



Chapter 23

Leisurely Middle-Class Lifestyle

What truly constitutes the best way of living for an individual? It's quite interesting. Ancient Chinese wisdom goes, "With wealth woven around the waist, ride a crane to Yangzhou." This saying carries a lot of meaning. "Wealth woven around the waist" means having endless money. So why not ride a horse, take a car, or even fly in a private plane? That's because only immortals can ride cranes, ultimately heading to Yangzhou, which is renowned for its beauties and cuisine. With unlimited money and divine health, one would naturally go to Yangzhou to enjoy a leisurely life.

Western culture also has its way of describing the enjoyment of life. In one tale, two people are chatting, and one says:

"You're one lucky fellow, living every day surrounded by fine wine, beautiful women, and music. If you had to give

up one, what would it be?"

"That's impossible! Without any one of them, life would be dull."

"This is a hypothetical question; you must answer."

"Then it would have to be the music."

"What about fine wine and beautiful women? If you had to give up one?"

"Then that would depend on their age."

I started living my own beautiful life after I turned seventy. At this age, talking about how to enjoy beautiful women is a bit pretentious. I'm only somewhat familiar with fine wine, and unless I'm drinking someone else's, I rarely spend money on wines myself. Therefore, I don't really understand the issues of "vintage." The best alcohol I've ever had was around 1981, when I visited San Diego at the southernmost tip of California. A friend who owned a Chinese restaurant in town not only drove us to nearby Mexican cities but also gifted me two large bottles of

Maotai from the mainland. I'm not exaggerating; the moment a bottle of Maotai was opened, the fragrance filled the air. When poured into small cups, it truly filled the room with an aroma.

I heard an anecdote, possibly concocted by admirers of Zhou Enlai: When Nixon and Kissinger visited Beijing, Zhou hosted a state banquet with Maotai served. They placed the bottle in an ice bucket, Soviet vodka style. The waiters filled glasses for the esteemed guests and Premier Zhou. Zhou proposed a toast and finished his glass in one go, and so did Nixon and Kissinger. Maotai's alcohol content exceeds 50%, but it tastes very mild. The Americans had never heard of Maotai before. As the glasses kept getting refilled, up to six or seven, Zhou kept company. Zhou was known for his drinking capacity. The story ends with Nixon and Kissinger returning to their hotel hammered, requesting extra Maotai for their trip back to the U.S.

This story either praises Zhou or ruins Maotai, as its demand spiked afterward. Back then, the Communists didn't understand the importance of branding. Building a brand takes decades, even centuries, but destroying one is easy. After the price of Maotai soared, demand still outstripped supply. I suspect the original factory couldn't keep up, leading to inadequately aged or subpar products being sold. After 1991, I bought Maotai in the U.S.; it shouldn't have been fake, but the quality had drastically declined. Many once superb baijiu like Wuliangye and Yanghe Daqu no longer seemed as delightful.

In recent years in Beijing, I've been drinking "Erguotou," bought from the underground level of Dong'An Market on Wangfujing Street. While other little stores sell Erguotou for twelve yuan a bottle, it costs forty in Dong'An Market. Why am I saying all this? As a middle-class individual ("xiaozhi" or "petty bourgeoisie"), I've heard a lot about fake alcohol in the mainland. It's crucial to be prudent, the first lesson

for petty bourgeoisie.

In Taiwan, initially, drinking Johnnie Walker felt very satisfactory. In recent years, Chivas has become popular, so I started drinking it as well. Following trends is also a petty bourgeoisie mentality. Occasionally, reports on TV show fake alcohol being uncovered in Taiwan. Hence, I'm extra cautious when purchasing alcohol. Returning from abroad, I never forget to buy duty-free tobacco and alcohol, often sneaking an extra bottle past customs. When I need to buy liquor, I order from a foreign liquor chain store, delivering by the box right to my door.

From my drinking habits alone, it's evident I'm not naturally aristocratic. Nowadays, the proletariat's hearty cheers are also gone. But after seventy, I'm finally enjoying a petty bourgeoisie lifestyle. This involves more than just drinking, playing mahjong, or watching TV drama series. It's a fundamental mindset. Taiwan's petty bourgeoisie is rising;

from our home's balcony view, you can see the many makeshift grills everyone has added to their balconies. Each one trying to claim a bit of sky space, whether just to place a few flower pots feels like they've profited. During fires, victims trapped behind the grills are often seen in Taiwan. Seoul has no such grills despite hosting the Olympics. Did they never face theft?

Parking in narrow lanes in Taipei is notorious. Despite having three nearby underground parking lots, offering hourly rates during the day and monthly rates at night at controllable prices, petty bourgeoisie care to spend hundreds of thousands on luxury cars but balk at paying for parking. Post-work, you often see cars circling lanes, looking for free spots, which they find preferable to parking illicitly on yellow lines. They, like urban rodents, circle endlessly.

Petty bourgeoisie are extremely selfish. They're masters at self-preservation. Regardless of how adverse the

circumstances, they can keep their decorum, especially under political strain. A past article cited statistical data, showing all major revolutionaries historically hailed from nobility or the proletariat, never from the petty bourgeoisie. There's no need to revolt; if the situation turns unfavorable, they just bow deeper to the elite and squeeze the working class harder, living comfortably. To them, "truth" or "justice" is unnecessary; profit is their truth and justice. Capitalist societies never use the term "petty bourgeoisie"; instead, they refer to "middle class" and praise it as the stabilizer of society. Indeed, with no one daring to revolt, society remains stable, though at the expense of the weak and poor.

From the example earlier about my alcohol purchases, you can clearly see that my mindset aligns 100% with that of the petty bourgeoisie. It doesn't stop there; if I can take advantage of someone else, it's even more worthwhile.

Here's another example of my behavior as petty bourgeois:

in America, it's hard to gather a mahjong group, so I play computer games online and also play bridge online.

Through these activities, I discovered an online casino that could be downloaded entirely. It had all sorts of slot machines, blackjack, baccarat, and dice games. When I found out I could play "for fun," I was thrilled. The casino gave me 5,000 units of virtual chips, and at my peak, I had more than 70,000 units. The casino repeatedly reminded me to try playing for real money, but I was convinced that if I gambled for real, they wouldn't give me such good hands. I wouldn't fall for that.

A few years ago, there was a popular autograph-style print in Taipei called "Don't Get Angry," which included phrases like: "He gets angry, you don't; if you get sick from anger, no one will substitute for you." This is also a representation of the petty bourgeoisie mindset. There is too much inequality in the world, and protecting one's health is the top priority for the petty bourgeoisie. Getting angry at

others and harming oneself isn't worthwhile. According to the news, a drunken youth in Taiwan wandered the streets hitting the elderly, the weak, women, and children with his motorcycle lock, causing everyone to scatter. However, he completely ignored the burly, able-bodied men walking around leisurely. This youth wasn't carrying a gun; wasn't there a single hero like those from "The Water Margin" who would stand up? Should one take action or not? Here's the thing; all 108 heroes from "The Water Margin" came from the proletariat or the aristocracy. Petty bourgeoisie would never participate in any dangerous revolutionary action.

As the saying goes, "A tiger at the end of its days eats meat, and a dog at the end of its days eats feces." I only began learning to be a petty bourgeoisie after seventy, so old habits die hard, sometimes falling back into proletariat tendencies.

Time flies, and it's already March 2003. March 20, 2004 is

significant for us in Taiwan as it's the presidential election day. Meanwhile, March 20, 2003, is vital for Americans as their troops entered Baghdad's capital of Iraq. At that time, I was staying at my daughter's home in San Francisco.

Reflecting on this war, the U.S. ignored the United Nations and invaded Iraq, smoothly occupying the entire country in less than twenty days. The U.S. military suffered minimal losses, mostly from plane crashes or accidents. Despite finding no nuclear, chemical weapons or so-called "weapons of mass destruction," and only adding Saddam Hussein to their captives, the U.S. should have been satisfied, right? But actually, they weren't.

On Monday, May 26, at noon, I turned on the TV and switched to a local station in San Francisco, witnessing a LIVE broadcast of Memorial Day commemorations. An annual national holiday on the last Monday of May, it honors military personnel who died in service. During the broadcast, a woman holding her child tearfully spoke about

her husband dying in Iraq, explaining her profound pain and hatred for Saddam. The camera even captured a man wiping his tears, moved by the woman's words. For no clear reason, I felt a sudden surge of anger, snapped off the TV, and told my daughter that I wanted to return to Taiwan. Despite frequent advice not to get angry and to protect my health, encountering such injustices in the world triggers my old habits, which I can't withstand!

What was broadcast just now? Precisely defining it, it's called "instigating patriotism." Similar programs frequently appeared on China Central Television's channel four.

"Patriotism" is inherently unhealthy, as moralists and religious scholars have long warned us. Human emotions fall on a spectrum from good to evil, where compassion is good, and hatred is evil. Patriotism is a narrow, hate-filled emotion. My hatred for Japan in my youth wasn't self-generated but incited through education. Stirring patriotism is far easier and more effective than advocating for truth

and justice, and it works immediately.

Didn't Americans say, "There's no such thing as a free lunch"? Occupying Iraq can be seen as a free lunch for America. They seized territory, took over oil fields, monopolized trade, and ultimately captured Saddam. Isn't that a free meal? Is this worth such emotional displays and patriotic enthusiasm and emphasizing the enemy's hatred?

In countries like Palestine, which lack true sovereignty, or Israel, surrounded by hostile Muslim nations, promoting patriotism is somewhat understandable. Even China's "century of humiliation" or Taiwan's push for independence partly justifies the need. But America? What grievances does historically unmatched hegemon America have? What force could genuinely oppress America?

America differs from its close allies like the U.K. and Japan, which are nation-states. America is a melting pot. Solving

terrorism by fostering hatred towards fellow global villagers
is incredibly foolish. It requires wisdom.

Thus, it has ruined my leisurely petty bourgeoisie days.