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Promoting Democratic Citizenship Among Rural Women: A Chinese NGO's Two Models

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Abstract

A Beijing-based non-governmental organization (NGO) strives to empower rural Chinese women and migrant girls by increasing their awareness of constitutional rights and promoting their capacities to exercise their civil and political rights. This article reports the NGO leaders' perceptions of the goals, strategies, and challenges in their citizenship endeavor, and analyzes their educational activities in theoretical and cultural contexts. By reporting a tension between the two founding leaders and unpacking the different approaches they take to engaging rural women, we demonstrate how the conceptualization of human rights education in the rural Chinese context is influenced by three approaches to human rights—the Confucian emphasis of rites, the Western tradition of emphasizing law, and the "human functional capacities" approach—and how the implementation process is constrained by China's political framework, the social conditions of rural women, and the NGO leaders' vantage points.

Keywords: Human Rights Education, "human functional capacities," citizenship education

The decade of 1995-2004 was declared as the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education (HRE). The United Nations (UN) General Assembly (1994) called upon governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), professional associations, and all other sectors of civil society to concentrate their efforts on promoting HRE for the purpose of building a universal culture in which "people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring respect in all societies" (UN Resolution 49/184). The UN General Assembly (1996) defines HRE as education, training, and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights. HRE accomplishes this by sharing knowledge, imparting skills, and molding attitudes directed towards: (a) the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; (b) the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity; (c) the promotion of understanding,

tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples, and racial, national, ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups; (d) the enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law; and (e) the furtherance of UN activities for the maintenance of peace.

When this global definition is implemented in national and local contexts, HRE is often used as an umbrella term by NGOs to include various forms of peace, tolerance, or citizenship education (Mihr, 2009). HRE also involves different content and strategies when targeting different populations and is adapted to meet local needs (Suárez, 2007; Tibbitts, 2002). For example, Tibbitts (2002) identifies three models of HRE: the *Values and Awareness Model*, which aims to increase the general public's awareness of human rights issues and influence the change of public values; the *Accountability Model*, which focuses on fostering and enhancing leadership and alliance development among professionals such as lawyers, journalists, and human rights advocates who play institutional roles of guaranteeing human rights; and the *Transformational Model*, which focuses on helping members of vulnerable groups through a process of healing and empowering. Underlying these different HRE approaches are different ideological orientations: HRE for global citizenship promotes values and fosters the development of skills along the line of cosmopolitanism, HRE for coexistence addresses inter-group conflict by reframing historical understandings of conflicts and guiding inter-group interactions, and HRE for transformative action addresses the problem of asymmetries in power relations by fostering a sense of agency and solidarity (Bajaj, 2011).

Drawing on empirical evidence from China, this article attempts to provide another perspective to the discourse of what HRE is and what it does in local contexts. We do this by providing an in-depth report of a case study investigating how the leaders and staff members of a Chinese NGO, the Cultural Development Center of Rural Women (CDCRW), perceived its goals, strategies, and challenges in providing HRE to rural women and migrant girls. Specifically, we describe a tension between the two founding leaders and analyze the conceptual and contextual complexities involved in defining and implementing HRE in local contexts, as reflected by the leaders' disagreements on the goals and strategies of providing HRE to rural Chinese women. In particular, we analyze how their programs integrate three conceptual approaches to the promotion of human rights: the Confucian emphasis of rites (norms of human conduct), the Western tradition of emphasizing law, and the "human functional capacities" approach developed by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000). We also analyze how the process of providing HRE in rural Chinese context is shaped by the constraints of China's political framework, the social conditions of rural women, and the NGO leaders' perspectives of HRE.

In addition to using the term HRE, we also use the term *citizenship education* when reporting and analyzing the CDCRW's activities. We choose to use the two terms interchangeably for both theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, the two concepts are highly contested and their relationship is a topic under heated debate in recent scholarship (for reviews, see Kiwan, 2012). Our position is in line with the argument that the concept of human rights implies a universal aspiration and the concept of citizenship implies rights accorded to members of a political community. At the level of practice, the universal ideal of human rights is central to citizenship education, and both terms are constructed differently in local contexts. Based on this theoretical

assumption, we decide not to use one term or the other, but to take an empirical approach to defining and using both terms. As researchers, we believe the CDCRW's programs fit the UN definition of HRE. As our report of its activities will show, the programs have components belonging to the Accountability and Transformational models (Tibbitts, 2002) and are largely guided by the ideology of transformative action (Bajaj, 2011). Also, we want to respect the CDCRW leaders' own decision to use the term "citizenship education" to describe their programs, particularly since the term "human rights" is politically sensitive in China.

It is important to clarify that it is not our intention to evaluate the effects of CDCRW's programs in this paper. Instead, we focus on reporting the leaders' perspectives of their goals and strategies, and the challenges of their activities in local communities. We then examine these issues in theoretical and cultural contexts by drawing on two analytical frameworks: the *rite-right-capacity* framework and the *narrative-positioning-identity-efficacy* framework. First, we examine the leaders' goals from the perspectives of three different approaches to human rights: the Confucian tradition of emphasizing rites, the Western tradition of emphasizing legal rights, and the "human functional capacities" approach. This analysis aims to unpack *what* the CDCRW does and *why*. Next, we examine their strategies using Haste's (2004, 2006, 2010) four-element framework of citizenship construction: identity, narratives, positioning, and efficacy. This analysis aims to shed light on *how* the CDCRW tries to achieve its educational goals and *why*.

In the following sections, we first review the social and political context of the CDCRW's citizenship activities, particularly the marginalization of rural Chinese women and Chinese NGOs' legal status. We also review literature on how citizenship is defined in recent Chinese history, Chinese intellectuals' endeavors to promote citizenship in rural China, and the current agenda of government-directed citizenship programs. We then introduce the two theoretical frameworks and our methods of data collection and analysis. Next, we present our findings by introducing the CDCRW's two models side by side, providing details of the two leaders' and their staff members' perceptions of the goals, strategies, and challenges in the programs. We then discuss the goals, strategies, and challenges in the light of the two analytical frameworks mentioned above.

Social and Political Context of CDCRW's Citizenship Activities

Rural Chinese Women's Marginalization

China today is still a party-state. There is not an independent judiciary, nor an elected legislature. Without these institutional guarantors of citizenship individual civil and political rights, though recognized by the Chinese Constitution, are not fully protected by laws in reality. The "hukou" (household registration) system institutionally discriminates against rural residents and migrant workers by restricting their access to state-sponsored benefits available to city residents (Chan & Buckingham, 2008; Solinger, 1999). Rural women are the most marginalized group of all. Their situation raised tremendous concerns when China made its suicide data available for international comparison in the late 1980s. China accounts for 21% of the world population, but its suicide rate accounts for 43.6% of that of the world, and for 55.8% among female suicides (Pearson, Phillips,

He, & Ji, 2002). Young rural women between the ages of 15 and 34 are the most likely to commit suicide (Murray & Lopez, 1996). The surprisingly high suicide rate among rural women has been attributed to the traditional patriarchal structure that supports men's authority over women, economic stress, family conflicts, and ready access to highly lethal pesticides (Pearson et al., 2002).

In addition, lack of education makes rural girls and women vulnerable. Despite successes in combating illiteracy in the 1950s-60s, and the Compulsory Education Law passed in 1986, educational decentralization during the 1980s and early 1990s increased private costs for schooling (Hannum, 2003). School dropout rates among rural girls were high due to financial difficulties, gender inequality, and appeal of migrant work in cities. Of the three million school dropouts, 76% were girls (Pearson et al., 2002). In 1996, women accounted for 72% of the 165 million illiterates in China (Rong & Shi, 2001). In poor areas such as Guizhou, Gansu, and Qinghai provinces, more than half of the female population was illiterate (Rong & Shi, 2001).

The Status of NGOs

The last 20 years have seen an explosive growth of NGOs involved in promoting social and economic justice (Baum & Zhang, 2007; Young, 2009; Zhang & Baum, 2004). For Chinese NGOs, the political environment in post-reform China is a "semi-authoritarian" one that is restrictive and conducive at the same time (Ho & Edmonds, 2008). Ho and Edmonds (2008) point out, on the one hand, there is a formal structure that imposes stringent state control over NGOs' activities. An NGO must have a government or Party sponsor in order to register with the Civil Affairs authorities for legal status. Relying on the Party-state for legitimacy, NGOs cautiously avoid any hint of organized opposition against the Party-state by adopting non-confrontational strategies. On the other hand, economic reforms and administrative decentralization have resulted in fragmented state authority below the very top of the system (Lieberthal, 1992). As state control over agencies weakened, civic organizations began to enjoy higher degrees of autonomy in deciding their activities (Lu, 2009). Chinese NGOs also use informal ties to become connected with state agencies to mobilize resources from the government for their own agendas (Ho & Edmonds, 2008). Furthermore, due to a general lack of trust of new organizations in Chinese society, government affiliation, endorsement, and assistance are critical for NGOs to gain trust and access in local communities (Yu, 2009).

Discourse of Citizenship in Recent Chinese History and Agendas of Government Directed Programs

Chinese governments and political reform movements in different historical times have often used the discourse of citizenship to emphasize individuals' obligation to contribute to the nation-state. Scholarly discussions on Chinese citizenship tend to start from the late Qing dynasty at the turn of the 20th century when the reformer Liang Qichao (1873-1929) used the term *guomin* (nation-state people) to speak of Chinese citizens (Goldman & Perry, 2002). Liang's purpose in introducing the idea of citizenship was to motivate Chinese people to take individual responsibility in building a rich and powerful country at the time of threat of Western Imperialism. At that time, the textbooks for girls and women promoted the view that citizenship for women entailed meeting the

requirements of the future mothers of citizens; women were educated to be physically strong, patriotic, informed on national issues, and willing to fulfill their national duties (Judge, 2002). The cultivation of committed citizenry continued to be the task of political education directed by the Nationalist government in the 1930s and the Communist government in the 1960s (Perry, 2002).

Believing that remaking Chinese peasants was the way to bring fundamental changes to Chinese society, liberal intellectuals in the Rural Reconstruction Movement (1920s-40s) such as James Yen promoted citizenship at the grassroots level and defined citizenship as the development of a "whole person," a person with knowledge, skills, and public spirit (Hayford, 1990; Yen, 1989). Supported by donors in the U.S., Yen invited hundreds of scholars and experts in agriculture, education, medicine, and sociology to live and work in Ding County, Hebei Province. Over a 10-year period (1920s-30s), they conducted sociological and agricultural research in local communities, opened one hospital and hundreds of schools, and organized cultural activities in local communities. The ultimate goal of Yen's rural reconstruction work was to promote citizenship (Yen, 1989). Unfortunately, the rural reconstruction work of Yen and his contemporaries was disrupted by the Japanese Invasion of 1937, and then completely stopped when the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. Other civic organizations were also eliminated at this time, and during the collective period of 1956-1978, China saw an absence of civil society (Ho & Edmonds, 2008).

Today, citizenship education in China is largely directed by different levels of government agencies. In the formal school context, citizenship education is included in the curriculum of *Sixiang Pinde* (Thought and Character) in junior high school and *Sixiang Zhengzhi* (Thought and Politics) in senior high school. Before 2003, the curriculum focused on cultivating patriotism, collectivism, and socialism in the young (Liu, 1998; Meyer, 1990). In 2003, moral and citizenship education in Chinese schools was reformed to include the teaching of individualism, consumerism, pro-social behaviors, and humanistic values (Li et al., 2004; Lu & Gao, 2004; Zhu & Liu, 2004). Outside formal institutions of education, local governments organized citizenship programs to change local office-holders' work styles and peasants' ways of thinking in order to quell peasants' grievances. These programs followed a top-down pedagogy that "exhort[ed] peasants to fulfill citizenship responsibilities while denying them civil and political rights" (Murphy, 2006). In addition, the central government has also used specific events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games to promote good manners and good habits among individuals (Law, 2010).

Analytical Frameworks

Our analysis of the CDCRW's citizenship goals, strategies, and challenges is guided by two analytical frameworks. The rite-right-capacity framework, which we use to examine the CDCRW's citizenship goals, derives from our review of literature on Chinese and Western concepts of human rights. It brings together three approaches to human rights: the Confucian tradition of emphasizing rites, the Western tradition of emphasizing law, and the "human functional capacities" approach (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). The narrative-positioning-identity-efficacy framework, which we use to unpack

the CDCRW's strategies and challenges, derives from Haste's (2004, 2006, 2010) discussion of the psychological process involved in citizenship construction.

Rites, Rights, and Capabilities

Considering the CDCRW's citizenship goals, we first face the theoretical question of where Chinese tradition and Western concepts of human rights converge and diverge. De Bary (1998), a well-respected scholar of Chinese classics, convincingly argues that there is no inherent incompatibility between Confucianism and modern Western concepts of human rights. He clarifies that, contrary to widespread ideas that link Confucianism to the denial of individual worth and the notion of unquestioning loyalty to the ruler, high Confucian tradition emphasizes individual dignity, personal responsibility, and mutual support. Seeking a balance of public and private, the Confucian ideal represents a communitarian ethic of participatory and non-coercive community life that is "supportive of universal human rights" (de Bary, 1998, p. 146).

According to de Bary (1998), Confucianism diverges from modern Western concepts of human rights in its reliance on "rites" instead of law to define individual-society relationships and uphold social order. When discussing individual dignity and social responsibilities, Confucian scholars have little faith in punitive law but emphasize voluntary observance of "rites" as "affirming and exemplifying norms of human conduct, including governance" (de Bary, 1998, p. 30). This is different from the Western tradition of discussing human rights in legal terms and relying on law to uphold human rights. As de Bary points out, traditional Confucian scholars have perceived law as an instrument of state power imposed on the people for its own sake instead of a way of countervailing state power. They have thus relied on public education in local settings and voluntary associations based on the principles of reciprocity and cooperation among members to promote a balance between the private and public spheres. The weakness of the Confucian approach of prioritizing consensual rituals, as de Bary (1998) points out, is that it does not address institutional issues at the level of central administration. In the absence of significant social and political infrastructure that could serve as the organs of "public opinion," Confucian scholars' efforts to change society often fall victim to unchecked state power (de Bary, 1991, p. 97).

Endowed with a Confucian humanistic tradition and having adopted a constitution that protects fundamental human rights, China, as described earlier, fails to provide its citizens, especially rural women, with the economic, social, and political conditions to exercise their constitutional rights. We thus face the second set of theoretical questions: What are the required conditions for a disadvantaged group like rural Chinese women to exercise their rights as citizens, and what gaps exist between the required conditions and China's reality that prevent rural women from living as equal citizens? The capability approach to human rights (Nussbaum, 1999) provides insights to the first question. Together with economist Sen (1999), Nussbaum generates a list of ten "central human functional capabilities" that are definitive of a truly human life and are universally applicable (Nussbaum, 1999, pp. 39-42). The list includes basic capabilities such as the ability to live a healthy life and more advanced capabilities including the ability to control one's environment through holding property, social networking, and political participation. Arguably, individuals' rights as citizens belong to the more advanced

capabilities, the function of which requires the combination of "internal capabilities" such as individual agency with external conditions such as educational and economic opportunities. According to Sen (1999), when general social development is not linked to the enhancement of individual agency, especially women's agency, through education, modernization is found to have no significant effect on social injustice, and perhaps even strengthens societal injustice.

Informed by the above perspectives, we assume that NGOs aiming to promote citizenship among Chinese individuals may try to bring changes in three aspects: reasserting the Confucian tradition of respecting individual dignity and serving the common good; pushing for policy changes and law amendment to better protect rural women's rights; and providing social, economic, and educational opportunities for rural women to develop their capabilities as full citizens. This assumption is examined in our analysis of the CDCRW's citizenship agenda.

Narrative, Positioning, Identity, and Efficacy

Haste's (2004, 2006, 2010) discussion on the four elements involved in the process of citizenship construction helps us unpack the CDCRW's citizenship strategies and understand its successes and challenges. Haste argues that propensity for civic participation can be understood in terms of four elements: narrative, positioning, identity, and efficacy. *Narratives* are cultural stories that carry values, beliefs, rhetoric, and explanations. They reflect shared meaning within a society; they are familiar and comprehensible. They may be implicit and taken for granted within a culture, or they may be explicitly drawn upon in support of a value position. *Positioning* is the process by which the self, or the social group, is defined by similarity or by difference, and in power or credibility relations, to other persons or groups. Positioning categories of people, behavior, or values as 'other' is a frequent mechanism for establishing in-group definitions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). *Identity*, both self-identity and group identity, incorporates narratives about values and beliefs, positioning of self and others both at the level of face-to-face interaction and at the level of one's in-group affiliation. Identity also includes one's sense of efficacy, the extent to which one feels able to be an agent in relation to one's physical and social environment. *Efficacy* refers to the individual's capacity to take responsibility and participate in the community (Haste, 2004, 2006, 2010).

Haste (2004) analyzes the complexities of the process of citizenship construction from three aspects: how to effectively promote capacity for community participation, different interpretations of responsibility, and different types of participation. First, Haste argues that, to gain efficacy, civic knowledge—information as well as the skills to treat the information critically—is not enough. For civic knowledge to translate into civic motivation and skills, individuals must engage in relevant tasks. To promote efficacy, education for citizenship needs to take a "praxis" approach by providing opportunities for community engagement and political participation appropriate to the individual's age and interests (Haste, 2004, p. 425).

Second, Haste (2004) provides three interpretations of responsibility. When responsibility means duty and obligation, individuals are expected to conform to social convention and rules. When responsibility is understood as mutual care and support,

individuals promote the benefits of those with whom they have affective ties. Finally, responsibility can mean acting based on one's moral judgment when facing injustice. These interpretations of responsibility may conflict with each other. For example, acting for the public good may lead to breaking conventional rules or harming the interests of one's family or community. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) similarly distinguish three levels of civic responsibility describing increasing commitment to dealing with social injustice and institutions.

Third, the concept of participation includes "conventional participation" within the system supporting the status quo, such as voting or campaigning activities, or "critical participation," challenging the status quo, often through protest (Haste, 2004, p. 426). Moreover, there is a distinction between low-cost and low-risk participation in the private sphere (e.g., giving in the form of charity) and high-cost and high-risk participation in the public-political sphere (e.g., participating in demonstrations). Reviewing empirical studies of young people's political and community participation in different cultural contexts, Haste (2004, 2010) emphasizes the critical role that practical experiences play in influencing individuals' perspectives on social and political issues and fostering their engagement and sense of efficacy.

In light of these conceptual distinctions, our analysis of the CDCRW's strategies pays particular attention to three aspects. First, we examine how the CDCRW leaders promote efficacy among rural Chinese women, for example, whether they use the knowledge approach or the praxis approach. We then examine how civic responsibility is explicitly and implicitly defined through the behaviors and activities that are encouraged and emphasized in the citizenship programs. For example, we look at whether they emphasize rules and obligation or care and support, and whether they encourage individual moral judgment. We also look into the type of participation encouraged of rural women and whether opportunities for high-cost participation in the public-political sphere were encouraged or provided.

Methods

Our analysis derives from an original case study we conducted with the CDCRW. Based in Beijing, the CDCRW is led by two female leaders: Xie Lihua, the editor-in-chief of a monthly magazine for rural women; and Wu Qing, a retired university professor of American Studies and a People's Deputy in the Beijing municipal congress. In the mid-1990s, the two women started organizing community activities for migrant women in Beijing and providing literacy classes to women in rural areas. Their organization provides adult literacy programs, job skills training, suicide intervention, community development programs, and leadership training in both Beijing and remote rural areas. Citizenship education is embedded in these programs in the form of informing rural women of their legal and political rights and encouraging their critical thinking and democratic participation in politics. Over the years, the CDCRW has gradually evolved to become one of the most influential NGOs in China, and its activities have been widely covered by both Chinese and overseas media (e.g., Glionna, 2008; Lin, 2004).

Data Collection

The purpose of our investigation was to understand the nature of the CDCRW's citizenship goals and activities, and the meaning of the NGO's existence and functioning as a key "case" of Chinese NGOs' involvement in citizenship education. We thus chose to do a case study that would allow us to use multiple methods and conduct in-depth and continuous examination of different aspects of the phenomenon under study (Flyvbgerb, 2006; Yin, 2009). During the two years of 2006-2008, we gathered information on the CDCRW from different sources. We collected in-depth interview data of the two founding leaders, Wu Qing and Xie Lihua. They included a two-hour, face-to-face interview with each leader in 2006 and follow-up phone interviews and email correspondence with the leaders between 2006 and 2008. In 2006, the first author spent one month in the CDCRW's headquarters in Beijing, collecting ethnographic data by observing the daily activities and conducting formal and informal interviews with the 30 staff members. The formal interviews were semi-structured and lasted from fifteen minutes to two hours. The informal interviews were exploratory and open-ended, giving the participants the opportunities to tell the stories they wanted. The interviews took place in CDCRW's office room, a nearby restaurant or cafe, or the staff member's home when the first author was invited for a visit. We also observed Wu Qing's citizenship class in the Beijing school and interviewed the principal, teachers, and students. Although unable to visit the CDCRW's rural intervention sites in remote areas, we conducted both semi-structured and open-ended interviews with the three program managers who had worked in those areas, and collected a large amount of photos and video showing local intervention activities.

Guided by a research plan, our investigation avoided following a rigid protocol but remained open to unexpected findings in the field, from which the design "emerged" as the study proceeded (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A major unexpected finding from the first author's daily interaction with the CDCRW's staff members was that Wu Qing and Xie Lihua shared the goal of empowering rural Chinese women through citizenship education, but took two different approaches. Thus, subsequent investigation focused on understanding how the two leaders disagreed with each other, how their disagreements played out in the CDCRW's citizenship activities, and whether and how the tension between them was resolved over time. During the two years of our data collection, the CDCRW was in the process of building a board of directors. We made regular phone calls to the CDCRW's leaders and staff members to follow the process.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis took the approach of sympathetically unpacking, instead of critically evaluating, the leaders' perspectives and experiences. To organize the interview and observation data into a meaningful form, we first followed the descriptive approach to case study research (Yin, 2009). Specifically, we pulled out data related to how the two leaders defined citizenship, what strategies were used in the various programs, and what challenges were perceived by the leaders, program managers, and the participants of their programs. We then crafted a narrative "profile" for each leader's approach (Seidman, 2006). Treating the profiles as two cases, we conducted cross-case thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to compare the leaders' citizenship beliefs and strategies.

Next, we used "theory-driven" themes (Boyatzis, 1998) to code the leaders' citizenship goals and strategies. Specifically, drawing on theoretical discussions of different approaches to human rights (de Bary, 1998; Nussbaum, 1999; Sen, 1999), we coded the leaders' goals by the themes: rites, law, and individual capabilities. We then drew upon Haste's (2004) framework to code their strategies using four categories: narrative, identity, positioning, and efficacy. It is at this conceptual level that we critically examined the cultural relevance of the NGO's citizenship goals and the pedagogical effectiveness of its strategies in the context of China's political framework and rural Chinese women's needs. Finally, we used narratives to organize our findings so that we did not lose the complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities in real life that the case-study approach helped to reveal (Flyvbgerb, 2006).

Discussion

In the following section, we first present the tension between the two founding leaders that emerged from the data, since the design of our further investigation emerged from this finding. We then examine the nature of the leaders' disagreements regarding how to engage rural women. For this purpose, we first introduce their personal and professional backgrounds as related to their work at the CDCRW. We then present side by side the leaders' understandings of the CDCRW's citizenship goals and the strategies they used in different programs. Following an introduction of how the leaders resolved their conflicts in 2007, we examine their goals and strategies in light of the two analytical frameworks discussed earlier.

Initial Finding: From "Golden Partnership" to Competing Decision-Makers

Our interviews with the leaders and the staff members suggested that the CDCRW's development as an influential NGO benefited from the two leaders' initial "golden partnership," as described by several staff members, in soliciting resources to promote the CDCRW's citizenship endeavors. Our analysis of the interview data also showed that, to a large extent, the CDCRW's citizenship goals and activities were defined by the two founding leaders' personal backgrounds and professional experiences, and the NGO's development had largely relied on their social connections. In 1994, Xie Lihua was the editor-in-chief of a monthly magazine for rural women. Born into a rural family in Shandong province, she had believed she knew about rural poverty until the day she distributed her magazine to a group of migrant women she met in Hebei province, and was shocked to learn that most of the women did not know enough Chinese characters to read it. Only one had attended school and the others were completely illiterate. Xie Lihua decided to do something to help. Inspired by the fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, Xie Lihua began to solicit funding in the name of her magazine to provide literacy programs to women in poor rural areas of Hebei, Guizhou, and Gansu provinces. She also organized suicide intervention programs and community development programs in various provinces.

In 1998, Xie Lihua founded the Beijing Practical Skill Training School to provide free job skills training for rural girls who dropped out of school. By 2006, the school had served 6,000 rural girls, two-thirds of whom found jobs in Beijing or Shanghai in hotels, restaurants, factories, and households needing domestic helpers. Located in Changping, a

suburb of Beijing, the school was supported by funding from the Chinese government, international funding agencies, and individual donors. As a boarding school, it provided free job skills training to rural girls 16 to 20 years old who had dropped out of school due to family financial difficulties. The school offered four programs: basic computer skills, tailoring, hairdressing, and restaurant table service. Students were assigned to the programs based on their own selection and availability of class space. In 2006, the programs lasted between one to three months, during which the school provided food and shared dormitory rooms to about 120 students recruited from different areas of China. The school also covered students' travel costs from their home areas to Beijing. At the end of the programs, the school introduced students to employers in Beijing and Shanghai. The school sent its staff to learn about their work conditions, benefits, and relationships with their employers to ensure work safety and provide further support to the graduates. For the same purposes, the school also maintained connections with many of the girls who moved to other cities or went back to their home areas.

From the very beginning, Xie Lihua worked closely with Wu Qing. For 20 years, since 1984, Wu Qing served as an elected representative in the Hai Dian district People's Congress or the Beijing municipal People's Congress, while continuing her teaching job as a university professor. In 1990, Wu Qing visited a poverty-stricken rural area for the first time. In addition to the lack of clean water, food, electricity, and roads, she was also exposed to gender inequality and the lack of education prevalent in that area. Since that time, she supported Xie Lihua's *Rural Women* magazine, the only magazine that provided information to rural women. Using the magazine as a way to communicate with rural women, Wu Qing and Xie Lihua learned about rural women's need for literacy classes, legal information, and social support. They began to solicit resources from the Chinese government and international organizations to provide programs to rural women. Our analysis of their earlier cooperative work suggested that, in the "golden partnership" period, Xie Lihua played the role of the pragmatic and capable decision-maker and Wu Qing, the passionate advocate and well-known moral leader.

Documents collected from the CDCRW and our review of media coverage of the leaders showed a continuous expansion of the CDCRW and wide recognition of Wu Qing and Xie Lihua's achievements as NGO leaders. In 2001, the CDCRW was registered as an NGO to encompass the Beijing school and the rural programs. Its donors included UNESCO, the Ford Foundation, Oxfam Hong Kong, foreign embassies in Beijing, and different levels of Chinese government including the Beijing Education Bureau. By 2006, the CDCRW had become one of the largest Chinese NGOs focused on helping rural women. In 2003, Wu Qing received the Outstanding Social Entrepreneur Award from the U.S.-based Schwab Foundation. In 2007, Xie Lihua was honored with the Vital Voices Global Leadership Human Rights Award in Washington, D.C.

While the two leaders shared a dedication to help rural women, they differed in their understanding of what citizenship meant to rural women and how it should be promoted. This was pointed out by Xie Lihua and also shown through our thematic analysis of their citizenship goals and strategies. Wu Qing believed it was important to increase rural women's knowledge of constitutional regulations concerning human rights protections. In her citizenship class, she used the Chinese Constitution, real-life stories, and her own example to motivate rural girls to work hard, be self-reliant, care for others, and work for

social change. Xie Lihua, on the other hand, believed that citizenship education along the lines that Wu Qing advocated was not realistic for rural girls and illiterate rural women. For her, gender education, social skills training, and the provision of social opportunities were more important.

Wu Qing and the staff members did not talk about the disagreements between the two leaders. Based on interviews with Xie Lihua and our research of the CDCRW's development over the years, we believe that the CDCRW's structural reorganization in 2004 was a turning point that changed the work relationship between Wu Qing and Xie Lihua. Xie Lihua called on Wu Qing to engage in joint decision-making instead of playing her previous role as the NGO's public figure and advocate. This structural reorganization magnified any differences of opinion between Wu Qing and Xie Lihua about the specific tasks of engaging rural women. Gradually, Wu Qing gained more decision-making power in the school, and Xie Lihua focused on managing the rural programs and struggled to run the CDCRW as the sponsor of both the rural programs and the Beijing school. By the summer of 2006, the disagreements between the two leaders and tension in the decision-making process threatened to tear apart the CDCRW. How the two leaders understood and dealt with their disagreements in the next two years would decide the future of the organization. Before introducing how the leaders resolved their conflicts in 2007, we first present their different views and practices in promoting citizenship among rural Chinese women, and examine the nature of their disagreements in theoretical and cultural contexts.

Two Models in Contrast: Cross-Case Thematic Analysis of Beliefs, Strategies, and Challenges

Citizenship for Wu Qing was primarily concerned with the individual's rights written in the Chinese constitution. For her, the most important concepts in the constitution were the protection of human rights and private property, which were articles added in 2004. Since there was not a clear definition of human rights in the Chinese constitution, Wu Qing cited the human rights provisions of the Charter of the United Nations (1945) to explain what human rights entailed. She particularly emphasized rural women's right to be equal to men and to urban residents. She believed that, in today's China, this right was not granted or given to rural women but that it needed to be fought for. For Wu Qing, citizenship also meant individuals' social responsibilities to care for others and society. She talked about it with passion:

> After 1949, Mao stressed class struggle. There have been so many political movements. People were labeled and were told to draw a line within the family. That's why people became so selfish and don't care for others…there has been a lot of hatred in China.

For her, rights, love, care, and social responsibilities should be included as central messages in education.

Wu Qing's perspective was manifested in her teaching of a citizenship class in the Beijing school she led. Once or twice a week, Wu Qing or a full-time teacher in the school taught a citizenship and gender class. Wu Qing's class focused on teaching

constitutional knowledge and gender knowledge in both the Beijing school and in the classes attended by rural women and local government officials in rural areas. Her class covered three topics: (a) introduction of constitutional and statutory rights such as marriage and labor contracts; (b) discussion of gender issues such as physical differences between men and women, the different social roles they play, and traditional biases and discriminations against women; and (c) discussion of psychological health issues, important social skills, and civic qualities.

In the class we observed, 70 girls sat quietly in a big classroom, each holding a copy of the Chinese constitution. During the class, Wu Qing asked the girls to read aloud the constitutional articles on protecting human rights, private property, and gender equality. She then told real-life stories in which these rights were openly violated. The stories included her family's experiences in recent Chinese history, especially their suffering during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). She also spoke of her own experiences when working as the People's Deputy and fighting to make the government responsive and accountable to people. Finally, she asked the girls to think critically about society and government, and to use the constitution as a weapon to fight against oppression and discrimination.

In regards to gender issues, Wu Qing discussed the physical differences between men and women, focusing on the physical advantages of women. She then listed and criticized traditional practices that treated women as inferior to men and encouraged the girls to feel good about their gender and to be courageous in pursuing their dreams. For the third topic, she focused on motivating the girls to become hard-working, self-reliant, and self-disciplined individuals; to love and help others; and to be citizens who vote and who work to make social changes. She also gave the girls concrete suggestions such as cultivating good personal habits and social manners. Throughout the one-hour class, Wu Qing's touching stories and passionate criticism of injustice, together with her shortly cut gray hair and authoritative voice, grasped the girls' complete attention and sent many of them into tears.

Our interviews with the rural girls provided evidence showing the impact of the Beijing school on their views of life, although these lasting impressions often differed from those they held when they first entered the school. For many, the first sight of the campus was a huge disappointment. The school was about a 1.5-hour drive from downtown Beijing and was separated by cotton fields, farmhouses, and endless birches beside the roads. It was built on a piece of land that had been a manure pit. By 2006, the problems of flies and odor were not as serious as they were in 1998 when the school was founded. Several one-floor buildings served as classrooms, dormitories, a library, and a dining hall. All school property, from buildings to furniture and trees, came from donations. Despite their initial disappointment, most of the girls reported positive feelings towards the school and teachers. Inspired by Wu Qing and other teachers, the girls were determined to work hard for a better future. By providing basic job skills training and job opportunities, the Beijing school helped many of the rural girls become self-reliant.

However, our interviews with the teachers and the graduates suggested that the school's influence was rather limited once they left school. The girls stayed on campus for only one to three months. Then they left the school to work in different fields and live in different areas of Beijing. Working long hours and living long distances from each

other made it difficult to socialize with the other girls they had met in the school and to maintain the sense of community they had built together. Additionally, by building the school in a suburb of Beijing, it was the intention of the CDCRW leaders to promote the school to funding agencies and employers in Beijing and to expose the girls to the environment of the city. However, during their stay at the school, the girls spent most of their time in classes with teachers and other rural girls. Upon graduating and finding jobs in Beijing, most of the girls found themselves facing a drastically different environment from that of the school. They often described the school environment as "simple" and the real world as "complicated" and full of dangers. During interviews, some teachers also expressed concerns that the gaps between the idealistic values promoted in the school and the "jungle rule" in the real world might render the girls vulnerable and disillusioned when facing unfair treatment.

In contrast to Wu Qing's focus on constitutional knowledge and motivation, Xie Lihua stressed job skills, social skills, and political skills. She believed that rural women needed job skills to be self-reliant and self-confident. Rural women also needed social skills to face oppression and ridicule, to solve real-life problems, and to defend their rights. Interventions for rural women should, according to Xie Lihua, "provide knowledge and skills as well as the opportunities or platforms for them to practice the skills." Xie Lihua also emphasized rural women's political skills. She argued that a deep-rooted patriarchal culture and the system of Party-state in Chinese society stifled democratic discussion and encouraged monopoly in decision-making. She believed that the CDCRW should try to facilitate the building of a democratic system and a democratic culture in villages by promoting rural women's skills in equal participation and their value of transparency in decision-making. To her, this work was the "breakthrough point" where the CDCRW could contribute to China's democratization.

Accordingly, Xie Lihua's rural programs focused on promoting women's skill development. By 2006, the CDCRW's programs in rural areas included literacy classes, suicide intervention, and community and political participation training. These programs were organized in different rural areas to better meet the needs of the local community. For example, literacy classes were organized in the western provinces of Gui Zhou, Gan Su, and Ning Xia, where higher proportions of rural women were illiterate. Suicide intervention was provided in the Qing Long county of He Bei Province, a poor mountainous area where women's suicide rates were particularly high.

Interviews with Xi Lihua and the program managers suggested that they relied on strategies such as classroom teaching of knowledge, skills, and positive values (e.g., respecting parents and helping one another rather than wasting time by playing Mahjong); classroom discussion of real-life stories; role-playing in class to practice skills; organizing team activities; organizing community networks; and providing continuing support after the programs. Team activities included folk art performances and sport competitions in local communities. Community networks were organized by forming alumni associations and support groups for rural women.

In applying these strategies, the programs directed their emphases to local needs. For example, the literacy programs focused on teaching counting and reading. The suicide intervention programs integrated psychological counseling, gender education, social skill training, and training in how to deal with emotional distress. In each village, the CDCRW

helped organize a Support Group for Rural Women's Health, which provided opportunities for women to sit together, share experiences, and support one another. The participation and leadership training programs focused on promoting women's participation in community affairs and village-level politics. The CDCRW also supported rural women to organize and manage their own associations. They also used the Beijing school as a base to invite rural women from different areas to attend training programs and conferences.

Xie Lihua's rural programs achieved different degrees of success and encountered various difficulties. By participating in the programs, many rural women felt respected and valued. A woman told a program manager, "Because of you, I will try to live a better life." Working with women in remote and poor areas, the literacy program managers often found themselves having to focus on more realistic goals in the field. Many of the illiterate women could not read numbers, and had difficulty using money, remembering bus routes, and going to the right bathroom. These difficulties prevented them from traveling to nearby areas where seasonal work opportunities were available. Unable to read or count, they were often cheated by dishonest employers. An experienced program manager summarized the goals of their literacy classes:

> I don't want to say that through literacy classes we are empowering rural women or they get a strong sense of gender. By the end of the sixth months, I will be very happy if they can travel to other villages, can keep records of the cotton they have picked, and can talk to us with more confidence.

Even these limited goals were not easy to reach. Rural women worked long hours in the field and considered this work as more important than learning to read and write. The literacy classes started at nine o' clock in the evening after the women had finished their fieldwork for the day, and ended at midnight. As a result, many women did not complete the program. Local program leaders also found Xie Lihua's insistence on building alumni associations from the literacy classes unrealistic. The rural women often lived in locations remote from one another and had different means of livelihood. It was very difficult to gather them together after they graduated from the literacy classes.

In contrast, suicide intervention managers found the strategy of building support groups particularly effective for suicide prevention. Their fieldwork suggested that important factors behind the high suicide rate among rural women were the feelings of loneliness and helplessness related to the agricultural reforms since 1978 and the subsequent social changes. When the system of collective production was done away, Chinese peasants gained the freedom to decide what to produce but lost their sense of collectivity. Families were left alone to deal with all the adversities life could bring. According to the program managers, support groups generated a sense of collectivity, which helped change rural women's negative feelings toward life. For the first time, many rural women felt they were listened to, cared for, and valued. However, program managers also reported that the support group did not work well in some villages. The CDCRW relied on the government-affiliated local Women's Federation to access rural women. In organizing the support group, the head of the village Women's Federation often automatically became the leader. In those cases when the leader was not supported

by local women or was incapable of organizing group activities the support group failed to play its critical role.

Conflict Resolution Through Democratic Participation Within the CDRCW

In 2006, the disagreements between Wu Qing and Xie Lihua about engagement strategies for rural women made it difficult for them to run the CDCRW as an umbrella organization overseeing the different programs. Our field observations suggested that Wu Qing had more decision-making power in the Beijing school and Xie Lihua focused on managing the rural programs, although she struggled to run the CDCRW as sponsor of both the rural programs and the Beijing school. The problem was finally solved in 2007 when the CDCRW established its eleven-member board of directors. Chinese and overseas experts supervised and participated in the electoral procedure. Xie Lihua was elected as the board chair by 31 staff members. Wu Qing and nine others from both inside and outside the CDCRW were elected to be board members. With the board as the decision-making body, decisions were effectively made and implemented.

In addition to structural changes, the leaders also learned to resolve disagreements by participating in training sessions, which provided a democratic context for in-depth discussions of the issues at hand. When Xie Lihua was interviewed again in 2008, she acknowledged Wu Qing's citizenship effort by giving the example of how the CDCRW's introduction of legal knowledge helped a rural woman defend her rights in a marriage dispute. Xie Lihua summarized the three themes of their citizenship program: introduction of legal knowledge on human rights, organizing community activities and support groups, and providing knowledge and skills for political participation. This new conceptualization integrates citizenship knowledge with citizenship efficacy. Reflecting upon the transitional process, the CDCRW leaders realized that the democratic values and social skills they work to promote among rural women must be practiced by the CDCRW by building a democratic system and culture within the organization.

Our investigation also suggested that international influence and support have played a key role in the CDCRW's development over the years. From the very beginning of their work, the CDCRW leaders have been motivated and supported by global women's movements. The World Women Conference held in Beijing in 1996 inspired Xie Lihua to start her intervention programs with migrant women. During the last 10 years, the CDCRW's leaders and staff have participated in over 40 training sessions provided by global organizations such as the World Bank, Oxfam Hong Kong, Plan-International, and Winrock International. These capacity building trainings were particularly important in introducing the concept of a board of directors and preparing the staff members for the board election procedure.

Theory-Based Analysis of Goals: Rites, Rights, and Capacities

The CDCRW's two approaches to citizenship construction demonstrate evidence of the co-existence of the three approaches to the promotion of human rights discussed earlier and the potential conflicts at the level of practice. First, the two leaders' beliefs about citizenship incorporated Confucian values of humanity, the idea of constitutional protection of human rights, and the concept of human rights as individuals' capabilities to fulfill their basic needs in the context of community. As de Bary (1998) observes, modern

Chinese intellectuals have sought to interpret Western concepts of legal rights in Confucian terms and "transplant them to Chinese soil" (p. 22). The CDCRW leaders follow this tradition by integrating Confucian communitarian values with modern Western democratic ideas. For example, when referencing the goals of citizenship education, Wu Qing and Xie Lihua echoed Yen (1989) in using the Confucian expression "learning to be a human being," *human* meaning self-respect, self-reliance, respecting and taking care of parents, and respecting and caring for others in the local community.

In addition to promoting these individual qualities, the CDCRW's rural programs assisted the development of local communities and also played the role of intermediary between rural women and the various levels of government. They helped organize associations and support groups among rural women, which provided support for rural women and a forum for them to practice participation and leadership skills. Different from traditional Confucian scholars who emphasized "rites" only, the CDCRW leaders strove to exert influence on higher administrative levels. Wu Qing's dedication to her work as the municipal People's Representative and her focus on teaching constitutional knowledge to rural women and local government officials suggest a strong emphasis on the function of law as countervailing state power and upholding human rights. A main goal of the CDCRW, as an organization, is to push for policy changes and legal amendments to better defend rural women's rights as citizens.

At the level of practice, the three approaches to human rights have the potential to diverge from one another. Under the influence of the Confucian teaching of personal responsibility and mutual support, hardships and social problems may be seen more as the result of individual failure and moral problems than that of structural inequality and institutional deprivation. Furthermore, the concepts of rites and rights may not be equally useful resources for individuals who lack the capacity to defend their legal rights and may even contradict each other. For example, Wu Qing's teaching emphasized individuals' constitutional rights to be treated equally. She also stressed individuals' responsibility to be hard-working and self-reliant when facing adversities. A paradoxical effect of her teaching was that, as some teachers in the CDCRW's Beijing school mentioned, when faced with unjust treatment in the workplace, the graduates from their school were more likely than other migrant workers to endure the situation rather than fight for fairness. This finding underscores the importance of the capacity component in citizenship education, particularly the promotion of "internal capacities" such as individual agency based on knowledge, skills, and moral courage.

Theory-Based Analysis of Strategies: Narratives, Identity, Positioning, and Efficacy

Haste's (2004, 2006, 2010) framework helps to illuminate the strengths and limitations of the strategies in the Beijing school and the rural programs. The first three elements, identity, narrative, and positioning, explain how the CDCRW programs psychologically empower rural women. Their programs create new narratives about rural women's gender identity. Gender equality is the CDCRW's most important mobilizer. The leaders and staff members try to increase rural women's confidence in their gender by explaining the physical advantages of women over men and by telling successful stories about women. They also criticize discrimination against women in social structures and cultural traditions. They thus provide an alternative narrative about being

women, a narrative different from taken-for-granted perceptions of gender differences. The women in the CDCRW's stories are self-respectful, self-reliant, and caring toward others.

The CDCRW programs also create new narratives about being rural residents. In the new narratives, peasants are not a group of passive individuals who are hard-working, law-abiding, and patriotic—qualities advocated in the school curriculum of moral education. Nor are they the "new peasants" who have good manners, good behaviors, and job skills, an image promoted by official media and government-directed training programs. According to Xie Lihua, the "new peasants" should be a group of liberated individuals who actively participate in building a shared community. By creating new narratives about what it means to be human, to be women, and to be rural women, the CDCRW helps create community narratives that rural women can use to resist negative stereotypes in dominant cultural narratives. As Rappaport (2000) argues, shared narratives are resources for personal and social change. By creating new community narratives, the CDCRW also helps rural women build a new sense of self-identity and a stronger sense of community.

An examination of the fourth element sheds light on how the Beijing school and rural programs are both limited in their success. The two leaders' disagreements on whether rural women need knowledge and motivation or skills and opportunities for social participation demonstrate the longstanding tension between the "knowledge" model and the "praxis" model in education theory. Wu Qing's teaching in the Beijing school follows a value- or knowledge-oriented model. The citizenship curriculum of the school is basically a lecture-based approach focusing on the teaching of constitutional knowledge and positive values. Though students are encouraged to critically examine society, the element of dialogue as the practice of critical consciousness is not included. Students have few real-life opportunities of meaningful social participation outside the classroom.

In contrast, the rural programs are organized in villages where rural women live and work. The local setting enables Xie Lihua to adopt the praxis model by organizing activities close to rural women's life. The rural programs embed citizenship education in literacy classes, livelihood training, health care, and activities tailored to the local context. They start from literacy classes, contextualize their training programs, and provide opportunities for rural women to practice social and political participation in the community. However, their efforts to promote democratic elections and women's participation in village leadership are largely limited to village-level politics. According to the distinctions Haste (2004) makes between conventional participation and critical participation, the CDCRW's participation activities belong to low-cost, conventional political participation.

Neither the Beijing school nor the rural programs directly challenge China's political system. The CDCRW's new narratives do not point at men or other social groups as the oppressor or competitor of rural women. Nor do they position the government or the current political system as the cause of rural women's suffering. Their narratives position the patriarchal tradition that treats women as inferior to men as one enemy, and women's submission to it as another. The clear message is that women must become strong individuals and help each other in order to lift themselves up as a consolidated group. Just as gender discourse is used to fight against inequality between men and women,

citizenship discourse is used as a principle of equality to demand a society more equal between men and women, urban and rural, rich and poor. This pursuit is consistent with the central government's wish to reduce gross disparities between social classes and groups to maintain its control. The CDCRW works as an advocate for rural women, pushes for institutional changes at the national level, but avoids stirring the emotion of anger towards the political system. We believe this is an important reason why the CDCRW's programs have been approved and continue to be supported by the government.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the CDCRW's citizenship programs highlights the conceptual, institutional, and pedagogical complexities involved in the process of HRE construction and implementation in local contexts. Conceptually, local NGOs face the challenge of interpreting the ideas of human rights in the context of their participants' day-to-day lives and may draw upon values and discourses in their own cultural tradition to make the human rights messages meaningful to the targeted population. In the case of the CDCRW, the Confucian tradition of emphasizing individual dignity, personal responsibility, and mutual support provides a value foundation for its programs and is integrated with the promotion of human rights as constitutional rights and as the development of human functional capacities. At the level of concept, as de Bary (1998) has argued, there is no inherent incompatibility between the rites approach and the approaches of law and capacity. At the level of practice, however, as pointed out by de Bary (1998) and evidenced by our study, individuals and groups may fail to consider human rights issues from all three perspectives if some perspectives are more emphasized than others by the culture of the institution or that of broader society.

Institutionally, the process of integrating the three approaches is shaped by the wider socio-political context and the power structure between the NGO and the population it serves. Our analysis shows that the CDCRW's function of promoting democratic participation is limited in both models: one provides citizenship knowledge in the sphere of public-political, but is limited to lecture-based teaching of constitutional statements of individual rights and Confucian values of personal responsibility and mutual support; the other emphasizes skills and opportunities for citizenship participation, but is limited to the private and civic spheres.

Pedagogically, dialogue is the key element to democratic education, which "requires critical thinking, and is also capable of generating critical thinking" (Freire, 1970, p. 92). Freire argues that it is through grassroots dialogue amongst those who are oppressed that empowerment and the generation of new narratives take place, leading to the liberating structures of social relationships. The CDCRW leaders have learned to use dialogue to deal with disagreements between themselves and to build a democratic system and culture within the NGO. However, our observations suggest that their interactions with the rural women are based more on the idea of disseminating expertise knowledge and democratic values than increasing the rural women's capacity to critically evaluate ideas through reciprocal conversation. We believe this particular capacity to critically evaluate is central to Nussbaum's (1999) and Sen's (1999) idea of "internal capacities." The fostering of these capacities is complex and requires economic and educational resources

and opportunities, as well as conscious efforts, at both psychological and systemic levels, to change the culture and power structure of school, family, and society.

By using the example of the CDCRW, we hope to have presented these complexities in order to open up new possibilities of social action and research. First, HRE program designers and evaluators may use the rite-right-capacity framework as a conceptual tool to identify the developmental needs of the targeted population and examine the extent to which the needs are met through a HRE program. Second, they may consider whether and how opportunities for meaningful participation are provided in not only the private and civic spheres, but in the public-political sphere of citizenship. Third, it may be helpful to ask what cultural and structural changes in the local context will facilitate a balanced promotion of rites, rights, and capacities.

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