratified	36
7	(because of) emergency	24
8	delighted	21

Frequencies of words indicating attitudes are shown in Table III. All the 8 words indicating attitudes can be simplified as choices included in “regret – gratified” or “understand – disgusted”, and interviewees also develop close concepts according to their own habits of expressing during the interview. For example, “understand” evolves into three variable attitudes – “should”, “maybe” and “because of emergency”, and “gratified” evolves into “delighted”. Although “disgusted” appears most frequently among all the words indicating attitudes, words indicating understanding also have relatively high frequencies, suggesting interviewees' tolerance to Beijing citizens' public civilization. Besides, “regret” about one's own uncivilized behaviors and delight feeling brought by civilized behaviors both suggest their active attitudes towards self-discipline.

4) Public behaviors interviewees concern the most

TABLE IV: FREQUENCIES OF WORDS INDICATING PUBLIC BEHAVIORS

Type	Word	Word Frequency
Uncivilized behavior	run the red light*	63
	loud	50
	talk	37
	late	36
	noisy	26
	destroy	25
	drop litter*	24
	kick up a fuss	22
	smoke	17
	doodle	13
	roughhouse	12
	crowd	11
	jump the queue	7

Civilized behavior	overtake	6
	offer seat	57
	give precedence	29
	stop	21
	queue up	20
wait for the green light*	6	
Neutral behavior	drive	43

Interviewees concern the most about the uncivilized behaviors in public places, the word frequencies of which are far higher than civilized behaviors. Among all the behaviors in public places, four behaviors that interviewees concern the most are “run the red light”, “offer seat”, “loud” and “drive” in descending order. The word frequency of “drive” reaches 43, suggesting this behavior has gained more public concern due to the increase in the number of private cars, and thus has been considered as a public behavior in the eyes of interviewees. Correspondingly, the “overtake” behavior of drivers has also become a matter of concern.

It’s worth noting that behaviors not mentioned in the questionnaire, including “smoke” (17 times), “jump the queue” (7 times), and “overtake” (6 times), also appear in the interview. What’s more, they even have word frequencies equal to or higher than certain civilized behaviors such as “wait for the green light” (6 times).

5) Interior factors affecting public life that interviewees concern the most

Keyword that is mentioned the most frequently is “recognition”, followed by four factors – “quality/literacy”, “psychological state”, “habit” and “morality”. Although interviewees mention “behavior” for 164 times, individual interior stabilizers including “quality” and “morality” (383 times in total) are mentioned far more frequently than “behavior” (164 times). It indicates that interviewees consider recognition as one of the important interior factors in public civilization, and they believe individual interior factors are more important than exterior behaviors.

6) Exterior factors that interviews concern the most

TABLE V: FREQUENCIES OF WORDS INDICATING EXTERIOR FACTORS

Ranking	Word	Word Frequency
1	subway	68
2	environment	62
3	society	53
4	road	52
5	occasion	50
6	place	44
7	community	37
8	city	25
9	village	23
10	public place	22
11	space	17
12	culture	17
13	elevator	16
14	park	14
15	corridor	9

From Table V we can see that words indicating exterior factors are mainly divided into two categories – specific words indicating places and locations, such as “subway”, “road” and “community”, and abstract words indicating exterior factors that affect public civilization, such as “society” and “culture”. The former ones suggest subways, roads and communities are the major occasions of

interviewees’ public life. They have explicit public consciousness about these occasions. While the latter ones suggest interviewees believe factors including “society”, “culture”, “space” and “occasion” have certain influence to public civilization.

IV. DISCUSSION: “MUTUAL OBSERVATION” BASED ON “UNDERSTANDING” HELPS BUILD PUBLIC CIVILIZED LIFE

A. Mutual Observation in Public Life Burdened with Responsibility

Just as mentioned above, interviewees in public life concern not only their own subject behaviors, but others’ words and deeds in public space. Judging from interview records, this kind of concern bears two intentions: one is to know how others’ words and deeds affect himself/herself or another person; the other is to know others’ reaction to his/her words and deeds, which serves as a standard to decide whether his/her words and deeds are proper. The former one is much more common. In everyday life, interviewees not only observe others’ bad habits such as spitting and dropping litters regardless of occasions, but criticize bad behaviors such as overtaking and neglecting the safety of pedestrians while driving. Although the latter one is not as common as the former one, it also reveals interviewees’ public civilization level through the psychological activities it causes. For example, reflecting on the attitude of the one who he/she offers seat to, the interviewee attributes it to that person’s low quality rather than his/her “improper” offer. Also there are cases that bear both intentions. For example, seeing another person offer seat to an old man, the interviewee feels gratified but ashamed. It’s lovely to see someone offer seat, but also shameful not being the one who does it.

Due to the scarcity of current methods, we cannot count up the frequencies of the above two intentions through software. Nevertheless, whatever the intention is, all kinds of “mutual observation”, including others’ words and deeds **in the eyes** of ours, our words and deeds **in the eyes** of others, who we are **in the eyes** of others as we **see**, and who they are **in the eyes** of ours as we **see**, are in “an explicit space”, showing “the trust in words and deeds as a kind of common life style”. And the true meaning of “mutual observation” still lies in the assurance of the authenticity of this very world involving ourselves [5]. That’s how the burden of responsibility in public life is revealed. From this kind of common life, namely words and deeds, we get to know we are responsible for each other. Thus an abstract concept of public life falls on “mutual observation” of “interpersonal relationships”, and visualizes as the seeing of others’ words and deeds in public space as well as the seeing of the influence of our words and deeds on others. Only by “seeing” or having the consciousness of “seeing” first can we combine “private” “individuality” with “public” “interpersonal relationships”. When reaching deep into “mutual observation”, “individuality” will remind us of the importance of “introspection”. That’s the very responsibility that “individuality” takes in “mutual observation” of “interpersonal relationships”. Without “mutual observation”, we are inclined to submit to our “private” desires in an

“individual” state, and “fall over each other” unconsciously

B. Understanding Extends the Shared Public Space

Nevertheless, we need to further figure out what kind of purpose “mutual observation” carries along the way. There are two extreme expressions indicating interviewees’ attitudes towards public behaviors: “disgusted” and “gratified”. The word “disgusted”, indicating disapproval to uncivilized behaviors, appears the most frequently (361 times), while “gratified” and “delighted”, two words indicating approval to civilized behaviors, appear 57 times in total. Between the two extremes, we can see that the word “understand”, indicating acceptance to certain pardonable uncivilized behaviors, appears 199 times. Being a “neutral” concept, “understanding” refers to the tolerance and consideration of others. It features obvious mildness. In the context of citizens’ public civilized behaviors, interviewers and interviewees focus on uncivilized behaviors. Once combined with interview records, the special function of “understanding” stands out markedly. For example, every interviewee objects and hates the uncivilized behavior of “running the red light”, but still they can “understand” it if there’s an “emergency”. Besides, some interviewees say they can “understand” people who take care of themselves or escape first in emergency. It is clearly that “understanding” is a buffer that eases “disgusted” feeling and avoids interpersonal conflict in public space.

Except for the function in interpersonal aspect, using its own “soft” and “mild” strength, “understanding” also restores the humanistic space in public life by wrestling with “hard” laws and systems. In this interview, the word “law” only appears 5 times, the word “order” appears 35 times and the word “rule” 29 times. It means that interviewees value “soft” standard more than “hard” law as a public life factor. If the public life is totally governed by exemplary laws and systems, then “mutual observation” will become “fight”, leaving no public space for people to relax. The original shared common life will be filled with monitoring and opposition. Artificial hard-and-fast laws or systems will force “we in public space” to break into “others and I in public space”. Thus the original community will split into lonely atoms scattering all around. However, the world we share reveals explicitly that “others” and “I” are in the same community. So when the public space opens arms, everyone travels through it, and experiences “understanding”, namely empathy. In this way, “others and I” grow together into “we”, not on the contrary way.

V. CONCLUSION

Problems arise when a society is used to solving all the issues of the public domain with systems. As the saying goes, “rules are dead, but men are alive.” To smart and flexible people, systems without the same strong punishing power as laws, no matter how strict they may look, can be avoided,

and even be taken advantage of. In that case, the realization of public civilization construction can only rely on people’s change deep inside. But how can we change people deep inside? If a society is used to discussing on politics about public life by criticism and preach, those occasional “interpersonal relationships” will also be restricted. When censure drives understanding away and system replaces discussion, our hearts are inevitably constrained due to the lack of softness brought by understanding. Therefore “mutual observation” in public space turns out to be “supervision”, and conflicts appear more and more frequently. For example, sometimes certain girl is slapped just because she doesn’t offer her seat, and sometimes people even fight against each other only for a seat. Such incidents are not rare nowadays. Civilization construction is meant to make our life better. Why do these civilized requirements result in so many uncivilized and even violent behaviors? After all, it’s the recognition frame of “mutual observation” to blame since it offers only cold and inflexible systems, not soft understanding that really matters. In fact, only by “mutual observation” based on understanding can we extend the space of public life. Thus “you and I” living in the space, who were once unrelated with each other, become “we in public life” through encounters featuring empathy and tolerance. In this way, “we” become the most meaningful and valuable factors in public civilization construction.

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