Political Consumerism in Contemporary China: Boycotts, Buycotts and Motivations for Participation

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Abstract

This thesis explores the origins, nature, and motivations of political consumerism in China. Although more than 210 boycotting and buycotting cases occurred in China between 2000 and 2024, the phenomenon has received little attention in the political consumerism literature. My research addresses four key questions: 1) What is the historical development of China's political consumerism? 2) Who engages in contemporary political consumerism in China? 3) How does political consumerism relate to political participation in China? 4) What motivations drive individuals to engage in nationalist political consumerism in China? I adopt an eclectic, question-driven approach drawing from the historical documentary sources, contemporary online observation, semi-structured interviews, and previously overlooked survey data to argue that political consumerism offers Chinese people, especially the under-represented groups, a limited alternative channel for political participation within a tightly controlled regime. Boycott participation, I find, is a supplement for contentious participation, and a substitute for institutionalised participation. Counterintuitively however, although most cases of political consumerism in China involve patriotic or nationalistic themes, participants' decisions are not always predominantly driven by political considerations. To capture this complexity, I distinguish a fourfold typology of consumer motivations – political, ethical, self-related, and economic. This gives me a structured lens for analysing political consumer behaviour. These diverse motivations undermine the dominant view of China's political consumerism as simply an exclusionary instrument of top-down policy.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of a higher degree at any other institution. I confirm that the main text does not exceed the prescribed limit of 80,000 words.

Chapter 1.
Introduction

"Want to make money in China while spreading false rumours and boycotting Xinjiang cotton?
Wishful thinking! #H&MBaselessAttackOnXinjiangCotton#"
– Chinese Communist Youth League, Weibo, 24 March 2021

"No rational consumption! We will consume wildly! (我们不要理性消费！我们要野性消费！)".
– Online slogan during the Erke Buycott in July 2021

In late March 2021, a wave of boycotts against foreign products erupted in China. A Weibo user named yipinghai'an (一坪海岸) had, on 23 March 2021, posted images of H&M's statement regarding the Xinjiang forced labour controversy, captioned: "As a long-time customer, I've taken the initiative to say good riddance to them. Bye H&M." Initially, the post attracted little attention. However, it gained prominence when the Weibo account of the Chinese Communist Youth League (hereafter, the Youth League), one of the most influential official voices on Chinese social media, reposted it 24 March with the comment: "Want to make money in China while spreading false rumours and boycotting Xinjiang cotton? Wishful thinking!" The repost, which included the hashtag #H&MBaselessAttackOnXinjiangCotton#, served as a key catalyst for the subsequent boycott campaign.

Figure 1: "#H&MBaselessAttackOnXinjiangCotton#" Sino Weibo topic with 620 million views. Source: Weibo.com

The Youth League's post immediately drew the attention of Chinese netizens, garnering over 620 million views and 282,000 comments within five days (see Figure 1). Some netizens called

for a boycott of H&M, while others expanded their outrage to other members of Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). In total, more than fifty foreign brands were targeted (see Figure 2). China's leading online shopping platforms, Taobao, JD.com, Pinduoduo, Suning.com and Meituan's Dianping subsequently removed H&M products from their platforms. Additionally, Chinese map services such as Baidu, Gaode, and Tencent erased H&M store locations from their databases (Yao, 2021). According to H&M Group (2021), in the second quarter of 2021, H&M's sales in China dropped by 23 per cent compared to the same period in 2020.

Figure 2: Lists of BCI members being targeted. Source: Weibo.com, ezumeirisubao.

This boycott became one of the most influential examples of China's political consumerism,

the subject of this dissertation, in recent years. Its significance is twofold. First, it represents the most common theme of political consumerism in China: targeting foreign entities or public figures for actions perceived by boycotters as questioning China's territorial integrity, raising human rights violations, or addressing the Taiwan issue. Second, it presents a complex mechanism of political consumerism in an authoritarian context.

A typical boycott in China involves four key actors: consumers, state actors, domestic corporations and public figures, and foreign targets. Boycotts can either be initiated by consumers, termed *spontaneous boycotts*, or by the state, referred to as *state-sponsored boycotts* (Chan, 2025). Notably, these two types are not mutually exclusive. As shown in Figure 3, spontaneous boycotts are initiated by consumers, typically targeting foreign entities. In such cases, state actors may later intervene by amplifying consumer sentiment and signalling to domestic corporations and public figures to suspend or terminate their collaborations with the targets, or they may choose to impose sanctions directly. However, in the Chinese context, boycotts may also be initiated by the state. The boycott of H&M is a representative example of a state-sponsored boycott. In these cases, government officials, state-affiliated media outlets, or government institutions may directly or indirectly mobilise consumers and domestic business partners to withdraw support from a foreign entity. In both manifestations, foreign targets often face triple pressure from consumers, business collaborators, and the state.

Figure 3: Interplay of key actors involved with foreign-targeted boycotts.
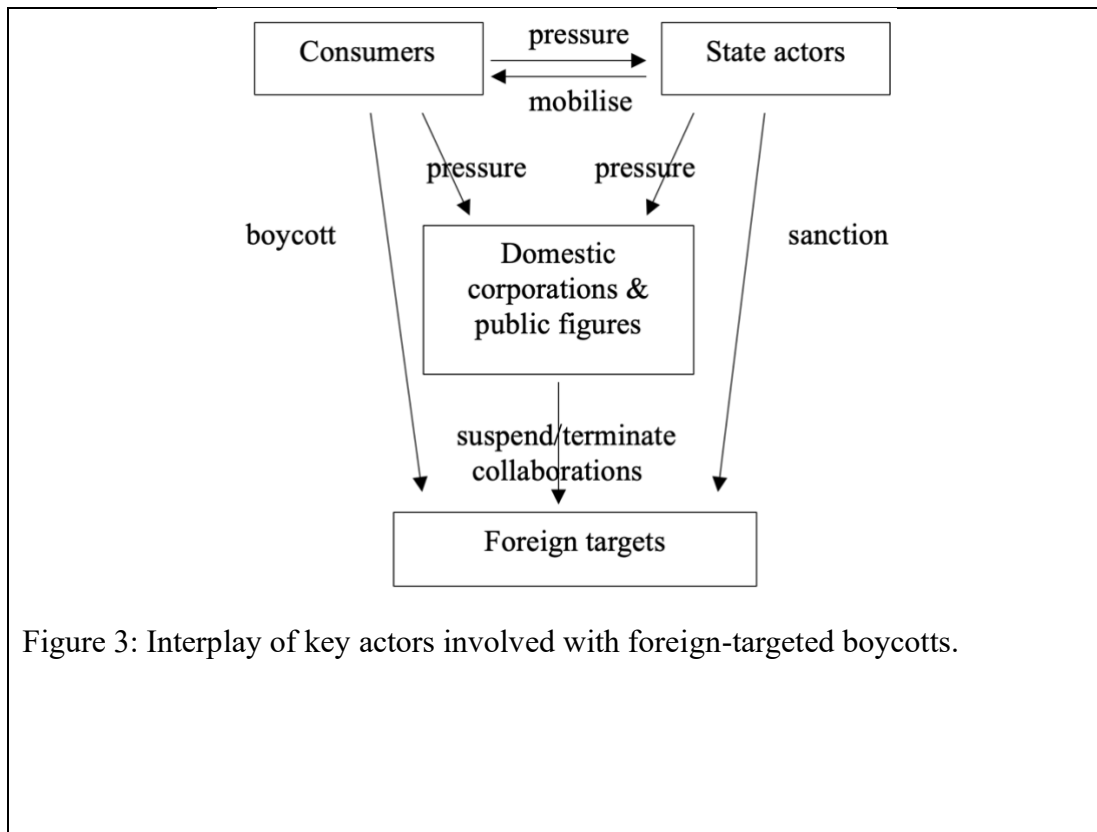
Buycotts in China often emerge spontaneously as a grassroots response to perceived injustice, alignment with social values, or expression of patriotism. These campaigns may target either domestic or foreign entities and can be motivated by moral endorsement or political values. The extent of state involvement in buycotts depends on the political sensitivity of the issue and the degree of alignment with official interests. When buycotts serve state interests or promote patriotic consumption, state actors may implicitly or explicitly support them by disseminating favourable messages through official media. Conversely, buycotts that challenge state legitimacy or address politically sensitive issues may be ignored or implicitly discouraged. Buycotts can also occur alongside boycotts. For example, during the Xinjiang cotton controversy, many consumers not only boycotted foreign retailers like H&M but also buycotted national brands that publicly supported Xinjiang cotton.

How should we understand the origins, nature, and power of Chinese political consumerism? This thesis aims to show how the processes described above, the interactions between individual consumers and the state, are integral to the origins, nature, and power of political consumerism in the context of China. I argue that while political consumerism opens up opportunities for political participation, individuals who engage in boycotts or buycotts do not

necessarily base their decisions on political considerations. Citizens in authoritarian states face significant restrictions on political participation, particularly in selecting government officials or directly influencing policymaking. Although institutionalised channels such as elections exist, they are often characterised by limited competition and a lack of transparency. While citizens can resort to contentious participation, such as protests, demonstrations, or filing complaints to government officials to express their political demands, these methods are highly risky, as dissent may provoke state repression and threats to personal safety.

Against this backdrop, political consumerism emerges as an alternative, non-institutionalised form of political participation. Unlike conventional political engagement, political consumerism is ostensibly individualised and market-based, using consumer purchasing power as leverage to influence socio-political issues. Since purchasing decisions are largely personal and voluntary, even highly controlled authoritarian governments have limited capacity to directly regulate or suppress such actions, making boycotts and buycotts a relatively safer channel for political engagement in these regimes. Governments and other actors can mobilise political consumption, but once it starts, they cannot easily or immediately stop it. The 2017 boycott of Lotte in response to South Korea's deployment of the THAAD missile system offers a telling example: during this campaign, some violent grassroots protests took place in several Chinese cities, despite efforts by the government to contain the unrest (Guoqiaotudou, 2021).

In China, political consumerism has seen a significant rise over the past decade. Between 2014 and 2024, more than 150 boycotts and over 35 buycotts occurred,[1] covering a wide range of industries, such as entertainment, food and beverage, automotive, retail, pharmaceuticals, tourism, technology, hospitality, cosmetics, gaming, and e-commerce. Both foreign and domestic brands have been targeted. These actions have addressed diverse issues, including geopolitical conflicts, nationalism, gender politics, social justice, animal welfare, environmental protection, labour rights, and corporate social responsibility. In an era of

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[1] To identify cases of boycotts and buycotts in China between 2014 and 2024, I conducted a comprehensive search using both Chinese- and English-language sources. Data were collected through keyword-based searches on social media platforms (e.g. Weibo and Zhihu), search engines (e.g. Google and Baidu), and from news archives, academic literature, media reports, and publicly circulated online calls for boycotts and buycotts. Drawing on this multi-source strategy, I identified at least 175 boycott cases and 45 buycott cases over this ten-year period. It is important to note that some actions—particularly buycotts—were subtle, less visible, and less likely to receive mainstream media attention, which may have led to underreporting. As such, the figures reported here likely represent a conservative estimate.

increasing authoritarianism in China (King, Pan, and Roberts, 2017), coupled with rising purchasing power, growing social awareness, and escalating geopolitical tensions, Chinese citizens have turned to market-based actions to communicate their political views.

Unlike their Western counterparts who tend to focus on socially progressive issues, political consumerism in China often relates to geopolitical tensions with foreign countries, with the state playing a significant role in shaping public responses. By analysing two empirical cases, the Erke buycott and the NBA boycott, this study demonstrates that political consumerism in China is shaped by an interplay between grassroots activism and top-down mobilisation. While political motivations appear to be the primary driver of many boycotts and buycotts campaigns, the findings of this study suggest that Chinese political consumerism is often driven by a complex array of political, economic, and social forces. This study distinguishes four types of motivation, political, ethical, self-related, and economic, offering a new analytical framework for explaining the motivations behind political consumer behaviour.

1.1 Literature Review

This section reviews the key literature on political consumerism, with a focus on five main lines of research:

1) What is political consumerism?
2) Political consumerism and economic statecraft
3) Political consumerism and political participation
4) Who participates?
5) Why do participants participate?

The first part examines the definitions and typologies of political consumerism, laying a conceptual foundation for this thesis. The second part engages with existing discussions on the relationship between political consumerism and political participation. While scholars in Western democracies increasingly recognise political consumerism as a form of political participation, scholarship on China rarely considers market-based political action as participatory. Thus, this study addresses this gap by extending the framework of political participation to include political consumerism in the Chinese context.

The third part considers existing research into who engages in political consumerism. Although a growing body of empirical work in Europe and North America explores the sociodemographic characteristics of political consumers, findings are often inconsistent and may be influenced by contextual variation. Notably, no empirical study to date has systematically examined the profile of political consumers in China. This study expands the scope of political consumerism research to the world's second-largest economy and an authoritarian regime. The final part introduces motivations behind political consumerism. Drawing on literature from political science and consumer research, this thesis proposes a new conceptual framework for analysing the individual-level motivations for engaging in political consumerism.

1.1.1 What is political consumerism?

Micheletti et al. (2004, p. xiv) define political consumerism as "consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices." It gained popularity in the early 2000s alongside the concepts of post-materialist values and lifestyle politics (Micheletti, 2003). In different national or institutional contexts, the use of consumption to engage with social or political issues is described using a variety of terms. For instance, Clarke (2008) notes that in Britain, the term "ethical consumption" is commonly used, while in Scandinavia, "political consumerism" is more prevalent. One explanation is that in Scandinavian countries, politics does not carry the same negative connotation as it does in the UK (ibid). Similarly, Barbosa et al. (2014) observe that in Brazil, terminology varies by institutional setting: government agencies tend to prefer "sustainable consumption", NGOs use "responsible" or "ethical consumption", and market actors favour the term "conscious consumption".

Despite this variation, political consumerism has become one of the most widely used terms in the literature. Researchers argue that it offers a more comprehensive framing, capturing a wide range of market-based practices aimed at social or political change (Barbosa et al., 2014, p. 94). It encompasses dimensions of ethical, sustainable, and conscious consumption, and is based on political attitudes, ethical values, or the evaluation of corporate and governmental behaviour (Micheletti et al., 2004; Stolle et al., 2005; Baek, 2010). It represents individual consumers'

efforts to assume the responsibilities of political, social, and economic development (Micheletti et al., 2004).

In political consumerism, the boundaries between private matters and the public agenda, between economic activities and political actions, and between consumers and citizens have become increasingly blurred (Micheletti et al., 2004; Holzer, 2006; de Zúñiga, Copeland, and Bimber, 2014). This creates a space for individuals, particularly those marginalised or excluded from institutionalised participation channels, to express their political views. As Micheletti (2004, p. 260) puts it:

> The market is, thus, attractive to marginalised groups because it does not force them to socialize themselves into public and political roles that have been stipulated by dominant groups in society. Women can engage in politics in a women-friendly way, young people according to their perceptions of lifestyles, and ethnic and non-white racial groups with multicultural sensitivity. In other words, these groups can do their own political thing.

This framing is particularly important in authoritarian regimes such as China, where official channels for political participation are tightly controlled and using them entails significant risk.

The concept of political consumerism has expanded over time from a focus on consumption (buycott) and non-consumption (boycott) to include symbolic and expressive practices such as cultural jamming (discursive political consumerism) and lifestyle politics (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Lekakis, 2017a, 2022). A boycott, also known as negative political consumerism, refers to "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (Friedman, 1985, p. 97). It is a punishment-oriented form which often involves confrontational rhetoric. A buycott, or positive political consumerism, refers to a situation in which consumers choose to purchase products from companies whose policies, practices or values align with their own. It is reward-oriented.

In addition to boycotts and buycotts, some scholars distinguish *discursive political consumerism*, which involves consumers using creative communicative methods to criticise corporate practices and raise public awareness (Micheletti and Stolle, 2008; Lekakis, 2017a,

2022). This type of political consumption often targets violations of corporate ethical standards and does not necessarily involve monetary transactions (Delistavrou, Katrandjiev, and Tilikidou, 2017). As Stolle and Micheletti (2013, p.171) put, discursive political consumerism "uses the market as an arena for politics while avoiding the harmful unintended effects of consumer boycotts… and the ethical dilemmas facing conscious consumers when buycott or reasonable choice opportunities are lacking." A frequently used method of discursive action is the creative appropriation of brand logos, names, or imagery to critique companies' behaviour. For example, activists altered the Nike logo into forms such as a whip, a knife, or other parodies to satirise the company's sweatshop practices, successfully attracting public attention to the movement (see Figure 4).
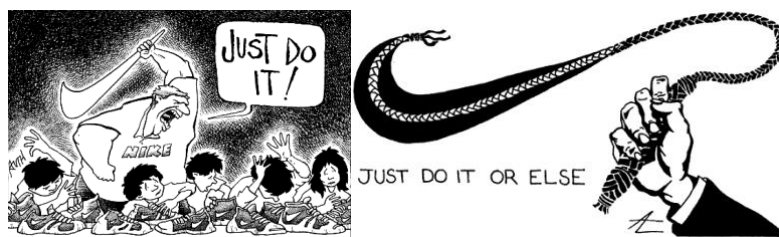
Figure 4: Discursive political consumerism: Examples of Nike sweatshop advertisements. Source: libcom.org.

In China, discursive political consumerism is often intertwined with boycotts and buycotts. For instance, during the "Shrunken Sanitary Pads" scandal in November 2024, the major sanitary pad brand – ABC was caught under the fire after its customer service reportedly responded to a complaint by saying, "if you cannot accept [the length difference] then you can choose not to buy it." Along with boycotts, many consumers used creative discursive actions to express their criticisms toward the brand. For example, some reinterpreted the brand name ABC as "Always Be Contemptible." Others posted: "ABC=缺德(缺 d)". The colloquial Chinese term 缺德 (que de) literally means "lacking virtue" and is commonly translated as "unethical" or "morally deficient." The original phrasing in Chinese included a letter play ("ABC = 缺 d"), which relies on Mandarin homophony and is not rendered in the English translation. Often in a humorous

manner, such discursive action can easily attract wide public attention. Therefore, it is frequently utilised by both boycotters and buycotters to convey messages. In this thesis, while I focus on the two basic forms of political consumerism – boycotts and buycott, I also show how online communities and interview respondents used discursive methods engaging in the Erke buycott (Chapter 5) and the NBA boycott (Chapter 6).

Finally, the fourth form of political consumerism is commonly referred to as *lifestyle politics*, in which consumers devote themselves to making daily purchasing decisions in accordance with their political attitudes and ethical values (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). For instance, some consumers may adopt a vegetarian lifestyle for the sake of animal welfare and environmental protection. Others avoid using plastic bags, opting instead for reusable alternatives when shopping. Scholars have also noted that lifestyle politics may incorporate elements of the other three forms of political consumerism (ibid). The boundary between lifestyle politics and the other three forms, boycott, buycott, and discursive political consumerism, is often blurred.

1.1.2. Political Consumerism and Nationalism

Existing research often frames political consumerism as a progressive attempt "to eradicate worldwide inequality… and to achieve better rights and protection for children, nature, and animals" (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013, p. 266). However, political consumerism is not inherently progressive; it can also be used for regressive purposes (Stolle and Huissoud, 2019; Lekakis, 2019; Lekakis, 2022). Empirically, such regressive political consumerism frequently takes nationalist forms. Prominent examples include the 2007 boycott of Starbucks in China for allegedly "contaminating" Chinese culture (Pál, 2009), campaigns against halal products in England (Lekakis, 2019), the 2019 boycott of Japanese products in South Korea over diplomatic friction (Ko and Kim, 2022), and a range of anti-foreign consumption campaigns across different contexts (Lekakis, 2018). These cases demonstrate that political consumerism can be grounded in nationalist and other exclusionary political orientations, revealing a conceptual blind spot in a literature that has been largely centred on progressive activism. Chapters 5 and 6 address this gap by examining two prominent cases of nationalist political consumerism in contemporary China.

Political consumerism has long been entangled with nationalism. As a mode of identification, "it can allude to one's national positioning, preference or politics" (Lekakis, 2018, p.499). Historically, citizens across diverse contexts have mobilised consumption for nationalist struggles or to express nationalist sentiments, ranging from early twentieth-century national product movements in China and the Swadeshi Movement in India, to "Buy American" campaigns during the Great Depression and post-crisis buycott of domestic products in Europe. The persistence of such practices across time and space suggests that nationalist political consumerism is not an anomaly but a recurring mode of political expression. Given its prevalence, particularly in contemporary China, it is therefore essential to examine how individuals make sense of, and justify, their participation in nationalist political consumerism. Importantly, such participation may be grounded in different affective and normative attachments to the nation, ranging from non-hostile patriotic identification to more exclusionary nationalist orientations. This distinction is conceptually clarified later in this chapter and operationalised in the empirical analysis.

It is important to clarify how related concepts such as consumer ethnocentrism, consumer nationalism, and economic nationalism have been defined and applied in existing research. This conceptual clarification helps explain why this study adopts the broader framework of political consumerism. Notably, ethnocentrism is "the belief that one's ethnicity is central and superior to others" (Lekakis, 2022, p. 47). *Consumer ethnocentrism* refers to consumers' beliefs "about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products" (Shimp and Sharma, 1987, p. 280). It has received significant attention in marketing and business scholarship. Research has shown that highly ethnocentric consumers often undervalue foreign products and overestimate domestic ones (Sharma, Shimp, and Shin, 1995). They tend to regard the purchase of foreign goods as "bad, inappropriate, undesirable, and irresponsible" (ibid, p. 27). Others suggest that such consumers view the purchase of domestic goods and rejection of foreign products as a normative response or moral obligation, even when imported alternatives are perceived to be of superior quality (He and Wang, 2015). Particularly during political, economic, or natural crises, ethnocentric consumption can be framed as "an exodus from the crisis," positioning consumption as a means through which citizens assume individual responsibility for national recovery (Lekakis 2017b, p. 287).

Consumer nationalism extends this focus from beliefs to practices. It refers to "consumers' invocation of collective identities based on their nationality to accept or reject products or brands from other countries" (Wang, J., 2005, pp.223-224). Widely deployed in sociology, communication, and cultural studies (Lekakis, 2022), this concept foregrounds how everyday consumption becomes a vehicle for articulating nationalistic sentiments in social, cultural, and economic domains (Wang, J., 2006). Consumer nationalism also constitutes an integral dimension of economic nationalism, which has been defined as "a form of 'consumer regime' where the state uses the marketplace for strategic purposes, namely, the creation of a consumer society that taps into the ideology of nationalism" (Lekakis, 2022, p. 54). While economic nationalism tends to adopt a top-down perspective, consumer nationalism highlights a more complex nature in which bottom-up consumer practices intersect with state agendas and commercial actors' strategies (Castelló and Mihelj, 2018; Liao and Xia, 2022).

While these frameworks offer valuable insights into the relationship between nationalism and consumption, this thesis argues that they remain insufficient for explaining how nationalist political consumerism is enacted and experienced at the individual level, and tend to reduce such practices to purely patriotic or nationalist motivations. In practice, not all acts of domestic consumption constitute political consumerism; only those shaped by political or ethical concerns fall within this category. Even then, such choices may also be influenced by other factors, such as psychological factors including peer pressure or self-efficacy; and/or economic considerations such as price, quality or convenience. Adopting political consumerism as the overarching analytical lens thus allows for a broader and more nuanced understanding of market-based political action, encompassing nationalist, patriotic, progressive, and mixed motivations. This choice ensures that the thesis remains centred on political consumerism as a mode of political participation, while using nationalist cases as analytically revealing sites rather than as the conceptual endpoint of the analysis.

1.1.3 Political consumerism and economic statecraft

While much of the existing literature and the preceding discussion emphasise individual agency within political consumerism, it is also important to acknowledge that political consumerism can function as a tool of informal economic sanction, especially in the context of China, where state actors may mobilise consumer sentiment to advance geopolitical objectives (O'Connell,

2022; Wong, Easley and Tang, 2023; Li and Liu, 2021; Chan, 2025; Ferguson, 2025). Ferguson (2025, p. 5) defines unilateral economic sanctions as "government-directed measures that limit or end different forms of economic exchange between the imposer of the sanction (the 'sender') and another state (the 'target')." In addition to directly sanctioning products from the target state or instructing domestic companies to cease business interactions with firms in that state, governments may also mobilise consumers to boycott goods from the targeted country (O'Connell, 2022; Chan, 2025; Ferguson, 2025). Although consumer-led boycotts are typically less precise and more difficult to control, consumers are arguably easier to mobilise than firms, as they may be more willing to bear certain costs than profit-driven enterprises (Wong et al., 2023, p. 1292). Moreover, informal sanctions, such as boycotts, can reduce the risk of legal challenges and diplomatic backlash, provide greater flexibility for governments to mitigate reputational damage without incurring significant political costs, and limit the target country's capacity for effective countermeasures (Ferguson, 2025, p. 1540).

Despite a growing body of literature examining political consumerism through the lens of economic statecraft, most studies focus on how the state and firms have responded to apparent boycotting and buycotting movements within China. However, we know little about how individuals within China adjust their consumer behaviour in response to state-encouraged political consumerism, especially when foreign firms or governments are seen as crossing Beijing's political red lines. This study addresses this gap by examining an empirical case – the boycott of the NBA – to explore how individuals responded to a state-led economic sanction.

1.1.4 Political consumerism and political participation

Brady (1999, p. 737) defines political participation as "action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes." While this definition highlights three essential aspects – that political participation is an action rather than a belief or attitude; it is carried out by ordinary citizens; and it is explicitly intended to influence political outcomes at some level – it overlooks another key characteristic: participation should be voluntary (Giugni and Grasso, 2022). In practice, this means excluding acts driven by legal obligation, economic or social coercion – especially when opting out would result in unreasonably high costs (van Deth, 2014, p. 354). Participation under such conditions lacks the essential element of free will and therefore falls outside the definitional scope of political participation (ibid).

Verba and Nie (1987, p. 2) defined political participation as "those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take." While widely accepted, this definition narrowly focuses on activities directed at governmental institutions, thereby overlooking political actions that target non-governmental actors such as corporations. Yet in today's globalised world, corporations can exert considerable influence over environmental, social, and ethical outcomes (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Thus, political actions targeting corporations for political, ethical, or environmental reasons should be included in the repertoire of political participation.

Barnes and Kaase (1979, p. 84) distinguish conventional from unconventional forms of political participation. Conventional political actions are "primarily those acts of political involvement directly or indirectly related to the electoral process." These include actions such as reading political news, discussing politics, persuading others to vote, attending political meetings, contacting government officials, or working for election campaigns (ibid). By contrast, unconventional political behaviour refers to "behaviour that does not correspond to the norms of law and custom that regulate political participation under a particular regime" (ibid). It involves tactics such as "petitions, demonstrations, boycotts, rent or tax strikes, unofficial industrial strikes, occupation of buildings, blocking of traffic, damage to property, and personal violence" (ibid, p. 59).

So far, the most comprehensive definition of political participation has been proposed by Jan W. van Deth (2014), who argues that an activity qualifies as political participation if it meets four criteria: 1) it is a behaviour; 2) the activity is voluntary; 3) the activity is carried out by a citizen; and 4) the activity is "used to express political aims and intentions by the participants" (ibid, p. 359). This is what he calls *a motivational definition of political participation*. Based on these criteria, political consumerism – where purchasing decisions are made not only on the basis of price and product quality but also on social, political, or ethical considerations – should be included in the realm of political participation.

Conventional understandings of political participation in authoritarian regimes regard citizens as basically passive, with participation limited to state-led mobilisation in support of pre-designated leaders. However, in the case of China, scholars argue that the communist government has transformed Maoist "command authoritarianism" to what is now termed

"consultative authoritarianism" (Tsang, 2009; Truex, 2017). Consultative authoritarianism is "a form of rule in which power holders use communication to collect the preferences of those their decisions will affect and take those preferences into account as information relevant to their decision-making" (He and Warren, 2011, p. 273). Under this system, the regime allows citizens to express their grievances through limited participatory channels on limited topics in order to ensure that more comprehensive change is avoided (Truex, 2017). Political consumerism can be seen as a participatory practice tolerated within consultative authoritarianism, particularly when aligned with the government's stance.

For instance, in the Chinese villages, urban residents' committees, and some township people's congresses, citizens do have some impact on the choice of candidates (Li, L., 2011; Manion, 2000; O'Brien and Han, 2009; Schubert and Ahlers, 2012). Cai (2004) finds that Chinese citizens often use the appeals system to approach government officials and influence the policy-making process. Distelhorst (2017) argues that since the Open Government Information (政府信息公开) reform in 2008, Chinese activists have been using quasi-democratic institutions to demand information transparency, and some have even managed to influence government policies. Similarly, drawing on an empirical survey, Truex (2017) finds that those who are less educated and excluded from the CCP display greater satisfaction with the regime and stronger feelings of government responsiveness once exposed to the online participation portals. Recent studies also find that online channels are widely used by citizens to voice their dissatisfaction and grievances (Cai and Zhou, 2019; Meng, Pan, and Yang, 2017). However, as these participatory channels are strictly controlled by the state, their overall effectiveness remains in question. As Truex (2017, p. 353) points out, "limited participation channels may temporarily increase stability and buy some support among citizens with low expectations. In the long term, however, such reforms may raise expectations that must be satisfied with further reform."

Fu and Distelhorst (2020) distinguish two types of Chinese political participation: contentious and institutionalised. While the former "entails using disruptive methods – protests, petitioning, strikes, and forming illegal associations – to influence officials or to make a symbolic statement," the latter "uses state-sanctioned channels such as local elections, government hotlines and mailboxes, and courts to influence policy, to handle and resolve complaints, or to adjudicate disputes that arise between the public and government entities" (ibid, p. 60). While this typology encompasses a wider range of political participation, it does not include

individualised participatory activities, such as political consumerism.

The relationship between political consumerism and political participation has been a central theme in the political consumerism literature. Although not always explicitly labelled as such, the following three lines of argument, the crowding-out, mobilisation, and supplement theories, represent the major strands in the literature. The first argues that political consumerism displaces traditional political participation and chips away at more radical political activism (Szasz, 2012). Szasz (2012) suggests that engaging in consumer-based activism, such as purchasing organic products, gives people a sense of satisfaction, reducing the likelihood of taking more effective political actions, such as lobbying for systemic change. As a result, political consumerism is seen as a mild substitute rather than a supplement to conventional political activism.

In contrast, *the mobilisation theory* posits that political consumerism expands political participation by offering an alternative platform for marginalised and oppressed groups (Micheletti et al., 2004). Historically, such groups have used market-based actions to resist oppression, such as the Boston Tea Party and the Chinese boycotts of Japanese goods in the early twentieth century. Contemporary examples, such as the 2011–2012 Nangchen Tibetans' boycott of Chinese vendors and the 2023 boycott of Maia Active for its controversial posts, further illustrate how political consumerism can empower marginalised groups by enabling them to "vote with their money."[2] According to this perspective, political consumerism serves as a democratic form of participation that allows alienated groups to challenge existing power structures.

The third line of argument, *the supplement theory*, critiques the crowding-out and mobilisation perspectives, arguing that political consumerism does not replace conventional political participation but rather extends it. Research suggests that political consumers tend to be socioeconomically privileged individuals who are already engaged in traditional political activities (Clarke et al., 2007; Strømsnes, 2009). Rather than mobilising new groups, political consumerism primarily functions as an additional tool for politically active elites. Empirical studies indicate that political consumers are more likely than others to participate in conventional political activities (Strømsnes, 2009; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Baumann,

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[2] For further details on these cases, see Chapter 4.

Engman, and Johnston, 2015; Echegaray, 2016). This suggests that political consumerism does not discourage engagement in traditional political avenues but instead serves as a supplementary channel for political participation.

Despite the extensive debate on the relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation, most research has focused on democratic societies, leaving authoritarian regimes largely unexplored. In countries like China, where political freedoms are significantly restricted, the marketplace may serve as an alternative space for political expression. The rise of political consumerism in China supports this assumption, yet it remains unclear whether it crowds out or complements traditional political participation. Furthermore, the question of whether political consumerism mobilises marginalised groups or primarily provides an additional avenue for those already engaged in conventional politics remains unresolved in the case of China. This study aims to fill the gap. Drawing on an empirical survey, this study tests these competing perspectives in an authoritarian context.

1.1.5 Who participates?

Political consumers are individuals who make purchasing decisions based on political or ethical considerations rather than solely on economic interests. For instance, political consumers may be willing to pay more for sustainable products to help protect the environment, or withhold purchases to punish producers for unethical practices. Through buying or not buying a product, political consumers express their attitudes and values on social and political issues, both domestically and internationally.

A considerable body of research has investigated the participants of political consumerism in democratic countries (Stolle et al., 2005; Baek, 2010; Newman and Bartels, 2011; Strømsnes, 2009; de Zúñiga et al., 2014; Neilson, 2010; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Yates, 2011; Kotzur et al., 2017; Ward and de Vreese 2011). However, the question of who political consumers remains subject to ongoing debate. First, a body of studies argues that political consumerism is more prevalent among women (Stolle et al., 2005; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Copeland, 2013; Koos, 2012; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Rössel and Schenk, 2017). Micheletti (2004, p. 260) explains that political consumerism is attractive to women and other traditionally marginalised groups because it allows them to "define and work with political issues in their own way, in

their own time frame, and in a very local and specific way." Rössel and Schenk (2017) argue that norms of pro-sociality and caring are a primary reason for the popularity of political consumerism among women. However, other scholars find that gender is an insignificant factor in political consumerism engagement (Kotzur et al., 2017; Strømsnes, 2009; Echegaray, 2016).

Second, the relationship between political consumerism and socioeconomic factors, such as education and income, remains contested in the existing literature. Numerous empirical studies conducted in Western contexts indicate that political consumers often possess higher socioeconomic status (Forno and Ceccarini 2006; Neilson and Paxton 2010; Echegaray, 2016). Especially, education has consistently been identified as positively and significantly associated with political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Strømsnes, 2009; Baumann et al., 2015; Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Yates, 2011; Koos, 2012). However, empirical evidence regarding the relationships between income and political consumerism remains inconclusive. While some studies find that political consumers are generally higher-income earners, others report no significant association. Moreover, research exploring the socioeconomic determinants of political consumerism within authoritarian contexts, such as China, remains notably absent. This thesis seeks to address this gap by examining the influence of education and income on political consumerism behaviour in China.

Third, existing research suggests a curvilinear relationship between age and political consumerism (Baek, 2010; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011; Echegaray, 2016; Yates, 2011). Baek (2010) finds that middle-aged individuals (26-56 years old) engage more frequently in political consumption than older or younger cohorts. Similarly, research in Western democracies suggests that older middle age groups (31-60 years old) represent the most active participants (Stolle and Hooghe, 2011). Through analysis of the 2002 European Social Survey (ESS) and the 2006 United States Citizen, Involvement, Democracy (CID) survey, Stolle and Micheletti (2013, p. 70) observe that political consumerism is more prevalent among the younger tier of the middle-aged group (30-44 years old). However, exceptions are noted in Denmark, Poland, Switzerland, and the UK, where individuals aged 45-59 years exhibit higher participation rates (ibid). In a non-Western context, Echegaray (2016) reports that young and middle-aged adults (25-44 years old) in Brazil are most likely to engage in political consumerism. While these findings suggest that political consumerism may follow the general lifecycle of conventional political participation which "rises in early years, peaks in middle age, and falls in later years" (Nie, Verba and Kim 1974, p. 326), it remains unknown whether this pattern applies to the

context of China. This study therefore investigates the age-participation relationship using data from the 7th wave of World Value Survey (China) (see Chapter 3).

Moreover, apart from the diverse findings about political consumers in general, some scholars have gone one step further and categorised political consumers into different types: boycotters, i.e. those who only participate in boycotts; buycotters, i.e. those who only participate in buycotts (Wicks et al., 2014; Neilson, 2010; Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2013); and "dualcotters", i.e. those who participate in both forms (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2013). These scholars argue that boycotters, buycotters and dualcotters differ significantly in their sociodemographic and attitudinal profiles (Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010; Copeland, 2013). Through analysing survey data from 2002/2003 European Social Survey, Neilson (2010) reveals that buycotters are more trusting in institutions, more altruistic and more engaged in voluntary organizations than boycotters. Similarly, drawing from an original survey of 1,300 U.S. adults, Copeland (2013) finds that, compared to buycotters, boycotters exhibit lower levels of political trust and are less influenced by citizenship norms. Using data from two National Civic Engagement Surveys (NCES) in the U.S., Baek (2010) finds that dualcotters possess greater political knowledge, are more active in seeking political information, and have higher incomes than boycotters and buycotters.

Despite this growing body of international research, little is known about political consumerism in China. A distinctive feature of Chinese political consumerism is that the majority of cases, particularly boycotts, have centred on patriotic and nationalistic themes (see Appendix A). Historically, since the late Qing Dynasty, political consumerism in China has been closely intertwined with struggles for national independence and economic prosperity. Given the country's distinct political system, cultural context, economic landscape, and strong nationalist tradition, Chinese political consumers may differ significantly from their Western counterparts. This dissertation investigates both the sociodemographic characteristics and underlying motivations of Chinese political consumers in order to fill this research gap. Due to limitations in the survey design, no buycott-related questions were included, and the quantitative analysis therefore focuses only on boycotters. However, this limitation is addressed through the case study chapters, which examine one boycott and one buycott case, thereby enabling a fuller exploration of both forms of political consumerism.

1.1.6 Why do participants participate?

What motivates consumers to buy or refrain from buying certain products for political or ethical reasons? This question has attracted attention from academics across political science, sociology, consumer studies, and media research. Discussions of motivational factors in political consumption are dispersed across disciplines. These studies propose a wide range of explanations, which can be grouped into two levels of analysis: the individual and the contextual. At the individual level, factors include personal values like post-materialist values, political orientation, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, self-enhancement, perceived egregiousness, consumer animosity, perceived costs, social media usage and perceived likelihood of success. At the contextual level, factors consist of three macro-level influences: political opportunity, economic opportunity, and cultural influence.

1.1.6.1 Individual-level

At the individual level, one of the most frequently cited explanations for political consumption is the influence of postmaterialist values. These include freedom of expression, quality of life, environmental protection, gender equality, social trust, and social justice (Dalton, 2006; Stolle et al., 2005; Micheletti et al., 2004; Copeland, 2013). Numerous empirical studies support this association. For instance, consumers purposefully buying fair trade products are often motivated by the desire to provide workers in developing countries with stable incomes and improved living conditions. Similarly, individuals concerned about environmental issues are more likely to buy environmentally friendly goods (Shah et al., 2007). Moreover, different types of postmaterialist values appear to be linked with different forms of political consumption. For example, Copeland (2013) finds that environmentalism is more related to buycotting and dualcotting behaviours, rather than boycotting.

However, it is important to note that these studies are based on data from developed democratic societies, such as the U.S. and Scandinavia, where the majority of the population holds either postmaterialist or mixed value orientations (Copeland, 2014b, p. 268). In contrast, in countries such as China, the overall level of postmaterialist values remains relatively low. Most Chinese citizens are either strongly materialist or exhibit mixed value profiles, with only a very small proportion identified as post-materialists (Table 1). This raises the question of whether post-

materialist values play a meaningful role in shaping political consumer behaviour in China –
an issue that remains underexplored.

Table 1. Materialist-Postmaterialist in China.[3]

	Materialist	**Mixed**	**Postmaterialist**
Have boycotted	44	31	8
Have not boycotted	1429	1336	106

As previously mentioned, political consumerism is not always progressive; it can also serve as
a vehicle for exclusionary or regressive purposes. In the Chinese context, nationalist political
consumerism represents the most controversial manifestation of such practices. While the
marketing and consumer behaviour literature has examined practices of nationalistic buying
and consumer ethnocentrism, these practices have rarely been conceptualised within the
frameworks of political consumerism research. Although a few recent studies have started to
investigate exclusionary or regressive forms of political consumerism, such as the "yellow
economic circle" in Hong Kong, these analyses have not addressed the phenomenon in the
mainland Chinese context (Lekakis, 2022; Chan and Pun, 2020; Tang and Cheng, 2022; Wong,
Kwong and Chan, 2021; Chan, 2022). To date, only a few scholars have examined cases of
nationalist political consumerism in China (Chan, 2025; Wong et al., 2023), but their analyses
have left the micro-foundational motivations and the meaning-making process unexplored. As
a result, there remains a critical gap in understanding regressive forms of political consumerism
as political acts.

Closely related to nationalist political consumerism are the concepts of patriotism and
nationalism, both of which have been shown to motivate participation in boycotts and buycotts,
yet through distinct psychological pathways. The relationship between patriotism and
nationalism is an enduring topic of academic debate. Patriotism can be defined as "a sense of
pride in one's own country, a desire to live there, respect for and loyalty towards its people"
(Barnes and Curlette, 1985, p. 44). Crucially, patriotic attachment does not necessarily entail
hostility toward other nations (ibid). Nationalism, by contrast, is often characterised by
"uncritical acceptance of national, state, and political authorities combined with a belief in the

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[3] Source: The 7th wave of World Value Survey (China)

superiority and dominant status of one's nation" (Skitka 2005). It is often associated with competitive or militaristic worldview (Druckman 1994). In their empirical survey, Kosterman and Feshbach (1989) found that nationalism was strongly associated with support for nuclear armament policy, whereas patriotism showed only a marginal connection. Similarly, Druckman (1994, pp. 63-64) points out that patriotism fosters strong group attachment without hostility towards others, whereas nationalism promotes both in-group loyalty and out-group dislike. Johnston (2017, pp. 13-14) further suggests that nationalism incorporates elements of patriotism but is distinguished by "more explicit comparisons between highly valued in-group traits and the devaluation of outgroups." This study therefore treats patriotism and nationalism as related but analytically distinct political motivations, enabling a more nuanced explanation of variation in how individuals interpret and engage in the boycott of foreign products and the buycott of national products in Chapters 5 and 6.

Another group of individual-level factors includes political efficacy, i.e., the belief that individual citizens can influence the political and social policies (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller, 1954); political trust, political interest, and organisational membership (Zhang, X., 2015; Koos, 2012; Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; Strømsnes, 2009). High levels of political efficacy and political interest are widely found to have a significant positive association with political consumerism (Koos, 2012; Zhang, X., 2015). Individuals who feel capable of influencing public policy or who are politically engaged are more likely to participate in acts of political consumption. Organisational embeddedness also appears to matter. Consumers who are active members of organisations are more likely to engage in political consumerism (Zhang, X., 2015; Katz, 2012). However, among these factors, the role of political trust is contested, which warrants closer examination.

Findings on the role of political trust remain mixed. While some studies suggest that political consumerism is positively correlated with political trust (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; Echegary, 2016), others report the opposite (Stolle et al., 2005; Gundelach, 2020). Researchers contend that political consumerism has flourished in Northwestern Europe and the United States as an innovative form of political participation, through which individual citizens attempt to solve transnational societal problems beyond control of governments, especially in today's globalised world (Micheletti et al., 2004; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Expanding the line of research to developing democracies, Gundelach (2020) finds that, similar to the

established democratic systems, political distrust serves as a significant driver of political consumerism. This stands in sharp contrast to the Chinese context.

Notably, there is little evidence to suggest that Chinese political consumers are motivated by low levels of trust in government. On the contrary, the majority of political consumerism cases in China appear to align closely with the government's stance, reflecting a high level of political trust in state authority. The case study of the NBA boycott discussed in Chapter 6 illustrates this alignment. However, exceptions do exist. Some individuals have employed market tools to voice criticisms of Chinese government policies (see the buycott of Paris Baguette and the buycott of Ukrainian products in Appendix B). These cases suggest that, similar to their Western counterparts, some Chinese political consumers use their purchasing power to assume individual responsibility for engaging in domestic and international politics.

Furthermore, social media usage is frequently cited as a significant driver of political consumerism. Studies show that individuals who actively use social media are more likely to participate in political consumption (de Zúñiga et al., 2014). Online communication channels can exert considerable impact on political consumerism (Kelm and Dohle, 2018). However, the effect of social media is not simply a matter of usage volume. Drawing on survey data from users of the Transition US social platform, Parigi and Gong (2014) argue that the quality of social media engagement is more important than the quantity. Specifically, respondents who maintained digital ties, i.e., "the relationships formed between activists who are interacting regularly online" (p. 239), were significantly more likely to adopt consumer actions aimed at producing societal change (ibid).

A growing body of research has explored the role of media in shaping consumer boycotts in China. Drawing on a case study of the 2017 anti-Lotte boycott, Sara Liao and Grace Xia (2022, p. 14) argue that Weibo significantly facilitated the viral spread, visibility, and escalation of the campaign, highlighting how digital platforms have become "indispensable for public political discussion as well as the convergence of citizenship and consumer identities." Similarly, Guo (2018), through an analysis of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CYL)'s Weibo posts during the Leon Dai incident (see Appendix A), shows how state media intensified nationalist sentiments and mobilised patriotic netizens to engage in online collective actions, such as boycotts. Bohman and Pårup (2022) find that approximately one third of the 90 boycott cases between 2008 and 2021 were supported by party- and state-affiliated organisations via

both social and traditional media. Although state-media involvement varies by case, these studies consistently suggest that media, particularly when affiliated with the state, is a powerful tool influencing individual boycott decisions. Building on this literature, my study not only explores the role of media in the NBA boycott but also extends the analysis to include a consumer buycott case, namely, the buycott of Erke in contemporary China.

Finally, the marketing science literature also explores the motivations behind political consumption, with a particular focus on boycott behaviour. The literature suggests that consumers are more likely to participate in boycotting movements if they:

1) are more susceptible to normative influence (Sen et al., 2001);
2) believe that doing so is morally right and will enhance their self-esteem (Mrad, Sheng, and Hart, 2013; Klein et al., 2004);
3) hold a higher degree of perceived egregiousness towards the targeted corporations (Klein et al., 2002);
4) harbour stronger animosity towards a foreign country (Klein et al., 1998; Tian and Pasadeos, 2012; Wang et al., 2013);
5) perceive lower costs associated with boycotting (Sen et al., 2001); or
6) have a higher belief in the likelihood of boycotting success (Sen et al., 2001).

Several empirical studies have investigated the role of consumer animosity in shaping boycott participation in China (Klein et al., 1998; Tian and Pasadeos, 2012; Wang et al., 2013). Klein et al. (1998, p. 90) define animosity as "remnants of antipathy related to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic events." They distinguish between two subtypes: *war animosity*, arising from historical or ongoing military conflict, and *economic animosity*, driven by perceived economic threats or controversial actions taken by foreign actors. In their study, Klein et al (1998) found that Chinese consumer animosity towards Japan negatively affects willingness to buy Japanese products, independently of product judgement. Building on this, Wang et al. (2013) show that susceptibility to normative influence is positively associated with war animosity, confirming that "the collective norms of Chinese consumers are to discourage buying Japanese products" (p. 46). In a survey of 150 Chinese university students in Beijing, Mrad et al. (2013, p. 44) demonstrate that consumer animosity translates into actual boycott behaviour when individuals seek to enhance their self-image (self-enhancement) or believe their participation will make a difference (perceived efficacy).

While these studies highlight key psychological and emotional factors, they largely overlook personal values, political orientations, and rational cost-benefit considerations that may shape boycott willingness and behaviour in China. Moreover, as they primarily focus on boycotts, other forms of political consumerism, such as buycotts, remain underexplored.

This thesis addresses the above-mentioned gaps by tracing the meaning-making processes behind consumers' boycott and buycott participation, particularly within the constraints of an authoritarian context. It draws on literature related to consumer animosity, rational choice theory, and psychological drivers of political consumerism. Building on this literature, I categorise individual-level motivations into four domains – political, ethical, self-related, and economic. These categories are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive, but they offer a useful analytical framework for interpreting the complex array of motivations underpinning political consumerism.

1.1.6.2 Contextual-level

At the contextual level, scholars have identified several macro-level factors that shape political consumerism. In particular, the political opportunity structure, especially the "openness of political system" and "potential state repression", can significantly influence individual participation in political consumerism (Koos, 2012; Zhang, 2015). Tarrow (1996, p. 54) defines political opportunity structure as "consistent, but not necessarily formal, permanent, or national signals to social or political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movement." When a political system offers ample opportunities for oppositional engagement, social movements are more likely to emerge and gain access to political decision-making (Hooghe, 2005, pp. 977-978). Historically, marginalised and oppressed groups, often excluded from formal political channels, have employed consumer boycotts as a tool of resistance (Micheletti et al., 2004). Notable examples include the May Fourth Movement in China, the Swadeshi Movement in India, the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the U.S., and the Bristol Bus Boycott in the UK. In contemporary contexts, citizens continue to politicise the market to defend their rights, express political grievances, and punish perceived wrongdoers (Micheletti et al., 2004; Zhang, X., 2015; de

Zúñiga et al., 2014). Where institutional political avenues are blocked or tightly controlled, the marketplace has emerged as an alternative site for expressing political demands.

However, in contrast to the above view, Koos (2012) suggests that in societies characterised by high levels of statism, where state power is highly centralised, consumers are less likely to participate in positive political consumption, such as buycotting, because institutional encouragement is lacking. In short, whether a lack of political opportunity serves to motivate or constrain consumer participation in political consumerism remains contested.

In addition to political opportunity, economic opportunity also plays a critical role in shaping political consumerism (Koos, 2012; Holzer, 2006). Specifically, Koos (2012, p. 40) argues that "national affluence, a concentrated retailing sector and the availability of labelled products provide a facilitating economic opportunity structure for positive buying and boycotting." In affluent countries, consumers are more likely to possess the financial means and access to substitute goods, making participation in boycotts or buycotts more feasible. Moreover, individuals with greater educational and financial resources are more inclined to adopt postmaterialist values, which are strongly associated with political consumerism (Dalton, 2006; Stolle et al., 2005; Micheletti et al., 2004; Copeland, 2013). Thus, higher levels of national affluence are generally considered to support the emergence of political consumerism.

China presents a nuanced case. Despite becoming the world's second-largest economy, the popularity of post-materialist values remains limited (see Table 1). As former Premier Li Keqiang noted at a press conference after the closing of the 13th National People's Congress, "600 million people have a monthly income of only 1,000 RMB (about 139 USD)" (gov.cn, 2020). A substantial proportion of the population continues to face unmet material needs and constrained disposable income. Yet in China, political consumerism remains highly visible, suggesting that factors other than economic affluence may play a more significant role in driving such behaviour in authoritarian contexts like China. This challenges the assumption that national affluence meaningfully facilitates political consumption.

Thirdly, some scholars argue that cultural dimensions also affect political consumption. Koos, for example, argues that societies that emphasise postmaterialist values, general trust in institutions and individual responsibility are more likely to prompt political consumption (Koos, 2012). However, this argument requires further examination because it overlooks

exclusionary and regressive forms of political consumption that occur within societies characterised by lower levels of postmaterialist values. In fact, China exemplifies this possibility. It has experienced more than 175 boycott cases and 45 buycott cases over the past decade, the majority of which were related to nationalist sentiment rather than postmaterialist values. This suggests that postmaterialist values seem to play a very limited role in driving political consumerism in China's authoritarian context.

Additionally, Sari, Mizerski, and Liu (2017) argue that in societies that highly value collectivism, political consumerism is more likely to succeed because individual consumers tend to act collectively rather than disassociate themselves from fellow groups. Similarly, Hoffmann (2014) examines the influence of national culture on boycott prevalence across countries and distinguishes between two dimensions of collectivism: in-group collectivism and institutional collectivism. These two dimensions have opposite effects in predicting boycott prevalence (ibid). On the one hand, in-group collectivism, i.e. "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organisations or families" (House et al., 2002, p. 6), is negatively associated with boycott prevalence (Hoffman, 2014). In such societies, people tend to prioritise in-group harmony and avoid conflicts, making them less likely to express displeasure with the actions of companies through boycotts (ibid). On the other hand, institutional collectivism, i.e. "the degree to which organisational and society institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action" (House et al., 2002, p.6), is positively associated with boycott prevalence. In these contexts, collective actions, such as boycotts, are socially supported, encouraging individuals to sacrifice personal needs for greater collective goals. In China, where institutional collectivism is strongly embedded in official discourse that prioritises collective over individual interests, consumer boycotts are likely influenced by such macro-level cultural orientations.

In sum, existing literature has identified three contextual-level factors that shape political consumerism: political opportunity, economic opportunity, and cultural norms. These factors offer valuable macro-level insights into the structural conditions under which political consumerism emerges. In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, I examine the historical evolution and sociodemographic characteristics of Chinese political consumerism from a macro-level perspective. Chapters 5 and 6 then shift to the micro-foundational level, investigating how and why individuals engage in boycotts and buycotts in China. While macro-level influences are acknowledged throughout the empirical analysis, especially in relation to state control, market

structure, and nationalist or collective cultural norms, the core analytical framework of Chapters 5 and 6 centres on individual-level motivations.

1.2 Research questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to investigate the origins, nature, and sources of power of political consumerism in China. Specifically, to address key gaps identified in the literature reviewed above, this study explores four research questions: 1) What is the historical development of China's political consumerism? 2) Who engages in contemporary political consumerism in China? 3) Does political consumerism crowd out or expand the repertoire of political participation in China? 4) What motivations drive individuals to engage in nationalist political consumerism in China?

1.3 Methodology

This thesis draws upon historical studies, consumer studies, and political science to provide a multi-faceted analysis of political consumerism in China. It adopts a multi-method approach that combines historical document analysis (Chapter 2), secondary survey data analysis (Chapters 3 and 4), and interviews and social media content analysis (Chapters 5 and 6) to explore both the general characteristics and lived experiences of political consumers in an authoritarian context. It draws on a broad range of data sources, including historical archives, government policy papers, media reports, nationally representative survey data, online observation, and in-depth interviews.

Rather than privileging a single theoretical lens, I draw on multiple explanatory traditions, including resource mobilisation theory, rational choice theory, consumer animosity, psychological drivers, postmaterialist values, and opportunity-structure arguments. This eclectic approach is particularly suited to analysing political consumerism in authoritarian contexts, as it captures "the interactions among different types of causal mechanisms normally analysed in isolation from each other within separate research traditions" (Sil and Katzenstein, 2010, p. 412).

Chapter 2 traces the historical development of Chinese political consumerism using digital archival sources such as *Shenbao* and *People's Daily*, government statements, policy documents, media reports, social media content, and academic literature in both English and Chinese. Chapters 3 and 4 use quantitative methods and analyse pre-existing survey data from the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) in China to examine, respectively, the sociodemographic characteristics of political consumers and the relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation in China. The quantitative method allowed me to capture the general characteristics of a large population in a way that is efficient and representative.

Chapters 5 and 6 adopt a mix-methods approach, focusing on two case studies: the NBA boycott and the Erke buycott. Quantitative content analysis is employed to assess the relative significance of motivational themes and categories across the interview data. Qualitative methods complement these findings by offering in-depth insights into why and how individuals engage in political consumption. Drawing on semi-structured interviews, online observation data, and government policy documents, the analysis uncovers how individuals construct meaning through political consumption and offers a deeper understanding of the underlying motivations driving political consumerism in China. This mixed-methods approach not only enables a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon but also enables methodological triangulation. Full methodological details are provided in the respective empirical chapters.

1.4 Contributions

While a growing body of international research has examined political consumerism, little is known about its dynamics in China. Given the country's distinct political system, cultural norms, economic landscape, and strong nationalist tradition, Chinese political consumerism may differ significantly from political consumerism in the West. This thesis investigates the historical evolution, nature, sociodemographic profile, and motivations of participants in Chinese political consumerism.

This thesis makes contributions to the study of Chinese politics and to the broader literature on political consumerism. It is the first study to examine the history of China's political

consumerism from the Late Qing Dynasty to Xi Jinping's New Era. It identifies four key historical phases and traces the leading forces driving political consumerism over time. The findings suggest that contemporary Chinese political consumerism has become increasingly atomised. While individuals can decide whether to participate in boycotts or buycotts, the lack of structural support from social organisations significantly limits their potential to evolve into large-scale movements. Consequently, their overall impact and effectiveness remain constrained. The historical analysis not only offers a diachronic perspective on China's political consumerism, but also situates contemporary practices within a longer-term trajectory of state-society dynamics.

This thesis also presents the first detailed sociodemographic profile of boycotters in China, providing an essential foundation for understanding the potential of political consumerism to shape international actors' perceptions and policies. While political consumerism, such as boycotts, is increasingly recognised in the West as a form of political participation, studies of Chinese boycotts have typically framed them either as a type of consumer behaviour or as an instrument of the party-state's economic statecraft, neglecting the dynamics between individual boycotting actions and political expression. By conceptualising boycotts as a form of non-institutionalised political participation, I show how they bridge the participation gap in authoritarian China by providing a low-threshold avenue for people with fewer socioeconomic resources, as well as for women and younger generations, to engage in national and international politics. I further argue that boycotts serve as a supplement to contentious forms of political participation and a substitute for institutionalised forms. This dynamic is crucial for understanding the power of Chinese political consumerism on the domestic and international political stage.

Finally, the thesis broadens the scope of political consumerism research by uncovering a complex and diverse set of motivations behind nationalist political consumption, an area overlooked by the existing scholarship focused on "progressive" cases. Synthesising key insights from political consumerism research, consumer animosity theory, and rational-choice cost-benefit analysis, alongside psychological factors, I propose a new motivational model to better explain political consumption behaviour in the world's second-largest economy. This model comprises four categories of motivations – political, ethical, self-related, and economic. While many political consumerism cases are triggered by foreign countries, corporations, or public figures crossing the political "red lines" of the Chinese state, this empirical study reveals

a more complex picture. Notably, political motivations were surprisingly among the least-cited by buycott participants when reflecting on their engagement in campaigns promoting national products. On the other hand, participants in the NBA boycott articulated a combination of expressive motivations (ethical and political considerations) and instrumental motivations (self-related and economic considerations). Beyond the Chinese context, this four-part motivational model offers a useful analytical framework for examining political consumerism across both authoritarian and democratic contexts.

1.5 Chapter overview

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 2 traces the historical development of Chinese political consumerism from the early 1900s to the Xi Jinping era. Using diverse sources ranging from the archives of *Shenbao* and other historical materials to government statements and policy papers, I detail four key stages in the development of Chinese political consumerism. The first period, from 1905 to the late 1940s, was marked by widespread urban Chinese engagement in boycotts of foreign products and buycotts of national goods, aimed at resisting foreign imperialist encroachment and achieving national salvation. The second period, the Maoist era (1949-1976), saw political consumerism reach its apogee. During this time, the state promoted a socialist lifestyle and stigmatised capitalist culture and consumer practices. This was reflected in practices such as buycotts of socialist fashion items and Mao badges, as well as boycotts of American cultural products such as films, books, music, and advertisements. The third period, from 1976 to the late 1990s, witnessed the rapid expansion of mass consumption, but political consumerism was rarely present in the public sphere. The fourth and current period began in 1999 and has intensified under Xi Jinping's leadership. During this period, the scope of political consumerism has broadened beyond defending perceived national interests to include social issues such as gender inequality, food security, animal welfare, and corporate irresponsibility. Nonetheless, most boycotts and buycotts continue to centre on contentious foreign policy issues.

Chapter 3 investigates who participates in boycotts in contemporary China. Drawing on nationally representative survey data from the 7th Wave of World Value Survey, I present a sociodemographic profile of Chinese boycott participants. First, unlike in the West, lower socioeconomic status does not appear to be an inhibiting factor for boycott participation.

Second, Chinese women are no less likely than men to engage in boycotts – a finding that stands in contrast to the marked gender imbalance that characterises China's institutionalised politics. Third, it is the youngest generation of Chinese adults who are most likely to participate in boycotts. These findings suggest that boycotts are used by underrepresented groups in Chinese society as an alternative venue for political expression.

Chapter 4 engages with the current debate on the relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation. In contrast to previous studies, this chapter distinguishes between institutionalised and contentious forms of participation, examining the relationship between boycott participation and each type separately. The data indicate that boycott participation serves as a supplement to contentious participation, and a substitute for institutionalised participation. This finding reflects the fact that, despite facing considerable constraints on formal political participation, Chinese citizens continue to express their political views on both domestic and international issues through market-based actions.

Chapter 5 and 6 explore the motivations of participants in China's political consumerism movements, with a particular focus on their nationalistic manifestations, namely, the boycotting of foreign products and the buycotting of national products. Drawing on in-depth online interviews with participants in the 2021 Erke buycott, Chapter 5 finds that participants' political motivations were surprisingly weak. Instead, economic, ethical, and self-related motivations were often more important. Chapter 6 investigates the high-profile 2019 NBA boycott in China. Based on in-depth interviews, I find that political and ethical considerations played a central role in motivating participants. Yet, instrumental concerns, including self-related factors (such as self-enhancement and susceptibility to normative influence) and economic motivations (such as perceived costs), coexisted with these expressive drivers. Despite differences in themes, both chapters apply the same four-part motivational framework developed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7 concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings and reflecting on the similarities and differences between political consumerism in China and the West. It also discusses the broader contributions and implications of the research, acknowledges its limitations, and outlines directions for future inquiry. As the world's second-largest economy, China has often utilised political consumerism as an informal instrument of economic statecraft.

However, the recent emergence of spontaneous and progressive political consumerism suggests a latent democratic potential that merits further investigation.

Chapter 2.

Historical development of Chinese political consumerism

"The (national product) movement was a driving force behind the spread of nationalist sentiment throughout China as a whole. It put 'nation' in front of everyone's eyes, on everyone's back, and on everyone's table and tongue. The elaboration, intensification, and institutionalization of this movement, in turn, provided new platforms and points of reference for further developments of nationalism."

- Karl Gerth, 2003, p.9

This chapter examines the historical development of Chinese political consumerism. Drawing on a diverse range of sources ranging from *Shenbao* archives, government documents, news reports, and academic literature, I identify four key transitional phases. The first phase, spanning from 1905 to the late 1940s, marks the origins of Chinese political consumerism. During this period, merchant groups, especially national product associations, were the primary actors, whereas the nationalist government became increasingly influential from the mid-1920s. Although student groups also played a significant role, especially during the 1919 anti-Japanese boycott, their actions were often supported, or arguably led by national product associations and the Nationalist government.

The second phase, from 1949 to 1976, was characterised by the paradoxical coexistence of dormancy and dominance in the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite a surge in mass consumption, this period saw no notable boycott or buycott campaigns. In the third phase, from 1976 to the 1990s, political consumerism remained largely dormant, even as mass consumption continued to rise.

The final phase began in 1999, following the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and extends to the present Xi Jinping era. During this period, the scope of Chinese political consumerism has expanded beyond the defence of perceived national interests to encompass wider social concerns, such as gender inequality, food security, animal welfare, and corporate social irresponsibility. However, most boycotts and buycotts have continued to centre on contentious foreign policy issues. Additionally, the

driving forces of political consumerism became more complex. On the one hand, the rise of internet technologies, especially social media, has rendered political consumerism increasingly atomised, granting individuals greater autonomy in deciding when, where, and how to engage. On the other hand, the state has remained pivotal in mobilising and demobilising individual engagement in political consumerism.

The remainder of this chapter is organised into five sections. The first four sections correspond to the key historical phases of Chinese political consumerism, while the final section summarises the chapter's key findings.

2.1 Historical roots of Chinese political consumerism 1905 – the 1940s

This section traces the historical roots of Chinese political consumerism to 1905, when China experienced its first nationwide boycott of foreign products. Prior to 1905, as trade with foreign countries expanded, there were sporadic instances in which Chinese merchants and local communities employed economic means to challenge foreign traders or colonial authorities. For example, in 1883, tea sellers in Hankou staged a strike against foreign tea buyers in demand of fairer prices (Remer and Palmer, 1933). Fifteen years later, in 1898, when the authorities of the French Concession in Shanghai seized a cemetery belonging to the Ningbo community, members of the entire community, spanning different social classes and occupations, collectively suspended business operations in protest (Morse, 1909 p.48). However, these actions remained localised and issue-specific. A large-scale anti-foreign boycott did not emerge until 1905, when the first major anti-American boycott took place (Remer and Palmer, 1933).

From 1905 to the 1940s, Chinese political consumerism movements (hereafter, PCMs) were closely intertwined with anti-imperialist and national independence movements. During this period, urban Chinese people developed distinctions between *national products* (国货) and *foreign products* (洋货), transforming the marketplace into a battleground for asserting sovereignty and resisting foreign encroachment. Early PCMs consisted of two strands: *Buycotting National Products Movements* (国货运动, BNPMs) and *Boycotting Foreign Products Movements* (抵货运动, BFPMs). The development of PCMs can be divided into five

phases. In the 1900s, merchant groups, particularly chambers of commerce, led the nascent movements. The 1910s saw the rise of BNPMs, often overlapping with BFPMs, with national products associations, especially the *National Product Preservation Associations* (国货维持会, NPPAs), emerging as key actors. From 1920 to 1937, the Nationalist government gradually replaced merchants as the principal driver. From 1937 to 1945, the movements declined due to war-related economic disruption and the suppression of organisations in the occupied area. Finally, from 1945 to 1949, PCMs re-emerged, led by the Chinese communist party and the national product associations.

Three questions are analysed in this section: 1) Why did political consumerism emerge in the early 20th century? 2) Who participated in political consumerism, and what motivated them? 3) What was its impact? First, I examine how the emergence of PCMs was shaped by four preconditions: the rise of modern Chinese nationalism, the growth of consumer culture, the expansion of the modern print media industry, and the development of social associations. I find that while PCMs engaged members of nearly all social strata, their principal participants were urban Chinese, particularly merchant groups, political elites, students, intellectuals, (educated) women activists, and workers. By contrast, the voices of rural population were marginal or entirely absent.

This section mainly draws on primary sources from the *Shenbao* digital archive (1872-1949) and secondary academic literature in both English and Chinese. To examine the BNPMs, I began by using keywords such as "national product (國貨)", which yielded over 103,000 results. This large volume suggests that the concept was deeply embedded in the early 20th century China. From these results, I identified and categorised key recurring phrases under three themes:

- Discursive mobilisation: "Promoting national products (提倡國貨)", "using national products (服用國貨)", "please use national products (請用國貨)", and "love for national products (愛用國貨)".
- Promotional initiatives: "National product year (國貨年)", "national product exhibition (國貨展覽會)", "national product printouts (國貨刊物)", "national product monthly (國貨月刊)", "national product weekly (國貨週刊)", "national product stores (國貨商店)", "national product shopping mall (國貨商場)", "national product museum (國貨

陳列館)”.

- Institutional infrastructure: "National product education (國 貨 教 育)”, "national product standards (國貨標準)”, "National product factory (國貨工廠)”, and "national product preservation association (國貨維持會)”.

These findings were cross-checked and contextualised using secondary literature to map a more comprehensive picture of the BNPMs in China.

To investigate the BFPMs, I used a similar method, searching for keywords such as "boycott (抵制), "boycott goods (抵貨)”, "boycott foreign goods (抵制外貨)”, and more specific terms like "boycott American goods (抵制美貨)”, and "boycott Japanese goods (抵制日貨)." I also included alternative expressions like "enemy products (仇貨)”, "inferior products (劣貨)”, and "Western products (洋貨)”, which were often used to refer to foreign goods. Unlike the buycotting movement, the boycotting movements were often triggered by political incidents, so I also examined major historical events to contextualise each case. Finally, these primary sources were supplemented with secondary literature to trace the broader origins and development of Chinese political consumerism.

2.1.1 The Emergence of Political Consumerism Movements: 1905 – 1910

This section examines the emergence of political consumerism in early twentieth-century China by focusing on three major boycotts: the 1905 anti-American boycott, and the anti-Japanese boycotts of 1908 and 1909. More importantly, it analyses the underlying factors that contributed to the rise of political consumerism during this period. This also helps identify enduring characteristics that persist in its contemporary manifestations.

2.1.1.1 The 1905 Anti-American Boycott

In 1882, the United States enacted the *Chinese Exclusion Act* (hereafter, the Act), which sought to prohibit the immigration of all Chinese labourers for a period of ten years. Under the restrictions imposed by the Act, many Chinese individuals faced severe discrimination in the U.S. The mistreatment of Chinese immigrants worsened over time, affecting not only labourers

but also social elites, who were frequently harassed and abused by American immigration officials (Wang, 2007 p.39). In 1904, upon the Act's expiration, the U.S. Congress passed legislation to extend it. In an effort to prevent the bill from becoming law, the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of San Francisco contacted the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce and called for a boycott of American goods (ibid).

In May 1905, during negotiations over the Act's extension, a large-scale anti-American boycott erupted across China. From Shanghai to other major cities and provinces, such as Suzhou, Hangzhou, Guangdong, Sichuan, Jiangxi, and Shaanxi, business groups, students, women's organisations, charitable and religious organisations, and political activists actively participated in the movement (Wang, 2007, pp. 116-117). For example, on July 25, 1905, Shanghai Sucheng Women's Vocational Normal Training Institute (上海速成女工师范传习所) hosted a women's convention (女子大会) to discuss strategies for boycotting American products (see Figure 5). Participants condemned the abuse of Chinese nationals in the United States and called for the production and consumption of Chinese national goods as substitutes for American imports.

Figure 5: "Women's Rally for Not Using American Goods (不用美货之女子大会)".
Source: *Shenbao*, 28 July 1905.

Boycotters adopted a variety of strategies to pressure both the Qing government and the United States to abolish the Act. Scholars and social elites delivered public speeches denouncing the injustice of the Act and the abuses against Chinese labourers. Artists and writers produced plays, songs, and novels that depicted the mistreatment of Chinese citizens in America and encouraged public participation in the boycott. Others volunteered to give out leaflets, booklets, or financed telegrams to disseminate boycott information. According to Wang (2007, p.2), between 22 July to 3 September 1905, Shanghai's *Shibao* published at least one pledge of support for the boycott each day, collectively representing around 13,000 individuals and business. By mid-September, influenced by persistent pressure from the U.S. government, fears that the boycott might evolve into an anti-government movement, and concerns about domestic commercial losses, the Qing court began to suppress the boycott movement (Wang, 2007). Ultimately, by the end of 1905, under pressure from both the Qing authorities and the American government, the boycott gradually subsided.

The economic effects of the 1905 boycott are difficult to evaluate. Statistics indicate that

imports from the United States increased by over 250 per cent in 1905, suggesting the boycott's long-term ineffectiveness (Remer and Palmer, 1933, p.36). Nevertheless, in South China, boycotting efforts achieved some short-term success (ibid). For example, in Shanghai, boycotters targeted the British-American Tobacco company and successfully reduced its sales (Cochran, 1980, p. 48). In Guangdong province, women supported the boycott by making rice cakes as substitutes for traditional moon cakes to avoid using American flour (Ts'ai, 1976, p. 99). Moreover, over 20,000 sacks of American wheat flour were stockpiled in warehouses due to market stagnation (Remer and Palmer, 1933, p.39). A direct outcome of the boycott occurred in June, when President Roosevelt instructed the U.S. Department of Immigration to treat Chinese immigrants holding legal documents with greater respect (Wang, 2007). Consequently, mistreatment of Chinese sojourners at ports declined significantly. However, the overall situation for Chinese workers remained worrisome, as the U.S. government refused to repeal the Chinese Exclusion Act (ibid).

Despite its limited success, the 1905 anti-American boycott was a landmark event in the history of Chinese PCMs. It marked the first nationwide anti-foreign boycott in China, involving all social classes and spreading across more than ten provinces (Gerth, 2003). Moreover, the boycott laid a foundation for future PCMs. It not only cultivated a cohort of activists who later dedicated themselves to boycotting foreign products and buycotting Chinese products, but also established a lasting connection between consumption and nationalism, allowing nationalistic consumption to flourish in Chinese society.

But why did the anti-American boycott erupt in 1905 rather than in 1882? Why did so many individuals participate in a boycott for the sake of overseas Chinese they had never met? And why was a boycott chosen as the method of resistance? Existing scholarship offers several explanations. First, Chinese responses to the Act were closely related to the emergence of Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth century. In the early years after the Act's enactment, the mistreatment of Chinese labourers in the United States received limited attention. It was not until the late nineteenth century that a modern concept of Chinese nationalism started to gain popularity (Zhao, 2004). Many urban Chinese increasingly identified as members of a Chinese nation rather than solely with local or regional affiliations, and they came to interpret the American exclusion of Chinese labourers as a national humiliation which needed to be changed (Wang, 2007). Moreover, the growing popularity of ideas such as popular sovereignty, the nation-state and national equality equipped Chinese elites and merchants with powerful

tools to mobilise the public and justify individual acts of boycott and buycott. Thus, in 1905, amid the negotiations over the Act's extension, newly awakened Chinese nationalists no longer remained silent or relied solely on the Qing court. Instead, they actively called upon the public to participate independently in the boycott of American goods.

Second, the 1905 anti-American boycott was grounded in China's expanding consumer culture. Following the forced opening of China to foreign imperialist powers, an increasing number of foreign goods entered the domestic market. By the early twentieth century, foreign products had become widespread in both urban and rural areas. In cities especially, items such as matches, machine-woven cloth (洋布), and cigarettes could be found in nearly every household (Li, 2013). At the same time, domestic commerce developed rapidly, with consumer goods and merchants circulating extensively across the country (Feuerwerker, 1980). The routine consumption of a diverse range of commercial goods, beyond necessities, became increasingly common among both elites and ordinary people. Yet formal political participation remained limited, with large segments of society, such as merchants, women, and workers, excluded from institutional political life. In this context, the marketplace emerged as an alternative arena through which individuals could express political views. China's increasing engagement with consumer goods, both local and foreign, helped set the stage for PCMs.

Third, the development of modern print media was another significant driver of the 1905 boycott. When the Act was first enacted in 1882, China's modern media infrastructure was still underdeveloped, and information about the Act, along with the suffering of Chinese labourers and elites in the United States remained scarcely known within China. However, following the First Sino-Japanese War, the rapid expansion of modern print media drastically altered this situation. From 1895 to 1898, approximately sixty newspapers were established across China (Chang 1980, p. 334). While most operated within limited localities, a number attained regional or even national circulation (ibid).

Modern newspapers played a pivotal role in disseminating information and shaping public opinion. In the years preceding the boycott, many publications reported on the mistreatment of Chinese immigrants in the United States. As a result, the Act became a subject of widespread public discussion, particularly in Shanghai and Southeast China (Wang, 2007, p. 57-58). The extensive coverage of the Act and the degrading experiences of Chinese migrants generated

both sympathy and indignation among domestic readers. Consequently, when the call to boycott American products was issued in 1905, individuals from diverse regions and social backgrounds responded actively. Undoubtedly, the development of modern print media was instrumental in mobilising public support and facilitating the nationwide scale of the 1905 boycott.

Lastly, the 1905 boycott was also facilitated by the expansion of social associations in early twentieth-century China. In 1882, calls for collective action like a boycott often lacked organisational support. It was not until the early 1900s, with the proliferation of social associations across Chinese cities, that large-scale boycotting movements became feasible. Notably, in 1905, a range of social associations, including chambers of commerce, study societies, women's organizations, speech societies and student groups, actively participated in the anti-American boycott (Wang, 2007). Among them, the chambers of commerce arguably played the leading role (Wang, 2007). However, in the later stage of the movement, some merchants became indifferent due to mounting economic losses (Wang, 2007). In contrast, intellectuals, students, workers, shopkeepers, and women's organizations across the country remained actively engaged. It was through the collective effort of these social associations that the 1905 boycott proceeded vigorously across China.

2.1.1.2 The Early Anti-Japanese Boycotts, 1908-1909

In the early 1900s, Chinese anti-foreign boycotts continued to develop. During this period, two major boycotts against Japanese products erupted in succession, both triggered by political disputes. The first, the 1908 anti-Japanese boycott, marked the earliest instance of Chinese engagement in a boycott to protest Japanese imperialism (Li and Zhang, 1963). It is widely acknowledged that the boycott was sparked by "the Tatsu Maru Affair."[4] Led by the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce and other merchant organisations, the protesters declared a boycott of Japanese products until Japan's economic losses matched the indemnity paid by the Qing government to Japan.

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[4] The Tatsu Maru Affair: In February 1908, a Japanese ship, *the Tatsu Maru*, was detained by Guang Dong officials for smuggling weapons to Macau. During the operation, the officials lowered the Japanese flag and replaced it with the Chinese flag, prompting a protest from the Japanese government. The Japanese authorities demanded that the Qing government return the vessel, pay an indemnity, and issue a formal apology. Following several rounds of negotiations, the Qing government eventually acceded to these demands.

On 18 March, the Guangdong Merchant Self-Government Association (yueshang zizhihui, 粤商自治会) hosted a "National Humiliation Memorial Convention (国耻纪念大会)" to advocate for a boycott of Japanese goods (*Shenbao*, March 27, 1908). Merchants declared their intent to burn Japanese merchandise; participants discarded and burned Japanese products such as hats, coats, cigarettes, and handkerchiefs; and organisers urged shopkeepers to put a sign saying "Remember National Humiliation" on their doors (ibid).[5]

> "Workers at the docks refused to unload Japanese ships. It was decided to lay a fine of $500 on any merchant purchasing the prohibited goods" (Remer and Palmer, 1933, p.41).

Within nine months, the boycott had spread to major cities of China, causing a considerable damage to Japanese trade (Orchard, 1930). For example, from April to December 1908, Japanese exports to China declined by more than 6%, compared to the same period in 1907 (ibid). Beyond its economic impact, this boycott also fostered the formation of widespread social coalitions in China (Gerth, 2003). For instance, some women in Guangzhou established the *National Humiliation Society* in Guangdong with the aim of boycotting Japanese products (Remer and Palmer, 1993).

In 1909, another boycott against Japanese products took place in North China. This boycott was provoked by Japan's takeover of the railway construction from Shenyang to Andong in North China. Compared to the 1908 boycott, the 1909 anti-Japanese boycott was less influential. It was initially instigated by Chinese students studying in Japan and later spread to overseas Chinese communities and parts of North China (Gerth, 2003). Lasting from August to October, this boycott persisted for three months but had little impact on the Japanese economy. Nevertheless, it drew global attention to China's strong resistance against Japan's

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[5] On 23 March 1908, *The Times* published a report entitled "The Tatsu-Maru Incident." An excerpt reads: "Over 50,000 persons attended an indignation meeting in Canton in connexion with the release of the Tatsu Maru. Many buildings were draped in mourning. Inflammatory speeches were delivered by 20 speakers including a boy of 12, whose words, calling for a Japanese boycott, moved his audience to tears. The listeners divested themselves of their Japanese garments, caps, and handkerchiefs, and made a huge bonfire of them, while one man, a dealer in Japanese goods, offered to sacrifice his stock for a similar purpose. It was suggested that posters should be affixed to shopfronts, appealing to purchasers to taboo Japanese manufacturers."

encroachment in North China (Orchard, 1930).

2.1.1.3 Summary

In the first decade of the twentieth century, amid the awakening of national consciousness, the rise of consumer culture, the growth of modern print media, and the expansion of social organisations, Chinese people increasingly employed negative forms of political consumerism, such as boycotts, to express their political demands. During this period, merchants often acted as the leading force in the BFPMs, while students, intellectuals, women and workers also played significant roles. Although boycotts reflected strong popular resistance to imperialist powers, they were at times excessively radical and produced unintended negative consequences for the domestic economy. For example, the 1909 boycott failed to significantly impact the Japanese economy, as participants focused on destroying Japanese products already in circulation rather than targeting future imports. Ironically, this approach harmed domestic merchants instead. This may help explain why early boycotts against Japanese products tend to be short-lived. By the 1910s, another form of political consumerism – buycotts – began to emerge in semi-colonial China and gradually evolved into a more enduring and widespread social trend.

2.1.2 Development of the Political Consumerism Movements in the 1910s

This section explores the evolution of PCMs during the 1910s. It shows that buycotting national products emerged at the beginning of the decade and developed vigorously throughout the period, becoming an integral part of Chinese political consumerism. Understanding the nature of Chinese political consumerism requires attention to both boycotting and buycotting practices. For this reason, this thesis investigates both forms empirically and in detail.

2.1.2.1 Emergence of Buycotting National Products Movements

At the beginning of the 1910s, China experienced a dramatic political transformation, with the Xinhai Revolution (1911-1912) in which the revolutionaries overthrew the Qing Dynasty and established the Republic of China (ROC). The new regime introduced a series of laws and regulations aimed at abolishing feudal customs and liberating the Chinese people. Among these

reforms was a change in traditional clothing style, which posed a serious threat to the domestic textile and garment industry. In response, the *National Product Preservation Association (中华国货维持会, NPPA)*, one of the most influential organisations in the history of the National Products Movements, was established in Shanghai at the end of 1911 (Gerth, 2003).

Initially, the NPPA sought to protect the economic interests of Chinese industrialists. It advocated for people to wear traditional Chinese-style clothes made of Chinese fabrics, which, to some extent, mitigated the decline of the domestic clothing industry. For example, in 1912, the NPPA successfully lobbied the newly-established Republic of China (中华民国, ROC) government to overturn the previous clothing policy of advocating Western-style suits and announce a revision to the policy in the Clothing Law (服制法), encouraging the public to wear Chinese-style clothes and use Chinese fabrics (*Shenbao*, August 31, 1912). Amid the turbulence of the "cut your queue and change your style of dress (剪辫易服)" and "Western clothing craze" period, this policy provided traditional-style Chinese clothing manufacturers with a space for survival.

As the NPPA was founded by commercial groups, primarily clothing manufacturers, it naturally focused on protecting the interests of the domestic garment industry. Despite its economic motivations, the NPPA's sustained promotion of Chinese-style clothing and nationalist consumption successfully associated appearance with patriotism. It propagated the notion that wearing Western-style suits signified disloyalty, and those whose clothes were made of imported fabrics were traitors to the country (Gerth, 2003). Consequently, when consumers purchased clothes in the market, they would probably have thought about the political meanings behind consumption. Nevertheless, the NPPA's activities soon extended beyond the clothing industry to include sectors such as food, stationery, toiletries, and medicine (Bi, 2018).

Specifically, the NPPA employed various strategies to promote national products. First, it regularly organised public lectures, often featuring prominent business figures and skilled orators advocating patriotic consumption. Between 1912 and 1914, it held 59 lectures and invited more than 90 speakers, with audience numbers rising from just four to several thousand (Yang, 1991). Second, the NPPA utilised print media, publishing magazines and brochures to reinforce nationalist consumption and promote domestic goods. In 1915, it launched the

National Product Catalogue (国货调查录) and the *Monthly National Products Magazine (国货月刊)*. While the former enabled consumers to distinguish national from foreign products, the latter offered updates on domestic goods, proposals for product improvement, and persuasive arguments for nationalist consumption (Bi, 2018). Third, the NPPA organised and co-sponsored national products exhibitions, either independently or in collaboration with the government and other associations (ibid). For example, in 1915, the Shanghai NPPA assisted the ROC government in hosting a National Products Exhibition that attracted an average of over 10,000 daily visitors and displayed nearly 100,000 items (Ma and Hong, 2009, p.70). Through diverse and sustained efforts, the NPPA successfully embedded nationalist consumption into everyday life.

Additionally, since its establishment, the NPPA was committed to building a nationwide network to promote national products. First, it cultivated relationships with political authorities and commercial associations across the country. By submitting letters and petitions to the ROC government and stressing the importance of preserving national products, the NPPA secured support from President Sun Yat-sen and influential government officials such as Chen Qimei, Wu Tingfang, and Zhang Qian (Bi, 2018, pp.44-5). Second, it mobilised merchants and patriotic activists to establish national products organisations aimed at revitalising domestic industries. Third, it collaborated with local groups to establish affiliated associations in cities and towns across China. Between 1912 and 1929, under the leadership of the Shanghai NPPA, 41 branches were founded nationwide, including both coastal and inner provinces (ibid). A nationwide BNPM was rising.

Overall, the NPPA played a pivotal role in the emergence of BNPMs across China. It capitalised on growing nationalist sentiment and actively promoted the idea that consuming national products was vital to national salvation (Gerth, 2003). It also inspired a substantial number of merchants and patriotic activists to establish similar organisations aimed at revitalising domestic industries. Through the coordinated efforts of these associations, buycotting national products became a widely advocated form of peaceful anti-imperialist resistance from the early 1910s.

2.1.2.2 Anti-Japanese Boycotts and the Rise of Consumer Nationalism

As BNPMs continued to develop in China, another major boycott occurred in 1915 in response to Japan's Twenty-One Demands, a series of concessions Japan sought from the ROC government. Anti-Japanese boycotts had already begun by March that year, when the *Society to Propagate the Use of National Goods* was established in Shanghai, promoting boycotts of Japanese goods and buycotts of Chinese goods (Remer and Palmer, 1933). The boycott escalated after Japan issued an ultimatum on 7 May and the ROC government capitulated on 9 May, sparking a nationwide boycott campaign across cities including Shanghai, Dalian, Yantai, Yingkou, Tianjin, Beijing, Chongqing, Changsha, and Hankou (ibid). Despite suppression by the ROC government, the boycott persisted for several months before gradually subsided by year's end (ibid).

Facing state suppression and Japanese diplomatic pressure, boycotters developed covert discursive strategies. They referred to Japan as "a certain empire (某帝国)" and to Japanese products as "enemy products (仇货), " thus spreading anti-Japanese sentiment while avoiding direct repression (Gerth, 2003, p.139). Activists also designated 7 and 9 May as "National Humiliation Days (国耻日)," using public commemorations and commercial tactics, such as embedding the symbol "5·9" into advertisements,[6] to encourage patriotic buying (Bi, 2018). From 1927 to 1940, the Nationalist government institutionalised 9 May as a national holiday,[7] reinforcing the boycott's symbolic resonance.

The 1919 anti-Japanese boycott deepened these narratives of humiliation. It was triggered by the Versailles Peace Conference's decision to grant Japan control over Shandong despite China's contributions to the Allied war effort. On 7 May, Beijing students staged a solidarity rally reported attended by over 10,000 people, prompting widespread shutdowns of theatres, schools, businesses, social organisations, and public offices (Gerth, 2003, p. 148). A renewed wave of boycotts followed.

The 1919 anti-Japanese boycott continued intermittently until 1921, spreading to over 200 cities across over 20 provinces (Chow, 1960). Students, merchants, workers, women activists,

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[6] For example, May Ninth Facial Cleaning Tooth Powder (五九牌擦面牙粉). See Appendix H. It is common to find slogans such as "Do not forget May Ninth (勿忘五月九日)", or "May Nineth Commemoration (五九纪念)" featured in advertisements.
[7] William A. Callahan (2006) highlights that the nation emerges not merely from the ideology of its leaders but also through popular performances, such as National Humiliation Day.

intellectuals, and other social groups actively participated. Politically, the boycott strengthened the Beijing government's position in the negotiations over Shandong and contributed to its eventual return. Economically, it had a significant impact on Japanese imports to China. Although Japanese's total exports China increased in 1919, their share of China's foreign imports declined from 43.0% in 1918 to 38.2% in 1919 (Li and Zhang, 1963). This decline was particularly sharp in the cotton sector, where Japan's share dropped from 66% in 1918 to 28% in 1919.

2.1.2.3 Summary

Since the early 1910s, with the emergence of BNPMs, Chinese PCMs gradually shifted from being boycott-oriented to a boycott-buycott combined movement. On the one hand, this shift was influenced by the prevailing idea of "economic war (商战)" in Chinese society. On the other hand, the primary driving force behind the boycotts at this stage was national products associations, whose core members were Chinese merchants. Thus, it is unsurprising that boycott organisers sought to integrate buycotts into the movements. Notably, this boycott-buycott combined pattern remains evident in contemporary political consumerism cases in China, including the buycott of Erke discussed in Chapter 5 and the boycott of NBA examined in Chapter 6.

Moreover, in the 1910s, national product organisations emerged as a major driving force of political consumerism in China. Although student groups played a significant role in the 1919 anti-Japanese boycott, their actions were supported and guided by national product associations. This reflects a distinctive feature of early Chinese political consumerism: movements led by civil society organisations. In contemporary China, however, strict state control has resulted in disbandment or severe restriction of many social organisations. In the absence of strong organisational support, political consumerism has become increasingly atomised. On the one hand, this may reduce the overall impact of boycotts and buycotts. On the other hand, it raises participation costs for individuals who have to rely on themselves to search for boycott-related information, identify substitutes, and communicate their demands to targets.

Furthermore, the 1910s witnessed a rise of nationalistic consumer culture in China. National product organisations consistently leveraged anti-Japanese sentiment and narratives of national

humiliation to advocate individuals to boycott foreign products and buycott national products. They employed various methods to intensify the relationship between individual consumption and national salvation. More than a century later, this nationalistic consumer culture still finds its place in contemporary Chinese society. As aforementioned, the most contentious forms of political consumerism in China are manifested through nationalist consumption (also see Appendix A). That is also why this thesis selects contemporary buycotts of national product and boycott of foreign products for its case studies.

The next section presents the third key phase of early Chinese political consumerism. It examines the characteristics of the continuing PCMs. More importantly, it demonstrates that from the mid-1920s onwards, the Nationalist government emerged as a central force in shaping these activities. The regime strategically employed political consumerism, both boycotts and buycotts, as a tool of economic statecraft to resist foreign economic encroachment, mobilise domestic public support, and promote the development of the national economy.

2.1.3 The Flourishing of the Political Consumerism Movements, 1920 – 1937

From 1920 to 1937, the Chinese PCMs entered a golden period of development. During this time, the Nationalist government emerged as a central force in the movement. Concurrently, BNPMs expanded rapidly across the country. The proliferation of national products associations, exhibitions, and museums, along with the establishment of "National Products Years" exemplifies this growth. The following section examines the historical development of BFPMs and BNPMs between 1920 to 1937, with particular attention to the role of the central government in shaping Chinese political consumerism and the rise of patriotic consumer culture.

2.1.3.1 The Expanding and Increasingly Sophisticated Role of the Nationalist Government

From 1920 to 1937, China experienced four significant anti-Japanese boycotts: in 1923, 1928, 1931 and 1937. Among these, the 1928 anti-Japanese boycott deserves special attention. Notably, this boycott marked a turning point, as it signalled the Nationalist government's emergence as a significant driving force in early Chinese PCMs.

The 1928 boycott was triggered by the Jinan Incident. On 3 May 1928, a military clash between Japanese troops and the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) broke out in Jinan, Shandong, resulting in thousands of Chinese casualties. On 11 May, Japanese forces defeated the NRA and occupied the city, maintaining control until March 1929. The Jinan Incident immediately sparked a wave of anti-Japanese boycott across China. On 6 May, the Nanjing government issued "General Methods on Severing Economic Relations with Japan (对日经济绝交办法大要)", which instructed party committees at all levels to

> guide various mass organisations, such as chambers of commerce, business associations, student unions, labour unions, farmers' associations, women's associations, etc., as well as various businesses that have trade relations with Japanese merchants, to jointly organise a committee to boycott enemy goods and preside over all matters related to breaking economic relations with Japan (Zhou, B., 2004).

On 7 May, the Nationalist headquarters in Shanghai, in alliance with 21 organisations, established the "*Shanghai Anti-Japanese Atrocities Committee (上海各界反对日本暴行委员会, also known as 反日会)*" to coordinate the boycott in the city (Pei, J.H., 2001).

With the joint efforts of the Nanjing government, business groups, and national products associations, the anti-Japanese boycott rapidly spread to cities across China. It was especially intense in Shanghai and the coastal areas of South China, where Japanese goods were targeted most severely (The Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1932). However, by April 1929, the Nationalist central government reversed its supportive stance and began suppressing boycotting activities (Huang and Zhou, 2010, p.100). Consequently, the 1928 boycott gradually faded.

The 1928 boycott marked a turning point in the early history of political consumerism in China, as it represented the first instance in which the government employed boycott strategies as a form of economic statecraft during a military conflict. It strengthened the Nationalist government's position in negotiations with Japan regarding the Jinan Incident, leading to Japan's withdrawal from Jinan in March 1929. Moreover, by actively engaging in the movement, the Nationalist government succeeded in cultivating a patriotic image and

reinforcing its legitimacy as the primary authority in managing Sino-Japanese diplomatic relations.

The involvement of Chinese political actors in the BFPMs began with the 1905 anti-American boycott. During this campaign, revolutionaries such as Sun Yat-sen, Chen Shaobai, Zheng Guangong, and Li Shinan sought to link the anti-American boycott with the anti-Qing struggle, using it as a platform to propagate revolutionary ideas (Huang, X.Q., 1995). Since then, political parties have frequently leveraged boycott movements to advance their agendas. However, before 1927, their primary objective was the overthrow of existing regimes – the Qing Dynasty and later the ROC government – through violent revolutions. As a result, they paid little attention to peaceful forms of economic resistance, such as boycotts. This dynamic changed after 1927, when the Nanjing government assumed national authority. The party's transition from a revolutionary force to a governing regime led to a reorientation of its stance toward boycotting and buycotting activities. On the one hand, the Nationalist government strictly monitored violent actions that might threaten political stability. On the other hand, it actively promoted nonviolent forms of mobilisation, including boycotts and buycotts. By 1928, the Nationalist government had surpassed merchant groups as the dominant force in China's boycotting movements (Huang and Zhou, 2010).

2.1.3.2 The Popularisation of Nationalistic Consumer Culture

The 1920s and the 1930s witnessed a booming trend of buycotting movements in China. During this period, two major forces led these efforts: national products associations and the Nationalist government. An increasing number of national products associations were established across China. For example, from 1921, the *Shanghai Citizens Association for the Promotion of National Products (上海市民提倡国货会)* began organising national products exhibitions *(国货展览会, NPEs)* in various locations. Between 1921 and 1926, it held fourteen exhibitions and helped many domestic factories to sell their products (Ma and Hong, 2009). In 1927, the *Shanghai Machine-Manufactured National Products Factory Association (上海机制国货工厂联合会, hereafter, MFA)* was founded, marking a new stage in the development of BNPMs. The newly established MFA transcended industrial boundaries by uniting a wide range of sectors, including textile, medicine, food, and chemicals (Chong, 2009). Beyond promoting the consumption of national products, the MFA also placed significant emphasis on

developing domestic raw materials to reduce domestic manufactures' dependence on foreign supplies (Chong, 2009).

In addition to the MFA, another key organisation in BNPMs was the *China National Products Production and Marketing Cooperative Association (中华国货产销协会, hereafter, PMCA)*. Through the establishment of *Chinese National Products Company Introduction Offices (中国国货介绍所)*, the PMCA facilitated better sales channels and provided stable cash flows to affiliated national product factories via trusted Chinese banks (Chong, 2009). In 1933, the PMCA also founded a permanent department in Shanghai dedicated exclusively to the sale of national products: the *China National Products Company (中国国货公司, hereafter, CNPC)*. The CNPC later expanded into an international network of stores specialising solely in Chinese national products (Gerth, 2003). During the 1930s, the PMCA played a pivotal role in cultivating a nationalistic consumer culture across China. Alongside the MFA and the PMCA, a substantial number of national products associations emerged during this period. Together, through their coordinated efforts, BNPMs flourished throughout 1920s and 1930s China.

After 1928, the Nationalist government emerged as the other leading force in the Chinese BNPMs. From the late 1920s, the newly established Nanjing government began to intervene extensively in BNPMs (Chen, H.Z., 1999). From 1928 onward, the Nationalist government implemented a series of policies aimed at promoting national products. Official documents emphasised that government institutions should prioritise the procurement of domestic products, thereby positioning the state as a model for the broader population (Zong and Lin, 1997, p.59). For example, on 7 November, 1928, the Ministry of Justice of the Nationalist Government issued six detailed regulations to support domestic products. These included: (1) protecting domestic factories and shops; (2) promoting publicity for national goods; (3) researching and imitating foreign products; (4) compiling textbooks and publications advocating national goods; (5) rewarding inventions of national products; and (6) requiring bookstores to indicate the factory that produced the paper used in each printed book. Each regulation was followed by detailed guidelines (Shenbao, 1928).

The government's commitment extended even to the military. The Military Affairs Commission issued orders mandating that all troops exclusively purchase and use national products, while also promoting patriotic awareness among soldiers (ibid). Officers were

instructed to frequently speak about the importance of promoting national goods, and a "Song for Promoting National Goods" was to be composed, taught to soldiers, and sung daily, including during marches (ibid).

First, the Nanjing government advanced the development of BNPMs by introducing the *National Products Standards (国货标准, NPS)*, China's first official classification system for national products. Since the beginning of BNPMs, both national products activists and patriotic consumers had expressed deep concern over the distinction between domestic and foreign products. Consumers frequently struggled to differentiate between them, and some producers and merchants exploited this ambiguity, either by disguising foreign products as domestic to avoid boycotts or by presenting national products as foreign goods to attract consumers who favoured imports (Gerth, 2003). To protect consumers from deception, the Nationalist government introduced the NPS to standardise product classification. Boycotters and buycotters were given clearer guidance for identifying a product's country of origin, and merchants gained a more concrete understanding of contraband items (Gerth, 2003). Importantly, by promoting the NPS, the Nationalist government not only strengthened the effectiveness of political consumerism but also significantly expanded its control over the domestic economy.

Beyond the implementation of the NPS, the Nationalist government actively engaged in a range of buycotting activities, including organising the NPEs, establishing *national products museums (国货陈列馆)*, and promoting *national products years (国货年)*. Following the establishment of the Nanjing regime, the government began to regulate and politicise these exhibitions. It issued the *General Rules for National Products Exhibitions (全国举办物品展览会通则)* providing systematic guidelines for NPEs (Ma and Hong, 2009, p. 72). For example, the rules required official verification from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce for all exhibitions and mandated the establishment of national products museums before hosting events. Additionally, the Nationalist government leveraged the NPEs as a propaganda tool to reinforce its authority. During the Chinese National Product Exhibition, officials actively promoted the legitimacy of the Nationalist regime. A notable example was the Shanghai Municipal government, which designed its pavilion as a symbol of modernisation, showcasing its vision of China's future under the Nationalist Party leadership (Gerth, 2003).

The expansion of BNPMs popularised nationalistic consumer culture in China. Throughout the 1920s and the 1930s, national products association and the Nationalist government actively promoted domestic goods in cities nationwide. They employed diverse strategies, included the *NPEs, national products museums (国货陈列馆), national products stores (国货商店), national products years (国货年)*, and extensive advertising campaigns.

First, *NPEs* were particularly influential within BNPMs. These exhibitions were often organised by the government agencies and/or national products associations and held in multiple locations. Unlike regular commodity exhibitions, which focused on market value, NPEs emphasised nationalist and anti-imperialist consumption (Gerth, 2003). Although they originated in the 1910s, NPEs gained significant momentum after 1928. According to Ma and Hong (2009, p.69), more than 250 NPEs were held in China before 1937. The most famous was the *Chinese National Products Exhibition (中华国货展览会)*, held in Shanghai from 1 November 1928 to 3 January 1929. This 64-day event attracted over 1.3 million visitors, making it the largest national products exhibition of the Nanjing era (ibid). The scale of the exhibition reflected not only the government's organisational capacity but also the growing public enthusiasm for nationalistic consumer practices.

Moreover, the role of national products associations in expanding the NPEs should not be overlooked. These associations not only assisted the government in organising exhibitions in major cities, but also launched *Mobile National Products Exhibitions (流动国货展览会)* in rural areas, encouraging rural consumers to support national products (Ma and Hong, 2009, p. 72). Overall, through the combined efforts of the government and national product associations, NPEs became one of the most effective instruments for promoting national products in Republican China.

Second, *national products museums* were another popular form that facilitated the development of BNPMs. Like NPEs, these museums aimed to educate consumers on identifying national products in the market and persuading them to buycott national products. Unlike NPEs, which were temporary and mobile, national products museums were permanent exhibitions housed in fixed locations. While museums provided continuous access to exhibits, they lacked the flexibility and wide geographic reach of mobile exhibitions like NPEs.

From the late 1920s, national products museums developed rapidly across China, with the Nationalist government serving as the principal driving force. In 1927, the government issued the *Rules for National Products Museums (国货陈列馆条例)*, mandating the establishment of museums in every province and city (Gerth, 2003, p.233). Within two years, about twenty-one museums were either established or renovated. In 1929, the government founded the *Capital National Products Museum (首都国货陈列馆)* in Nanjing, one of the most well-known museums of BNPMs era. Remarkably, in its first year alone, the museum displayed over 7,000 items and attracted nearly 1 million visitors (Shenbao, 1930).

Third, boycotting activists focused on establishing *national products stores* to promote nationalist consumption. While exhibitions and museums emphasised publicising national products and cultivating awareness among consumers, these stores prioritised direct sales to the public. Both boycotters and buycotters advocated for retail spaces that exclusively sold Chinese national products (Gerth, 2003). However, in the 1920s, only a few stores or markets attempted to operate exclusively with national products, and most of these efforts were short-lived (Gerth, 2003). A major breakthrough occurred in 1934, with the establishment of the Chinese National Products Company (CNPC, *中国国货公司*), a comprehensive department store dedicated entirely to national products (ibid). As the CNPC expanded across Chinese cities and even into overseas Chinese communities, it became, in Gerth's words, "an important symbolic and practical step in the process of nationalising consumer culture" (Gerth, 2003, p. 211).

Fourth, advertising served as a powerful tool in promoting nationalistic consumer culture throughout PCMs. As previously mentioned, national enterprises frequently incorporated nationalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric into their advertisements. Symbols of national humiliation, such as "5.9" and "9.18", were commonly featured to remind consumers of past injustices and encourage them to buy Chinese products (Figure 6). Merchants also strategically named their products to evoke anti-imperialist sentiment and appeal to patriotic consumers. Examples include such as "national humiliation (国耻)", *Diyang* (抵羊, literally "resist sheep", a pun on *dizhi yanghuo* 抵制洋货, "boycott foreign goods"; see Figure 6), and jiuyiba (九一八, "September 18"), a reference to the Mukden Incident. From the late 1920s, the Nanjing government further institutionalised this practice by distinguishing national products advertisements from those promoting foreign goods and offering special incentives to promote

national products (Shenbao, 1928).

Figure 6: Diyang Wool Yarn (抵羊牌毛线); May Ninth National Humiliation Commemorative Items (五九国耻纪念品). Source: Shenbao.
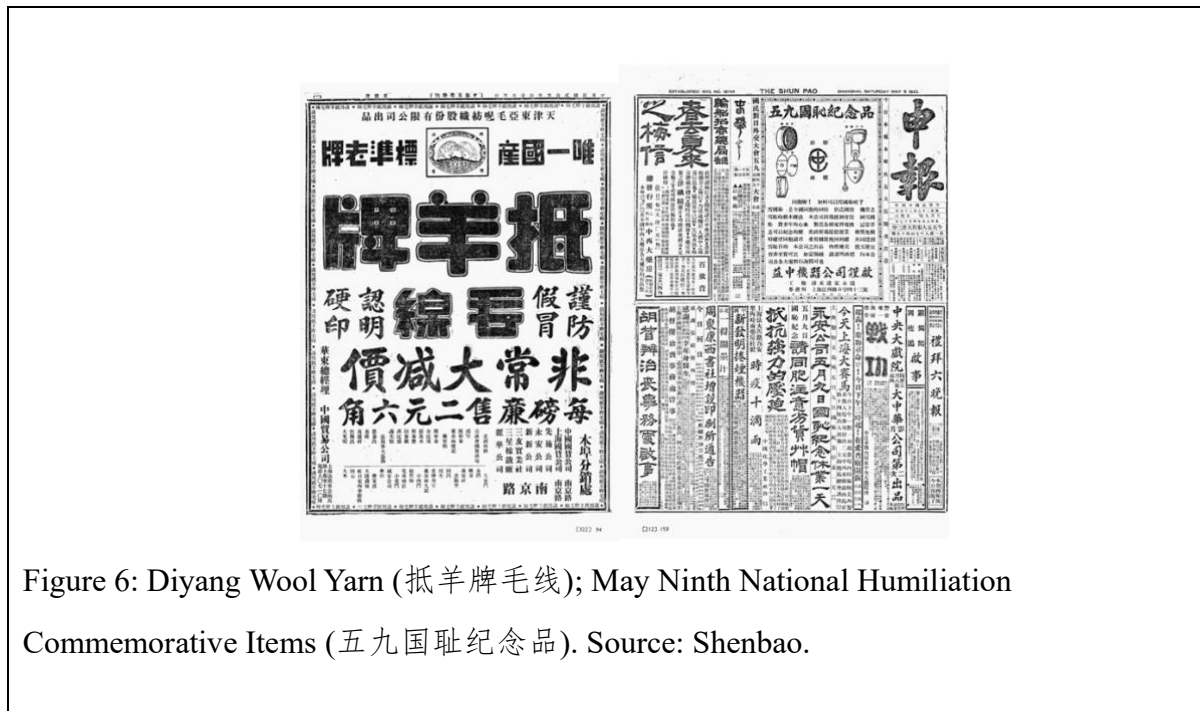
Finally, in order to mobilise a broader range of citizens across different social classes to engage in the national products movement, the Nationalist government designated a series of themed campaign years: 1933 as the "Year of National Products", 1934 as the "Women's National Products Year", 1935 as the "Students' National Products Year", 1936 as the "Citizens' National Products Year", and 1937 as the "Civil Servants' National Products Year". During these campaigns, national product associations adopted various strategies, such as organising National Products Motor Parade (国货汽车游行大会) and Lantern Rally for National Products (国货提灯大会), to promote domestic goods. Cities such as Kaifeng, Xuzhou, Yancheng, and Bangbu launched national products exhibitions, organised national product promotion weeks, and held public lectures encouraging the use of domestic goods (Pan, 1998, p.36). The movement spread widely across both coastal and inland cities, engaging a diverse range of social groups, including women, students, and civil servants. While these campaigns contributed to the development of domestic industries and promoted the concept of national product consumption, China continued to face a significant trade deficit during this period (Pan, 1998).

2.1.3.3 Summary

Overall, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, national products associations and the Nationalist government adopted diverse strategies, including national products exhibitions, national products museums, national products stores, advertising, and themed campaign years, to promote buycotting movements. Through these varied promotional campaigns, national identity became increasingly intertwined with consumer behaviours. By creating nationalised consumption spaces for consumers, a nationalistic consumer culture gradually became an integral part of everyday life in Republican China.

In 1937, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War led to the breakdown of diplomatic relations between China and Japan, which in turn disrupted their economic ties. Although some Japan-made products remained on the Chinese market, they were primarily in the hands of domestic merchants. Under these conditions, boycotting Japanese products risked harming Chinese businesses rather than Japan's economy. As a result, economic sanctions such as boycotts, were no longer effective in constraining Japan's military aggression. Following the onset of war, boycotting movements rapidly declined, and buycotting efforts also suffered significant setbacks. As large areas of China came under Japanese occupation, BNPMs became increasingly difficult to sustain. Many national product associations were forced to suspend operations, and some were disbanded entirely (Chen, 1999). After the Battle of Shanghai, the city – along with many other coastal areas – was left severely damaged. As BNPMs had been largely centred in Shanghai, the movement was particularly hard hit (ibid). Generally, after 1937, political consumerism in China – both the boycotting and the buycotting strands – gradually faded away.

2.1.4 The Re-emergence of the Chinese Political Consumerism Movements: 1946-1949

After the Second Sino-Japanese War, as China remained embroiled in the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), a new wave of "buycotting Chinese goods, boycotting American goods" emerged. In July 1946, Hu Boxiang, *General Manager of the Family Industry Association (家庭工业社)*, launched the "Support National Products Movement (爱用国货运动)", which gained widespread support across multiple sectors of society (Xu, B.Y., 1946). Hu Boxiang outlined

two guiding principles for the campaign: first, it aimed to reshape consumer attitudes through publicity rather than coercion, promoting pride in domestic goods while respecting individual freedom; second, it explicitly distanced itself from anti-foreign boycotts to avoid confusion (ibid).

On 30 August 1946, the Nationalist government and the United State signed the "Surplus Property Bulk Sale Agreement" (hereafter, the Agreement). The Agreement aimed to "bring about the speedy turnover to China of war surpluses for use by China in rehabilitating its economy, combating inflation, and acquiring foreign exchange through sales for export" (Brown, 1948). However, the influx of low-cost, high-quality American products severely disrupted China's domestic industries. One notable example was the hosiery industry. On 11 January 1947, *Shenbao* published an article titled *Glass stockings flood the market, leading to the decline of local hosiery factories*:

> … Last year, influenced by the civil war, traffic was blocked, and sales were stagnant. However, the actual sales in Shanghai from January to June were still good. It was after June, due to the large-scale import of American glass stockings, which were sold at a very low price… The entire market was almost monopolised by glass stockings… The stocking factories in Shanghai were in a state of collapse and could not maintain large-scale production…By the end of 1946, most of the factories, (about two-thirds of the total) still could not maintain. Accordingly, ten large factories in the hosiery industry including China, Taiji, Qinyi, Huaan, and Fukang, have now stopped production. (*Shenbao*, 1947)

In fact, the hosiery industry was not the only sector affected by the influx of American imports. Other industries such as canned food, rubber, cotton, cigarettes, and matches all suffered significant losses. In response, national product organisations such as the MFA, along with domestic industrialists, actively called on the public to support national products and avoid using American products.

During this period, the Chinese Communist Party emerged as one of the leading forces in the movement. In alliance with business groups, it launched the "Use Chinese goods and boycott American products (爱用国货，抵制美货)" campaign. To coordinate the movement, the CCP

established the *Committee for Supporting National Products and Boycotting American Goods (爱用国货抵制美货委员会)*, which organised public gatherings and speeches (Shanghai Local Chronicle Office, 2001). Arguably, the CCP's involvement in the campaign was driven primarily by political motives – to challenge the Nationalist government and gain popular support. Nonetheless, the movement attracted broad backing from nationalist intellectuals such as Guo Moruo, Deng Chumin, Ma Yinchu, and many patriotic entrepreneurs (ibid).

2.1.5 Summary

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese people increasingly employed political consumerism, specially boycotts and buycotts, for political expression. During this period, PCMs in China underwent dramatic changes. First, the leadership of PCMs shifted from commercial groups to political actors. From 1905 to the mid-1920s, merchant groups, such as chambers of commerce and national products associations, played a central role in initiating, organising, and managing both boycotting and buycotting campaigns. In the 1928 anti-Japanese boycott, the Nationalist government assumed leadership and emerged as the dominant force in PCMs, representing a turning point for both BFPMs and BNPMs. Finally, during the civil war, the Chinese Communist Party became an influential force in leading the newly re-emerged political consumerism movement.

Second, the main activities in PCMs evolved significantly over time. From 1905 to 1909, boycotts were the primary means through which Chinese patriots resisted foreign influence. In the 1910s, with the emergence of national products associations, such as the NPPAs, buycotts became a key strategy to counter foreign economic dominance and support the national economy. From 1920 to 1928, as BNPMs expanded nationwide, boycotts grew increasingly confrontational. Following the Nationalist Party's consolidation of power in the late 1920s, Chinese PCMs became increasingly institutionalised, entering what could be considered their golden era of development. However, the outbreak of the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 led to the stagnation of BFPMs, while BNPMs struggled to continue. During the Chinese Civil War, a resurgence of anti-American boycotts and buycotts of national products signalled the beginning of a brief recovery for Chinese PCMs, although this momentum was soon interrupted by the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

Overall, the boycotting and buycotting movements from 1905 to 1949 laid the foundation for Chinese political consumerism. These movements redefined material culture by establishing a clear distinction between "national products" and "foreign products", making "the consumption of national products a fundamental part of Chinese citizenship" (Gerth, 2003, p.4).

Chinese elites and commercial groups utilised various strategies to promote nationalist consumption. Activists leveraged the booming modern print media to help consumers distinguish national from foreign products, promote domestic brands, and spread the idea of economic salvation. Publications such as *National Product Investigations* (国货调查录), *National Products Monthly* (国货月刊), *Women and National Products (妇女与国货)*, and *New Record of National Products* (国货日新录) were dedicated to this cause. National products associations also organised public lectures featuring business leaders and skilled orators to advocate nationalist consumption. In collaboration with commercial associations and the state, they established national products exhibitions, museums, and retail stores to further promote nationalistic consumer values. Through these sustained efforts, nationalist consumption became deeply embedded in public life, shaping Chinese consumer culture well beyond the era of the National Products Movements.

Second, PCMs introduced a new form of political engagement for individuals living in semi-colonial cities. In a country where national sovereignty was infringed by foreign powers and access to formal political participation was limited, consumers turned to the marketplace as an alternative arena for political expression. By refusing to purchase foreign products, Chinese consumers signalled resistance to imperialism and conveyed political messages to foreign companies. While not all boycotts achieved their intended outcomes, some produced significant political and economic effects. At the same time, patriotic participants engaged in the positive consumption of national products – BNPMs – to support domestic enterprises and express their nationalist sentiments.

Third, Chinese PCMs played a role in constraining the foreign companies from dumping products into the Chinese market. For instance, the *Shanghai Tianchu MSG Company* (上海天厨味精厂) was founded in 1923 by the patriotic entrepreneur Wu Yunchu (吴蕴初). Prior to its establishment, the MSG market in China was dominated by Japanese firms. Through active participation in national products exhibitions and other promotional campaigns, Tianchu

successfully captured domestic markets and curtailed Japan's economic exploitation in this sector (Jiang, 1995, p. 82).

Finally, political consumerism played a crucial role in China's industrialisation and the growth of national brands. Between 1913 and 1926, the number of national products sold at *Tianjin Industrial Sale Department* (天津工业售品所) grew from fewer than 300 to over 8,000, a more than twentyfold increase (Jiang, 1995, p. 81). This dramatic growth demonstrates how PCMs stimulated domestic production. Both BFPMs and BNPMs contributed to industrial growth by creating market advantages for domestic manufacturers during boycotts and enhancing brand visibility through buycotting campaigns. Participation in NPEs, national products museums, national products stores, and national products years enabled national enterprises to strengthen brand recognition and expand production capacity.

2.2 Political Consumerism in Mao's Era: Dormant or Dominant?

The previous section traced the historical roots of political consumerism from the 1905 anti-American goods movement to the late 1940s. This section investigates the history of Chinese political consumerism during Mao Zedong's era (1949-1976). It draws on multiple sources including the People's Daily digital archive (1949-1976), government documents, and secondary literature. A keyword search in the People's Daily archive for terms such as "boycott (抵制)", "national products (国货)", and "domestically produced (国产)" returned only a limited number of relevant results, suggesting that political consumerism was not a prominent feature during this period. Nonetheless, by integrating insights from existing historical scholarship, this section identifies two contrasting interpretations of the Mao-era political consumerism. The first, a "dormant" status theory, argues that political consumption in Maoist China was largely absent due to the socialist planned economy and the state's suppression of consumerism. In contrast, the "dominant" status theory contends that political consumerism entered a new phase under Mao, characterised by state-led initiatives. This framework laid the foundation for contemporary political consumerism in China, where the state or state-affiliated media frequently act as key agents in mobilising grassroots consumers. Such state involvement represents a distinct feature of China's political consumerism.

2.2.1 Dormancy theory

Some consider PCMs during the Mao era to have been in a state of dormancy. This was primarily due to the suppression of the two fundamental elements of political consumerism: a liberal market mechanism and substantial consumer agency. During this period, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) implemented a centrally planned economy, characterised by state-planned production and centralised distribution (Liu, F., 2016). Consumer choices were severely restricted, as both production and distribution were directed by the state. For example, beginning in 1953, the CCP introduced the *unified purchase and sale system* (统购统销). Daily necessities, such as grains, cotton, and oil were purchased by the government and redistributed through official channels. Private trade in these commodities was prohibited.[8] Under these circumstances, consumers had limited influence over the production and were dependent on the state for access to goods and services. This structurally disadvantaged position left them with little capacity to use consumption as a means of expressing political values or attitudes.

Another important reason for the decline of political consumerism during the Mao era was the state's ideological and institutional suppression of consumerism itself. The CCP regarded consumerism as a threat not only to socialist values but also to the state's economic planning objectives (Gerth, 2020). On the ideological front, official propaganda associated consumerism with individualism, inequality, hedonism, and other aspects of bourgeois lifestyles (ibid). Economically, the state's focus during this period was on heavy industry, supporting large-scale technologies such as steelmaking, mining, machine tool production, and defence manufacturing (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1955).

As Mao Zedong famously declared, "Without (heavy) industry, there can be no strong national defence, no well-being for the people, and no prosperity for the country" (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1955). Light industry, which produced consumer goods, was

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[8] Although the CCP implemented a unified purchase and sale system, underground market activities persisted across China. For instance, through an analysis of 2,690 cases of 'speculation and profiteering (投机倒把)' in two counties in eastern China, Frost and Li (2024) find that underground market activity was widespread and sustained on a reasonably large scale throughout the Maoist China. However, due to persistent shortage of goods, it is unlikely that Chinese consumers were able to engage in boycotts in their daily lives.

considered secondary and even counterproductive, as it diverted resources away from heavy industry. Therefore, the CCP deliberately limited the supply of consumer goods and suppressed profit incentives within the state-owned sector in order to curb consumerism.

2.2.2 Dominant theory

Recently, some historians have revisited everyday business and consumption practices during the Mao era, arguing that consumerism did not entirely disappear under socialism. For example, Gerth (2020) argues that a form of state-led consumerism persisted throughout this period, as the Chinese state used consumption to promote political values and diplomatic objectives. In the 1950s, the consumption of Soviet products increased in China, reflecting the political alliance between the two countries. As part of this trend, the Chinese government encouraged citizens to wear "'patriotic clothing' made from 'patriotic cloth'" as a demonstration of political loyalty and socialist solidarity (86). Here, "patriotic cloth" referred to Soviet-supplied fabrics. At the same time, this campaign served a pragmatic purpose by assisting the Soviet Union in reducing its surplus fabric stock through exports to China.

Meanwhile, the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 intensified the CCP's cultural policies. A key example was the launch of the "Clear Away Hollywood Films" campaign, which targeted American films as ideological threats (Rao and Shao, 2006). According to *People's Daily* (1950):

> The *Ministry of Culture of the Central People's Government* (中央人民政府文化部) issued five provisional measures: *Issuance of Screening Licenses for New Films, Export of Domestic Films, Import of Foreign Films, Clearing of Old Films,* and *Film Industry Registration*. These measures were designed to promote the development of domestic film industry, boycott toxic American films, and protect and support the private film industry so that it could appropriately cooperate with the state-owned film sector. The aim was to implement a patriotic spirit in the film industry and to uphold the policy of balancing public and private interests.

The campaign quickly gained momentum at the grassroots level. In November 1950, workers at the Shanghai Paris Grand Theatre (上海巴黎大剧院) publicly displayed a banner reading "Refuse to Screen American Films" and issued a call to action (Zhang, J., 2015). The

movement spread rapidly. On 11 November, eight major newspapers in Shanghai, including *Jiefang Daily* and *Wenhui Daily*, jointly announced they would cease publishing advertisements for American films. The following day, the Shanghai Cinema Industry Association declared that all cinemas in the city would suspend screenings of American films starting 14 January. On 17 January, employees of the Shanghai Western Film Distribution sector issued a collective statement in support of the boycott. As a result of this coordinated campaign, Hollywood films disappeared from Shanghai's cultural marketplace for the next 30 years (ibid).

2.2.2.1 The Buycott of Mao Badges

Another notable example of political consumerism in Maoist China was the widespread buycott of Mao Badges. From 1966 to 1969, the country experienced what became known as the Mao Badge Fad, a mass buycott movement directly mobilised by the state. The initial promoters were high-ranking officials such as Lin Biao and Zhou Enlai, who publicly wore Mao badges and gifted them to visitors in Beijing (Gerth, 2020, p.202). Simultaneously, the government enacted policies to encourage both the production and consumption of Mao badges. For example, the *National Price Committee of the State Council* introduced price controls to prevent inflation, and provincial governments, such as that of Shaanxi, were instructed to produce thirty million badges (Gerth, 2020, p.204).

The state-run press played a crucial role in promoting the Mao badge movement. Newspapers regularly published articles, poems, and personal narratives celebrating Mao badges as symbols of loyalty and honour. For instance, on 23 December 1966, *People's Daily* featured five articles praising the enthusiasm of frontier soldiers, who regarded possessing a Mao badge as a mark of pride (People's Daily, 1966).

Although material motivations, such as fashion, exchange value, and social status, were present, the movement was primarily driven by political considerations. Many participants used Mao badges to express ideological commitment, demonstrate loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao, and reinforce their political identity. In some cases, Mao badges functioned as a form of political capital, facilitating Party membership, employment opportunities, or career advancement (Gerth, 2020). Others wore Mao badges to protect

themselves from political persecution during the Cultural Revolution; even those personally indifferent often felt compelled to acquire and display them as a public gesture of allegiance (ibid).

Nonetheless, the movement was not without its critics. Some individuals opposed the commodification of Mao badges, arguing that their production and trade mirrored capitalist practices and were thus ideologically incompatible with socialism (ibid). Others condemned the commercialisation of Mao's image as a sign of disrespect, particularly when badges were poorly manufactured or sold for profit, and called for tighter restrictions on their use and distribution. Beyond ideological concerns, the movement also attracted criticism for its excessive consumption of resources and its contribution to growing social inequality, prompting concerns among Communist Party leaders. In response, the state began to crack down on unauthorised badge production. As official tolerance declined and public enthusiasm waned, the Mao badge fad gradually came to an end.

2.2.3 Summary

In sum, during the Maoist era, political consumerism in China entered a new phase: *state-led political consumerism.* Unlike earlier movements which were primarily driven by grassroots actors, the Communist state became the central force in mobilising citizens to engage in both boycotting and buycotting campaigns. Consumer products were often heavily politicised: items associated with socialist values, such as Mao badges, liberation shoes, Mao suits, Lenin suits, and patriotic cloth, were widely promoted and celebrated. In contrast, goods labelled as "capitalist poisons," including Hollywood films and Western-style advertisements, were publicly condemned and subject to boycotts. Contrary to the conventional assumption that political consumerism was dormant during this period, it was not only active but dominant, largely top-down, and ideologically driven.

Later, this chapter examines the revival of political consumerism in contemporary China, particularly under Xi Jinping's leadership. While consumers today enjoy greater autonomy in their everyday consumption choices, their participation in boycotts and buycotts remains heavily influenced by state-led mobilisation. This framework of state-led political consumption can be traced back to the 1920s, when the Nationalist government encouraged citizens to

purchase domestic products and boycott foreign goods. Political consumerism reached its apogee during the Maoist era, becoming institutionalised and ideologically driven. In the contemporary period, political consumerism has re-emerged with new characteristics, which will be explored in the following sections.

2.3 The Rise of Mass Consumption and the Germination of Chinese Political Consumerism 1976 to 1990s

This section examines the development of Chinese political consumerism from 1976 to the late 1990s. Following the same methodological approach as the previous section, I conducted keyword searches in the *People's Daily* digital archive for terms related to boycotting or buycotting. However, no identifiable cases of political consumerism were found during this period. Despite this apparent absence, the broader socio-economic shifts were underway. Drawing on government documents and academic literature, this section outlines the rise of mass consumption in post-Mao China. During this period, the country gradually transitioneod from a centrally planned, producer-driven economy to a more market-oriented, consumer driven society. Chinese consumers were increasingly empowered as central actors in the marketplace. Although political consumerism had yet to fully emerge, this period can be seen as a preparatory stage, one that laid the foundation for the resurgence of boycotts and buycotts from 1999 onwards.

Between 10 November and 15 December 1978, the CCP held the Central Party Work Conference (中央工作会议), a pivotal event that marked a turning point in China's modern history. The conference reaffirmed Deng Xiaoping's leadership and consolidated support for the "*Reform and Opening Up*" policy (改革开放政策), which was formally endorsed at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, held from 18 to 22 December 1978 (Vogel, 2011). Over the next two decades, China gradually transitioned from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. As the economic reforms deepened, government policy towards consumption also evolved, shifting from a restrictive stance to one that actively encouraged consumer spending. Supported by pro-consumption policies, mass consumption in China experienced a dramatic revival. Within a few decades, Chinese society was transformed from an ascetic, producer-oriented model into a consumer society (Wang, N., 2009). Next, I will analyse key policy shifts introduced during the reform era and consider how they

contributed to the resurgence of political consumerism in post-Mao China.

Benefiting from China's economic reforms, mass consumption experienced three major waves of growth. The first wave, occurring between 1979 and 1982, was driven largely by the success of rural economic reform. From 1979 onwards, the CCP gradually introduced a new Household Responsibility System (家庭联产承包责任制) in rural China. Under this system, land was contracted to individual households by collective organisations, and farmers were granted greater autonomy over production decisions. After meeting state quota obligations, farmers were allowed to retain surplus produce for personal use or sell it on the market (Hsü, 2017, p.876). The reform led to immediate increases in agricultural productivity and significantly improved rural incomes.

From 1980 to 1981, the system expanded to all provinces in China. By 1984, approximately 98% of farmers had adopted the new household responsibility system (Hsü, 2017, p.876). Statistics show that between 1978 and 1984, the net incomes of Chinese farmers increased at an average annual rate of 17.6 per cent, while their per capita consumption expenditure grew at an average annual rate of 15.4 per cent (Liu, 2016, p. 269). These figures demonstrate that rural economic reform significantly improved the living standards of Chinese farmers and enabled them to pursue consumer aspirations. For example, after meeting basic needs, many farmers were able to purchase everyday technologies that had previously been considered privileges exclusive to urban residents – commonly known as the *Big Three* (三大件): a watch, a bicycle, and a sewing machine (ibid).

With rapidly growing consumer demand, the supply of goods failed to keep pace. As a result, China experienced an inflation rate of 6% in 1980 – the first instance of inflation since the late 1950s (Yunxiang Yan, 2012, p. 264). In response, the government implemented economic rectification and austerity measures over the next three years (1982–1985) (ibid). As a result, the first wave of mass consumption came to an early end.

The second wave of mass consumption began in early 1985, shortly after the launch of the urban economic reform plan in 1984, and lasted until 1989 (Yan, 2012, p. 264). Building on the success of rural economic reforms and the booming individual economy, the government initiated comprehensive reforms in the urban sector. Notably, on 20 October 1984, the 3rd

Plenary Session of the 12th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (十二届三中全会), adopted the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Reform of the Economic System* (中共中央关于经济体制改革的决定，hereafter "the *Decision*"). The Decision criticised the traditional view that a planned economy was inherently incompatible with a commodity economy. Instead, it emphasised that "The full development of a commodity economy is an indispensable stage in the economic growth of society and a prerequisite for our economic modernisation" (Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1984).

Moreover, the *Decision* stated that the rural household contracted responsibility system was also applicable to urban areas. Urban enterprises were ordered to "establish various forms of the economic responsibility system with contracted jobs as the main content" (ibid). Furthermore, it highlighted that the individual economy in China was compatible with socialist public ownership and that the government should provide it with legal protection. Notably, these policies greatly facilitated the development of individual entrepreneurs and self-employed workers (*getihu*). By June 1988, there were approximately 225,000 private enterprises across China, employing 3.6 million people (Hsü, 2017, p.934). A substantial number of these self-employed individuals accumulated significant wealth, with some emerging as millionaires (ibid. p. 934).

Then, in 1986, the CCP launched the *Seventh Five-Year Plan* to guide the next stage of economic reform. Compared to previous plans, the Seventh Plan placed greater emphasis on aligning market development with consumer demand. To achieve this, it prioritised the expansion of consumer goods production, the upgrading of the consumption structure, and the promotion of the policy of "let some people get rich first (让一部分人先富起来)" (Zheng, H., 2006). These policy shifts helped stimulate mass consumption in the following years.

Between May and June 1988, the government lifted price controls on four major non-staple food items – pork, eggs, vegetables, and sugar – resulting in a sudden price surge of 30 to 60 per cent in major urban areas (Hsü, 2017, p.932). Between 1983 and 1988, the purchasing power of most urban wage earners declined significantly, in some cases by more than 100 per cent, leading to a marked deterioration in living standards (ibid. p.933). Meanwhile, inflation contributed to a rise in official corruption, evident in practices such as nepotism involving the

children of senior officials, informal and unauthorised access to state resources, and the proliferation of underground economic activities (ibid. p.933). Rising prices, coupled with ineffective government control, and increasing corruption, fuelled growing public dissatisfaction. The collapse of communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989 further undermined confidence in China's reform trajectory, even among Party members and government cadres. That same year, the outbreak of Tiananmen Square Protests marked the end of the second wave of mass consumption.

The third wave of mass consumption growth began in1992, marked by Deng Xiaoping's famous Southern Tour (*nanxun*). During this trip, Deng repeatedly emphasised the necessity of accelerating economic reform and opening up. He famously asserted:

> "Planning is not equivalent to socialism, nor is the market economy inherently capitalist. Capitalism involves planning, and socialism can accommodate markets. Poverty is not socialism. We must pursue a socialist path toward common prosperity" (Vogel, 2018, p. 600).

Deng's speeches garnered widespread support from diverse sectors, including the military, local officials in southern regions, and other reformist leaders. As a result, conservative factions within the Party leadership were compelled to accept Deng's policy direction, which prioritised the acceleration of economic reforms and further opening to the outside world. Later that year, the 14th National Congress announced that the next stage of economic reform would aim to establish a socialist market economy. Since then, China's economy has experienced dramatic growth.

By the mid-1990s, insufficient domestic consumption had gradually become an obstacle to China's economic development (Zhang M.J., 2015), a situation further intensified by the 1997 financial crisis. Recognising the significance of expanding domestic demand, the government decided to implement proactive fiscal policies to promote mass consumption (Zhang M.J., 2015). During the 1998 Central Economic Work Conference (中央经济工作会议), Jiang Zemin emphasised that expanding domestic demand was fundamental and represented a long-term strategic approach for China's economic development. Following this, the CCP implemented a series of initiatives to stimulate consumption. These included supportive

policies for personal and automobile loans, investments in housing and transportation infrastructure, and the promotion of spending in the tourism and entertainment sectors. Consequently, mass consumption entered a new phase of rapid expansion.

Nevertheless, the opening-up policy also played an essential role in advancing China's PCMs. Under this policy, China initiated pilot projects to attract foreign investment and acquire advanced technologies. Geographically, China adopted a sequential opening-up strategy, progressing from Special Economic Zones to the broader Southeast Coastal Areas, and eventually to inland regions (Li and Zhao, 2019). By 1996, these opening-up initiatives had reached major coastal cities and 11 inland provinces. Moreover, in 2000, the central government launched the *Western Development Project* (西部大开发), further extending the opening-up policy to China's western regions.

Apart from geographic extension, China's opening-up strategy also achieved significant success in foreign trade. For instance, in 2001, China's total imports and exports reached approximately 509.8 billion U.S. dollars, representing a 3.6-fold increase compared to 1989 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2002). In the same year, China's foreign trade dependence ratio rose to 44 per cent. Furthermore, after five years of negotiations, China officially joined the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in December 2001. These developments signified a strengthening link between China's domestic economy and the global market, thereby enhancing the influence of Chinese consumers on the international economic dynamics.

Overall, the early decades of economic reforms and opening-up initiatives laid a concrete foundation for the subsequent development of Chinese political consumerism. During this period, official discourse gradually shifted from condemning personal consumption to accepting, and eventually encouraging, individual consumption. This transformation liberated consumer demand and legitimised everyday purchasing behaviour in modern China.

Furthermore, by 1998, the Chinese market had successfully transitioned from a producer-driven to a consumer-driven market (Xu, 1998), signifying a notable rise in consumer power. Particularly in the early twenty-first century, as China's economic reforms and opening-up process deepened, the Chinese market emerged as an essential arena for global economies. The vast consumption potential of Chinese consumers attracted intense competition among both

domestic and foreign companies, substantially increasing their global influence.

As discussed above, the development of China's foreign trade significantly boosted the influence of Chinese consumers on foreign enterprises. Although explicit expressions of political consumerism, such as boycotts and buycotts, were relatively rare during this period, Chinese consumers were nonetheless significantly empowered as core actors in the market. Entering the twenty-first century, these empowered consumers began engaging more actively with domestic and foreign companies in pursuit of both material and non-material objectives. As a result, PCMs experienced a revival in China, re-emerging as an influential mode of public engagement.

2.4 The Revival of Chinese Political Consumerism 1999 – present

This section explores the evolution of Chinese political consumerism from 1999 to the present, highlighting its diversification and changing dynamics. On the one hand, boycotts remain short-lived and are typically associated with sporadic socio-political or ethical issues. On the other hand, buycotts were rarely visible in the public sphere in the early 2000s. It was not until 2013 that buycotting movements began to gain traction in China. Given the differing trajectories of these two forms of political consumerism, I address them separately. To build a solid empirical foundation, I collected over 200 cases of boycotts and buycotts that occurred during this period (see Appendices A and B). These cases were identified through systematic reviews of Chinese- and English-language media reports, blog posts, social media content, academic literature, and publicly available policy documents. This triangulated approach allows me to identify the key features, primary actors, and impacts of contemporary Chinese political consumerism.

2.4.1 The 1999 Anti-American Boycott and the Re-emergence of Political Consumerism in Contemporary China

Contemporary Chinese boycotts re-emerged in 1999, triggered by the NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade on 8 May 1999. The incident resulted in the deaths of three Chinese journalists and injuries to dozens of Chinese citizens. In response to what was condemned as NATO's "barbaric" actions, large-scale protests quickly erupted across China.

Outraged protesters chanted slogans such as "Boycott American Products" (抵制美货) (Li, Y., 2006). They employed a range of methods, including street demonstrations, online protests, petition-signing campaigns, public speeches, and boycotts, to express their anger. American brands such as McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), and Coca-Cola became primary targets (Hooper, 2000; Yu, 1999; see Figure 7).

Figure 7: 1999 Anti-American Protest. Source: inf.news.

Although the boycott did have tangible impact on certain businesses, its overall economic effect remained relatively limited. For example, according to Yu (1999), KFC's sales declined by approximately 10% in the days following the incident, with the effect particularly pronounced in smaller cities.

Nevertheless, the 1999 boycott represented the first major foreign product boycott in the post-Mao era. Although anti-American sentiments[9] had previously existed in Chinese society, collective consumer actions had rarely been visible in the public sphere. The 1999 boycott thus marked the first instance of Chinese consumers collectively engaging in political consumption, using their purchasing power to protest against the political actions of a foreign government.

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[9] In the 1990s, China and the U.S. had experienced several political disputes, including the Yinhe Incident in 1993 and the Third Taiwan Strait Crisis in 1996.

While short-lived in its economic effects, the symbolic significance of the 1999 boycott was far-reaching. It can be argued that contemporary Chinese political consumerism began with this movement.

Moreover, the 1999 boycott marked the first instance in which the Internet was used to mobilise participants and disseminate information within the context of Chinese political consumerism. Notably, *People's Daily* launched the *Kangyi Luntan* (*Protest Forum*, later renamed *Qiangguo Forum* 强国论坛) the day after the NATO bombing incident to provide an online public space for citizens to express their opinions (Jiang, 2019). Within one day, more than ten thousand posts were published (ibid, 2019, p. 83). This event established a precedent for future online and offline political consumerism movements, demonstrating how digital platforms could be used to coordinate mobilisation and disseminate boycott-related information across geographic boundaries. As Internet access expanded, its role in Chinese political consumerism grew significantly.

Finally, the 1999 boycott once again demonstrates the dynamics of bottom-up and top-down interplay in Chinese political consumerism. According to Jiang Yaping, a senior editor at *Peoples' Daily* and co-founder of the *Qiangguo Forum* and people.com, he and his colleagues seized the opportunity presented by the NATO bombing incident and launched the forum without obtaining prior permission from the central government. One month later, in July, Ding Guangeng, a member of Politburo Committee at the time and the official responsible for ideological affairs and media propaganda, visited *People's Daily*, listened to a report on the people.com and the *Protest Forum*, and praised the organisation's handling of the incident. Ding stated:

> … The central government recognised the power of online media. As a result, it decided to strengthen research in this area and increase investment in Internet development. *People's Daily* was the first step (Jiang, 2019, p. 85).

This episode clearly illustrates that sub-state actors can initiate actions that influence the central government's policy towards boycotts.

2.4.2 The 2005 Anti-Japanese Boycott and the Rise of Nationalist Websites and Forums

In the 2000s, sub-state actors – particularly nationalist websites and forums[10] – played a key role in shaping China's boycott movements. Unlike official media such as *People's Daily*, these platforms were spontaneously created and maintained by grassroots forces (Wang, J., 2010). They devoted themselves to disseminating boycott-related information, fostering anti-Japanese sentiment, and mobilising citizens for both online and offline activism. These forums, often marked by emotive language, functioned as a free space for bottom-up mobilisation. For example, on 10 September 2004, a widely circulated boycott call on www.cmilitary.com by a user named "cengjingyongyou (曾经拥有)" from Tsinghua University stated:

> As ordinary citizens, what we can do is to unite our individual strength to strike back at Japan! If all Chinese people around the world stop buying Japanese goods, Japan will lose $100-140 billion in foreign exchange income annually – an amount equivalent to several decades of China's foreign exchange reserves! … As Tsinghua students, we have even greater ability and responsibility to promote the boycott of Japanese goods and make it a habit for us, blooded Chinese, to resist Japan through our consumption choices (cengjingyongyou, 2004).

This type of rhetoric was not isolated. According to Hong (2007), around 100,000 netizens were active in anti-Japanese forums during the mid-2000s, which formed a substantial online force capable of launching petitions, initiating street demonstrations, and calling for boycotts. Their impact became particularly visible during the 2005 anti-Japanese movement, when online forums actively coordinated both online and offline protests against Japan's bid for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). These grassroots campaigns gained significant momentum, despite the absence of official endorsement.

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[10] Examples include: the September 18th War Research Association website, China Diaoyu Islands Protection Volunteer website, Xuezhu China website, Patriotic Alliance website forum, China Anti-Japanese website, China Civilian Diaoyu Islands Protection Federation website, Memorial Hall of the Victims of the Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders website, Jiangxi Anti-Japanese League Forum, Japanover website, Anti-Japanese Right-wing Alliance website, and Xriben Anti-Japanese Forum (Wang, J., 2010).

While the Chinese state officials did not directly support these boycott activities, they tacitly tolerated them. On the one hand, the government utilised these nationalist forces to strengthen its bargaining position in diplomatic negotiations, demonstrating that its hands were tied by the domestic public opinion. On the other hand, the powerful grassroots anti-Japanese sentiment compelled the state to clarify its position in the face of escalating nationalist demands. In a relatively under-regulated online environment, the Internet offered individuals a comparatively open space for political expression. This period thus illustrates a significant feature of Chinese political consumerism in the 2000s: rather than being purely top-down or bottom-up, boycott mobilisation often reflected a dynamic interplay between grassroots actors and state authority. However, due to the tightened state regulation over sensitive online content, the rise of social media, the lack of stable financial resources, and the government suppression of grassroots anti-Japanese sentiment, most of these websites and forums shut down and eventually disappeared in the early 2010s. By the time of the 2012 boycott, the information hub for anti-Japanese mobilisation had already shifted from nationalist websites and forums to larger social media platforms such as Weibo, and official media websites.

2.4.3 Chinese "Internal Affairs" and Boycotting Foreign Products Movements

Since 2000, a recurring factor provoking boycotts of foreign products has been China's "internal affairs", namely, issues related to Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Foreign brands have frequently faced boycotts for allegedly "interfering" in these matters or disseminating controversial information about them. For instance, in 2008, a key reason for the boycott of French retail giant Carrefour by Chinese consumers was its alleged support for Tibetan independence groups. In 2013, Taiwanese singer *Deserts Chang* had her Beijing concert cancelled after holding up a Taiwanese flag during a performance in Manchester. In 2016, Taiwanese actor *Leon Dai* was accused of supporting Taiwan independence and was subsequently removed from the film *No Other Love* (没有别的爱). Similarly, in 2019, NBA broadcasts were banned by most Chinese media after Houston Rockets' general manager Daryl Morey posted a tweet in support of the Hong Kong protests. In the same year, Arsenal player Mesut Özil criticised the Chinese government's Xinjiang policy, sparking an online backlash against both him and the club. In 2022, China witnessed a nationwide boycott of H&M following the company's decision to stop sourcing cotton from Xinjiang. Evidently, these four

issues continue to provoke strong public sentiment and frequently trigger boycotting movements.

2.4.4 The Revival of the Buycotting National Products Movement in China, 2013 – present

In recent years, China has witnessed a notable resurgence of BNPMs, reflected in the popularity of terms such as "New national products (新国货)", "national products trend (国潮)", "Chinese elements (中国元素)", "Chinese style (中式)", which have become buzzwords in Chinese society. Reportedly, in 2018 alone, on Alibaba's online shopping platform alone, the cumulative search volume of the top ten "Chinese elements" related keywords reached 12.6 billion (AliResearch, 2019).[11]

Previously, although there were occasional calls to support national products, it was not until 2015 that the BNPM began to gain significant momentum in China. One major factor behind this trend was consistent state support for domestic brands. In November 2015, Chinese leader Xi Jinping proposed the "supply-side structural reform" policy at the 11th meeting of the Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs, aiming to address the inefficiencies in the existing supply structure and enhance the driving force for sustained economic growth (Xinhua, 2015). This marked a milestone in the revival of BNPMs.

In the following years, the government issued several documents to clarify and guide the implementation of supply-side structural reform. In June 2016, the General Office of the State Council (GOSC) issued *the Opinions on Giving Product Brands the Leading Role to Push Forward the Upgrading of the Supply and Demand Structure* (hereafter *the Opinions*), which explicitly emphasised the importance of promoting domestic brands to meet the evolving demands of Chinese consumers (GOSC, 2016). Specifically, *the Opinions* noted that domestic brand development was severely lagging and highlighted the urgent need to expand domestic consumption and encourage the return of overseas spending to China. The document also proposed the establishment of "China Brand Day" to promote homegrown brands and enhance their influence and recognition (GOSC, 2016). In 2017, the GOSC officially designated 10

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[11] The top ten Chinese elements-related keywords include tea, Chinese style, Hong Kong style, *Hanfu*, *Guofeng*, antiquity, oriental, Forbidden City, Su embroidery and Peking Opera.

May as China Brand Day. Since then, China's domestic brands have gained significant momentum. As homegrown brands expanded, consumers became increasingly confident in and attracted to them, naturally contributing to the rise of the buycotting domestic products movement.

In addition to the policy support, the media have played a significant role in propagating Chinese culture. On the one hand, traditional media have been instrumental in advocating national products. For instance, some television channels have produced culturally themed programmes, such as *Chinese Poetry Congress* (中国诗词大会), *National Treasure* (国家宝藏), and *There Is Something New in the Palace Museum* (上新了·故宫), to popularise Chinese culture. These programmes have sparked public interest in Chinese heritage and gained widespread popularity among audiences (Yao, L.Q., 2019).

Moreover, at the 2019 China Brand Day, the *China Daily* New Media Centre hosted a pop-up event, *A National Products Store* (有间国潮馆), in Beijing. The store featured five sections – national products, national culture, national arts, national animation, and national music – and provided an immersive environment for visitors to engage with Chinese culture (ibid). Form 10 to 12 May, approximately 6,000 visitors attended the event, and related online discussions garnered over 400 million impressions (Broad Consulting, 2019). Notably, this event closely resembled the national products exhibitions of the twentieth century, as both were state-led initiatives aimed at cultivating a nationalistic consumer culture.

On the other hand, social media has served as a powerful accelerator for the rise of BNPMs. First, it has contributed to the rejuvenation of traditional culture in Chinese society. Short video platforms, in particular, have promoted widespread user participation due to their accessibility and rapid dissemination. Many content creators, such as Li Ziqi, have gained significant popularity by producing innovative, high-quality videos that showcase traditional Chinese culture. Between April 2021 and March 2022, the number of creators producing traditional culture-related content on short video platforms increased by 23 per cent year-on-year. The volume of such content grew by 51 per cent, generating over 22 billion likes, comments, and interactions, thereby reinforcing public confidence in Chinese cultural identity (Research Team of the Institute of Sociology, 2022). Second, social media plays a critical role in mobilising individuals to participate in collective actions, including buycotting national products. It

provides a real-time space for communication and information exchange among users across different locations. Moreover, by rapidly and broadly disseminating content, it enables like-minded individuals to connect, coordinate, and act collectively (Hwang and Kim, 2015). These developments suggest that the operationalisation of BNPMs increasingly relies on atomised, individualised consumer actions facilitated by digital platforms.

Third, the rise of BNPMs has been significantly influenced by the rapid development of e-commerce. On the one hand, the popularity and convenience of online shopping platforms have made them effective channels for promoting nationalistic consumption. Many lesser-known homegrown brands have gained visibility through these platforms. On the other hand, e-commerce platforms are well equipped with the necessary resources such as funding, technology, talent, sales channels, and media networks to revitalise domestic products.

Notably, Tmall has emerged as a leading online platform in promoting Chinese national brands. For instance, in 2017, Tmall launched "*Tian Zi Hao Plan* (天字号计划), aimed at helping time-honoured Chinese brands expand their global presence. 1,128 brands have since been certified as the "*Chinese Time-Honoured Brands* (中华老字号)" by the Ministry of Commerce, with over half of successfully establishing a presence on the Tmall platform (*China Daily*, 2018). By the end of 2017, sales of the programme's first batch of featured brands had increased by more than 80 per cent (ibid).

In 2018, "*Tmall China Day* (天猫中国日)" debuted at New York Fashion Week and achieved notable success. Two prominent Chinese brands, Li-Ning and Peacebird, attracted widespread media attention both domestically and internationally. Reportedly, Li-Ning's turnover grew by more than 300 per cent that year (Peng, 2019). Moreover, in 2019, Alibaba Group launched "*New National Products Plan* (新国货计划)", which supported 134 national brands in reaching annual turnovers exceeding 1 billion RMB. In 2020, the introduction of "*6.18 National Products Festival* (618国货节)" marked another key initiative by Tmall to promote nationalist consumption. According to statistics, on the first day of the campaign alone, over 37,000 new brands experienced turnover growth of more than 100 per cent compared to 2019 (KPMG, 2020). Overall, by the late 2010s, Chinese e-commerce platforms such as Tmall were playing an active role in revitalising time-honoured brands and supporting emerging homegrown brands. Undoubtedly, these platforms have made significant contributions to the

resurgence of BNPMs in China.

Fourth, rising productivity and domestic innovation have laid a concrete foundation for the emerging trend of buycotting national products in China. Previously, Chinese products were often perceived as low-quality, cheap, or imitative. However, after decades of rapid development, China has become the world's leading manufacturing powerhouse and has maintained this position for fifteen consecutive years as of 2024 (Xinhua, 21 January 2025). In 2023, the country's manufacturing value-added output reached 4.66 trillion USD, accounting for 29 per cent of the global manufacturing, which surpassed the combined output of the next four largest manufacturing economies (China Power Team, 2024). Notably, China is also the only country in the world that possesses all industrial categories listed in the United Nations industrial classification system (Zou, 2024). These advancements have reshaped consumer perceptions. In many sectors, domestic brands are increasingly preferred over their foreign counterparts. For instance, in 2021, the homegrown brand Luckin Coffee surpassed Starbucks in the number of outlets in China (Global Times, 2022). In 2022, Anta Sports' annual revenue in the Chinese market exceeded that of Nike China for the first time. Similarly, in the cosmetics industry, domestic brands have gained increasing popularity among young Chinese consumers. These achievements have greatly boosted consumer confidence in domestic products, creating a favourable environment for the continued rise of the BNPM.

Finally, the revival of the Chinese traditional culture has played a significant role in the rise of twenty-first-century BNPMs. Since 2014, the Chinese government has actively promoted policies aimed at strengthening cultural confidence and preserving traditional heritage. A landmark policy was the 2017 issuance of the *Opinions on Implementing the Inheritance and Development of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture* (关于实施中获优秀传统文化传承发展工程的意见) by GOSC, which, for the first time, clearly articulated the state's commitment to rejuvenating Chinese culture (GOSC, 2017). Backed by strong state support, this cultural revival has rapidly expanded. Moreover, as mentioned before, business actors and media have also played important roles in revitalising traditional culture. Together, these efforts have contributed to the re-emergence of national products consumption as a widespread consumer practice.

2.4.5 Beyond Nationalism: New trend of Political consumerism in China

Although most instances of political consumerism remain rooted in nationalist sentiment, a growing trend has emerged focusing on social, ethical or environmental concerns. Specifically, I identify four themes of political consumerism that are not grounded in nationalism. Next, I will briefly discuss each theme.

Theme 1: Gender Politics and Political Consumerism

In recent years, a series of high-profile, women-led political consumerism campaigns targeting sexism in China – across industries ranging from clothing and cosmetics to automotives and gaming – have held both domestic and foreign brands accountable for sexist practices and have promoted greater gender awareness. Notable examples include: the 2020-2024 boycott of *Black Myth Wukong* due to sexist remarks made by its co-founder Feng Ji; the 2021 boycott of Purcotton for a controversial advertisement widely condemned as misogynistic, victim-blaming, and perpetuating stereotypes of sexual violence; the 2023 boycott of sports brand Maia Active over a controversial International Women's Day (8 March) campaign titled "This March 8, Shut Up", which was criticised for dismissing feminist concerns and trivialising gender inequality in China; and the 2024 boycott of Flortte and HYNTOOR over advertisements perceived as sexist and demeaning to women (see Appendix A). Against this backdrop, slogans such as "My money is my vote (钞票就是选票)" have come to symbolise the rise of political consumerism within China's authoritarian context. Women, traditionally marginalised in institutional politics, have increasingly become active political consumers.

Theme 2: Animal Welfare and Political Consumerism

In addition, animal welfare has emerged as a significant theme within Chinese political consumerism. A high-profile case is the boycott of Guizhentang, one of China's largest producers of bear-bile products and the biggest owner of captive Asiatic black bears in southern China. The company's attempts to launch an initial public offering (IPO) in the early 2010s provoked widespread backlash due to its inhumane method of bile extraction. Despite lacking state support, the boycott attracted widespread support from diverse groups, including media outlets, animal rights organisations, scholars, artists, and business groups. Under intense public pressure, Guizhentang was forced to withdraw its IPO application. Beyond this case,

campaigns calling for boycotting fur products, opposing animal performances, and buycotting cruelty-free alternatives have also gained substantial support. Additionally, vegan and vegetarian food market in China has grown from under 10 billion USD in 2018 to 12 billion USD in 2023 (Tindall, 2024). These cases illustrate that Chinese consumers have become increasingly aware of the broader impact of their consumption on other living beings, the environment, and society at large.

Theme 3: Labour Rights and Political Consumerism

Labour rights represent another underexplored yet significant theme within Chinese political consumerism. While labour-related boycotts are more commonly observed in Western democracies – often addressing issues such as unfair wages, unsafe working conditions, and forced labour – China has witnessed isolated but impactful cases. A notable example is the 2019 boycott of Huawei following the widely publicised "Li Hongyuan Incident", also known as "Huawei 251." Li, a former Huawei employee, was detained for a total of 251 days after requesting severance pay when his contract was not renewed. His story, which went viral online, triggered widespread backlash, with many consumers publicly pledging to boycott Huawei products (Yuan, L., 2019). This incident underscored growing public concern over labour justice and corporate social responsibility in China.

Theme 4: Anti-government Political Consumerism

Despite the Chinese government's tight control over political participation, some consumers have utilised market-based actions to express dissent toward state policies. A high-profile example is the 2022 buycott of Paris Baguette, a South Korean bakery chain. In September 2022, the Shanghai Administration for Market Regulation imposed a 580,000 yuan fine on the bakery for baking and selling bread without permission during the Shanghai lockdown in April 2022. The fine immediately sparked a public backlash, as many citizens viewed the punishment as unjust, given the hardship and uncertainty experienced during the lockdown. In response, consumers lined up at Paris Baguette outlets across China, aiming to buy out their products to support the brand and express dissatisfaction with the government's lockdown enforcement (see Figure 11). Although such buycotts remain rare in the Chinese public sphere, this case illustrates how political consumerism can provide a relatively open and lower-risk channel for citizens in authoritarian regimes to express discontent with state policies.

Figure 11: "Shanghai residents respond to the fine on Paris Baguette with a shopping spree." Source: Weibo.com.

Notably, these four themes discussed demonstrate the atomisation of political consumerism in China, as actions are often initiated and sustained by individual consumers or loosely connected online communities rather than formal organisations. This emerging trend suggests that an increasing number of Chinese citizens are becoming aware of the broader social and political implications of their consumption choices. Similar to their counterparts in liberal democracies, these political consumers often mobilise around values such as freedom of speech, gender and labour equality, social justice, environmental sustainability, human rights, and animal welfare. Although this study does not empirically investigate these socially progressive forms of political consumerism in depth due to resource constraints, their presence highlights a crucial dynamic: even within an authoritarian context, consumers can express political and ethical positions through relatively low-risk, market-based actions. Future study should further explore this phenomenon, examining how socially conscious political consumers in China align with, or diverge from, those in democratic contexts.

2.4.6 Summary

From the NATO bombing in 1999 to the current Xi Jinping era, Chinese political consumerism has undergone significant transformation. In the early 2000s, boycotts were largely reactive, driven by nationalist sentiment and facilitated by the rapid expansion of internet forums. Sub-state actors, including nationalist websites, online forums, and official media outlets like the

People's Daily, played a pivotal role in cultivating anti-foreign sentiment and coordinate boycotts. While the Chinese state did not openly endorse these activities, it often tolerated them, particularly when they aligned with broader diplomatic objectives.

In 2015, Xi Jinping launched the supply-side structural reform policy, which marked the turning point of the buycotting national products movements (BNPMs). Since then, BNPMs have gained significant momentum in China. This revival has been driven by a combination of strong state support, targeted media campaigns, the rapid expansion of e-commerce platforms, rising productivity and domestic innovation, and the resurgence of traditional Chinese culture. In recent years, an increasing number of Chinese consumers have also begun to engage in political consumerism to address socially progressive issues such as gender equality, labour injustice and animal welfare.

Overall, this period marks the diversification of Chinese political consumerism. While the majority contentious boycotts and buycotts remain tied to nationalist themes, a growing number of socially progressive campaigns have emerged in China. This shift suggests that in an authoritarian context, political consumerism has become an alternative arena through which individuals can express political demands and advocate for societal change. Moreover, contemporary Chinese political consumerism has become increasingly atomised. While the state and large platforms continued to play a role in shaping consumer sentiment, individual consumers now often act independently, leveraging digital tools to express their political and ethical preferences. This atomisation has enabled faster mobilisation but has also limited the long-term sustainability and collective bargaining power of these movements.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has traced the historical evolution of Chinese political consumerism from the early twentieth century to the present, identifying four key transitional phases: 1905 – 1949; 1949 – 1976; 1976 – the late 1990s; and 1999 to the present. Through ananalysis of boycotting and buycotting movements in each phase, this chapter demonstrates that Chinese political consumerism has undergone significant transformations in terms of its leading actors, underlying motivations, and the role of the state.

First, the leadership of political consumerism has shifted over time: from merchant group (1905 – the mid-1920s) to the Nationalist government (1928 – the 1940s), to the Communist Party (1949 – 1976), and more recently, to a hybrid model in which both the state and individual consumers play critical roles. Second, the motivations underlying political consumerism have also evolved. While nationalist sentiment has historically dominated these movements, recent years have witnessed an increasing number of individuals engaging in socially progressive forms of political consumerism. Third, the role of the state has transformed from passive tolerance to strategic mobilisation. In particular, over the past two decades, the state has frequently interacted with sub-state actors, leveraging consumer sentiment as a part of its broader economic statecraft. Fourth, contemporary Chinese political consumerism has become increasingly atomised, with individual consumers leveraging digital tools to express political and ethical preferences in the absence of strong organisational structures.

These shifts suggest that political consumerism in contemporary China should not be seen solely as a top-down instrument of state propaganda or nationalist mobilisation. Rather, it constitutes a complex arena where individual consumers, commercial groups, and political actors intersect. In an authoritarian context, consumers can resort to the marketplace to pursue political goals and engage in political life.

Chapter 3.

Who boycotts in China? A sociodemographic profile

The previous chapter examined the historical development of political consumerism in China. This chapter investigates the sociodemographic profile of boycotters in contemporary China. By closely examining the 7th wave of World Values Survey (WVS) conducted in China in 2018 (Haerpfer et al., 2020), I find that Chinese boycotters differ from their Western counterparts in a number of significant respects.[12] First, unlike in the West, lower socioeconomic status does not hinder boycott participation. Second, Chinese women are not less likely than men to participate in boycotts, whereas a considerable gender gap exists in institutionalised politics in China. This suggests boycotts may diminish gender inequality in political participation in China. Finally, it is the youngest generation of Chinese adults that are most likely to engage in boycotts. Based on these findings, I argue that boycotts constitute an alternative venue of political expression for under-represented groups in Chinese society.

This chapter is organised as follows. The first section provides background on consumer boycotts in China. Next, by reviewing the broader literature on the relationship between political consumerism and sociodemographic factors in Western contexts, as well as scholarship on political participation in China, I formulate a set of research hypotheses. The third and fourth sections describe the research methodology, followed by results and discussion. The last section summarises the chapter's key findings.

3.1 Consumer boycotts in China

The term "boycott" was first used in the 1880s by Irish peasants protesting the harsh treatment they endured from Charles Cunningham Boycott, a land agent of Lord Erne (Moran, 1985). Friedman (1985, p. 97) defined consumer boycott as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace." It is an explicit means of expressing consumer objections and dissent towards specific products in the market.

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[12] Ideally, I would examine the profiles of both boycotters and buycotters. However, the chapter focuses only on boycotters due to the availability of unique WVS data.

As the previous chapter demonstrated, boycotts have a long history in China. Since the early twentieth century, Chinese consumers have consistently weaponised their purchasing power to punish foreign countries involved in political conflicts with China or to express dissent against governments. As Karl Gerth (2003, p. 362) has argued, "the movements became a common outlet for the expression of nationalism. It resonated across Chinese life because so many Chinese were seeking a way to express their nationalism in an environment in which doing so was difficult and even deadly." Today, as we shall see, politicised consumption continues to serve as a substitute for more conventional forms of political participation.

The recent increases in disposable income, the development of diversified channels for accessing political information, and the deepening economic ties between China and other countries have empowered Chinese consumers to exert their influence on international politics and express their opinions in the global market. Bohman and Pårup (2022) find that between 2008 and 2021, there were at least 90 instances of consumer boycotts targeting foreign companies in China. High-profile targets have included French multinational retail Carrefour in 2008 over Tibet and disruptions to the Beijing Olympic torch relay,[13] Japanese car brands in 2012 over the Sino-Japanese Diaoyu Island disputes,[14] the South Korean conglomerate Lotte in 2017 over the South Korean government's deployment of the THAAD missile defence system,[15] the NBA over the Houston Rockets' general manager's support for Hong Kong's anti-extradition movement,[16] and H&M over its decision to stop sourcing cotton from Xinjiang. These examples illustrate that in China, consumers are increasingly conscious of the political

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[13] On 8 April 2008, during the Beijing Olympic Torch relay, Jin Jing, a torch bearer, was attacked by pro-Tibetan agitators in Paris. Two days later, a call was issued to boycott French brands on a Chinese-language Internet bulletin board (BBS). With Carrefour being one of the main targets. The company was accused of donating to the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, Dalai Lama. Despite Carrefour issuing several statements to clarify its position, a wave of boycotts emerged in many Chinese cities, including Beijing, Hefei, Kunming, Harbin, Xi'an, Jinan, and Qingdao (BBC Chinese, 2008).

[14] On 10 September 2012, the Japanese government announced plans to "purchase" the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, quickly sparking a nationwide call in China to boycott Japanese goods.

[15] In late 2016, the Republic of Korea (ROK) decided to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system against potential threats from North Korea, a move strongly supported by the United States but repeatedly opposed by the Chinese government, which argued it would jeopardise border security. When Lotte Group reached a land exchange agreement with South Korea's Defence Ministry for THAAD development on 27 February 2017, it triggered a widespread backlash against the Lotte in China. See Wong et al., 2023.

[16] On 4 October 2019, the Houston Rockets general manager Daryl Morey posted an image with the slogan "Fight for freedom, Stand with Hong Kong", expressing support for the Hong Kong protesters opposing the Chinese government's proposed extradition law. Although Morey quickly deleted the tweet, it still prompted a widespread backlash against him as well as the NBA across China.

implications of their consumption and are intentionally politicising it to influence foreign relations, sometimes individually, sometimes in concert with government policy.

For foreign observers, the most attention-grabbing Chinese boycotts have been those launched in defence of state positions or perceived national interests, and they often constitute economic manifestations of Chinese nationalism (Callahan, 2006; Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2015; Reilly, 2014; Sullivan and Wang, 2022). Building on the discussion in Chapter 2, boycotts targeting brands for ethical, environmental, and social reasons have also become increasingly common in recent years. For instance, many consumers are now highly sensitive to products or brands that have used misogynistic content in advertisements or packaging. Once such content is exposed, the targeted companies face intense public pressure and are often forced to withdraw controversial products and issue official apologies.[17] In addition, the boycott of animal performances has become a contentious issue, especially since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Boycotters have targeted zoos, aquariums, circuses, and other commercial entities involved in animal abuse, encouraging the public to refrain from buying tickets for such shows. One famous example is the 'Save Little Elephant Moli' Campaign in 2022.[18] Many boycotters intend to take individual responsibility to supervise wrongdoing in the marketplace and to build a more ethical society. However, boycott movements are not necessarily representative of the broad population. Particularly in China, with its vast population, a small minority of consumers can impose substantial costs on their targets. Who, then, are China's boycotters?

3.2 Political consumerism and sociodemographic predictors

The relationship between socioeconomic factors, such as education and income, gender, and age, and political consumerism has been extensively investigated in the general literature

[17] Brands previously targeted for sexist advertising content include Audi, Purcotton, Yuexianhuo Dairy, OUPAI Wet Wipes, and Weilong Food & Co. All withdrew the controversial advertisements and issued public apologies.

[18] Since August 2021, some netizens and animal protection organisations raised concerns regarding the mistreatment of a five-year-old elephant named Moli, who had been abused and forced to perform at various venues. Despite sustained rescue efforts by activists, these initiatives initially yielded little success. On 24 April 2022, after the actress Chen Qiaoen posted on Weibo calling for public action, the hashtag #SaveLittleEelephantMoli went viral. Numerous netizens joined the movement, urging the local government to close the zoo and rescue Moli. Many also expressed their commitment to boycotting animal performances in all forms (Jiang, 2022). In response to the overwhelming online protests, the Henan Forestry and Grassland Administration intervened and announced that Moli had been relocated to her birthplace at the Kunming Zoo.

within the Western context. In what follows, I review these findings and formulate hypotheses regarding Chinese political consumers. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the nature of political consumerism in China, I compare the significance of sociodemographic factors in shaping boycott participation with their influence on institutionalised participation. These hypotheses will be tested empirically using data from the 7th wave of WVS (China).

3.2.1 Socioeconomic predictors and political consumerism

Many empirical studies in the Western context have found that political consumers often possess a higher socioeconomic status (Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Yates, 2011). This has been explained by the argument that education fosters "civic skills, competencies, and knowledge that lead to political participation" (Norris, 2002, p. 91). Income is also identified as a significant predictor of political consumerism (Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Neilson and Paxon, 2010; Sandovici and Davis, 2010; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Yates, 2011). It seems that political consumers need financial resources to choose more expensive alternatives (in the case of boycotting) or to purchase high-cost or non-essential targeted products (in the case of buycotting). Hence, the following two hypotheses are proposed:

> H1a (Education): *The higher an individual's level of education, the more likely they are to participate in boycotts.*
> H1b (Income): *The higher an individual's income level, the more likely they are to participate in boycotts.*

Although research in the Western context suggests that political consumerism is more accessible to individuals with higher socioeconomic status, I argue that this factor is less significant in the Chinese context. Firstly, the most common manifestations of Chinese political consumerism are boycotts of foreign products and buycotts of national products. Participants involved in such actions do not require a higher level of education to access relevant information, as it is often disseminated widely through state propaganda and mainstream media.

Second, benefiting from low labour costs and strong manufacturing capacity, consumers in China can readily find affordable substitutes, particularly for targeted foreign products. As a

result, income becomes a less significant factor in shaping participation in political consumerism in China.

Third, Chinese political consumerism does not require participants to demonstrate a strong commitment to boycotting or buycotting products. Due to state regulations and restrictions on NGOs and social organizations, political consumer movements in China often lack organizational support. While this may reduce the effectiveness of boycotts or buycotts, the absence of coordinated organizational involvement also means that individual participants are not expected to attend regular meetings or consistently adhere to boycott or buycott practices. Individuals can join or drop out at any stage. This flexibility enables those with lower socioeconomic status to adjust their engagement according to their personal needs and capacities.

Finally, unlike in institutionalised participation, political consumers are not required to meet specific standards or acquire basic skills to be able to join boycotts or buycotts (Stolle and Hoogh, 2011). Political consumerism in China is more accessible than institutionalised participation. For example, to join the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), applicants must undergo a rigorous process including writing an application letter, obtaining references from two full party members, being approved at a general membership meeting of the local party branch, receiving further approval from a higher-level party organization, undertaking at least one year of study, passing a background check and additional examinations, and ultimately obtaining final approval from their party branch (People's Daily Theory Channel, 2012). It can therefore be inferred that the threshold for joining the CCP is substantially higher than that for participating in boycotts. While filing complaints via government websites may appear inexpensive and accessible, complainants may incur significant personal risks if their grievances cross government red lines. Therefore, I argue that political consumerism, particularly boycotts in China, can help to reduce inequality in political participation by offering a more private, accessible, and safer arena for civic engagement, including for individuals with lower socioeconomic status.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> H1c (Education): *Education has a weaker relationship with boycott participation than with institutionalised participation.*

H1d (Income): *Income has a weaker relationship with boycott participation than with institutionalised participation.*

These hypotheses, together with H1a and H1b, will be tested empirically to assess the distinct role of socioeconomic factors in shaping political consumerism versus institutionalised participation in China.

3.2.2 Women and political consumerism

A considerable body of research has found that political consumerism is more prevalent among women than men (Andersen and Tobiasen, 2004; De Zúñiga, Copeland and Bimber, 2014; Forno and Ceccarini, 2006; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Rössel and Schenk, 2018; Stolle, Hooghe and Micheletti, 2005). One explanation is that women have traditionally been responsible for household shopping, which makes them more susceptible to market-related activism than men (Neilson, 2010; Stolle et al., 2005). Additionally, women tend to be more attuned to social issues such as animal rights and children's rights, and are therefore more likely to engage in ethical consumption (Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti., 2005). Finally, as a non-bureaucratic and low-profile form of participation, political consumerism is particularly appealing to traditionally marginalised groups like women (Clarke, 2008).

In the Chinese context, women remain significantly underrepresented in institutionalised politics. According to Cheng, L. (2017), at the central level, since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, no woman has ever served as a member of the Politburo Standing Committee. The state media outlet Xinhua News Agency released the new Central Committee membership list for the 20th Party Congress, showing that among 205 new full members, only 11 are women, approximately 5 per cent (Xinhua, 2022). At the local level, a recent report notes that women account for approximately 3 per cent of provincial-level party secretaries (Janik, Blaugher and Ray, 2022). Moreover, although there are about 28 million female members in the CCP, male membership stands at 64 million, nearly 2.3 times higher (ibid). Overall, despite President Xi Jinping's commitment to "cultivating and selecting female officials and giving full play to their important role" (Xi, 2022), gender inequality in Chinese politics is still acute.

On the other hand, women in China are politically active outside formal political institutions.

For example, Hou (2020) discusses how young Chinese women have adopted online and offline petitions, street performances, protests, and hashtag activism to express their political beliefs. The *#MeToo* movement offers a compelling example of the rise of women's political participation in China (Yin and Sun, 2021). Moreover, recent years have witnessed a growing number of boycotts targeting brands that use sexualised advertising (see Appendix A).

Based on these considerations, I propose the following hypotheses:

> H2a: *Women are more likely to participate in boycotts than men.*
> H2b: *Women are more likely to participate in boycotts than in institutional politics.*

3.2.3 Age and political consumerism

Researchers have found that the middle-aged generation tends to be more actively engaged in political consumerism (Baek, 2010; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). For instance, Baek (2010) reports that engagement in political consumerism is disproportionately higher among the middle-aged population in the United States.[19] Similarly, through analysing the demographics of political consumers in the 2002 European Social Survey (ESS) and the 2006 United States Citizen, Involvement, Democracy (CID) survey, Stolle and Micheletti (2013, p. 70) found that political consumerism is particularly prevalent among the younger segment of the middle-aged group (30-44 years old). Political consumerism appears to follow the general lifecycle pattern of conventional political participation, which "rises in early years, peaks in middle age, and falls in later years" (Nie, Verba and Kim, 1974, p. 326).

However, in China, it appears that the younger generation (18-30) constitutes the primary force behind political consumerism. Over the past decades, the majority of boycotts and buycotts in China have originated on social media platforms such as Weibo, Bilibili, and Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok). According to the 2020 Weibo User Development Report, approximately 80 per cent of Weibo users were born after 1990 (Sina Weibo Data Centre, 2020). Similarly, the core user group of Bilibili comprises Generation Z+, born between 1985 and 2009 (Bilibili Inc., 2023). As young people are more active than other age groups on social media platforms, it is likely that they represent the primary age group engaging in

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[19] Here, the middle-aged generation refers to the baby boomers and the generation X.

contemporary boycotting activity in China. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: *The younger an individual is, the more likely they are to participate in a boycott.*

3.3 Data and measurement

It should be noted that surveys investigating Chinese political consumption, such as boycotts and buycotts, are highly limited, both in number and scope, especially at the national level. In an authoritarian country like China, any politically motivated activity is a sensitive issue, often avoided in public discourse. State censorship of public opinion has intensified in recent years, which makes it difficult to approach individuals who have engaged in political consumerism and to collect reliable data. Moreover, selecting nationally representative samples in a country with a population of 1.4 billion and a complex administrative structure presents a considerable challenge.

The 7th wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) of China provides an opportunity to help fill this research gap. To the best of my knowledge, the WVS is the only nationally representative dataset that includes a question on boycotting behaviour (Haerpfer et al., 2020). The 7th WVS was conducted through face-to-face interviews from July 2018 to October 2018. Respondents were intended to be representative of the adult population, that is, individuals aged 18 and above. Researchers employed the GPS-Assisted Area Sampling Method to select participants from both rural and urban areas across 31 provinces of mainland China, excluding Tibet and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. A total of 4,921 valid addresses were selected, at which 3,036 respondents were successfully interviewed, yielding a response rate of 61.7 per cent.

3.3.1 Boycott variables

The dependent variable in this study is boycott behaviour. The WVS measures boycott participation using the question: *People may take different actions to express their opinions. Please indicate whether you have done, whether you might do, or under any circumstances would never do… Joining in boycotts.* In this study, I recode boycott behaviour into a binary variable, where individuals who reported having participated in a boycott are coded as '1', and

those who indicated they might boycott or would never boycott are coded as '0'.

3.3.2 Sociodemographic factors

A set of variables is used to investigate the influence of sociodemographic factors on Chinese citizens' willingness to participate in boycotts. *Age* is treated as a continuous variable. *Gender* is a binary variable, with males coded as '0' and females as '1'. *Education* is recoded as a binary variable, where respondents with tertiary education are coded as '1' and those without as '0'. *Income* is recoded into a three-category variable: low income is coded as '0', middle income as '1', and high income as '2'. [20]

3.3.3 Institutionalised participation variables

To better understand who is willing to boycott in China, I also compare the sociodemographic characteristics of people who have participated in boycotts with those who have engaged in institutionalised participation. Specifically, I use the following questions from the 7th wave of WVS (China) to capture institutionalised political actions:

> (1)   *Please indicate in the previous local elections, whether you have always voted; sometimes voted or never voted before.*
>
> (2)   *People may take different actions to express their opinions. Please indicate whether you have done, whether you might do, or under any circumstances would never do. Contacting government officials.*
>
> (3)   *Now I am going to read out a list of voluntary organizations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are a member, an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization? Political party.*

Both the *vote in local level* variable and *contact government officials* variable are recoded into binary variables, where '1' represents respondents who have participated in these political

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[20] All variables are extracted from WVS 7 China. In WVS 7, *income* is measured by the question Q288 – *"On this card is an income scale on which 1 indicates the lowest group and 10 the highest income group in your country. We would like to know in what group your household is. Please, specify the appropriate number, counting all wages, salaries, pensions and other incomes that come in."* In this study, I recode this variable into a new three-category scale: groups 1-3 are coded as '0' (low income); groups 4-7 as '1' (middle income); and groups 8-10 as '2' (high income).

actions, and '0' indicates no such participation. The *party membership* variable is similarly recoded, with non-members coded as '0' and an active/inactive member as '1'.

3.3.4 Control variables

Several control variables are included in this study. The first is *residential area*, coded as a binary variable: rural areas are coded as '0' and urban areas as '1'. To assess *political interest,* I use a four-category scale ranging from 'no interest' = '0' to 'very interested' = '3'. I also include the variable '*discussing politics with friends*', which ranges from 'never' = '0' to 'frequently' = '3'. Presumably, the more frequently people discuss politics with friends, the more likely they are to join a boycott. For *general trust*, respondents were asked: "*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*" I recode this as a binary variable, where 'no, need to be very careful' is coded as '0', and 'yes, most people can be trusted' as '1'. *Social media usage* is recoded as an ordinal variable ranging from 0 = 'never' to 4 = 'daily'. *Religious belief* is also included as a binary variable: those who report not belonging to any religion are coded as '0', and those who report belonging to a religious denomination are coded as '1'.

3.4 Results and Discussion

Based on the answers to the question "*People may take different actions to express their opinions. Please indicate whether you have done, whether you might do, or under any circumstances would never do: Joining in boycotts*", I have categorised the respondents into three groups: 1) *boycotters*: those who report having boycotted in the past; 2) *potential boycotters*: those who state that they might boycott in the future; and 3) *non-boycotters*: those who indicate that they would never boycott. There is no overlap between these groups, as participants were required to select only one option. Figure 12 shows the proportions of each group based on data from the 7th wave WVS.

Figure 12. Boycott willingness.
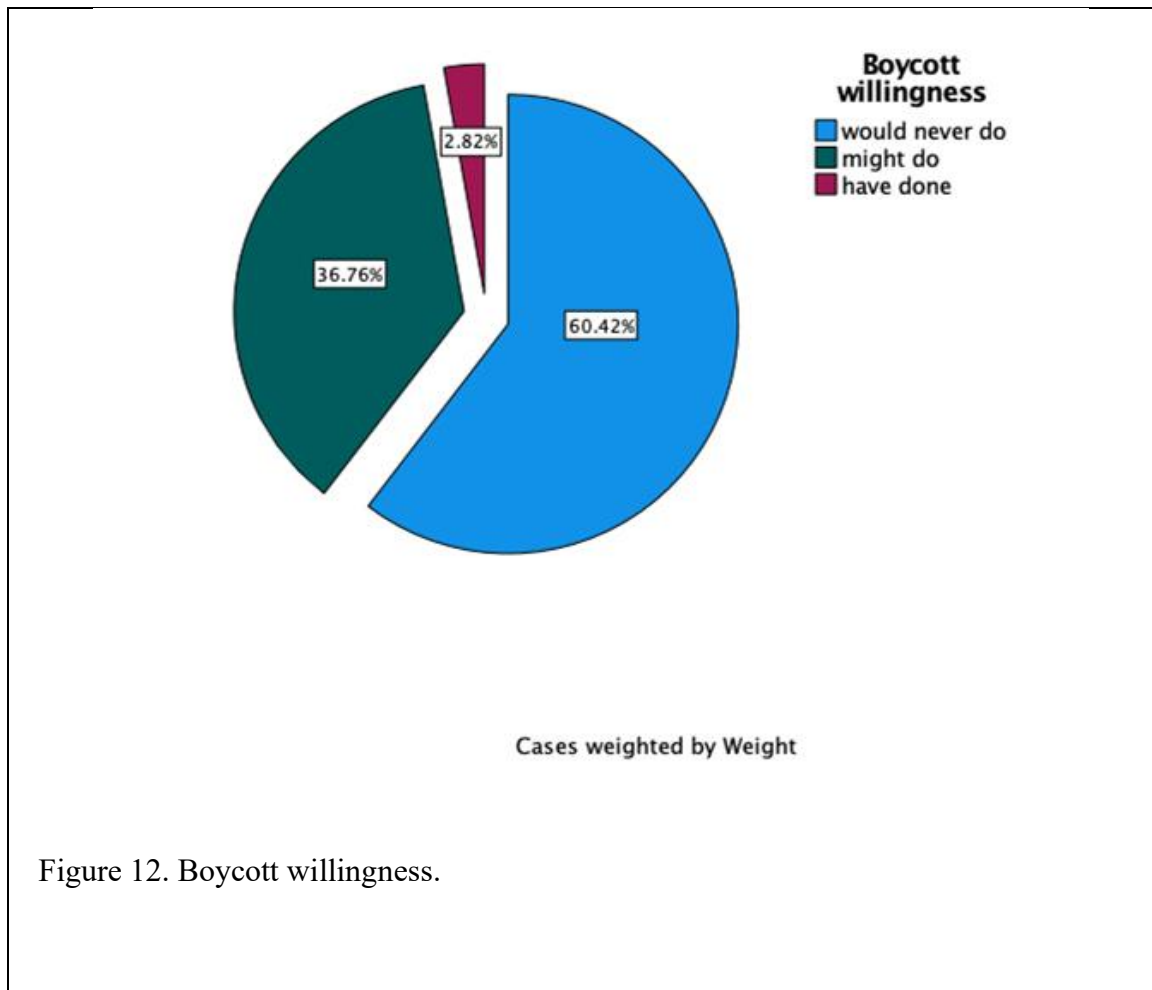
Notably, boycotters account for only approximately 2.8 per cent (N = 85) of all valid responses (N = 3,006). Given the apparent popularity of boycotting within China, and its prominence in media and policy discussions abroad, this percentage is surprisingly low. However, as boycotting constitutes a non-institutionalised and, at times, protest-oriented form of political action, it is possible that some participants provided false or cautious responses during face-to-face survey interviews due to safety concerns. Furthermore, given China's population of approximately 1.4 billion, even a proportion as small as 2.8 per cent represents around 40 million individuals. In addition, more than one-third of respondents (N = 1,105) reported that they might join a boycott in the future. This finding is consistent with the observation that Chinese boycotts often receive widespread public support, although they do not necessarily result in measurable economic outcomes (Heilmann, 2016). Finally, the third group (N = 1,816), non-boycotters, comprised about 60.4 per cent of the overall sample.

3.4.1 Sociodemographic profiles of boycotters

Table 2 suggests that boycotters and potential boycotters are very much alike, particularly concerning age, education, and income. Both groups also share similar demographic profiles, distinguishing them from non-boycotters. As discussed above, this similarity may be attributed to the possibility that some boycotters modified their responses to conceal previous participation due to safety concerns. Moreover, while there are gender differences between boycotters and potential boycotters, these differences are relatively minor.

Table 2. Sociodemographic profiles of respondents (percentage).

Respondents	Age			Gender		Education		Income		
	18-29	30-49	50 and above	Male	Female	Tertiary education	No tertiary education	Low	Middle	High
Boycotters	30.6	49.4	20	54.1	45.9	26.6	73.4	32.9	57.6	9.4
Potential boycotters	30.6	47.9	21.5	49.3	50.7	24.7	75.3	32.8	59.1	8.1
Non-boycotters	17.1	42	40.9	49.4	50.6	13.1	86.9	40.0	51.4	8.6
Total	22.4	44.4	33.2	50.5	49.5	17.8	82.2	37.2	54.4	8.4

3.4.1.1 Education

Unexpectedly, there is little correlation between education and boycott behaviour in China. At first glance, tertiary education appears to be a positive factor (Table 3); however when controlling for other variables, its significance disappears (Table 4). The regression model therefore undermines H1a: *The higher an individual's level of education, the more likely they are to participate in boycotts.*

Table 3. Bivariate associations between sociodemographic predictors and boycott behaviours.

	Age	Gender (0=male)	Tertiary education (0=no)	Income
Boycott behaviours	-0.049**	-0.016	0.038*	0.016

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed).

This finding marks a difference between China and the West, where political consumerism, including boycotting, is generally understood as a knowledge-intensive form of participation which typically requires a higher level of education (Baek, 2010; Graziano et al., 2012; Neilson and Paxton, 2010; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). How might this difference be explained? One hypothesis is that most boycotts in China are triggered by companies perceived to have crossed political red lines, for example, by questioning China's territorial integrity or referencing sensitive issues related to Hong Kong, Tibet, or the XUAR (Bohman and Pårup, 2022; see also Appendices A and B). Participation in such boycotts does not necessarily require higher education, as these topics are routinely emphasised by state-owned media. While this may make boycotting more accessible to less-educated individuals, it also raises concerns. In particular, it may foster increasing reliance on state-controlled information rather than independent critical thinking. This tendency could hinder the development of ethically and socially conscious political consumerism in China.

Table 4. Sociodemographic predictors of boycott participation and three institutionalised participatory actions.

	Boycott behaviours	Vote in local level	Party member	Contact government officials
Age	0.980*	1.052***	1.003	0.996
Gender (0=male)	0.972	1.179	0.670**	0.663**
Tertiary Education (0=no)	1.280	2.897***	4.995***	1.972***
Income	0.993	1.121	1.278*	1.117
Residential area (0=rural)	0.905	0.919	0.949	0.916
Political interest	0.894	1.334**	2.021***	1.371**
Discussing politics with friends	2.303***	1.262	1.298	1.547**
General trust	0.961	1.181	1.284	0.965
Social media usage	0.985	0.978	1.089	1.058
Religious belief	1.179	0.854	0.667	0.758

Note: Binary logistic regression analysis. Exp(B) and significant level.
*Significant at 0.05 level.
** Significant at 0.01 level.
*** Significant at 0.001 level.

Secondly, as expected, Table 4 shows that tertiary education has a stronger relationship with all three forms of institutionalised participation than with boycott behaviour. The odds ratios for tertiary education suggest that having tertiary education is associated with a 189.7% increase in the likelihood of voting at the local level, a 399.5% increase in joining a political

party, and a 97.2% increase in contacting government officials. This result supports *H1c: Education has a weaker relationship with boycott participation than with institutionalised participation.* In other words, for individuals with lower levels of education, boycott participation may serve as a more accessible channel of political engagement in authoritarian contexts such as China.

3.4.1.2 Income

Surprisingly, income is found to be an insignificant predictor of boycott participation. Table 2 shows that the proportion of high-income respondents is the highest among the boycotter group. The potential boycotter group also includes the highest percentage of middle-income respondents, while approximately 40 per cent of individuals in the non-boycotter group fall into the lower-income category. However, when examining the relationship between income and boycotting behaviour, this association proves insignificant in both the bivariate correlation and the regression model. In short, the results disconfirm *H1b: The higher an individual's income level, the more likely they are to participate in boycotts.* This may be explained by the fact that Chinese boycotters often target foreign products (see Appendix A), and that affordable, domestically produced alternatives are often widely available. This contrasts with the situation in many Western contexts, where the well-off are more likely to boycott.

On the other hand, in line with findings from Western contexts, higher income is correlated with institutionalised participation in China, particularly party membership, whereas voting in local elections and contacting government officials show no significant association with income. Table 4 reveals that individuals with higher incomes are 27.8 per cent more likely to be party members than those with lower incomes. This result confirms H1d: *Income has a weaker relationship with boycott participation than with institutionalised participation.* Moreover, it suggests that boycotts have the potential to mitigate inequalities in political participation in China, contrary to the common argument that boycotts reinforce social inequality by excluding lower-income groups.

But would the situation in China be different? Firstly, it is important to note that prior literature on political consumerism has predominantly focused on ethical boycotts in the Western context. This form of boycott is often associated with the consumption of products labelled as

fairtrade, *non-sweatshop*, *sustainable*, *cruelty-free*, *organic*, or *pride*. Notably, such products often carry higher price tags. By contrast, ethical boycotts constitute only a small proportion of boycotts in China. The majority are politically motivated and tend to target foreign products, sometimes high-end or luxury foreign brands, which are generally more expensive than their domestic alternatives (see Appendix A). Consequently, the economic cost of boycotting foreign products is often relatively low for Chinese consumers.

Secondly, the specificity of the Chinese market offers another possible explanation for these findings. Known as "the world's factory", China not only has a sufficient supply of consumer goods but also benefits from lower labour costs compared to Western countries. This allows Chinese boycotters to easily identify affordable substitutes for the boycotted products. In markets similar to China's, where labour is relatively cheap and consumer products are widely available, consumers are likely to have access to more affordable alternatives and may therefore be less influenced by income in political consumption choices. In other words, the Chinese pattern of boycotting may also be observed in countries with similar market structures.

3.4.1.3 Gender

Firstly, this study finds that boycotts are not more popular among women than men in China. Both the bivariate correlation (Table 3) and the regression model (Table 4) show that the relationship between boycott behaviour and gender is negative and statistically insignificant, thereby rejecting H2a: *Women are more likely to participate in boycotts than men.*

Secondly, when compared with institutionalised political participation, particularly party membership and contacting government officials, gender appears to be a less influential factor in boycotting behaviour. On the one hand, men are significantly more likely than women to be party members and to contact government officials. As the odds ratios for gender indicate, for every unit increase in gender (0 = male), there is a 33 per cent decrease in the likelihood of holding party membership and a 33.7 per cent decrease in the likelihood of contacting government officials. On the other hand, gender has no significant association with boycott behaviour, suggesting that women are not less likely than men to engage in this form of participation. Thus, the finding supports *H2b: Women are more likely to participate in boycotts than in institutional politics.* This implies that boycotts may help to reduce gender inequality

in political participation in China by offering women an alternative venue through which to express their views and act politically.

3.4.1.4 Age

First, according to Table 2, almost half of the boycotters are middle-aged (30 – 49). Young people aged 18 – 29 account for 30.6 per cent of total boycotters, almost double the proportion observed in the non-boycotter group. Individuals aged 50 and above account for only 20 per cent of the boycotter group. The age distribution among boycotters appears to reflect the lifecycle of political participation – that is, "participation rises in the early years, peaks in middle age, and falls in later years" (Nie, Verba, and Kim, 1974, p. 326). However, as the middle-aged cohort represents the largest share of the overall sample; simply comparing the proportion of each age group does not provide a complete picture of the relationship between age and boycott participation. Rather, the bivariate correlation analysis (Table 3) shows a negative association between age and boycott behaviour. This relationship also holds in the binary regression model (Table 4), where the odds ratio for age indicates that with each unit increase in age, the likelihood of engaging in boycotts decreases by 2 per cent. This finding supports *H3: The younger an Individual is, the more likely they are to join a boycott.*

This finding is important because it indicates that boycotts offer the younger generation an opportunity to engage in politics, thereby potentially reducing the age gap in political participation in China. Compared to the middle-aged cohort, younger individuals typically possess fewer economic resources and are less represented in institutionalised political participation. However, because boycotts in China involve relatively low financial barriers to entry, they provide a more accessible way for young people to express their voices. Additionally, the development of social media further contributes to narrowing the age gap in boycott participation. Prior research has found that political consumerism is positively associated with social media usage. Recent developments show that social media platforms have become crucial tools for boycotters seeking information and maintaining communication (Baek, 2010; De Zúñiga et al., 2014). Given that the younger people represent the core user base of major Chinese social media platforms like Weibo, Bilibili, and Douyin, it is reasonable to expect that this demographic participates in boycotts more actively than older age groups.

3.5 Conclusion

Boycott participation appears to be on the rise in China. However, despite the growing significance of boycotts in the economic and political spheres, there has been no systematic examination of the sociodemographic characteristics of Chinese boycott participants using survey data. Furthermore, there has been limited exploration of Chinese boycotts from the perspective of political participation. This study represents a first step towards addressing this gap by investigating the sociodemographic profiles of boycotters in China through the lens of political participation.

Drawing on the 7th wave of the WVS (China), this study finds that Chinese boycotters exhibit a markedly different sociodemographic profile from their Western counterparts. First, socioeconomic factors such as education and income are not significantly associated with boycott participation in China. This may be related to the unique characteristics of Chinese boycotts. On the one hand, most boycotts are triggered by actions of foreign companies or public figures crossing China's political red lines, such as the perceived questioning China's territorial integrity, or bringing up human rights issues. Participants do not require a certain level of education to access relevant information, as it is already widespread in public discourse through state-led propaganda. On the other hand, Chinese boycotters can easily find affordable substitutes for the targeted products, meaning that wealth plays only a limited role in enabling participation. Moreover, institutionalised forms of political participation in China are positively associated with both education and income. This suggests that boycott participation may provide a more accessible avenue for political expression among individuals with lower levels of education and income.

Second, in contrast to findings on consumer behaviour in Western contexts, gender has no significant association with boycott participation in China. However, this is not the case for institutionalised forms of political participation in China, such as party membership or contacting government officials, where women are significantly less likely to be involved compared to men. This finding is important because it suggests that boycott participation may help to mitigate gender inequality in Chinese political life. Chinese women's willingness to participate in boycotts may reflect a broader trend of increasing interest in non-institutionalised

forms of political participation.[21]

Finally, the WVS data also indicate that the younger generation in China is more likely to participate in boycotts. This finding contrasts with previous empirical research, which suggests that middle-aged individuals constitute the major force behind boycotts (Baek, 2010; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). As the core user group of Chinese social media platforms, young people are more likely to be exposed to boycott calls online. Given that boycotts in China often do not require substantial financial resources, it is unsurprising that young individuals are more actively involved. Consequently, this study suggests that boycotts represent a key avenue through which the younger generation participates in politics, potentially helping to narrow the age gap in political participation in China.

The limitations of the quantitative analysis presented above should be acknowledged. First, the analysis does not distinguish between pro-government and anti-government boycotts, nor between boycotts targeting foreign versus domestic products. It is possible that sociodemographic factors, such as income, gender, age, or education, play different roles in shaping these different forms of boycott behaviour.

Second, this study focuses exclusively on boycotts, neglecting other forms of political consumerism, such as buycotts. Existing literature on Western cases has identified important differences between boycotters and buycotters (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014; Neilson, 2010; Rössel and Schenk, 2018). However, there is currently a lack of survey items capturing buycott participation in China. Given the growing frequency of both boycotts and buycotts in China, it is essential that future nationally representative surveys incorporate questions that allow for the comprehensive study of all forms of political consumerism.

Despite these limitations, this chapter's findings have several important implications. First, the analysis suggests that under-represented groups may seek to make a difference in the Chinese society by engaging in boycotts. More importantly, this study challenges the common argument that political consumerism exacerbates societal inequality by providing evidence that individuals with lower economic resources enjoy the same boycott opportunities as their more

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[21] The White Paper Movement is a recent example as it was started from a female university student's protest.

affluent counterparts. Finally, the findings indicate that boycott participation may contribute to reducing gender inequality by providing women with an alternative channel for political engagement. Future research could investigate the factors that motivate Chinese women to participate in politics via boycotts, buycotts, or other forms of political consumerism.

Chapter 4.

Boycott participation: crowding out or expanding the conventional participation repertoire in China?

The previous chapter investigated the sociodemographic profile of boycott participants in China through the lens of political participation. This chapter shifts its focus to explore the relationship between boycott participation and conventional forms of political participation. While this relationship has been widely debated (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Strømsnes, 2009; Stolle, Hooghe, and Micheletti, 2005; Baumann, Engman, and Johnston, 2015; Rössel and Schenk, 2018; Micheletti et al., 2004), few studies have examined it in the context of authoritarian regimes. As noted in Chapter 3, China has a unique political participation system, described as "consultative authoritarianism", under which the regime permits citizens to express grievances through limited participatory channels on restricted topics, thereby preventing more comprehensive change. Fu and Distelhorst (2020) distinguish between two types of political participation in China: contentious and institutionalised. In this chapter, I compare the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals engaged in these two forms of participation with those of boycotters. Drawing from the 7th Wave of the World Values Survey (Haerpfer et al. 2020), this chapter finds that boycott participation is particularly appealing to younger individuals who actively engage in contentious politics. Boycott participation appears to act as a supplement to contentious participation and a substitute for institutionalised participation.

This chapter is structured as follows. The next section reviews three major theoretical perspectives on the relationship between boycott and conventional political participation. Section Three presents the hypotheses. Section Four introduces the data and measurement strategy, followed by a discussion of results in Section Five. The final section summarises the key findings.

4.1 Debate on the relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation

The relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation has been central to the debate within political consumerism research. As noted in the literature review, there are three major theories discussing the role of political consumerism in the repertoire of political participation: crowding-out, mobilisation, and supplement.

The first is the crowding-out theory, which is based on the idea of "the displacement of a certain form of political participation as a consequence of political consumption" (Rössel and Schenk, 2018, p. 269). It posits that political consumerism impedes the development of social change and erodes other more radical political activities. This theory has primarily been developed in the context of the United States and other Western democracies, where conventional forms of political participation, such as voting, are declining, while unconventional activities such as political consumerism are on the rise (Dalton, 2008; Putnam, 2000). For example, Szasz (2012, p. 79) argues that individuals who engage in political consumption are more likely to "silence the internal voices" that urge them to take further action. He criticises the consumption of organic or natural products as driven primarily by self-protection, which fails to inspire additional political efforts targeting fundamentally unsustainable practices through effective state regulation (Szasz, 2007).

In contrast to the crowding-out theory, the mobilisation theory suggests that political consumerism provides an alternative channel for people "who feel less able to participate through the traditional channels of political involvement" (Strømsnes, 2009, p. 309). In other words, political consumerism does not crowd out other political activism but expands the conventional political repertoire by mobilising new groups of citizens, particularly those who are marginalised and oppressed, to engage in political life (Micheletti et al., 2004). For example, historically, in some colonial empires, oppressed populations were excluded from the traditional political arena, yet they adopted market-based actions to fight for citizenship rights and resist colonisation (Micheletti, et al., 2004). In the early twentieth century India, the *Swadeshi* movement emerged in Bengal and beyond, urging consumers to boycott British-made cloth, particularly from Manchester mills, as a part of the struggle against colonial exploitation (Sreekumar and Varman, 2019). Led by Gandhi, the movement aimed to promote local industry and resist British rule. Around the same time, China witnessed waves of boycotts against foreign products and buycotts in support of domestic goods in response to imperialist encroachment and colonisation. Particularly, those excluded from conventional channels of

political participation, such as merchants, women, workers, played a vital role in these movements.

There are many contemporary examples supporting the mobilisation theory. A notable instance in contemporary China is the 2011-2012 Nangchen Tibetans' boycott of Chinese vendors. From February 2011 to July 2012, the Nangchen Tibetan community initiated a long-term boycott against local Chinese vegetable vendors over exorbitant pricing (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2012). Without directly confronting Chinese vendors or local police, they successfully pressured some sellers out of the local market and established an alternative supply chain, sourcing vegetables from Xining and selling them in Nangchen at reasonable prices.

Another recent example is the boycott of Maia Active, a domestic brand specialising in women's activewear, following its controversial International Women's Day post titled "*This March 8, Shut Up (这个38，闭嘴吧)*." The campaign, which criticised what it termed "excessive feminism (过度女性主义)" and "causing conflict (没事搞对立)," provoked widespread public backlash, leading consumers to cancel orders and boycott the brand. According to the financial data reported by *China Entrepreneur*, Maia Active's net sales dropped sharply in 2023, with first-quarter growth dropping to 4% from 60% in 2022. While other factors may have contributed, some analysts suggest that the boycott played a significant role in this downturn (Liang, 2024). This is a typical example of women-led consumer boycott in China, illustrating how traditionally marginalised female consumers are increasingly leveraging political consumerism to defend their rights and challenge discrimination.

However, the third main theory – the supplement theory – criticises the mobilisation theory, arguing that political consumerism is not a substitute for conventional participation but rather an expansion of it. Similar to conventional forms, political consumerism tends to appeal more to social elites who possess a certain level of wealth, have higher educational backgrounds, and show greater interest in politics (Strømsnes, 2009). A considerable body of empirical research has shown that political consumers are more likely to engage in conventional political participation than others (Barnes and Kaase, 1979; Strømsnes, 2009; Stolle et al., 2005; Baumann, Engman, and Johnston, 2015). The characteristics typically associated with politically active individuals are also commonly observed among political consumers (Strømsnes, 2009, p. 312). Therefore, the supplementary theory posits that political

consumerism neither discourages citizens from engaging in conventional forms of political participation nor functions as a substitute for marginalised groups. Instead, it acts as a supplementary channel that coexists with and reinforces conventional modes of political engagement.

Throughout the extant debates on the relationship between political consumerism and conventional political participation, most research has been conducted in democratic societies, where political freedoms and opportunities for citizen engagement are comparatively broad. By contrast, only a few studies have investigated this relationship within authoritarian contexts, leaving a significant gap in our understanding of whether and how these dynamics translate to settings with highly constrained political opportunities. In countries such as China, individuals have increasingly resort to alternative arenas, such as the marketplace, to express political demands. The growing prevalence of political consumer actions illustrates this trend.

However, key questions remain unresolved: Does political consumerism crowd out or extend the repertoire of political participation in authoritarian contexts? Does it primarily mobilise politically marginalised individuals, or does it offer an additional channel for those already engaged in conventional politics? Addressing these questions is essential not only for advancing theoretical debates on political consumerism but also for understanding the nature of civic engagement in non-democratic settings. In the following section, I develop a set of hypotheses to address these questions.

4.2 Hypotheses

First, based on the crowding-out theory, one would expect individuals who engage in political consumerism, specifically boycotts in this study, to show less inclination to participate in other forms of conventional political participation. This leads to the following hypothesis:

> *H4a: Boycott behaviour is associated with a decreased likelihood of engaging in conventional political participation.*

In contrast, if political consumerism expands the repertoire of conventional political participation, one would expect boycott behaviour to be positively associated with other participatory acts. Accordingly, the hypothesis is:

H4b: Boycott behaviour is associated with an increased likelihood of engaging in conventional political participation.

Second, to investigate whether political consumerism mobilises individuals who are traditionally disengaged from conventional political participation (*mobilisation theory*) or primarily appeals to those who are already actively engaged in it (*supplement theory*), it is crucial to examine the sociodemographic characteristics of individuals involved in different forms of political participation. If the sociodemographic profiles of those engaging in boycotts and conventional political participation are similar, it can be argued that boycotting functions as a supplementary channel to conventional political participation, since those who engage in boycotts also partake in conventional politics. Accordingly, the hypothesis is:

H5a (supplement): Boycotters and participants in other conventional forms of political participation share the same sociodemographic profiles.

If not, it can be argued that political consumerism mobilises new groups to engage in politics. Thus, the proceeding discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

H5b (mobilisation): Boycotters and participants in conventional forms of political participation have different sociodemographic profiles.

However, as discussed in Chapter 3, within the realm of conventional participation, two distinct forms can be identified – institutionalised and contentious participation. Institutionalised participation refers to formal and less confrontational channels that offer citizens limited opportunities to vent grievances (Fu and Distelhorst, 2017). In contrast, contentious participation encompasses more confrontational and disruptive forms of dissent. The Chinese state, particularly under the Xi Jinping administration, has shown increasing intolerance toward contentious activism, employing both formal and informal coercive tactics to suppress such activities (ibid). These include criminal charges, harassment by private security forces or unidentified actors, and even state-organised disappearances (ibid, p. 78). Given these

distinctions, boycott participation may relate differently to institutionalised versus contentious forms of participation. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate these relationships separately to better understand the role of boycott participation in the broader landscape of political participation in authoritarian regimes.

> H6a: *Boycotters and participants in contentious participation share the same sociodemographic profiles.*
>
> H6b: *Boycotters and participants in contentious participation have different sociodemographic profiles.*
>
> H7a: *Boycotters and participants in institutionalised participation share the same sociodemographic profiles.*
>
> H7b: *Boycotters and participants in institutionalised participation have different sociodemographic profiles.*

4.3 Data and measurements

To test these hypotheses, I use data from the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) of China conducted through face-to-face interviews between July and October 2018 (Haerpfer et al. 2020).

4.3.1 Boycott variables

As in Chapter 3, boycott behaviour serves as a dependent variable in this study and is coded using the same method.

4.3.2 Political participation variables

To investigate the relationship between boycott behaviour and other forms of conventional political participation in China, this study examines the following 8 distinct political actions:

1) Voting in local party congress.
2) Contacting a government official
3) Party membership
4) Signing a petition

5)   Attending peaceful demonstrations

6)   Joining a strike

7)   Signing an electronic petition (online)

8)   Organizing political activities and protests (online).[22]

First, each political participation variable is recoded into a binary format, where '1' indicates that a respondent has participated in the activity, and '0' indicates non-participation. Second, these 8 binary variables are aggregated into a new composite variable – *conventional participation* – by summing the values to create an ordinal scale ranging from 0 to 6, indicating the number of different conventional actions each respondent has engaged in. Third, following the typology of political participation in China proposed by Fu and Distelhorst (2020), these actions are divided into two subtypes: the first three actions are classified as 'institutionalised participation', while the remaining five are classified as 'contentious participation'. Based on this categorisation, two additional variables are constructed: one measuring *institutionalised participation* (range: 0-3), and the other measuring *contentious participation* (range: 0-5).

4.3.3 Sociodemographic factors

The measurements of sociodemographic factors follow the same approach as in Chapter 3.

4.3.4 Control variables

The control variables used in this study are consistent with those introduced in Chapter 3. These include residential area, discussing politics with friends, general trust, social media usage, and religious belief.

4.4 Results and discussion

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[22] Except *Voting in local party congress* and *Party membership*, all other 6 political actions are measured by the same question in the WVS. That is, *People may take different actions to express their opinions. Please indicate whether you have done, whether you might do, or under any circumstances would never do.*

Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics for respondents who reported participating in various forms of political activity. Overall, levels of political engagement among Chinese citizens appear relatively low. While institutionalised participation is more common than contentious participation, active involvement in local-level voting and party membership remains limited. In contrast, all forms of contentious participation show participation rates below 8%. Notably, regime-challenging activities, such as boycotts (2.8%), strikes (2.1%), demonstrations (1.4%), and organising online protests (0.6%), are especially rare. However, these low figures may understate actual participation due to social desirability bias or self-censorship during face-to-face interviews, as respondents may avoid disclosing politically sensitive behaviour in authoritarian context.

In China "the Party monopolises all the legitimate channels of interest articulation and aggregation, any organized effort outside of the control of the party-state to influence government policy making is strictly prohibited" (Guo, 2007, p. 460). With the development of information technologies, the Party's control over the citizens' political participation has reached an unprecedented level. The intensification of online censorship exemplifies how the state silences critical voices and deters dissent. Even so, boycotting participation appears to be slightly more common than other forms of contentious political activity, with the exception of signing petitions (both online and offline). Why, then, is boycott participation more prevalent than strikes, demonstrations, and organising online protests, yet less common than signing petitions?

On the one hand, compared to boycotts, actions such as strikes, demonstrations, and organising online protests involve significantly greater risk. Strikes, commonly used as a non-institutionalised participatory action in democratic societies, are illegal in China. Demonstrations are also highly restricted, with organisers and participants required to obtain permission from government authorities. Without it, they risk being charged with 'disrupting social order' (扰乱社会治安). The recent White Paper Protests provide a notable example: many participants were detained both during and after the events.

In the context of China's increasingly sophisticated digital surveillance apparatus, even online mobilisation for collective protests entails considerable personal risk. In contrast, political boycotts, as individualised acts of political expression, offer greater autonomy and relative

safety. As an individualised act, boycotting situates between the private life and public engagement, allowing participants to pursue political or ethical objectives autonomously through their consumption choices. Although individuals may or may not perceive themselves as part of a broader imagined community, the inherent individualism of boycotting provides participants with a degree of flexibility and freedom often unavailable in other forms of political participation.

Surprisingly, signing petitions, both online and offline, is more popular than boycott participation. Petitioning (请愿) is often regarded as a high-risk form of political activity in China. Anecdotal evidence suggests that local governments often employ coercive measures to prevent petitioners from submitting letters or visiting higher-level authorities. Given that boycott participation is a more individualised and less confrontational form of political activism, one might expect it to be more popular than signing petitions. However, the findings do not support this assumption. Arguably, this may be related to political norms in China. Notably, petitioning has a long history, dating back to the Western Zhou dynasty (1047 – 772 BC), when ordinary citizens could stand on a 'lung stone' (肺石) and beat the Dengwen Drum (登闻鼓) to express grievances (Chen, S., 2022).

In contemporary China, petitioning is commonly referred to as "*xinfang* (信访, letters and visits). It is described as "an act of defiance against targeted local authorities" (Li, L.J., 2008, p. 211), wherein petitioners typically bypass immediate administrative bodies and appeal directly to higher-level officials. Importantly, petitioning remains legally permissible, provided it does not involve mass mobilisation, which is politically intolerable (ibid). As a 'boundary-spanning' form of participation, straddling institutionalised and contentious participation, petitioning continues to be one of the most widely used channels through which Chinese citizens seek redress and voice grievances (Li, 2008, p. 210). This may help to explain its greater popularity compared to boycott participation.

Moreover, Table 5 shows that the percentage of both active and inactive local voters is approximately 26.8%, which is substantially higher than other political actions. Some may question this relatively high rate of local election participation and view it as an inflated representation of actual institutional participation in China. Unlike voting in democracies, electoral participation in China is often regarded as state-mobilised rather than citizen

initiatives (Shi, 1997). However, recent studies suggest that citizens in villages, urban residents' committees, and certain township people's congresses may exert some influence over candidate selection (Li, L.J., 2011; Manion, 2000; O'Brien and Han, 2009; Schubert and Ahlers, 2012). Therefore, the relatively high participation rate reported in Table 5 could reflect the outcomes of China's top-down political reforms aimed at institutionalising local elections since the early 1980s. Nonetheless, the overall effectiveness and democratic potential of these local electoral systems remain limited and warrant further investigation.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for respondents reporting participation in different political activities.

	Have done (%)	Might do	Would never do (%)
Join a boycott	2.8	35.7	60.5
Contact a government official	7.8	37.2	55
Sign a petition	6.9	44.8	47.4
Attend peaceful demonstrations	1.4	31.6	67.0
Join a strike	2.1	25.2	72.7
Sign an electronic petition (online)	3.9	25.6	70.5
Organize political activities and protests (online)	0.6	12.1	87.3
	Active	Inactive	Not participate
Vote in local level	9.5	19.4	71.1
Party membership	4.0	8.5	87.5

Surprisingly, organising political activities and protests online appears to be the least common form of political engagement, less popular even than relatively radical protest actions such as demonstrations and strikes. This may partly reflect limitations in the survey methodology, which excluded several common forms of online political participation, such as filing complaints on government websites, monitoring officials' behaviour and policy-making processes, and engaging in everyday political discussions via social media platforms. These forms of online participation have become increasingly prevalent in recent years, and their omission may help explain the unexpectedly low reported rates. In addition, the tightening of online censorship likely plays a significant role. The party-state actively manipulates online

content to downplay or suppress politically sensitive topics that could lead to collective actions, such as online petitions and online protests (Cai and Zhou, 2019). The advancement of surveillance technologies has further enabled the state to monitor individuals involved in online political activities. This heightened visibility and perceived risk may discourage citizens from participating in online activism.

4.4.1 Does boycotting crowd out other forms of political participation in China?

Table 6 reports the results of binary logistic regression analysis examining how boycott behaviour relates to different forms of political participation. The dependent variables are 8 modes of political actions, and the key independent variable is the boycott behaviour. The regression models include sociodemographic controls such as age, gender, tertiary education, income, and residential area, as well as theoretically informed variables such as political interest, discussing politics with friends, general trust, social media usage, and religious belief. Notably, the results suggest that boycotts do not crowd out other forms of contentious participation in China. On the contrary, respondents who report engaging in boycotts are significantly more likely to participate in all listed forms of contentious political action. Particularly, those who have participated in boycotts are about 10.8 times more likely to have signed petitions and 49.6 times more likely to have attended peaceful demonstrations.

Table 6. The relation between boycott behaviour and different forms of political participation.

	Vote in local level	Party member	Contact government officials	Sign petitions	Attend peaceful demonstrations	Join strikes	Sign petition (online)	Organize political activities and protest (online)
Boycott behaviour	1.679	1.807	2.265*	11.833***	50.595***	2.765*	6.389***	4.781*
Age	1.052***	1.004	0.997	1.004	1.000	0.963***	0.969***	0.980
Gender (0=male)	1.152***	0.689**	0.668*	0.887	0.962	1.256	1.125	0.536
Tertiary Education (0=no)	2.899	5.029***	1.944***	1.420	0.795	0.089***	2.372***	1.984
Income	1.148	1.276*	1.117	1.049	1.193	0.878	0.886	2.625*
Residential area (0=rural)	0.899	0.935	0.918	0.731	0.915	1.037	0.929	0.572
Political interest	0.737**	0.491***	0.720**	0.903	0.989	1.003	0.931	0.709
Discussing politics with friends	1.233	1.298	1.496**	1.502*	1.442	0.836	1.964**	1.951
General trust	1.167	1.255	0.957	1.132	1.146	0.957	0.905	0.529
Social media usage	0.989	1.088	1.060	1.009	0.902	1.095	1.405**	0.916
Religious belief	0.869	0.673	0.748	2.449***	1.834	1.802*	2.296***	0.895

Note: Binary logistic regression analysis. Exp(B) and significant level
*Significant at 0.05 level.
** Significant at 0.01 level.
*** Significant at 0.001 level.

These findings are consistent with several high-profile cases of political consumerism in China. For instance, in 2005, when Japan sought a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), protesters employed a range of tactics, including demonstrations, signing petitions, and boycotting Japanese products to express their anger and political discontent (Wingfield-Hayes, 2005). A similar pattern emerged during the 2012 anti-Japanese boycotts, when demonstrators took to the streets carrying banners and slogans advocating the boycott of Japanese goods (Hille and Nakamoto, 2012; see Figure 13). These examples, together with the statistical results presented in Table 6, reinforce the view that boycotts in China are closely

intertwined with contentious political participation, particularly in the form of petitions and demonstrations.

Figure 13: "Boycott Japanese Products, Support National Products." Source: Chinatimes.com.

However, the relationship between boycott behaviour and different forms of institutionalised participation is not uniform. On the one hand, participation in boycotts is associated with a 126.5% increase in the likelihood of a respondent having contacted government officials. On the other hand, it shows a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with both voting in local elections and party membership.

Why might boycott behaviour relate differently to these three forms of participation? One possible explanation lies in the nature and structure of each mode. Compared to contacting government officials, both voting and party membership are more formalised and procedurally constrained. Becoming a party member or voting in local elections typically involves navigating complex bureaucratic processes and meeting specific eligibility criteria, whereas contacting government officials is more accessible and informal. Moreover, contacting government officials is often motivated by specific complaints, grievances, or administrative concerns, typically related to everyday political issues. In contrast, local elections and party membership are more tightly controlled by state institutions and primarily serve the purpose of selecting government personnel and loyal party members. As such, the latter are less likely to function as meaningful channels for expressing dissent. Additionally, contacting government

officials is generally more flexible and immediate, which may align more closely with the individualised nature of boycott behaviour.

Second, the level of citizen initiative in these three forms of participation varies significantly. Party membership, for instance, does not necessarily entail active political engagement. Research shows that 49% ordinary party members (*party members without position, 无职*) in Beijing have never participated in any of the 18 political activities in Beijing (Guo, 2007, p.467). Similarly, voting at the local level is often tightly controlled by official institutions which leaves limited opportunities for voters to express their needs or preferences (Zhong and Chen, 2002). By contrast, contacting government officials and engaging in other contentious political actions are typically initiated by citizens themselves. This difference in the degree of initiative may help explain why boycott behaviour is more closely associated with contacting officials than with voting or party membership.

Finally, the differing outcomes observed in the regression results may be partially influenced by the way these three variables were measured in the survey. In the 7th WVS, the questions on voting at local level and party membership are framed differently than those about other forms of political participation. Notably, these two sets of questions do not assess respondents' willingness to participate. By contrast, the question measuring *contacting government officials* is phrased similarly to that on *boycott participation*. Consequently, these discrepancies in measurement may help explain the divergent relationships observed between boycott behaviour and various institutionalised forms of participation.

To sum up, results from the 7th wave of WVS indicate that boycott participation does not crowd out conventional forms of political participation in China. More specifically, respondents who reported participating in boycotts were significantly more likely to engage in all listed forms of contentious political action, such as signing a petition, attending peaceful demonstrations, joining a strike, signing an electronic petition online, and organising political activities and protests online. However, the relationship between boycott behaviour and institutionalised participation is more nuanced. While boycott participants were significantly more likely to have contacted government officials, the associations with voting at the local level and party membership were positive yet statistically insignificant.

4.4.2 Is boycotting a substitute or a supplement for conventional political participation in China?

While the above discussion rejected the crowding-out thesis, it remains unclear whether boycotts mobilise individuals who are disengaged from conventional political participation or primarily appeal to those already active within established political channels. To address this question, I first compare the sociodemographic profiles of boycotters with those who participate in conventional political activities, with the focus on four key factors – age, gender, tertiary education, and income. Second, I distinguish between two forms of conventional participation – contentious and institutionalised – and compare the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants with those of boycotters. As discussed in the literature review, these two forms differ significantly in both structure and intent: institutionalised participation operates through formal, state-sanctioned mechanisms to influence policies and file complaints, while contentious participation relies on disruptive, confrontational tactics to express grievances and demands. Given these distinctions, we might expect individuals involved in each type to differ from one another. Consequently, the relationship between boycotting and these two types of participation may also differ. Table 7 shows the results of the linear regression analysis.

Table 7 indicates that younger individuals are more likely to engage in boycotts, whereas men and those with higher levels of education are more likely to engage in conventional participation. The sociodemographic profiles of boycotters and conventional political participants appear to be distinct: gender and tertiary education are significantly associated with contentious participation but not with boycott participation, while age shows the opposite pattern. These findings do not fully support either H5a: *(supplement): Boycotters and participants in other conventional forms of political participation share the same sociodemographic profiles*, or H5b: *(mobilization): Boycotters and participants in other conventional forms of political participation have different sociodemographic profiles*. Therefore, to dig deeper, it is necessary to disaggregate contentious and institutionalised forms of participation.

Table 7. Sociodemographic profiles of political participants by type of action.

	Boycott participation	Conventional participation	Contentious participation	Institutionalised participation
Age	0.980*	1.002	0.985**	1.013**
Gender (0=male)	0.972	0.751**	0.997	0.750**
Tertiary Education (0=no)	1.280	2.522***	1.273	3.307***
Income	0.993	1.112	0.920	1.215*
Residential area (0=rural)	0.905	0.859	0.812	0.906
Discussing politics with friends	2.303***	1.893***	1.759***	1.840***
General trust	0.961	0.981	0.972	1.100
Social media usage	0.985	1.031	1.076	1.008
Religious belief	1.179	1.320*	2.246***	0.806

Note: Binary logistic regression analysis. Exp(B) and significant level
*Significant at 0.05 level.
** Significant at 0.01 level.
*** Significant at 0.001 level

Table 7 highlights important differences between the institutionalised and contentious participation, particularly with respect to age: younger respondents are more likely to engage in contentious participation, whilst older respondents tend to favour institutionalised forms. However, the positive association between age and institutionalised participation and the negative association with contentious participation appear to offset one another, resulting in a statistically insignificant relationship when these categories are combined under the broader 'conventional participation' measure. Consequently, comparing boycotters with conventional participants as a unified group risks obscuring meaningful variation. To address this issue, the analysis proceeds by disaggregating conventional participation into its institutionalised and contentious components, thereby allowing for a more nuanced examination of their respective relationships with boycott behaviour.

4.4.2.1 Boycott participation vs contentious participation

According to Table 7, gender, education, and income are not significantly associated with either boycott participation or contentious participation. However, age exhibits a significant negative relationship with both forms of participation, indicating that younger respondents are more likely to engage in them than older individuals, thus supporting H6a: *Boycotters and participants in contentious participation share the same sociodemographic profiles.*

As discussed in Chapter 3, the relatively low cost of participating in boycotts in China, due to cheaper labour markets and the wide availability of substitute goods, makes it particularly accessible. For younger individuals with limited financial resources, boycott participation offers a low-barrier entry point into political engagement. Moreover, as a digitally mediated form of engagement, boycotts rely heavily on social media. Given that the younger generation constitutes the most active segment of internet users in China, it is more frequently exposed to boycott campaigns and online calls to action. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are more likely than older individuals to participate in boycott activities.

Furthermore, the likelihood of engaging in contentious participation decreases with age. Contentious forms of participation, such as demonstrations, strikes, and protests, often involve disruptive or confrontational actions that are heavily regulated by the Chinese government. Engaging in such activities can result in significant personal costs, including financial loss, social stigma, and even physical harm.

Legally, citizens' rights to engage in contentious actions are not strongly protected. For example, the current Constitution of the PRC does not guarantee the right to strike. According to Article 35 of the Constitution, "citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of procession and of demonstration" (National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 2004). Although strikes are among the most common forms of non-institutionalised political participation in democratic societies, they remain illegal in China. Furthermore, Article 7 of *the Law of the People's Republic of China on Assemblies, Processions and Demonstrations* (1989) stipulates that "For the holding of an assembly, a procession or a demonstration, application must be made to, and permission obtained from the competent authorities in accordance with the provisions of this Law." These legal restrictions act as a deterrent to individuals seeking to use collective action to express dissent or influence policymakers.

The risks associated with contentious participation are especially salient for middle-aged and older individuals, who may have more to lose due to established family and career responsibilities. In contrast, younger individuals, who typically face fewer long-term consequences, may be more willing to engage in such actions. Thus, it is understandable that older generations are less likely to participate in contentious politics compared to their younger counterparts.

4.4.2.2 Boycott participation vs institutionalised participation

Does boycott participation act as a supplement to, or a substitute for, institutionalised political participation in China? To answer this question, I compare key sociodemographic factors, including age, gender, income, and education, between boycotters and individuals engaged in institutionalised forms of political activity.

__Age__

Table 7 shows that age is significantly and positively associated with institutionalised participation. This finding is consistent with conventional wisdom that such forms of engagement are typically dominated by older generations. According to Wei (2023), the average age of the 2,980 delegates in the 13th National Party Congress is 52, with 54.8% delegates falling into the 50-59 age group. Only 42 delegates were between 22 and 29 years old, accounting for just 1.4% of the total. These figures indicate that the younger generation is largely marginalised within China's institutionalised political structures. By contrast, as previously discussed, boycott participation is more prevalent among younger individuals. This suggests that for those disengaged from formal political processes, particularly younger citizens, boycott participation may act as a substitute channel for political expression and engagement.

__Gender__

Another noteworthy finding is that men are more likely to engage in institutionalised political participation in China, whereas the gender gap in boycott participation is negligible.

Institutionalised participation remains heavily male-dominated. For example, among 2,977 delegates of the 14th National Party Congress, 2,187 were men, accounting for 73.5% of the total (Wei, 2023). At the highest level of political power, no woman has ever served as a member of the Politburo Standing Committee since the founding of the PRC (Cheng, L., 2017). Even at the provincial level, a recent report indicates that women occupy only a small fraction of party secretary positions, approximately 3% (Janik et al., 2022). Given the deeply rooted patriarchal structures in Chinese politics, it is unsurprising that women are underrepresented in formal political channels. By contrast, the effect of gender on boycott participation is statistically insignificant. Yet, the fact that men are not more active than women in boycott participation suggests that boycotts may offer a more inclusive and accessible channel for political engagement. In this sense, boycott participation appears to partially mitigate gender inequality in China's broader political participation landscape.

Education

It is not surprising that education is positively and significantly associated with institutionalised forms of political participation. As discussed earlier, institutionalised participation, such as voting and party membership, often involves high entry barriers, many of which are closely tied to individuals' educational background. Party membership provides a clear example. According to a recent report from the Organization Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, by the end of 2021, 53.2% of the 96,712,000 CCP members held a tertiary education or higher (Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee, 2022), compared to only 15.5% of the overall Chinese population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This disparity suggests that individuals with lower levels of education face reduced access to institutionalised channels of political engagement.

By contrast, the relationship between education and boycott participation is positive yet statistically insignificant. This finding is consistent with H1c, which suggests that education plays a less prominent role in shaping boycott participation than it does in conventional forms of political engagement, particularly institutionalised participation. Arguably, boycott participation helps to reduce the education-based participation gap by offering a relatively low-threshold channel through which individuals with lower levels of formal education can engage in political expression in China.

<u>Income</u>

Regarding the income factor, the results show that each unit increase in income is associated with a 21.5% increase in the likelihood of engaging in institutionalised participation, indicating that respondents with stronger economic backgrounds are more inclined to engage in formal political activities. This finding is consistent with Shi Tianjian's empirical study of political participation in Beijing during the late 1980s. Shi (1997) found that higher-income citizens were more likely to engage in institutionalised participation, such as voting. The positive relationship between income and institutionalised participation can be interpreted through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: individuals who have satisfied their basic needs are more likely to pursue higher-order goals, such as political influence and civic rights. By contrast, boycott participation shows a negative but statistically insignificant relationship with income, suggesting that an individual's economic status does not significantly influence their willingness to join a boycott. This may be attributed to China's relatively low labour costs and well-developed consumer market, which enables participants to easily find affordable substitutes for targeted products. Therefore, economic constraints are less likely to deter individuals from engaging in boycott actions. Boycott participation may contribute to reducing income-based gap in political engagement in China.

Overall, Table 7 shows that older, male, highly educated, and higher-income individuals are more likely to engage in institutionalised participation in China, while younger citizens are more active in boycott participation. Although gender, tertiary education, and income are not significantly associated with boycott participation, H7b is still supported: *Boycotters and participants in institutionalised participation have different sociodemographic profiles*. In line with mobilisation theory, this finding suggests that boycott participation serves as a meaningful political outlet for individuals underrepresented in formal institutional channels to engage with politics in China.

4.5 Conclusion

In sum, the WVS survey data in China suggest that boycott participation serves as a supplement to contentious participation and a substitute for institutionalised participation. Rather than attracting previously disengaged groups, it appears particularly appealing to younger

individuals who are already active in contentious politics. On the other hand, it provides an outlet for the younger generation which is traditionally marginalised in institutionalised political spaces to voice political demands through consumer-based actions. Moreover, boycott participation may help reduce the gender gap in political engagement by offering a more accessible and less formalised avenue for Chinese women, who remain underrepresented in institutionalised forms of participation.

Notably, the analysis identifies a cancelling effect between the positive association of age with institutionalised participation and its negative association with contentious participation, resulting in an insignificant relationship when these are combined as 'conventional participation'. This finding underscores the importance of disaggregating participation types to capture nuanced patterns in political behaviour. As an individualised and non-institutionalised form of engagement, boycott participation empowers Chinese citizens to express grievances and assert political positions outside the formal political arena.

Having examined the broader characteristics of political consumerism in China, particularly boycott participation, I next turn to two significant case studies – the 2019 NBA Boycott and the 2021 Erke Buycott. Specifically, the next two chapters investigate the motivations behind individual participation in these political consumerism campaigns, drawing on empirical evidence to better understand how and why citizens engage in these market-based forms of political action.

Chapter 5.

Motivations for buycotting national products: A case study of the Erke buycott in China

Building on analyses of boycotting – a negative form of political consumerism – in the previous two chapters, this chapter turns to its positive counterpart: buycotting. While earlier findings showed that boycott participation in China serves as a supplement to contentious participation and a substitute for institutionalised participation, this chapter explores the motivations underpinning individuals' engagement in buycotting. Drawing on a detailed case study and in-depth participant interviews, it offers new insights into buycotting practices in the contemporary Chinese context. This study adopts the grounded theory methodology, generating theory inductively from empirical data (Denscombe, 2010). As a result of this theory building process, I develop a four-category framework summarising the main motivations for buycotting. In the next chapter, I demonstrate that this framework is applicable to both boycotts and buycotts, and can therefore serve as a general framework for understanding political consumerism.

Today, a growing number of consumers are more aware of how their purchasing choices impact the environment, human and animal welfare, the construction of social values, and the development of political agendas, both locally and globally. Reflecting this trend, an increasing number of research studies move beyond political consumerism and capture differences between boycotting and buycotting (Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014a; Neilson, 2010; Wicks et al., 2014; Yates, 2011). Nevertheless, compared to boycotts, the phenomenon of buycotting has not been as thoroughly examined.

Current scholarship on political consumerism is unevenly distributed, with a skew towards North American and European contexts (Wicks et al., 2014; Neilson, 2010; Baek, 2010; Copeland, 2014a, 2014b; Katz, 2012; Lekakis, 2017b). There is a notable scarcity of studies addressing this phenomenon in China. While a number of studies have investigated how Hong Kong citizens engaged in the pro-democracy movement through political consumption, such as boycotting pro-government firms and buycotting "yellow shops" that supported protesters (Chan and Pun, 2020; Tang and Cheng, 2022; Wong et al., 2021; Chan, 2022; Lekakis, 2022;

Li and Whitworth, 2023), research on political consumerism in mainland China remains scarce. Moreover, much of the existing literature examines political consumerism driven by environmental or ethical concerns (Copeland, 2014b; Rössel and Schenk, 2018; Lekakis, 2013; Newman and Bartels 2011). More recently, a growing number of studies examine manifestations rooted in nationalistic sentiment or prejudice against ethnic, racial, and religious groups (Stolle and Huissoud 2019; Affeldt, 2019; Lekakis, 2019, 2022; Park, 2019; Micheletti and Oral, 2019; Chan, 2025). Nonetheless, research on political consumerism in authoritarian contexts remains limited. Given China's status as one of the world's largest economic powers, its expansive consumer market, and its authoritarian political system, investigating the drivers of political consumerism in this context can enrich the existing knowledge. Such research holds implications not only for scholars, but also for policymakers and corporate stakeholders seeking to understand consumer behaviour in non-democratic settings.

As shown in Chapter 2, recent years have witnessed a revival of the buycott of national products movement (BNPM) in China. Themes have varied from national pride and China-foreign political conflicts to domestic natural disasters, the Covid-19 pandemic, gender equality, corporate social responsibility (CSR), labour rights and other socio-political issues (see Appendix A). This thematic diversity suggests a growing convergence between China's political consumerism and that observed in Western societies. As discussed in Chapter 2, early twentieth-century Chinese political consumerism was primarily driven by nationalist sentiment. In contrast, contemporary buycotts are shaped by ethical considerations, environmental concerns, and other values, reflecting a significant transformation in politically motivated consumption practices.

However, existing literature on the buycott of national products predominantly emphasises the influence of nationalism and often through the lens of economic statecraft (Callahan, 2006; Wang, J., 2006; Chan, 2025; Demir and Ferguson, 2025). Few studies have examined the phenomenon from the perspective of individual consumers' lived experiences. For example, drawing on in-depth interview with 26 Yellow Economy's supporters, Chan (2022) finds that a collective identity is a pivotal driver for citizens to engage in political consumerism during Hong Kong pro-democracy movement. Moreover, Li and Whitworth (2023) draw on social media posts and in-depth interviews and examine the challenges to the success and sustainability of the yellow economy in Hong Kong. Furthermore, empirical research into the motivations behind Chinese consumers' support for national products has primarily employed

quantitative approaches, such as consumer surveys, and tends to focus narrowly on variables such as cultural identity, ethnocentrism and patriotism (He and Wang, 2015; Li and Wang, 2005; Tsai, Yoo, and Lee, 2013; Wang and Chen, 2004; Wang, Zhuang, and Zhou, 2012). Such approaches often frame buycotting as ethnocentric consumption, foreclosing discussion of the dynamics of ethical, economic and other self-related mediators. In contrast, the starting point of this study is not already-formed consumer ethnocentrism and the antecedents associated with it. Rather, it asks the broader question of why individuals respond to calls for buycotting domestic brands in their everyday consumption. In short, the goal is to probe buycotters' purchasing decisions in their full complexity. To do so, this research adopts an intensive method: a case study informed by in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants.

The remaining of the chapter proceeds in the following order. First, it proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the motivations underpinning buycotting behaviour. Second, I introduce the 2021 Erke buycott case, situating it within its historical context. The third section outlines the research method and data collection procedures, followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings. The final section reflects on the study's implications, limitations, and scope for future research.

5.1 What is a Consumer Buycott?

A consumer buycott is defined as "efforts by consumer activists to induce shoppers to buy the products or services of selected companies in order to reward these firms for behaviour consistent with the goals of the activists" (Friedman, 1996, p. 439). It is a reward-oriented form of political consumerism that aligns closely with engaged citizenship norms and shares key characteristics with civic engagement (Copeland 2014b). Buycotting represents a form of consumer empowerment in which individuals deliberately and proactively support companies that demonstrate socially responsible practices. Importantly, buycotting constitutes a meaningful form of political participation in everyday life. Especially for those who live under authoritarian regimes where formal avenues for civic engagement are limited, monitored, and often strictly controlled by states, buycotting offers a low-risk, easily accessed, and flexible mode of political expression.

Friedman (1996) distinguishes between two types of buycotts: single-target buycotts and multiple-target buycotts. The former refers to campaigns that support a specific brand, product, manufacturer, or firm, whereas the latter involves the promotion of a broader range of targets. According to Friedman (ibid, p. 445), single-target buycotts tend to be viewed with scepticism, as the public may question the consumer group's relationship with the targeted company and suspect potential conflicts of interest or commercial gain. However, single-target buycotts are not uncommon in contemporary China. Recent examples include the 2020 buycott of Luckin Coffee, the 2022 buycott of Paris Baguette and the 2023 buycott of BooksChina.com (see Appendix A). In some cases, single-target initiatives may evolve into multi-target campaigns. For example, in the Erke case discussed below, the buycott of Erke sparked a broader wave of national products support, from which other brands such as Mixue Bingcheng, Guirenniao, and Huiyuan, benefited.

5.2 Background

As outlined in Chapter 2, the revival of domestic brand consumption in China dates from 2015, when Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the policy of "supply-side structural reform" at the 11th meeting of the CCP Central Leading Group for Financial and Economic Affairs. Since then, domestic brands have experienced rapid growth. This resurgence reflects a combination of state-led policy initiatives, targeted media campaigns, the rapid expansion of e-commerce platforms, rising productivity and domestic innovation, and the revival of traditional Chinese culture. Together, these factors have contributed to the renewed prominence of the consumption of national products in China over the past decade.

Buying national products has increasingly become a lifestyle choice among many Chinese consumers. According to KPMG (2021), the rapid rise of the national products trend (*guochao*) has emerged as a key driver of growth in China's consumer market. During the 2024 Spring Festival, Cao County, a major hub for the production and sale of Hanfu (汉服, traditional Han Chinese clothing), generated over 3 billion RMB in revenue, largely from the sale of Mamianqun (马面裙, traditional Chinese pleated skirt) and other Lunar New Year-themed apparel (Chang, Y., 2024). In April 2022, Ocean Insights conducted a national survey of 4,833 respondents to examine the motivations behind consumers' engagement with *guochao* content

(Research Team of the Institute of Sociology, 2022). The findings revealed that 62.5% of respondents engaged with such content due to their preference for purchasing *guochao* and domestic products, as well as their interest in learning about leading national brands. Additionally, 51.5% reported that their engagement was motivated by a sense of national pride in China's economic and cultural development. A further 30.5% stated that they consumed *guochao* content as a means of acquiring knowledge, deepening their understanding of contemporary Chinese culture, and enhancing their personal development (ibid, p. 33).

Advocacy of national brands in China has often manifested through buycotts, frequently intertwined with incidents involving boycotts of foreign products. For example, in late 2018, following the imposition of U.S.'s economic sanctions on Huawei, many Chinese netizens called for the purchase of Huawei products as a means of supporting the brand and resisting U.S. pressure. Similarly, during the 2021 boycott of H&M over its stance on Xinjiang cotton, thousands of consumers pledged to support domestic apparel companies using Xinjiang-sourced cotton. As a result, Li-Ning, a leading Chinese sportswear brand, recorded a 419% increase in sales on Tmall.com during the Labour Day holiday period (Credit Suisse, 2021). [23]

However, not all buycotts are driven by international conflicts or expressions of nationalism. A significant number are rooted in domestic political or social concerns. In July 2021, for example, the relatively obscure sportswear brand Erke went viral on Weibo after making generous donations to flood-stricken areas in Henan province. In another instance, during the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympics, media coverage revealed that one-third of Baixiang Noodles' employees had disabilities, which prompted a wave of support for the brand among Chinese consumers. Such cases suggest that although patriotic slogans often feature prominently in buycott discourse, nationalism or patriotism may not always constitute the primary motivation behind consumer action. This chapter focuses on the Erke buycott as a case to investigate the deeper mix of reasons behind consumer participation.

Between 17 and 23 July, Henan province experienced severe flooding due to a prolonged period of heavy rainfall, affecting over 14 million people across 150 counties. On 20 July, the provincial capital, Zhengzhou, was struck by an intense rainstorm, resulting in substantial casualties and significant property damage. The following day, the domestic sportswear brand

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[23] China's biggest B2C e-commerce platform, spun off from Taobao.

Erke announced via Weibo (a Chinese microblogging platform similar to Twitter) that it would donate supplies worth 50 million RMB to support flood relief efforts. A few hours later, around midnight, a netizen named "Baibutao (白不桃)" commented under the post, "Oh my! It feels like you're about to go bankrupt, yet you're still donating so much (娘嘞感觉你都要倒闭了还捐这么多)." Other users soon echoed this sentiment, expressing frustration at the disparity in public attention between celebrities and socially responsible businesses. On user, "Tainongdamangguo (台农大芒果)," remarked: "A celebrity can get trending with just 500,000 RMB, while a conscientious business spends 50 million RMB but only gets over a hundred comments and two thousand likes. I'm really feeling frustrated about this." Another user, "Shizaiwuyushule-- (石在无语薯了--)", added: "Try to promote it a bit darling (referring to Erke), I'm worried for you!"

These emotionally charged comments quickly drew widespread attention. Thousands of netizens began commenting under Erke's post, calling for support of what they described as 'conscientious enterprise (良心企业)' and 'national brand (国货品牌).' The hashtag #TheCommentsOnErke'sWeiboAreReallySaddening (鸿星尔克的微博评论好心酸)# soon went viral, receiving over 1 billion views. In response, millions of users flocked to Erke's livestream shopping channel, pledging to purchase its products as an expression of support for this perceived national enterprise (minzu qiye, 民族企业).

Erke's buycott rapidly gained traction across multiple online platforms. On 22 July 2021, its Taobao livestreaming channel reportedly attracted over 2 million viewers, generating sales in excess of 90 million RMB (Forbes China, 2021). Within 48 hours, Erke's livestreaming sessions on Douyin had accumulated sales of more than 130 million RMB (ibid). The discovery that Erke's official Weibo account did not hold a VIP membership triggered another wave of consumer action, as netizens spontaneously renewed the brand's VIP status. On 23 July, the hashtag #Erke'sMembershipIsRenewedTo2140 (鸿星尔克的会员被冲到了 2140 年)" topped Weibo's trending list. Capitalising on this momentum, Erke official Weibo account posted a message declaring:

Erke is determined to become a century-old brand, otherwise, it will not live up to the support of online members. #TogetherWeStandWithHenan# Dear friends, we earnestly ask everyone to pay more attention to the disaster situation!

As of 28 July, just five days later, the post had amassed over 3.9 million likes and received more than 100,000 comments. Many netizens not only pledged to support the brand, but also uploaded screenshots of their purchases in the comment section. In response to the overwhelming public support, Erke's CEO, Wu Rongzhao, released a video on 25 July urging consumers to engage in "rational consumption." Paradoxically, this appeal triggered even greater enthusiasm, as numerous netizens chanted, "*No rational consumption! We will consume wildly*! (我们不要理性消费！我们要野性消费！)."

However, as the brand garnered widespread online attention, some netizens began to question the authenticity of Erke's donation, raising suspicion about possible charity fraud. In response, Erke, the One Foundation, and the Zhengzhou Charity Federation released official statements clarifying the donation process and confirmed its legitimacy. Notably, on 26 July, the National Supervisory Commission (国家监察委员会) published an article on its official website entitled *Erke's Explosive Popularity: A Touching Story of Kindness Sparking Kindness (鸿星尔克爆红：善引发善的动人故事)* commending Erke's contribution and reinforcing a positive narrative around the brand's philanthropic act (Lan, 2021). On the same day, the Cultural, Sports, and Tourism Bureau of Pingjiang County in Henan province announced that visitors wearing Erke shoes would receive discounts or free admission at selected tourist attractions (See Appendix C).

According to JD.com, one of China's leading e-commerce platforms, Erke's online sales increased more than 52-fold on 23 July alone. Between 23 and 24 July, total livestream sales on Taobao exceeded 107 million RMB (Ye, 2021). The surge in demand also extended to offline retail: physical stores experienced a dramatic influx of customers, with many outlets selling out of inventory. This wave of buycott soon expanded beyond Erke. Other domestic brands such as Mixue Bingcheng, Guirenniao, Huiyuan, and Qirui, also experienced surging support, as a broader movement to buycott national products gained traction across China (Forbes China, 2021).

5.3 Methodology

As the preceding section showed, the Erke buycott offers a compelling empirical case for exploring the understudied dynamics of consumer buycotts in contemporary China. To examine the motivations underlying individuals' buycott of Erke, this research uses a case study approach centred on participant interviews. A case study is "an intensive study of a single case or a small number of cases which draws on observational data and promises to shed light on a larger population of cases" (Gerring, 2017, p. 28). Case studies are particularly valuable in emergent research areas where theoretical frameworks are underdeveloped, offering a means to investigate novel phenomena and contribute to theory development (Rowley 2002).

5.3.1 Case selection

I employ descriptive case study methods in this chapter. Gerring (2017) distinguishes between two types of case studies based on the aims of a research project: descriptive and causal inference. Descriptive case studies seek to use a representative case – or set of cases – to describe a broader phenomenon, whereas causal-inference case studies are designed to explain causal factors by identifying, estimating, or assessing a hypothesis of a phenomenon (ibid). This research aims to enhance the understanding of consumer buycotts in contemporary China. Hence, a descriptive case study is an appropriate strategy, as it enables an in-depth examination of a single, representative case to map the motivations, dynamics, and characteristics of buycotting as a broader phenomenon in contemporary China.

Specifically, I adopt the typical case approach by selecting the buycott of Erke as a representative instance for this analysis. A typical case is one that exemplifies general characteristics of a wider category. While consumer buycotts in China have become increasingly diverse, the buycott of national products remains the most prominent and enduring form. As I showed in Chapter 2, recent years have seen a notable revival of the buycott of national products movement (BNPM). The Erke case stands out as one of the most influential and representative examples of this movement.

Firstly, it was a nationwide campaign that sparked a significant surge in the consumption of national brands across the country more generally. Although it began as a single-target

campaign, it quickly expanded into a multi-target initiative, benefiting numerous domestic brands, such as Mixue Bingcheng, Guirenniao, Anta, and Huiyuan, which all saw substantial increases in sales. Secondly, the Erke case exemplifies buycotts that emerge in response to domestic social issues, specifically, the 2021 Henan flood disaster, a context rarely examined in the existing scholarship, particularly in the non-Chinese literature. Thirdly, as with earlier instances of buycotts, the Erke buycott was accompanied by a parallel wave of boycotts targeting foreign sportswear brands. These features position the Erke case as a significant example of contemporary Chinese political consumerism.

5.3.2 Procedures and sample

This case study explores the motivations behind Chinese consumers' engagement in the Erke buycott. To capture participants' subjective experiences, I adopted the grounded theory, an inductive qualitative research method. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which are commonly used in qualitative research to obtain "descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2008, p. 3). Semi-structured interviews offer a balance between flexibility and structure. Compared to unstructured interviews, they enable novice researchers to maintain a clear focus and avoid excessive deviation from core research questions. At the same time, they are more adaptable than fully structured interviews, which allows researchers to add follow-up questions and adjust prompts in response to participants' narratives (Brinkmann, 2014). This flexibility is particularly valuable for generating rich in-depth data.

For the sampling strategy, I employed purposive sampling to recruit individuals who had either buycotted Erke products and/or participated in online discursive political consumerism, i.e. openly expressed their intention to purchase Erke products in support of domestic brands on Weibo or WeChat. From January 2022 to April 2022, I contacted 60 potential participants who had been engaged in online discussions related to the Erke buycott. Of these, 19 agreed to take part in the study, of which 6 respondents were subsequently excluded after it became clear that they had not engaged in either buycotts or discursive political consumerism. In total, 13 semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Participants, aged 20-31, came from diverse professional backgrounds, including a factory worker, a bank employee, state-owned company employees, private company employees, small business

owners, and a university student (see Appendix D). To protect participants' identity, all interviewees have been anonymised; the names appearing below are pseudonyms.

Given the political sensitivity of the topic, I was aware of the risk of social desirability bias in participants' responses. To mitigate this, interviews were conducted anonymously via online voice calls rather than in person. This method protected participants' privacy and helped them speak more freely, particularly when expressing critical or politically sensitive views. In most cases, I did not know their real names or appearances, which further reduced social pressure and the tendency to self-censor. Interview design also played a key role in minimising desirability effect. I began with non-sensitive, descriptive questions to build trust before gradually shifting to political topics. Throughout, I maintained a neutral stance and used open-ended, non-leading phrasing. Nonetheless, the possibility remains that some respondents may have overstated patriotic sentiments or downplayed criticism of foreign brands. To address this, I triangulated interview accounts with online discourse around the Erke buycott. This cross-validation helped assess whether participants' narratives reflected broader patterns of public opinion or were isolated expressions shaped by the interview context. Overall, I believe the interviews offered rich insights into subjective motivations that would have been difficult to capture through surveys alone.

5.3.3 Data Analysis

This study adopts the grounded theory methodology, which seeks to generate theory inductively from empirical data (Denscombe, 2010). Interview transcripts were analysed using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. The analysis began with open coding, during which I examined each transcript line by line and assigned codes to key words, phrases, and narrative segments that reflected specific motivations for participating in the Erke buycott. For instance, one participant, Li Hui, referred to concepts such as *patriotism* (爱国) or *patriotic spirit* (爱国情怀) on several occasions during the interview. Given the established significance of patriotism as a political value affecting individual behaviour, both expressions were categorised under the theme 'patriotism'. Additionally, statements referring to national unity, pride in being Chinese, or the protection of national interests, despite not explicitly using the term *patriotism*, were also grouped under this theme.

Some interview responses were associated with multiple motivations. For instance, Cao Linxi stated:

> As an ordinary person, I can't do much in the face of a major disaster, but I can contribute in my capacity as a consumer by purchasing their products, so that such patriotic enterprises can thrive and grow stronger. That's far better than supporting another company that lacks patriotic sentiment.

This response was coded under *perceived efficacy*, *patriotism* and *perceived CSR*, as it articulated belief in individual agency, national loyalty, and moral appreciation of the brand's charitable conduct.

At the end of the first round of open coding, I had generated 26 initial codes and identified 781 quotations across the interview data. During the second round, I employed the constant comparative method to refine the coding framework by consolidating overlapping or redundant codes. This process produced nine core motivational themes: (1) *patriotism,* (2) *animosity,* (3) *altruism,* (4) *perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR),* (5)*perceived efficacy,* (6) *self-enhancement,* (7) *susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII),* (8) *consumer demand* and (9) *product evaluation (including product design, product price, and product quality).*

These themes can be further organised into four overarching categories: political, ethical, self-related and economic considerations (see Table 8). The classification is consistent with the conceptual definition of political consumerism, which distinguishes political consumers from non-political consumers based on political and ethical concerns (Micheletti et al., 2004). First, the political considerations category includes patriotism and animosity, both of which reflect individuals' political orientation. Second, the ethical considerations category includes altruism and perceived CSR, both rooted in moral reasoning and normative evaluations of companies' actions. Third, the self-related category reflects psychological motivations, including perceived efficacy, self-enhancement and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII). Finally, the economic category captures motivations grounded in material interests, namely product evaluation (e.g., quality, price, and design) and consumer demand. This provides a clear analytical framework for understanding the complex and overlapping drivers of consumer buycotting behaviour in the contemporary Chinese context.

In addition to identifying the underlying motivations for participants' buycotting behaviour, I also assess the relative significance of each motivation within individual buycott decision-making processes. To achieve this, I calculated the frequency with which each motivation theme appeared in each interview. Given the semi-structured interview format, the length and depth of responses varied across participants. To ensure comparability, I used percentages rather than raw frequency counts. For example, in Wang Ping's interview, the coding results were as follows: patriotism (2), animosity (1), altruism (5), perceived CSR (7), perceived efficacy (0), self-enhancement (4), SII (5), consumer demand (1) and product evaluation (8) – totalling 33 codes. In this case, perceived CSR accounted for approximately 21% of her overall motivational references. Using this approach, I constructed a motivational profile for each participant, offering a more nuanced understanding of the weight each theme carried in shaping the individual action (see Appendix E).

Theme category	Definition	Examples
Political considerations	Refers to respondents' political values, such as patriotism, animosity, and freedom of speech, or political orientations such as political trust, organisational membership, and political efficacy.	Patriotism: Expressions of national pride, national unity, or love for the country. Animosity: Hostile attitudes toward foreign countries especially in response to previous political conflicts.
Ethical considerations	Refers to moral reasoning in decision-making, including values like altruism, perceptions of corporate social responsibility, gender equality, and perceived egregiousness.	Altruism: Willingness to support Erke despite of personal inconvenience, out of a desire to contribute to society during hardship. Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility: Positive evaluation of Erke's donation to Henan as a reflection of corporate ethics.
Self-related considerations	Refers to psychological and identity-driven motivations, such as self-efficacy, self-enhancement, or susceptibility to interpersonal influence.	Self-efficacy: Belief in one's ability to make a difference through consumption. Self-enhancement: Feelings of pride or moral satisfaction from participating in the buycott. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence: Influence of peers, online communities, or desire for social approval. Tendency to align with dominant media narratives or follow peer-endorsed messages.
Economic considerations	Refers to material and practical concerns in consumption, such as price, product quality, consumer demand, and time.	Consumer demand: Mention of practical needs or interest in the product independent of political or ethical values. Product evaluation: Judgements about product price, quality, and design as influencing the purchase decision.

Table 8. Thematic coding scheme: Erke buycott case.

5.4 Results and discussion

Having calculated the relative significance of each motivational theme in individual interviews, I proceeded to compare the aggregate prominence of each theme across all participants. This involved calculating the *average percentage* of each motivational theme's appearance across the sample. For example, the theme 'animosity' accounted for an average of only 2% of motivational references across all respondents. In other words, when treating the full set of participants as a single analytical unit, animosity represented just a small fraction of the overall motivations identified. Using the same method, I calculated the average percentage of each of the remaining eight themes.

On average, the most frequently cited motivation was *product evaluation* (including product quality, product design, and product price), followed by *susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII)*, *patriotism*, *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)*, *consumer demand*, *altruism*, *self-enhancement/ perceived efficacy* and lastly, *animosity* (see Figure 14). These motivational themes are presented below according to the four overarching categories introduced earlier: political, ethical, self-related and economic considerations. The next sections examine each category in detail.

Figure 14 – Erke motivation categories and themes.
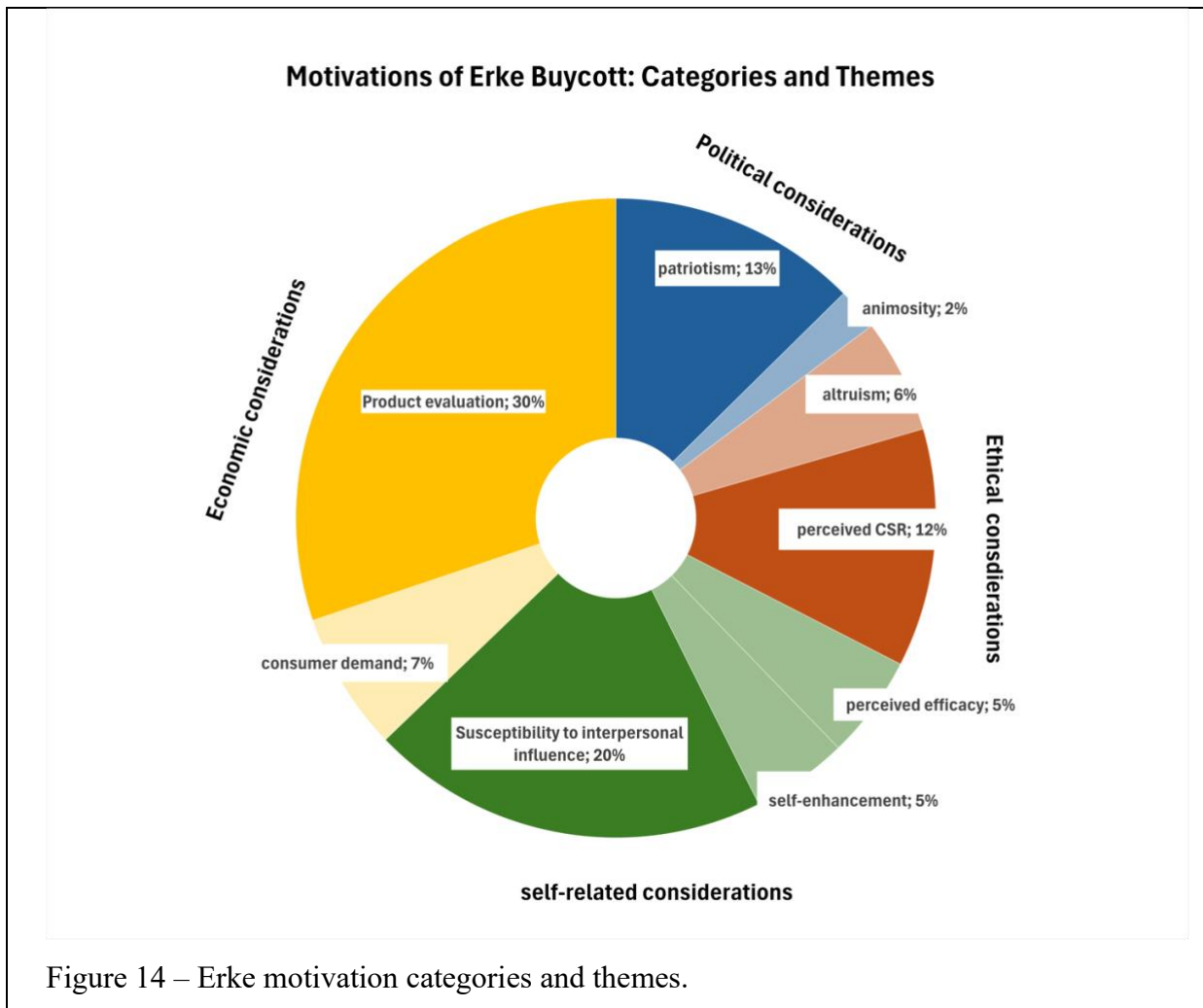
5.4.1 Category 1: Economic considerations

5.4.1.1 Product evaluation

The most frequently mentioned reason among respondents related to product attributes such as quality, price, and design.

Quality

Product quality was a frequently mentioned motivation for supporting the brand during the buycott. Many participants cited attributes such as durability, comfort, and overall cost-performance ratio as key factors in their purchasing decision. For example, when asked about her previous impression of Erke, Wang Ping said:

I feel that their prices are really low, and the quality of the shoes was probably just too good – they simply won't wear out. Then, when I think about throwing them away, I feel that they're not actually damaged, so I can't bring myself to do it.

Her response reflects a perception of unexpectedly high product durability, which positively shaped her evaluation of the brand. A similar shift in perception was evident in Duan Peng's account. Initially sceptical of Erke's quality, his opinion changed after approximately two months of use. Duan Peng reported that the quality of Erke products exceeded that of some items he had previously purchased from global brands such as Adidas and Nike.

However, while most respondents praised the quality of Erke products, Wu Kai held a contrasting view. He expressed dissatisfaction, describing the product as barely meeting minimum standards:

If the product itself is worthless, and you're asking me to pay for it entirely out of sentiment, I don't think I can do that.

Wu further noted that unless Erke enhances its comfort, design, and brand recognition, he would refrain from purchasing their products in the future. While his critique was primarily directed at product quality, it is important to acknowledge that his decision was also shaped by a negative purchasing experience.

Price

All the participants referenced price as a significant factor in their decision-making process (Appendix E). Many respondents emphasised the affordability of Erke products, frequently describing them as offering "excellent quality at a reasonable price" (Chu Tian). For instance, Jin Fu stated:

At that time, I happened to need a new pair of shoes, so I checked the Erke official website. There happened to be a pair with a nice design that I really liked, and the price was affordable, so I bought them.

Such comments suggest that affordability not only shaped individual purchasing decisions but also contributed to the broader momentum of the buycott. Indeed, price may have been a critical enabling factor allowing the Erke buycott to escalate into a nationwide consumption craze. For comparison, before the Erke buycott, there was a wave of buycotting of Li-Ning sportswear products in early 2021. However, that episode proved more limited and short-lived. One possible explanation is that Erke's lower price point made its products more financially accessible to a wider demographic of consumers, thereby lowering the threshold for political consumer participation.

In other instances, however, low pricing initially deterred participants from purchasing Erke products. Prior to the buycott, several respondents associated lower prices with inferior quality, outdated design, and weak brand recognition. When asked why he had not considered buying Erke products before the campaign, Duan Peng explained,

> I think brands like Adidas and Nike might have better designs and are worn by more people, which might explain their higher prices. That was one of the reasons I hadn't bought Erke before.

This quote illustrates how perceived brand prestige and design appeal – rather than affordability – shaped Duan's earlier consumption preferences. However, following his participation in the Erke buycott, his perspective shifted. He discovered that the quality of Erke products was comparable to that of more expensive international brands, leading him to reassess his assumption. For Duan, a low price no longer equated to low quality.

Design

Participants expressed mixed views regarding the design of Erke products. While some described the designs as stylish or acceptable, others reported difficulty finding aesthetically appealing items on Erke website or in physical stores. Notably, however, negative perceptions of design did not necessarily hinder buycott participation. For example, Li Hui described Erke's shoes as unable to "keep up with the trend" and "a bit ugly", yet still choose to support the brands:

I don't think its design is particularly bad; some styles are still okay, passable. Personally, I have a patriotic attitude towards our country. As long as it's Chinese, I feel I should continue to support it.

Li Hui's account illustrates that, in some cases, patriotic feeling overweighed aesthetic preferences. Despite his reservations, he rationalised his decision by framing the purchase as an expression of patriotism rather than merely consumer preference. A similar dynamic appeared in Wang Ping's account. Although she was unable to find a suitable product for herself – either due to limited sizing or aesthetic dissatisfaction – she nonetheless chose to participate in the buycott by purchasing for a family member:

When I went to buy [Erke shoes], there were basically no size 36s left, and I didn't see any style I liked either. At the time, there were more larger sizes available, so I bought three pairs of size 42 shoes for my dad. – Wang Ping

However, in some cases, participants abandoned their purchase intentions due to dissatisfaction with available products. This did not necessarily signal a withdrawal from the buycott. Instead, several participants chose to engage in discursive political consumerism, for example, by promoting the brand online, or delayed their purchase until a more suitable product became available. Mu Rong exemplifies this form of engagement. During the initial wave of the Erke buycott, Mu Rong did not buy any products because she found the designs unappealing. Nonetheless, she was among the most active online buycotters in this study, regularly interacting with Erke-related content on Douyin through comments, likes, and reposts, and introducing the brand to her friends. Her support persisted even six months after the event:

I think [Erke's] shoes are too flashy – I don't like that, so I didn't buy any. But recently I've been browsing Red, [24] and I think my next pair of running shoes could be a white pair from Erke. Their white ones actually look pretty nice. – Mu Rong

Mu Rong represents a segment of consumers whose purchasing decisions were significantly influenced by their assessment of product design. This pattern is also evident in broader online

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[24] Red, also known as Xiaohongshu, is a Chinese social media platform and e-commerce platform.

discourse. On 28 July 2021, a Weibo user named "Tuweijiaoshou (土味教授)" asked followers whether they or their acquaintances had purchased Erke products. Among the 43 respondents, 22 users reported that they had neither bought nor intended to buy from the brand. Of these, five explicitly cited poor product design as their primary reason. One user criticised the aesthetic of Erke's shoes, accusing the brand of imitating high-end models such as Yeezy and Air Jordan:

> Although domestic products are good, I still don't want to buy knockoffs.

For these consumers, product design and originality outweighed nationalist or ethical motivations. Even amid heightened patriotic sentiment, some participants resisted buycotting Erke products when it conflicted with their personal interests.

In sum, product evaluation – including assessments of quality, price, and design – emerged as the most frequently cited motivational theme across interviews. However, participants' assessments of Erke products varied considerably. Those with positive impressions were more likely to make a purchase, yet a negative evaluation did not necessarily result in non-participation. In several cases, respondents chose to buycott Erke products despite reservations, motivated by socio-political or ethical considerations. These findings suggest that, for some participants, political or moral alignment with the brand outweighed economic preferences.

5.4.1.2 Consumer Demand

Consumer demand, which accounted for approximately 7% of all coded motivations, represents a significant component of the economic considerations category. It typically emerged as a supporting factor in the later stages of decision-making. In this study, several participants reported that they chose to buy Erke products because they had existing needs – particularly for sportswear – at the time they became aware of the buycott. For instance, Duan Peng reported spending around 2,000 RMB on Erke clothing and shoes. He explained that he had recently started a weight-loss programme and required sportswear, which made the decision to support Erke both practical and symbolic. Notably, Duan had not purchased any Erke products in the past ten years, indicating that while consumer demand facilitated the purchase, it was not the primary driver of his decision.

Conversely, a lack of immediate consumer demand can impede participation in buycotting through purchase. Although Erke experienced a surge in popularity, Gao Shuang – a long-standing customer of the brand – chose not to make another purchase during the shopping frenzy. He explained:

> Because in the year before the buying frenzy, I had already bought four or five pairs of Erke shoes. As a rational consumer, since I currently don't have a need to buy more, I wouldn't act irrationally.

Gao's case highlights the moderating role of demand in influencing consumption choices. In the absence of a practical need, even individuals who hold favourable views of a brand may refrain from further purchases. However, this does not preclude other forms of support. Gao remained an active participant in the online discursive sphere, posting regularly on Weibo, sharing positive experiences with Erke products and encouraging others to consider purchasing them. Such endorsement, when amplified through social media, may have been just as influential as direct consumption. Gao's active advocacy – alongside that of many other online participants – contributed to the widespread success of the Erke buycott on a national scale.

5.4.2 Category 2: Self-related Considerations

5.4.2.1 Susceptibility interpersonal influence (SII)

As a core component of self-related considerations, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) emerged as the second most frequently cited motivational theme among respondents, accounting for approximately 20% of overall cited motivations. Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989, p. 474) define this concept as "the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others." SII has been shown to have a significant impact on consumers' purchase decisions (Bearden et al. 1989; Batra et al. 2001).

Researchers have distinguished between two types of interpersonal influence: normative and informational. Susceptibility to normative influence (SNI) consists of two dimensions: value-expressive and utilitarian influence. The former is driven by "the individual's desire to enhance self-image by association with a reference group", while the latter is reflected in "individuals' attempts to comply with the expectations of others to achieve rewards or avoid punishments, and it operates through the process of compliance" (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 474). By contrast, susceptibility to informational influence involves "an influence to accept information from others as evidence about reality" (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955, p. 629). Studies suggest that individuals with higher levels of SNI are more likely to participate in a boycott, particularly when their reference group includes actual or potential boycotters (Sen, Gürhan-Canli, and Morwitz, 2001).

Notably, similar to boycotts, the interview data reveal that consumer buycott behaviour is also influenced by SNI. For example, when asked why he engaged in the buycott of Erke products, Lu Shu explained that it was not primarily due to the donation but largely because he wanted to follow suit. He said,

> Since so many people were buying [Erke products], I could buy a pair too. Just give it a try. After all, I happened to have the need at the time.

In this case, SNI and consumer demand overtook ethical considerations in motivating Lu Shu to buycott Erke products.

Some participants indicated that their buycotting behaviour was influenced by peers, particularly other netizens. For instance, Wu Kai recalled:

> In the comments section [of Douyin], there were several popular comments saying things like, "We should support domestic products and buy a pair of Erke shoes." Some people even shared their purchase orders, saying they had already placed an order. That was what triggered my awareness to buy, so I went and bought a pair too.

In addition to buying a pair of Erke shoes, Wu Kai also shared his purchase on his WeChat Moments, clarifying that his motivation was to seek social validation. As he explained, "To put it simply, it was about following the trend, rather than expressing a strong sense of patriotism."

Evidently, for Wu Kai, participating in the buycott was a means of demonstrating alignment with the group. In his case, value-expressive influences exerted a greater impact than patriotic sentiment.

Another example is Zhou Xiaoli. During the interview, she mentioned that she was afraid of wearing Nike or Adidas shoes during the campaign, stating:

> I felt that if I wore them, people might call me a traitor.

Zhou demonstrated a heightened inclination to conform to prevailing social norms by avoiding Nike or Adidas shoes, thereby preventing potential criticism from others. It is important to note that during the Erke buycott, a temporary boycott emerged in China against foreign fashion brands such as Adidas and Nike. During this period, netizens actively engaged in Taobao and Douyin livestreams, urging sellers to remove these foreign products and encouraging Chinese consumers to prioritise domestic brands while boycotting foreign ones. Given this social context, Zhou's decision to refrain from wearing Nike or Adidas shoes becomes more understandable.

Nevertheless, Zhou Xiaoli also actively engaged in the buycott of Erke. She stated:

> We just felt like going along with the crowd – posting on WeChat Moments and Douyin – purely to 'chase the clout' (蹭一下流量), but it seemed like our posts didn't really take off.

Here emerges an interesting concept – *clout-chasing*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *clout* is defined as "power and influence over other people or events." A clout-chaser is someone who seeks attention, recognition, or popularity online. In the case of Erke, the brand went viral on Weibo, appearing on the trending list 17 times, between 22 and 29 July. This surge in online visibility attracted a wave of clout chasers, with Zhou Xiaoli as a typical example. After seeing several viral Douyin videos about the Erke buycott, she followed the trend, bought a pair of sports shoes and posted them on her social media accounts. However, Zhou never wore the Erke shoes afterwards, explaining that "wearing Erke products may make people feel that I am a clout chaser." Once again, Zhou exhibited a high SNI, particularly in

the form of utilitarian influence, with her buycott behaviour strongly shaped by social conformity dynamics.

In addition, some respondents demonstrated a degree of susceptibility to informational influence, aligning with dominant media narratives that praised Erke for its generous donation despite the company's financial difficulties. For instance:

> Why did so many companies donate – even those that gave more than Erke – but none of them received such a strong public reaction? It's because Erke made that donation while on the verge of bankruptcy, yet still gave so much to the country. That's what moved people. I am quite an emotional person myself, and I found it really touching too. – Mu Rong

> [I] commented and shared the post because, just like what was said online at the time, the company itself was facing difficulties, yet it was still able to contribute so much to charity. I felt it was really admirable and wanted to cheer it on. – Jin Fu

Both Mu Rong and Jin Fu's impressions of Erke's financial difficulty were likely shaped by online discourse. As noted in the background section, one of the most-liked Weibo comments – "Oh my! It feels like you're about to go bankrupt, yet you're still donating so much." This comment attracted more than 806,000 likes.

In sum, the respondents' participation in the buycott was significantly influenced by their SII. Normative influence led respondents to conform to the social expectation of supporting a socially responsible domestic brand, while avoiding foreign brands to prevent social criticism. Informational influence also played a notable role, as widely circulated media narratives shaped perceptions of Erke's charitable action and financial hardship. These two forms of influence often operated simultaneously, jointly reinforcing buycott participation.

5.4.2.2 Self-enhancement

The American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology defines self-enhancement as "any strategic behaviour designed to increase either self-esteem or the esteem of others." It

entails "taking a tendentiously favourable view of oneself" (Sedikides and Gregg, 2008, p. 102). Among the various motivational themes, self-enhancement was one of the least frequently mentioned by respondents, accounting for only approximately 5% of all coded references.

Prior research suggests that if consumers believe participating in a boycotting movement is a right thing to do and that it can improve their self-esteem, they are more likely to engage in such behaviour (Mrad, Sheng, and Hart., 2013; Klein, Smith, and John, 2004). In the Erke buycott, several participants expressed that supporting Erke was morally meaningful. Some viewed the act of buycotting Erke as an activity filled with 'positive energy (正能量),' which evoked positive emotions.[25] In other words, buycotting Erke products helped participants feel good about themselves, thus enhancing their self-esteem.

> As someone who has long used Anta and Erke, and often buys their products, I felt really good seeing the company do something like this. It felt very comfortable. Then seeing this brand being liked and used to support by so many people, I also felt it was quite nice – like my past choices were the right ones. – Gao Shuang

> During that period, I felt that buying Erke gave me a kind of emotional support – it made me feel like I was someone with *zheng neng liang* and a strong sense of patriotism. – Chu Tian

5.4.2.3 Perceived efficacy

Perceived efficacy refers to the belief that each boycott participant can contribute significantly to the achievement of collective goals (Sen et al., 2001). In the Erke buycott, respondents did not demonstrate strong perceived efficacy, with this factor accounting for only approximately 5% of coded motivations. In other words, when consumers believe that their buycotting behaviour is likely to succeed or make a difference, they are more inclined to engage in such activities. The buycotting participants interviewed for this study exhibited a certain degree of

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[25] "Positive energy (正能量)" is an important propaganda formulation in the Xi Jinping era, which refers to "the need for uplifting messages as opposed to critical or negative ones – and particularly the need for content and puts the Party and government in a positive light" (China Media Project, 2021).

perceived efficacy, tending to believe that their purchases and online discursive actions were effective and capable of influencing others.

For example, Mu Rong, a 20-year-old university student, actively promoting Erke products online during the campaign. Prompted by Douyin promotional short videos about Erke's donation, Mu began following the case closely. She mentioned that she often visited the comments section of such videos on Douyin, left supportive remarks, and shared them with her friends. Mu believed that her actions helped influence her friends' attitude towards the brand:

> Because I thought Erke was good, I expressed my opinion [in support of it]. I believe that people's positive feelings towards it would also increase because of my own positive feelings. I feel I can influence those around me. – Mu Rong

Mu was evidently confident that her online buycotting efforts contributed to enhancing the brand's public image. Nonetheless, it is important to notice that she did not purchase any Erke products during the initial campaign due to dissatisfaction with their design. However, six months later, by the time of the interview, she reported planning to buy a pair of Erke running shoes as she needed a pair and found the design appealing and the price more affordable than Nike. Mu's case illustrates how product evaluation – particularly product design – can play a crucial role in the ultimate purchasing decision, even when initial ethical or self-related motivations are present.

5.4.3 Category 3: Ethical Considerations

5.4.3.1 Perceived Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (1999) defines CSR as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large." This definition broadens the scope of the company's responsibilities to include not only economic and legal considerations but also ethical and social commitments (He, Kim, and Gustafsson, 2021, p. 217). While a considerable body of research has found a positive relationship between CSR performance and consumer

responses towards companies and their products (Bhattacharya and Sen 2004; Sen et al. 2001), most studies have focused on liberal market economies. In the Chinese context, CSR may serve not only as an ethical signal but also as an alignment with social values and national interests. The interview data suggests that CSR performance enabled consumers to interpret their support as both ethically justified and socially meaningful.

In this study, Erke's CSR performance was exemplified by its donation of 50 million RMB in aid to flood-devastated areas in Henan province. On average, CSR was the third most frequently mentioned motivation by respondents, accounting for 12% of coded motivations. Among all participants, 10 out of 13 praised Erke's donation to Henan, explaining that it was this act of generosity that first captured their attention. For example, when asked about her views on the Erke buycott, Chu Tian stated:

> During that particularly difficult period last year, [Erke], as an ordinary Chinese enterprise – a domestic sportswear brand – suddenly stepped forward to make a donation. That was when I first began paying attention to the company.

However, it is important to acknowledge that the influence of CSR varied among stakeholders. For those with personal ties with Henan province, the response was particularly strong, with support remaining high even after the campaign. Wang Ping serves as an illustrative example:

> Because I'm from Henan, I was very touched by Erke's assistance to the province. At that moment, I felt that, as someone from Henan, I should also show some gratitude or give something back.

Previously, Wang mentioned that she was not fond of designs of Erke products. Nevertheless, she actively engaged in the buycott and purchased three pairs of shoes for her father as an expression of gratitude and to commend the company's benevolent actions. She later noted that the Erke's donation had positively influenced her perceptions of the brand: "If I were to choose between brands like Xtep, Anta, and Erke, my first choice would be Erke."

5.4.3.2 Altruism

Altruism also emerged as a motivation for participants to engage in the Erke buycott, accounting for approximately 6% of all identified motivations. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005, p.879) describe it as a behaviour guided by a rule of seeking to promote the welfare of others, even at the expense of personal sacrifice. Individuals exhibiting high levels of altruism are more inclined towards engaging in prosocial behaviours (Sprecher, Fehr, and Zimmerman, 2007). Previous studies have found that political consumers, particularly buycotters, tend to be more altruistic than non-political consumers (Neilson, 2010). They are often willing to sacrifice personal benefits in order to support favoured businesses, thereby indirectly contributing to societal welfare.

Consumers frequently perceive purchases of national products as a way to support domestic brand and strengthen the national economy. In the case of the Erke buycott, several participants expressed the belief that, as individual consumers, their ability to directly contribute to disaster relief and the reconstruction of flood-affected areas was limited. Nevertheless, they felt they could wield influence by supporting socially responsible enterprises that had made substantial donations to Henan. For instance:

> As an ordinary person, I can't do much in the face of a major disaster, but I can contribute in my capacity as a consumer by purchasing their products, so that such patriotic enterprises can thrive and grow stronger. – Cao Linxi

This raises an important question: why did individuals like Cao Linxi choose to support a brand involved in disaster relief rather than donate directly to charitable organisations? One possible explanation lies in widespread public distrust of charitable institutions in China, fuelled by high-profile scandals involving the Chinese Red Cross Society and persistent concerns about corruption.[26] In contrast, purchasing from Erke enabled consumers to contribute indirectly to relief efforts while also receiving a tangible good in return. For many, this form of support felt more trustworthy, personally rewarding, and effective than conventional donation channels.

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[26] One notable example was the 'Guo Meimei – Red Cross Scandal.' In 2011, twenty-year-old Weibo influencer Guo Meimei boasted about her luxury cars and designer handbags while claiming to be the 'commerce general manager' of the Red Cross Society of China. This sparked a nationwide outcry, with the public suspecting she had funded her lifestyle using donated charity funds. This controversy severely damaged the organisation's reputation and led to a prolonged decline in public donations.

Another illustrative case is that of Wu Kai. During the buycott, Wu reported a negative shopping experience with Erke: after placing an order online in July, he was forced to cancel it due to a three-month delivery delay caused by stock shortages. Despite this, Wu said:

> Setting aside some issues between Erke and myself, purely in terms of brand influence, it is still a relatively positive and patriotic brand. I don't want to cause any negative impact on it because of my personal experience.

Wu's willingness to set aside his personal dissatisfaction highlights a broader concern for the brand's public image. His decision to acquiesce and suppress personal grievances in favour of collective benefits demonstrates a form of altruistic consumer behaviour.

5.4.4 Category 4: Political Considerations

5.4.4.1 Patriotism

Accounting for 13% of all mentioned motivations, patriotism emerged as a salient factor behind the buycott of Erke. Patriotism is defined as the love of one's own country without holding prejudice against other countries (Druckman 1994). It is associated with "a more cooperative or peaceful approach to the world" (ibid, p. 47). Unlike nationalism, which is strongly associated with nuclear armament policy, patriotism is only marginally connected with it (Kosterman and Feshbach 1989). Patriotism is a significant driver in the choice of domestically produced goods over imported ones, as patriotic consumers perceive such consumption as a part of their duty to support their nation's economy and domestic producers (Han, 1988).

> When the product quality is similar, I always choose domestic products, because I feel that we must support our own. As people say, "if you don't care for your own child, how can you expect others to?" – Jin Fu

Here, "child" refers to national products, while "others" represent non-Chinese consumers. Jin's words convey a strong emotional bond with the nation. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that he also emphasised the importance of product quality in influencing his purchasing decisions.

For him, product quality is a prerequisite when choosing a product, with product nationality considered only after evaluating product attributes.

This finding aligns with data presented in the Participants' Motivations Profile (see Appendix E), where product evaluation was the most frequently mentioned theme in Jin's responses, accounting for 39% of his total motivations. In Jin's case, SII was the second most frequently mentioned factors, followed by patriotism. This pattern illustrates that consumer buycotts of national products are not solely driven by their political values such as patriotism; market factors, such as product attributes, and social factors, such as SII, also play significant roles in shaping participants' behaviour.

Additionally, during the interview, many participants referred to Erke as a "patriotic enterprise," "our national brand," "Chinese enterprise (中国籍的企业)," "a positive brand", "a positive energy (正能量) enterprise," "the pride of domestic products (国货之光)," and "a patriotic symbol." These labels demonstrate that participants' positive attitudes towards Erke. The emphasis on Erke's country of origin (COO) not only reflects pride but also creates a distinction between "us" and "others." Notably, this division also appeared in other cases, for instance:

> I think what [Erke] conveys in society is that Chinese society is very united. Whenever something goes wrong somewhere, we all give our full support. It might not be like in some other [countries] – in China, the people and regions really feel like one whole. – Gao Shuang

On the one hand, the buycott of Erke fosters a sense of unity among Chinese individuals. On the other hand, it may also incite feelings of hostility towards foreign countries and companies – a phenomenon that will be examined in the following section.

5.4.4.2 Animosity

Consumer animosity was the least mentioned motivation among participants, accounting for 2% of all coded responses. Klein et al. (1998) classified animosity into two subtypes: war animosity and economic animosity. While war animosity arises from historical or ongoing military conflict between nations, economic animosity stems from perceived economic threats

or controversial actions taken by foreign actors (ibid). Drawing on original survey data, Smith and Li (2010) find that animosity is positively related to consumers' willingness to boycott foreign products. Similarly, in this study, although animosity was infrequently cited, it nonetheless emerged as a motivational factor in certain cases. For instance, Liu Chao, a 28-year-old male participant, explained that in light of trade tensions between China and the U.S., as well as growing domestic support for national brands, he preferred to purchase Chinese products.

A comparable sentiment was expressed by Hua Chenlu, a 30-year-old female participant, who referred to the Xinjiang Cotton Incident as a turning point that led her to support national brands and refrain from purchasing foreign brands. [27] Although she expressed an aesthetic preference for brands such as Nike and Under Armour, she chose to limit her purchases on political ground. As she stated:

> I think as a consumer, you have the freedom to make your own choices and exercise your rights. But as the old saying goes, "First comes the nation, then the family (先有国后有家)." So when it comes to issues involving national positions or interests, I believe the interests of the nation should come first.

Hua's response exhibits a strong nationalist orientation, linking individual consumption choice with national interests. Her stance demonstrates a willingness to subordinate personal preference in favour of collective well-being. However, her acknowledgement of the superior quality and design of foreign products aligns with prior findings suggesting that economic animosity does not necessarily affect consumers' judgement on product quality (Tian and Pasadeos, 2012; Wang, He, and Li, 2013).

Furthermore, one participant who expressed hostile attitudes towards foreign products viewed the buycott as a strategic tool to compel foreign companies and countries to demonstrate greater respect for China's national interests.

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[27] In late March 2021, a nation-wide boycott erupted in China targeting the Swedish fashion giant H&M over its decision to stop sourcing cotton from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Millions of Chinese netizens participated in the online backlash and many vowed to boycott the company.

In fact, some foreign brands have engaged in behaviours that we see as insulting to China. Through the Erke case, I feel that when they deal with the Chinese market, they might be more restrained when it comes to crossing our national bottom line. – Jin Fu

Jin exhibited a sense of victimhood consciousness, perceiving foreign brands as bullying Chinese companies. He believed the buycott would serve as a warning, compelling them to recognise the rising influence of Chinese companies and to restrain their future conduct. Although most participants did not express such views, similar perspectives were identified in the online observation data. For example, in response to an Erke post, a Weibo user identified as "Xiaotianxin_ (小甜歆_)" commented,

Please pay more attention to domestic products. Adidas and Nike only eat Chinese people's rice and smash Chinese people's pots (多看看国货吧 阿迪耐克只会吃中国人的饭砸中国人的锅).

This remark garnered 1,270 likes by 30 April 2022. Here, netizens explicitly linked consumer choices with nationalist sentiment, criticising foreign brands that profited from the Chinese market while allegedly undermining China's interests. This rhetoric relates to the Xinjiang Cotton Incident referenced in the Chapter 1, during which several foreign companies, including Adidas and Nike, announced they would cease sourcing cotton from the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.[28]

Nevertheless, it should be noted that animosity is the least significant factor identified in this study. 8 out of 13 interviewees did not express hostile attitudes towards foreign brands. They believed that buying foreign products should not be seen as unpatriotic behaviour. Some explained that it is irrational to boycott foreign products because foreign brands like Adidas

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[28] In response, Chinese official media, *CCTV News* published a commentary on 24 March 2021: "H&M Group's actions, under the guise of advocating for human rights, fundamentally contradict principles of justice and morality. Their true intent is to undermine the growth of Chinese businesses and workers. While they claim to adhere to international market principles, in reality, they eat China's food while break China's pot (profit from China while simultaneously harming its interests), displaying blatant hypocrisy and a complete disregard for corporate social responsibility" (Luo, 2021). Zhao Lijian, then spokesperson for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, also used the same expression – "*chi fan za guo* (吃饭砸锅)" to condemn involved foreign entities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 29 March 2021).

and Nike are manufactured in Chinese factories and contribute positively to China's economy. Others argued that consumption is an individual behaviour and should not be used to pressure consumers into boycotting foreign products, emphasising that purchasing foreign goods "does not equate to a lack of patriotism" (Kong Yu, Zhou Xiaoli).

5.5 Discussion

In the preceding sections, I examined the nine primary motivational themes identified in this study. To compare the frequency with which each category of motivation was expressed by each respondent, I used the proportions of each motivational theme calculated earlier. For example, in the case of Gao Shuang, patriotism accounted for 6% of the motivations mentioned and animosity for 9%, leading to a total of 15% for the political consideration category. Following this method, Figure 15 presents the results for each respondent's motivation categories.

First, political considerations were the least frequently mentioned category of motivations among the participants in this study, accounting for 15% of the overall motivations referred to in the interviews. This finding challenges the common belief that Chinese buycotts of domestic products are primarily driven by nationalist sentiments and patriotism (Sun, N., 2021). Of course, this figure might vary with a larger sample size or a different buycott case. While acknowledging the limitations of this case study, it nonetheless provides reason to question the widespread assumption that nationalism is the primary driver behind consumers' decisions to buycott domestic products in China.
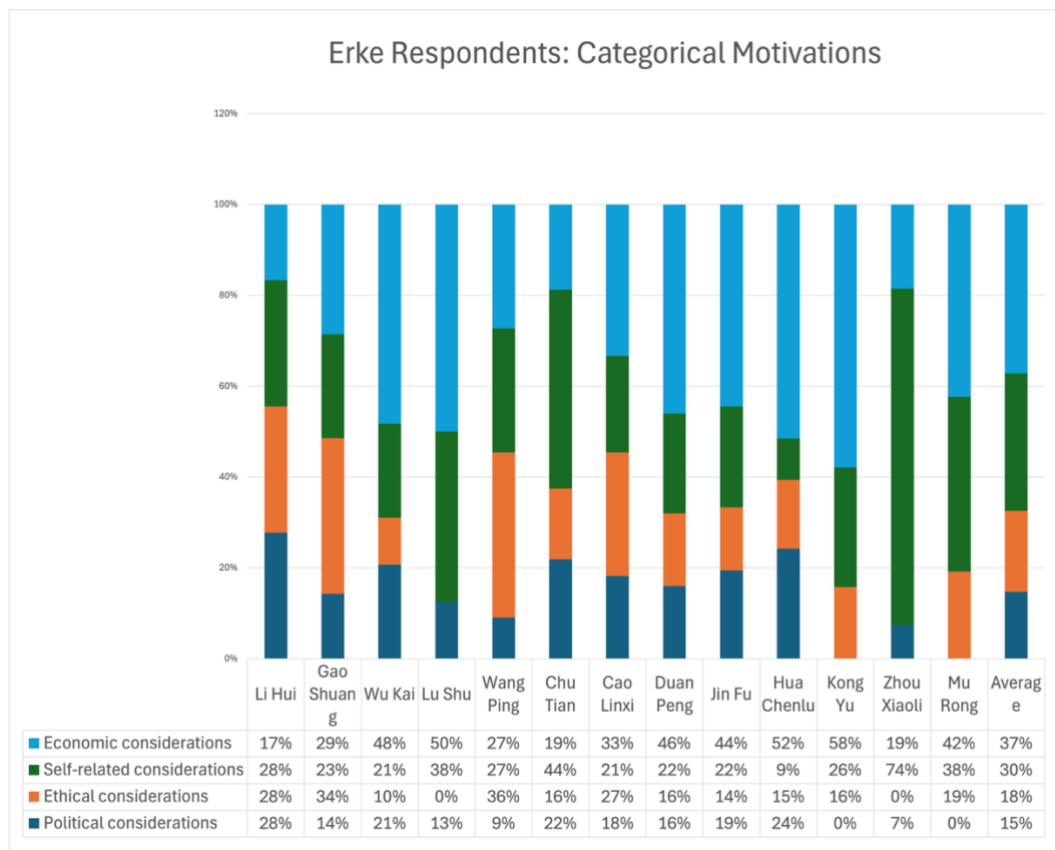
Figure 15. Erke respondents' categorical motivations.

Neither Kong Yu nor Mu Rong cited political considerations as factors in their participation in the Erke buycott. Instead, it was Erke's CSR practices that enhanced the brand's image and inspired them to support a socially conscious brand. They believed that consumer choices should be guided not by political ideologies but by economic considerations. Kong, in particular, explicitly rejected the politicisation of consumption or the practice of boycotting foreign brands for political reasons. As she expressed:

I believe that what I choose to buy or use is a matter of personal freedom. If the government ever imposes restrictions and says we cannot buy certain [foreign] brands, then I'll comply. But since that hasn't happened yet, I still have a degree of freedom. I can choose from among these brands the one I like the most and that suits me best.

Her comments reflected a subtle resistance to efforts by the state to mobilise nationalist sentiment against foreign companies. She referred to the December 2021 boycott of Sam's Club, during which the Chinese government was seen to have actively mobilised public criticism of foreign companies that avoided sourcing products from the XUAR.[29] Kong strongly opposed such campaigns, arguing that consumers should retain the autonomy to choose preferred products and rejecting the view that purchasing foreign goods constitutes unpatriotic behaviour. As Kong's stated, "many things shouldn't be infused with political sentiments."

Kong Yu's example illustrates how individuals residing in authoritarian regimes with constrained political freedoms often seek to preserve their consumer autonomy. While rejecting ethnocentric consumption, they may still engage in selective buycotts of domestic products, motivated by ethical considerations rather than patriotism or nationalism. Attributing such instances of buycott participation to nationalist or ethnocentric consumption would be a mischaracterisation.

Second, Figure 15 illustrates that, on average, economic considerations were the most frequently cited motivation driving respondents to buycott Erke products. But can we then infer that economic motivations were the key driving force behind the decision to buycott Erke? The answer is not straightforward. On the one hand, economic factors played a crucial role in the decision-making process for some participants. Consumers were less likely to make a purchase when they perceive a product's quality, price, and design as lacking, or when they do not have a need for the product. Mu Rong serves as a typical example.

On the other hand, interview data indicate that some participants were willing to sacrifice their economic interests to partake in the buycott. In this study, most respondents had never bought or even considered buying Erke products in the past decade prior to the donation. Nearly half explicitly stated that Erke was never on their shopping list when choosing sportswear. As mentioned before, Cao Linxi, a 28-year-old female respondent, explained that her initial

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[29] For instance, on 31 December 2021, the website of the Communist Party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) published an article accusing Sam's Club of "maliciously" removing products from the XUAR (Chen, L., 2021). This criticism was echoed by several state media outlets, including the Global Times, guancha.cn, chinanews.com, and cankaoxiaoxi.com, which reposted the CCDI's article or published articles condemning the company's actions.

interest in the Erke stemmed from its social responsibility practices, with economic motivations influencing her decision only during the subsequent purchasing stage. She stated:

> First of all, the premise is that it donated 50 million RMB to Henan Province, and it became popular because of that. It was also for this reason that I began to pay attention to it. Then I found suitable products, and coincidentally, I also had a need for them, so I chose to make a purchase.

Thus, in Cao's case, ethical considerations took precedence over economic factors in shaping her purchasing decision.

Similarly, political considerations and self-related factors were also found to precede economic motivations in the decision-making process for some participants. Notably, several respondents mentioned that they were influenced by the highly publicised online buycotting trend, indicating that self-related motivations, such as susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII), played a significant role in their decision to engage in the buycott.

> …many friends of mine were saying we should support Erke, and it was all over my WeChat Moments. I also happened to see a lof of netizens saying they had bought Erke's products. [Some even left comments], like "Just send me the shoelace, I'll handle the shoes myself," which I found quite amusing. I happened to need a new pair of shoes then, so I checked Erke's official website. There was a style I liked, the design was nice, and the price was affordable, so I bought it. After the purchase, I even posted about it on my WeChat Moments. – Jin Fu

> We bought it mainly to ride the trend on Douyin… We just went to a shop to have a look. I ended up buying a pair of pink trainers – it was on sale and cost no more than 300 RMB. But after that, I never actually wore them. – Zhou Xiaoli

As previously illustrated, Jin Fu serves as a representative example. His decision to engage in the buycott was heavily influenced by friends and internet users, reflecting a strong inclination to conform to social norms. Additionally, the fact that he posted about the Erke shoes on his WeChat Moments, mirroring the supportive posts he had seen, suggests that his buycott

behaviour was shaped by the prevailing social atmosphere. Therefore, the theme of SII, as a self-related consideration, played a significant role in Jin's buycott decision. Jin's comments also imply that economic considerations became relevant at the later stage of his purchase.

For Zhou Xiaoli, a 28-year-old businesswoman, her decision to purchase was primarily influenced by Erke's significant online presence, while the economic aspects of the product, such as price, were less of a concern. This may be attributed to Zhou's financial situation. As a business owner, she possessed sufficient financial resources, while Erke products were priced significantly lower than brands such as Li-Ning or various foreign labels. Consequently, the perceived economic cost for Zhou was minimal with her buycott behaviour more strongly driven by self-related factors, particularly SII.

Third, self-related factors emerged as the second-most influential determinant motivating consumers to engage in buycotts, following economic considerations. Notably, within the realm of self-related factors, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) was the second most frequently cited motivational theme among respondents, after product evaluation. For certain participants, such as Chu Tian and Zhou Xiaoli, self-related considerations were the most frequently mentioned motivations, constituting 44% and 74% of their responses, respectively. Previous research on consumer boycotts has already established that individuals with a high tendency toward SII, strong confidence in the boycott's success, and a belief in its moral righteousness of boycotting are more likely to participate (Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004). This study builds on these findings, suggesting that buycott participants are similarly influenced by self-related considerations.

This finding deserves particular attention in the Chinese context. As a society deeply influenced by collectivist values, China places a high emphasis on social cohesion, which may contribute to individuals' elevated susceptibility to normative influence. In such settings, aligning with perceived group norms becomes not only a social expectation but also a moral responsibility. Meanwhile, susceptibility to informational influence can be especially significant when individuals regard official media narratives as trustworthy and authoritative. Even user-generated content on social media platforms can attain perceived legitimacy if it gains widespread circulation and is not subject to state censorship. In such cases, the absence of deletion or suppression is often interpreted as tacit government approval or at least neutrality. This creates a discursive environment in which unofficial narratives aligning with national

sentiment can exert influence comparable to, or even greater than, that of formal media sources. As one respondent, Wang Ping, observed:

> I usually follow media accounts like *People's Daily* and *CCTV News* on Weibo, and similarly on Douyin… So when browsing, I saw them reposting, commenting on, and publishing content about Erke's donation. That's why I felt that, judging from the government's stance, it should be one of support.

Fourth, the majority of respondents exhibited a notable degree of ethical consideration in their decision-making processes. They expressed strong support for Erke's CSR initiatives and a desire to leverage their purchasing power to assist the company in overcoming financial challenges. For some participants, such as Gao Shuang and Wang Ping, ethical considerations were the primary motivation behind their participation in the buycott. Notably, the extent of consumers' ethical engagement appeared to be influenced by their local identities. In the case of Erke's buycott, consumers from Henan province displayed more altruistic attitudes and a stronger perception of Erke's CSR efforts. For example, Wang Ping, who is originally from Henan, was moved by Erke's support for the people of Henan. She not only purchased three pairs of Erke shoes but also left comments on the company CEO's Weibo page to express her gratitude. By contrast, Zhou Xiaoli's decision to participate in the buycott was largely unrelated to ethical considerations. She stated:

> If none of my friends around me or the content came across on Douyin had been related to Erke at that time, I would probably have just glanced at it online. I would have felt that the issue was quite distant from me. After all, the donation was made to Zhengzhou, and the company isn't based in Gansu, so I would have felt it had little to do with me.

Zhou's remarks further highlight the role of local identity in shaping consumers' altruistic attitudes and their evaluation of CSR initiatives. These cases suggest that local identification may amplify consumers' sense of moral responsibility and responsiveness to corporate actions.

Fifth, it is important to note that political, ethical, and self-related considerations often appear interconnected, rather than following a strict sequential order. For instance, Chu Tian, a 26-year-old female respondent, mentioned that she had never purchased any Erke products before. However, during this buycott, she chose to support Erke products because there was "*a sense*

of inspiration, moral righteousness, and a stirring of patriotic feelings" shared by many. Chu Tian's motivations in this context reveal three distinct categories: "a sense of inspiration" can be interpreted as self-enhancement within the domain of self-related considerations; "moral righteousness" aligns with ethical considerations; and "a stirring of patriotic feelings" clearly falls within the realm of political consideration. These findings underscore that political consumers are often driven by entangled motivations. Reducing them to singular labels, such as nationalist, patriotic, ethical, or clout-driven, risks oversimplifying the complex nature of political consumer behaviour.

Finally, it is important to highlight that every respondent referenced either political considerations, ethical considerations, or both. None of participants entirely disregarded these two categories in their accounts of the Erke buycott. This pattern highlights how the "wild consumption" of Erke products constitutes a highly salient case of buycott behaviour in contemporary China. Participants' purchasing decisions extended beyond mere economic objectives and were shaped by political and/or ethical reasons.

5.6 Conclusion

Existing studies on buycotting motivations have primarily focused on consumer experiences in Western democracies. Within the field of political consumerism, little attention has so far been directed towards consumer experiences in authoritarian contexts such as China. Although some studies have investigated Chinese consumers' preferences for domestic goods, they have typically framed such behaviour as ethnocentric or nationalist (He and Wang, 2015; Li and Wang, 2005; Tsai et al., 2013; Wang and Chen, 2004; Wang et al., 2012), thereby overlooking the complex interplay of political, ethical, economic, and self-related factors underpinning these purchasing decisions. Based on in-depth interviews, this chapter contributes to addressing this gap, demonstrating how these four dimensions collectively shape Chinese consumers' buycott of national products.

Political considerations were the least frequently mentioned during the interviews, challenging the prevailing assumption that Chinese buycotts of national products are primarily driven by ethnocentric or nationalistic attitudes. Instead, the findings indicate that economic, ethical, and self-related motivations are often more salient, even in a highly politicised context. While a

few respondents expressed hostile attitudes towards foreign actors, most showed patriotic sentiment without nationalistic elements. Among self-related factors, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) – including both normative and informational dimensions – played a crucial role. Respondents' decision-making was often affected by peer pressure, online community norms and exposure to dominant media narratives. With the rise of the influencer economy (网红经济), consumers with a high SII were particularly likely to engage in buycott campaigns to gain social recognition or "chase clout". In the Erke case, ethical considerations – especially perceived CSR – served as a direct catalyst. Similar to their Western counterparts, Chinese consumers increasingly consider the ethical conduct of corporations in their purchase decisions.

Although all respondents acknowledged considering economic factors during the buycott process, the degree to which these considerations influenced their decisions varied markedly. For some, dissatisfaction with Erke's product design ultimately deterred purchase. Yet others proceeded with the purchase despite such dissatisfaction, prioritising the buycott over personal preference. The willingness to forgo individual consumption standard in favour of symbolic support highlights the political and ethical significance of the Erke incident. Crucially, every respondent mentioned either political or ethical considerations, or both, in shaping their decisions. This finding supports the argument that the so-called "wild consumption" of Erke products should not be viewed simply as impulsive or irrational behaviour; rather, it represented an intentional effort to reward CSR practices and promote domestic industry, even at the expense of individual utility.

This chapter constitutes a foundational investigation into the motivations of buycott behaviour in an authoritarian context. Accordingly, the findings should be regarded as exploratory rather than comprehensive. Nevertheless, this chapter advances existing scholarship on political consumerism by developing a four-part motivational framework – political, ethical, self-related, and economic – grounded in the Chinese context. Unlike most previous studies that focus on ethnocentric or nationalist explanations, this framework emphasises the interplay of multiple drivers, challenging the assumption that buycotting of national products in authoritarian regimes is primarily driven by nationalist sentiment. However, whether this framework holds across other buycott episodes or broader forms of political consumerism remains an open empirical question. Future research could explore additional motivational factors and examine

this framework's applicability across different socio-political contexts. In particular, cross-national comparisons between buycott campaigns in authoritarian and democratic settings could further illuminate how political context shapes the motivations behind political consumption.

Chapter 6.

Motivations for boycotting foreign products: A case study of the NBA boycott in China

The previous chapter investigated the positive type of political consumerism – buycotts – through an in-depth case study of the motivations of participants in the 2021 Erke buycott. This chapter investigates what motivates Chinese people to boycott foreign products through an intensive case study of the 2019 NBA boycott in China, which began when Daryl Morey, General Manager of the Houston Rockets, tweeted a social posting expressing support for Hong Kong's contemporaneous protest movement. Through analysis of the in-depth interview results, I identified nine motivational themes, namely *perceived egregiousness, animosity, patriotism, nationalism, political trust, perceived costs (availability of substitutes, preferences for the boycotted products, time), perceived efficacy, self-enhancement,* and *susceptibility to interpersonal influence.*

Although the two cases represent distinct phenomena with differing sets of motivations, the fourfold typology of motivations – political, ethical, economic, and self-related – constructed in Chapter 5 remains applicable to this boycott case. First, specifically, an economic consideration –perceived costs – was the most frequently identified of the nine individual reasons behind boycotters' decision-making. When perceived costs were high, participants tended to limit their boycott to specific individuals or teams. When perceived costs were low, participants exhibited a strong determination to boycott the whole NBA, and even extend their boycott to American products. Second, not surprisingly, political considerations were the key driving force behind participants' boycott decision. However, in contrast to the existing literature focused on Western consumers (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Copeland and Boulianne, 2022), most participants in this study indicated a high level of political trust. Their boycotting actions were in sync with the government's attitudes towards the NBA. Third, ethical considerations, particularly perceived egregiousness, significantly influenced boycott decisions, as participants believed that it was their moral obligation to stand against the wrongdoers. Fourth, participants expressed divergent views regarding the efficacy of their individual boycott actions. While some believed their participation could impose significant economic losses on the NBA, others regarded their personal impact as negligible. Nevertheless,

many still chose to engage in the boycott. This was often underpinned by strong political trust and confidence in overall participation. For those with low perceived efficacy, boycotting served primarily as an expressive act, venting frustration and sending a warning signal to the NBA and other foreign actors.

The chapter begins by outlining the background of contemporary consumer boycotts of foreign products in China. I then review the literature on consumer boycotts and the motivations behind them. This framework also draws on the motivation typology developed in Chapter 5 to ensure analytical consistency across the two cases. Following this, I introduce the interview methodology used in the study and present the results of the interviews. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the findings and suggestions for future research.

6.1 Background

In recent years, consumers worldwide have increasingly adopted political consumerism, particularly boycotts, to hold unethical corporations accountable or to pressure corporations and governments to adopt more socially, economically, and ethically responsible practices. This trend is evident not only globally but also within China, which has experienced a significant rise in boycott movements since the 2000s. Between 2010 and 2023, over 140 boycotts were recorded in China (see Appendix A), targeting both domestic and foreign companies across sectors, including retail, food and beverage, automotive, electronics, aviation, entertainment, clothing, technology, e-commerce, hospitality, and cosmetics. The themes of these boycotts range from national security, territorial disputes, and issues concerning Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Macao, to racial and gender discrimination, animal rights, cultural appropriation, consumer rights, environmental protection, and broader demands for social equality (see Appendix A).

Most existing research on Chinese boycotts focuses on those targeting foreign products, brands, or countries. The literature can be broadly grouped into four main areas: 1) the historical development of Chinese boycotts of foreign products (Gerth, 2003, 2010, 2020; Wang, G.H., 2007); 2) the consequences of these boycotts (Heilmann, 2016; Luo and Zhou, 2019); 3) the role of the government in boycotts (Reilly, 2014; Wong et al., 2023; Ferguson, 2025); and 4) the motivations of individual participants (Klein et al., 1998; Smith and Li, 2010; Tian and

Pasadeos, 2012). Most focus on the impact of consumer animosity and its antecedents. However, boycotting is a complex phenomenon. Studies have shown that factors such as cost-benefit evaluations, psychological elements such as self-enhancement and perceived efficacy, susceptibility to normative influence, and perceived egregiousness also significantly shape boycott behaviour (Sen et al. 2001; Klein et al. 2004). In parallel, research in political consumerism has highlighted the role of values and political trust in motivating consumer engagement in buycotts and/or boycotts (Copeland, 2014a; Gundelach, 2020; Kotzur et al., 2017; Micheletti et al., 2004; Stolle et al., 2005; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). This chapter integrates insights from the consumer marketing and political consumerism scholarship to propose a fourfold typology of motivations for understanding boycott behaviour.

On 4 October 2019, the Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey reposted an image with the slogan "Fight for freedom, Stand with Hong Kong" on Twitter. The tweet showed Morey's support for the Hong Kong protesters who were opposing the Hong Kong government's attempts to enact legislation permitting extradition to Mainland China. Although Morey quickly deleted the tweet, it stirred up a widespread backlash against both Morey and the National Basketball Association (NBA) across China. On 6 October, the Chinese Consulate General in Houston condemned Morey for his "erroneous comments" on Hong Kong.

> We are deeply shocked by the erroneous comments on Hong Kong made by Mr. Daryl Morey…We have ... expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Houston Rockets, and urged the latter to correct the error and take immediate concrete measures to eliminate the adverse impact… Anybody with a conscience would support the efforts made by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to safeguard Hong Kong's social stability.

In addition to the official government response, on the same day, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) issued a statement on Weibo announcing the suspension of cooperation with the Houston Rockets due to Morey's "improper remarks," which ignited a boycott campaign against the Houston Rockets and the NBA. Shortly afterwards, Shanghai Pudong Development Bank, Li-Ning, and Jiayin Financial Technology issued statements, suspending or terminating their cooperation with the Rockets. On the same day, two of the NBA's major Chinese partners, China Media Group and Tencent, announced the suspension of live streaming and news coverage of Rockets games.

On 7 October, Morey posted two tweets expressing that he did not intend to "cause any offense to the Rockets fans and friends… in China" and his tweets are his own opinions and "in no way represent the Rockets or the NBA." On the same day, NBA Chief Communications Officer Mike Bass issued a statement describing Morey's comments as "regrettable." However, neither Morey's posts nor Bass's statement put down the anger of Chinese NBA fans. The incident continued to escalate.

On 8 October, an NBA community event in Shanghai was cancelled. Later that day, NBA commissioner Adam Silver issued a statement defending his employees' freedom of expression:

> I recognise our initial statement left people angered, confused or unclear on who we are or what the NBA stands for… Values of equality, respect and freedom of expression have long defined the NBA — and will continue to do so… the NBA will not put itself in a position of regulating what players, employees and team owners say or will not say on these issues.

The same day, several Chinese celebrities, including Li Yifeng, Bai Jinting, Zhen Yunlong, Fan Chengcheng, Zhou Yiwei, and Wu Jinyan, announced their withdrawal from the NBA China Games-related activities. CCTV Sports Channel issued a statement expressing strong dissatisfaction and opposition to Silver's defence of Morey's right to freedom of expression. It stated:

> We believe that any statements challenging national sovereignty and social stability do not fall under the scope of free speech.

As a consequence, CCTV announced it would review all cooperation and exchanges involving the NBA. Moreover, both CCTV and Tencent extended their suspension to include all the preseason NBA games played in China.

On 8 October, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang responded to journalists' questions regarding the Morey controversy, stating that the Chinese public had expressed its position and attitudes. "How can it be possible to carry out exchanges and cooperation with China without knowing China's public opinion?" Geng asked. "NBA's cooperation with China

has been going on for quite a long time, so for what should be said and what should be done, they know best."

The statement from China's central authorities further pushed the incident to another peak. Houston Rockets merchandise was removed from shelves on major Chinese e-commerce platforms such as Taobao.com and JD.com. Taobao.com even blocked all search queries related to the Rockets. By 10 October, all eleven Chinese companies that were official NBA partners, including Anta, Changhong, Ctrip, Dicos, eHi Car Services, Master Kong, Meiling, Mengniu, Migu Video, Wuzun, and Xiaoying Tech, had announced they were "terminating" or "suspending" their partnership with the NBA (Xu, Q., 2019; see Figure 16).

Figure 16: "Chinese Enterprises Suspend Cooperation." Source: *CCTV News*.

How did the Chinese online public respond to the series of events described above? Firstly, the dominant opinion on Chinese social media was the condemnation of Morey for his "improper remarks" and a demand that the NBA sack Morey. In reply to a Weibo post by *CCTV News* on 6 October addressing the issue, one netizen named "zhaotiantian (赵天天)" commented:

> We, the vast community of Chinese basketball fans, issue the following call: 1. Daryl Morey must apologies via Twitter, or the Houston Rockets must dismiss him. 2. If neither of the above actions is taken, we call for the following: First, fans across the country to boycott all Houston Rockets games; Second, Tencent and CCTV to cease broadcasting Rockets games; Third, sponsors to terminate or refuse to enter into any

commercial partnerships with the Houston Rockets or their players [within the limits of the law]. For me, basketball comes second, my country comes first!!! ᴄɴ

This comment garnered 2,500 likes. Similar views were frequently seen on Weibo. In addition, many netizens vowed to boycott the broadcast of the Rockets' games. Some urged CCTV and Tencent Sports to stop broadcasting Rockets games, and all Chinese sponsors of the NBA to cut ties with the Rockets.

> Support! If Morey isn't sacked, I will never watch another Rockets game or buy any Rockets-related merchandise or products linked to their players! – Charon-miaochaju (Charon-秒差距)

> Today's China must not be easily insulted or offended. Morey must pay the price for his words and actions. We firmly boycott the broadcasting of the Rockets and boycott the team itself. – heergeshi (赫尔格式)

Secondly, after the first statement issued by Mike Bass, many netizens were irritated by the wording of the post. The NBA's statement did not receive public forgiveness but was widely perceived as an attempt to appease both sides. As one popular Weibo post put it:

> The official wording [from the NBA] was "regrettable", which means "lingren yihan (令人遗憾, unfortunate)", not "jiqi shiwang (极其失望, deeply disappointing)." This second-hand translation added emotional overtones. – shishaopibushidougan (食莒皮不食豆干)

The above comment gained 4,880 likes online, which indicated that Chinese netizens were not satisfied with the Chinese statement. Instead, they were deeply angered and dissatisfied with the NBA's failure to apologise or dismiss Morey. Notably, among the various criticisms, some showed extreme attitudes and included racist remarks. For instance, a comment by sugeladumeidi (苏格拉都没底), which received 3,979 likes, stated:

> If we say we support 9/11, how would the American pigs feel? Try putting yourselves in our shoes.

Such extreme and racist views were not isolated. For example, under another Weibo posted by the Communist Youth League of China on 9 October, several netizens also commented or liked remarks marked by hostility and extremism:

> Well, we also have freedom of speech. Los Angeles belongs to China, so please, you Americans, don't oppose it! Thank you. – tonghuashunyaya (同花顺呀呀)

> There should have been a couple more deaths in 9/11 – would've made me laugh. I suggest Bin Laden's followers do it again, for America! – shimeamaoagouagua (什么阿猫阿狗阿瓜)

While these comments received fewer likes – 9 and 1 respectively – they reflect the presence of a group of netizens who hold deep animosity towards the US. The Morey Incident provided an outlet for them to vent anger.

The third group of people were fans who are concerned about the ban of the NBA and the escalation of the incident. They did not openly oppose the boycott or the ban, but neither did they support such actions. Some expressed disappointment in Morey and the NBA for not issuing an acceptable apology. Others simply conveyed confusion about the controversy and anxiety over whether they would be able to watch their favourite players' games in the future. The following are two comments extracted from the *CCTV News* Weibo post on 6 October 2019.

> I feel quite upset when I saw this news – especially because it was the Rockets. This team has probably been the most familiar with China and received the most attention from Chinese fans among all NBA teams, yet in the end, it became the one that most disheartened us…♡ – xiaoshihoudeshitoulu (小时候的石头路)

> As a huomi (火迷，fans of the Houston Rockets), this really hurts. – D-Bestlinjinfan(D-Best 林金帆)

Finally, amidst the widespread condemnation and hostile reactions, a small minority of netizens expressed opposition to the boycott of Morey, the Houston Rockets, and the NBA. They rejected the claim that Morey's comments constituted "inappropriate remarks" in support of Hong Kong independence. For example, a user named *qingcaijun* questioned this narrative, stating, "What inappropriate remarks are you talking about? Do you even know? Can you see the truth?!" qingcaijun's response clearly suggests that the official interpretation of Morey's tweet is potentially biased and propaganda-driven. In addition, several other netizens publicly voiced their disagreement with the overwhelming criticism directed at Morey and the NBA. For example, one netizen said:

> Oh, come on! Do you think you can ban [the NBA] just because you want to? It was just a team's general manager posting a tweet, and you're making such a big deal out of it? He's in the US, where there's freedom of speech. At most, he'll lose his job. – xiaowutongxueao (小吴同学啊哦)

Although the number of dissenters was small, their voices should not be overlooked. Moreover, since these dissenting opinions appeared in the comment sections of official media accounts such as *CCTV News* and the Communist Youth League of China, it is plausible that more dissenting views were expressed in less public settings, such as offline conversations, posts by unofficial Weibo users, or other personal social media accounts.

In fact, one prominent example of dissent was Wang Haoda, known as "the last Rockets fan in China," who posted on Weibo:

> I live and die with the team. Come arrest me.

The post was accompanied by an image of himself wearing a Houston Rockets jersey, with his face and one eye covered, alluding to the image of Hong Kong protesters and appearing as if he were about to burn the flag of the PRC (China Digital Times, 2019). Shortly after, he was reportedly arrested by cyber police in Liaoyuan City, Jilin Province, for "making remarks insulting the national flag" (ibid). Wang's case clearly sent a signal to the public that those who publicly support NBA and Hong Kong protesters may face legal consequences. This further

demonstrates the extent to which political expression is tightly controlled in an authoritarian regime.

In sum, this section has traced the emergence and escalation of the 2019 NBA boycott, highlighting the role of government institutions, commercial actors, and social media discourse in shaping a nationwide campaign. Although the online space was largely dominated by patriotic and nationalist sentiments, public reactions to the Morey incident were more diverse than commonly assumed. A closer examination reveals a spectrum of attitudes, ranging from extreme nationalism to ambivalence and dissent. This suggests that the actual motivations underlying boycott participation may also be more heterogeneous than explanations grounded solely in nationalist sentiment would imply. The widespread online calls for boycott also reflect that in an authoritarian context, where political opportunities are severely limited, individuals may view political consumerism, such as the NBA boycott, as a rare opportunity to express their political values, whether in support of the state or in dissent from dominant narratives. Importantly, this section does not seek to explain individual boycott behaviour per se, but rather to contextualise the macro-level conditions under which boycott decisions were made. It lays the foundation for the following analysis of how individuals experienced, interpreted, and responded to the NBA boycott. In what follows, I turn to the conceptual framework underpinning this study of boycott motivations.

6.2 Conceptual Framework

6.2.1 What is a consumer boycott?

A consumer boycott is defined as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (Friedman, 1985, p. 97). According to Friedman (2002), consumer boycotts typically serve two purposes: instrumental and expressive. Instrumental boycotts pursue practical goals, such as pressuring the target to change undesirable practices or strategies, while expressive boycotts are often short-lived and aim to convey generalised statements about the

boycott's objectives (ibid, pp. 12-13).[30] While Friedman's categorisation covers a wide range of consumer boycotts, it tends to conceptualise them as collective or organised efforts, overlooking the role of individual agency in marketplace boycotts (Ettenson and Klein 2005). At the individual level, consumers' boycott goals may be instrumental, expressive, or a combination of both. Furthermore, individual participants may have varied motivations for engaging in boycotts. Thus, in this study, I take individual consumers as the unit of analysis.

Friedman (2002) further distinguishes between two types of boycotts: media-oriented and marketplace-oriented. In media-oriented boycotts, participants focus primarily on generating publicity, and their actions usually do not go beyond what Friedman termed "action-considered" and "action-requested" stages. This type of action is similar to what Micheletti and Stolle (2008) refer to as *discursive political consumerism*, that is using "communicative actions to take advantage of the market vulnerabilities that have risen in late capitalist market niches to create consumer awareness and change global corporate enterprises" (p. 751). In contrast, marketplace-oriented boycotts go beyond mere announcement and requests for participation, moving to "action-organised" and "action-taken" stages, with a stronger focus on boycott activities in the market. These are escalated versions of media-oriented boycotts, with the primary goal of causing economic harm to the target (Friedman, 2002, p. 11).

The NBA boycott is a typical example of a hybrid boycott that combines both media-oriented and marketplace-oriented strategies. Later in this chapter, I will demonstrate how interview respondents used online communication tools to raise public attention to the NBA case and exert pressure on both the NBA and broader audiences. In addition, I will examine what specific actions participants took to punish the NBA in response to the Morey controversy. First, however, it is necessary to establish a range of potential motivations for boycott participation, based on existing research.

6.2.2 Consumer boycott motivations

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[30] One recent example of instrumental boycott is the previously mentioned 2022 boycott of Henan Qinyang Zoo in China, during which boycotters called for the local government to close the zoo and rescue the little elephant Moli. As for expressive boycotts, the 2021 boycott of H&M is a typical example.

This section presents a conceptual framework that reviews the relevant literature on the motivations behind consumer boycotts. This framework also draws on the fourfold typology of motivations developed in Chapter 5 to ensure analytical consistency across the two cases.

6.2.2.1 Political considerations

This section develops the political dimension of the analytical framework by examining how political values and orientations influence participation in nationalist political consumerism in China. Existing research has demonstrated that political values are an important individual-level factor of political consumerism (Copeland, 2014b; Gundelach, 2020; Kotzur et al., 2017; Micheletti and Stolle, 2004; Stolle et al., 2005). Much of this research, however, has focused on politically progressive forms of political consumerism, such as fairtrade, anti-child labour campaigns, sustainable consumption, animal welfare and green consumption, leaving exclusionary or nationalist manifestations comparatively under-theorised.

Recent scholarship has increasingly recognised that political consumerism can also serve regressive or exclusionary purposes, including the mobilisation of nationalist sentiment against perceived external threats (Stolle and Huissoud, 2019; Lekakis, 2019). In the Chinese context, nationalist political consumerism constitutes a particularly salient manifestation of this dynamic, often emerging in response to geopolitical tensions and foreign-related controversies. Understanding participation in such cases therefore requires closer attention to political values associated with nationalism and patriotism, rather than assuming the presence of progressive value commitments.

A considerable body of consumer research has investigated the influence of political values like traditionalism, patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism on consumers' purchasing intentions towards foreign products (Castelló and Mihelj, 2018; Tian and Pasadeos, 2012). For example, Lekakis (2017b) investigates ethnocentric consumption in Greece during the economic crisis and finds that nationalism and ethnocentrism motivate consumers to buy Greek products while boycotting German and Dutch goods. Tian and Pasadeos (2012) find that traditionalist, nationalist consumers in China are more likely to hold strong war-related and economic animosity, which subsequently affects their perceptions of product quality and willingness to buy Japanese goods. Additionally, Gao (2012, p. 183) argues that tensions in

China's foreign affairs will lead to boycotts of foreign brands, especially when people feel that their national pride is under threat.

Building on the conceptual discussion in Chapter 1, this study treats patriotism and nationalism as related but analytically distinct political motivations. Patriotism captures attachment, loyalty, and affective identification with the nation, whereas nationalism is more strongly associated with perceptions of national superiority and out-group dislike (Druckman, 1994; Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989). This distinction is analytically useful for interpreting variation in how participants interpret their boycott behaviour, whether as an expression of national identity, moral obligation, or as a punitive response to perceived foreign insult.

Finally, some research on political consumerism suggests that people who are disappointed with the government's inability to solve problems are more likely to take individual responsibility and resort to alternative means of political engagement (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). In other words, the lower the trust individuals hold towards the government, the more likely they are to engage in boycotts (Gundelach, 2020). For example, historically, when China was under the encroachment of foreign countries, the Qing Court and later the Nationalist government were unable to effectively resist imperialist aggression. In response, Chinese citizens actively adopted political consumerism methods, both boycotting foreign products and buycotting national products (Gerth, 2003). However, in contemporary China, whether boycott participants are primarily motivated by distrust in the government remains an unsettled question. On the one hand, Chinese boycotts are often led by patriotic or nationalist consumers whose political positions align closely with those of the Chinese Communist Party. On the other hand, some scholars have found that certain participants use boycotts as an outlet to vent their anger about the government (Gries, Steiger and Wang, 2016).

6.2.2.2 Ethical considerations

Klein et al. (2004, p. 96) define perceived egregiousness as "the belief that a firm has engaged in conduct that is strikingly wrong and that has negative and possibly harmful consequences for various parties." It aligns with what I classify as an ethical consideration, referring to moral reasoning in individual decision-making. A significant body of research has demonstrated that perceived egregiousness directly influences boycott participation (Klein et al., 2002; Hoffmann

and Müller, 2009). The higher the level of perceived egregiousness, the more likely the consumer is to join the boycott (Klein et al. 2004; Braunsberger and Buckler 2011). Although existing scholarship has explored the role of perceived egregiousness in motivating boycott participation, most studies have focused on boycotts related to social justice, ethical values, or human rights. There is a noticeable gap in research examining boycotts driven by other, less inclusive political values. Presumably, in these boycotts, participants may also consider a target's actions or policies to be seriously wrong, or harmful to their community, and therefore deserving of punishment or correction.

6.2.2.3 Self-related considerations

Self-related considerations refer to psychological and identity-driven motivations, such as perceived efficacy, self-enhancement, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Sen et al. (2001) define perceived efficacy as the belief that each boycott participant can contribute significantly to the achievement of collective goals. Research suggests that individuals are less likely to free ride if they believe their personal contribution can meaningfully impact the outcome (Sen at al., 2001; Stolle et al., 2005; Smith and Li, 2010).

Second, prior studies have shown that self-enhancement is positively associated with the likelihood of participating in a boycott (Klein et al., 2004). In other words, if consumers believe participating in a boycotting movement is the right thing to do, and if doing so improves their self-esteem, they are more likely to engage in such behaviour (Mrad et al., 2013; Klein et al., 2004). I expect a similar effect to apply to the NBA case: participants are likely to justify their actions as morally appropriate and socially desirable.

Third, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, especially susceptibility to normative influence (SNI), has been identified as a significant factor shaping consumer boycott behaviour (Sen et al., 2001; Wang, He and Li, 2013). While informational influence refers to tendency to "accept information from others as evidence about reality", normative influence involves an influence to conform to the expectations of others (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955, p. 629). This distinction is important for understanding how different types of interpersonal influence may operate in the NBA boycott. In the context of the NBA case, the dominant narrative portrayed Morey's comment as "inappropriate remarks", and "supporting Hong Kong riots", thereby "hurting the

feelings of the Chinese people" and "damaging national interests." Within such a socio-political environment, individuals who are more susceptible to dominant narratives and prevailing social norms are expected to be more likely to participate in the boycott.

6.2.2.4 Economic considerations

As defined in Chapter 5, economic considerations refer to material and practical concerns in consumption, such as price, product quality, consumer demand, and time. Perceived costs of withholding consumption, such as product substitutability and product preference, have been widely recognised as key factors affecting individuals' willingness to engage in boycotts (Sen et al., 2001; Klein et al., 2004; Barakat and Moussa, 2017; Heinberg, 2015). This aligns with what I define as economic considerations.

Specifically, three dimensions of perceived costs are taken into consideration in the NBA case. First, the availability of substitutes in the market plays a significant role in consumers' decisions to participate in boycotts (John and Klein, 2003; Sen et al., 2001). Previous literature has established that access to substitutes is a primary concern for boycotters (Aish et al., 2013). When a targeted product has a close substitute, the likelihood of participation increases (John and Klein, 2003). Second, preference for the boycotted product is also considered as a part of perceived costs, which directly affects the boycott decision (Sen et al. 2001; Klein et al. 2004). The greater the preference for the boycotted product, the lower the likelihood of participation. Third, consumer boycott participation is also affected by the time cost of withholding consumption. If engaging in a boycott requires extra time and effort, such as finding alternatives, changing consumption habits, or monitoring targets' activities, individuals are expected to be less likely to participate.

Table 9 summarises the core thematic categories, key definitions, and sub-themes used in interview coding. While derived from the existing literature, these categories were refined to reflect the empirical context of the NBA case. The table provides an analytical framework for coding and interpreting participants' boycott motivations in the sections that follow.

Theme category	Definition	Examples
Political considerations	Refers to respondents' political values (e.g., patriotism, animosity, and freedom of speech), and political orientations (e.g., political trust, organisational membership, and political efficacy)	Patriotism: Expressions of non-hostile pride, attachment, and loyalty to the nation.
		Nationalism: Expressions of national superiority and out-group dislike.
		Animosity: Hostile attitudes toward foreign countries, especially linked to previous or ongoing military, political, or economic conflicts (Klein et al., 1998).
		Political trust: Confidence in state institutions or government efficacy.
Ethical considerations	Refers to moral reasoning in decision-making, including perceived egregiousness or violations of collective moral standards.	Perceived egregiousness: Beliefs that a target's actions are seriously wrong or harmful to the community.
Self-related considerations	Refers to psychological and identity-driven motivations, such as perceived efficacy, self-enhancement, or susceptibility to interpersonal influence.	Perceived efficacy: Belief in one's ability to contribute significantly to the achievement of collective goals.
		Self-enhancement: Feelings morally good or validated by participation.
		Susceptibility to interpersonal influence: Influence of peers, online communities, or desire for social approval. Tendency to align with dominant narratives or follow peer-endorsed messages.
Economic considerations	Refers to material and practical concerns in consumption, such as product preferences, availability of substitutes, and time costs.	Perceived costs: Judgements about whether participation would cause inconvenience or personal loss, such as lack of suitable substitutes and emotional or habitual attachment to the target, and time costs.

Table 9. Typology of Boycott Motivations and Coding Themes.

6.3 Methodology

Similar to Chapter 5, I adopt the descriptive case study method to examine a broader phenomenon. More specifically, I used the typical case approach to select a representative case – the boycott of the NBA in China – to examine the nature of the phenomenon and motivations of those involved. A typical case exemplifies the key characteristics of a broader category (Gerring, 2017). As detailed in Chapter 2, in contemporary China boycotts of foreign products are the most contentious form of political consumerism. In 2019 alone, more than 17 consumer boycotts targeting foreign products occurred across various sectors, from fashion to sports (see Appendix A). Among these, the NBA boycott is a typical case that shows how Chinese consumers use the boycott as a tool to punish foreign entities or individuals for political reasons.

Firstly, the NBA boycott typifies a class of cases in which the trigger was a controversial issue related to China's domestic affairs and publicly framed as *ruhua* (辱华, "insulting China"). Secondly, the incident provoked a nationwide online backlash against a foreign target. It involved a diverse range of actors, including state authorities, commercial firms, government institutions, and individual citizens, displaying both top-down and bottom-up mobilisation dynamics. This interplay is also an important feature of recent foreign-targeted boycotts in China. Thirdly, the NBA case is analytically valuable due to the high profile of its target. As a world-famous basketball league with deep commercial and cultural ties to China, the NBA attracts intense media coverage and generates substantial political, economic, and public impact both domestically and internationally.

I employed purposive sampling to recruit participants who had either 1) boycotted the Houston Rockets' games and/or other NBA games, or 2) participated in online discursive boycott, that is, those who publicly expressed an intention to boycott NBA-related products or games on platforms such as Weibo or WeChat. From January 2022 to April 2022, I contacted 120 potential participants who had engaged in online discussions about the NBA boycott via either Weibo or WeChat. Compared to the Erke case, it was more difficult to recruit participants for the NBA case. Given that the boycott was mobilised by the state, one might expect participants to be more forthcoming, viewing that actions as aligned with official discourse and therefore less sensitive. However, most potential participants did not reply to my initial messages.

Among those who responded, several declined to participate after receiving participant information sheet. Two respondents explained their concerns: one expressed fears that sharing information could be exploit by *jingwai shili* (境外势力 foreign forces) to harm China's national interests; the other voiced suspicion that, because I was studying at a foreign university, I might be a spy. Finally, 15 individuals agreed to participate in the study. Of these, 3 respondents were not supportive of any boycotts against the NBA or other parties involved in the incident. Participants, aged 20-37, came from diverse professional backgrounds, including employees of state-owned enterprises, civil servants, private-sector professionals, media professionals, and a university student (see Appendix F).

Notably, all interviewees in this study were male, which was unexpected given the visibly active participation of many female netizens in the online boycott campaign. For example, female netizens were particularly vocal in condemning fans who attended the NBA Shanghai game, frequently using the term "gui zu lan hai (跪族篮孩)."[31] The term is a play on "nanhai (男孩, boy)", replacing "男 (man)" with "篮 (basketballs). Given this discursive visibility, I anticipated greater gender diversity among interview participants. The absence of female respondents therefore raises a hypothesis: there may a gendered difference between those who engaged in the boycott itself and those who participated in online discussions surrounding it. This highlights a potential sampling bias and suggests the need for further research to further explore the gendered dynamics of political consumerism in China.

Similar to the Erke case, I used online voice calls to mitigate the influence of social desirability bias. Each interview lasted approximately 30–60 minutes. To ensure anonymity, all names used below are pseudonyms. I also included three non-participants in the sample, as their reasons for not engaging in the boycott offer valuable insights into the broader understanding of political consumerism. However, for the purpose of analysing the significance of motivational themes and categories, I focus primarily on the twelve respondents who participated in the boycott.

6.4 Data Analysis

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[31] Gui zu lan hai (跪族篮孩) is a buzzword emerged on Chinese Weibo referring to Chinese basketball fans who attended and supported the NBA China game on 10 October 2019 in Shanghai, an act that led to widespread ridicule across the nation.

This study primarily adopts an inductive qualitative approach to identify motivational patterns from semi-structured interview data. While the analysis was data-driven, it was also informed by a fourfold typology of motivations developed in Chapter 5, allowing for analytical comparison and extension. Similar to Chapter 5, I also used ATLAS.ti software to analyse interview data. I began with open coding, systematically reviewing each transcript line by line and labelling keywords, phrases, or segments that reflected participants' boycott behaviour or underlying motivations. For instance, several participants mentioned that boycotting the NBA had little personal cost because they "did not have time" to watch NBA games. This pointed to time constraints as a relevant factor influencing boycott decisions. Accordingly, I created a code, "time", and subsequently searched across the dataset for related expressions, including indirect references such as "too busy" or "need to work", which were grouped under the same theme.

In some cases, a single segment revealed multiple motivational dimensions. For example, one participant, Zhang Hong, noted: "I feel that even if we express our views online, it rarely makes a difference, so I believe some matters are best left to the state." This comment simultaneously reflected low perceived efficacy and high political trust. It was therefore coded under both categories: perceived efficacy and political trust. The first round of open coding generated 66 initial codes and identified 638 quotations. In the second round, I adopted a constant comparative method to refine the coding scheme by consolidating overlapping or redundant codes. This iterative process resulted in nine core motivational themes: (1) *perceived costs (availability of substitutes, preferences for boycotted products, time), (2) animosity, (3) patriotism, (4) nationalism, (5) political trust, (6) perceived egregiousness, (7) perceived efficacy, (8) self-enhancement,* and *(9) susceptibility to interpersonal influence*.

While the majority of these themes overlap with the motivational themes identified in the Erke buycott case, several themes emerged exclusively in the NBA case, including perceived egregiousness, nationalism, political trust, and perceived costs. Notably, despite the differences, all identified motivational themes can still be categorised using the fourfold typology of motivations developed in Chapter 5. Table 9 presents the coding scheme and theme categorisation.

Following the same approach as in the Erke buycott, I assessed the relative significance of each motivational theme in shaping individual boycott decisions. Specifically, I calculated the frequency with which each motivational theme appeared across interviews in the NBA case. Based on this, I constructed a motivational profile for each of the interviewed participants (see Appendix G).

6.5 Results and Discussion

Following the same approach as in the Erke buycott, I calculated the average percentage share of each motivational theme across the boycott participants. This measure enables comparison of the aggregate prominence of each theme across all participants. For instance, the theme 'animosity' accounted for an average of 10% of all motivational references. Applying this method, I found that *perceived costs* (including availability of substitutes, preferences for boycotted products, and time) were, on average, the most frequently cited motivational theme. These were followed, in descending order, by *perceived egregiousness, perceived efficacy, animosity, nationalism, political trust, susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII), patriotism, and self-enhancement* (see Figure 16).

Results show that political considerations constituted the dominant motivational category, accounting for 31% of all coded motivations. The remaining three categories – self-related, economic, and ethical considerations – each accounted for 24%, 24% and 22% respectively.[32] In the following sections, I examine each of these categories in detail.

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[32] Percentage have been rounded to the nearest whole number. As a result, totals may not sum exactly to 100%.

Figure 17. NBA motivation categories and themes.
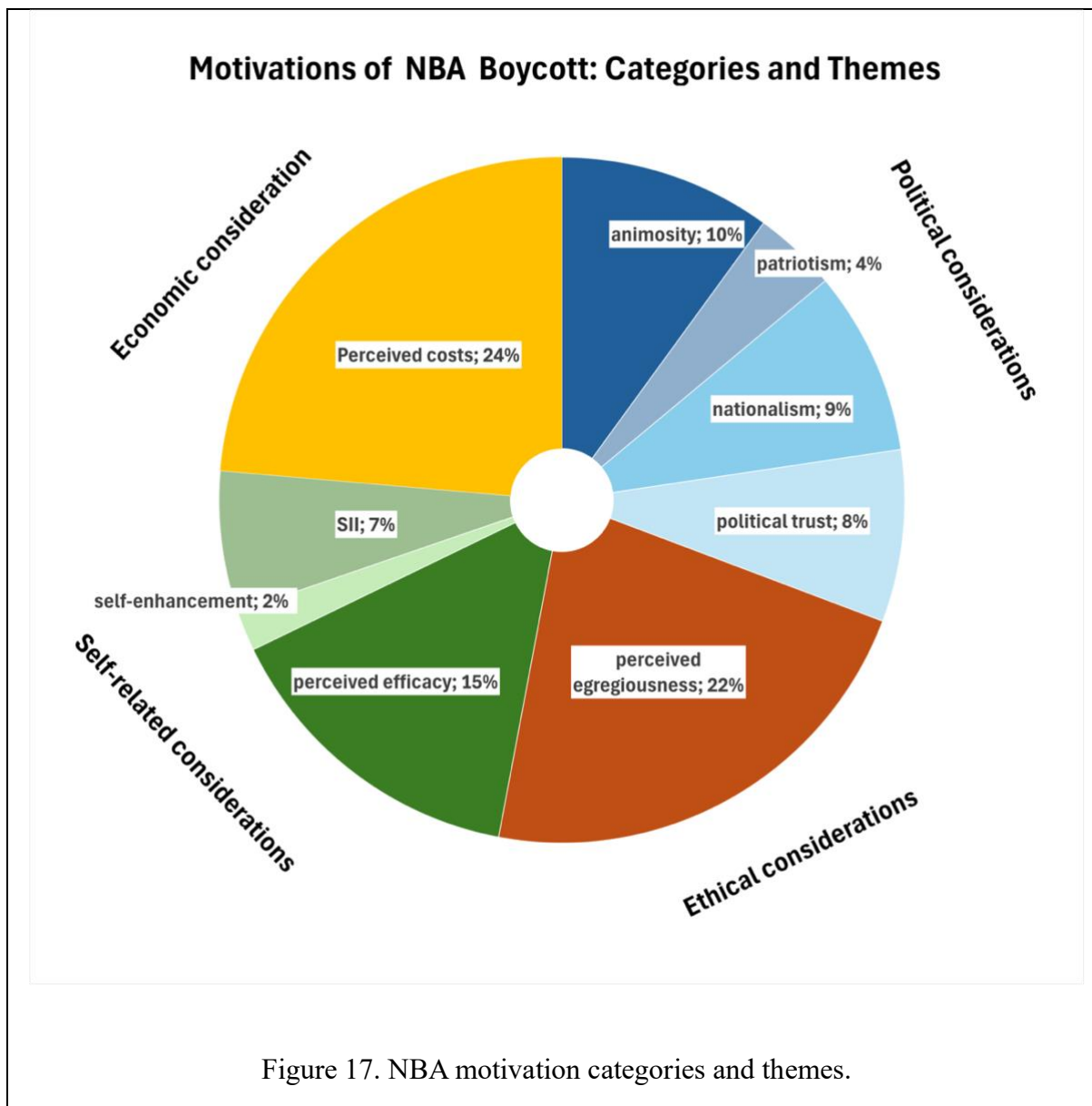
6.5.1 Category 1: Economic considerations

6.5.1.1 Perceived costs

Availability of Substitutes

As part of the perceived costs of withholding consumption, the availability of substitutes in the market plays a significant role in consumers' decisions to participate in boycotts (John and Klein 2003; Sen et al. 2001). Research has shown that access to substitutes is a primary concern

for boycotters (Aish et al., 2013). When the targeted product or service has a close substitute, the likelihood of individuals joining a boycott increases (John and Klein, 2003). In my study, eight out of twelve participants reported substituting NBA games with alternatives. These included games organised by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA), the National Basketball League (NBL), football matches, or even general entertainment programmes. Such adjustments suggest that for these participants, the perceived cost of boycotting the NBA was relatively low. For instance, Du Yiran stated:

> When I couldn't watch the NBA games, I chose to watch the NCAA and our own CBA games.

His reference to the CBA as "our own" signals a sense of national identification and pride, subtly framing the NBA as "the other" in contrast to domestic leagues. However, it is noteworthy that the NCAA is also an American basketball organisation. Du only targeted the NBA but not other American sports entities. Even within the NBA, Du confined his boycott to the Houston Rockets and then-general manager Daryl Morey. As a fan of the LA Clippers, Du consciously chose not to extend the boycott to other teams, especially his favourite team. Since he was not a supporter of the Rockets, the perceived cost of boycotting was minimal.

This pattern was evident in other interviews as well. Several respondents limited their boycott actions to specific individuals, teams, or players, such as Morey or the Rockets. In doing so, they reduced the personal costs of boycotting while still signalling a political or moral stance. For many, the highest cost was the loss of viewing specific Rockets games.

For many NBA fans, boycotting the league was a relatively low-cost behaviour. Unless they had already purchased tickets for the NBA China Games, the primary economic loss involved the inability to watch free NBA broadcasts on CCTV or the need to pay for access via Tencent Sports – excluding Houston Rockets games, which were removed from the platform. In response to the incident, Tencent Sports sought to minimise disruption for existing subscribers. Users who had bought premium membership specifically for Houston Rockets games were offered the option to switch to another team without additional charges or to request a refund (guancha.com, 2019). This low-cost nature of participation likely contributed to the widespread participation in the NBA boycott across China.

Consider the example of Wang Tianyu. During the Morey incident, Wang ceased watching NBA games after CCTV imposed its broadcasting ban. He purposefully avoided alternative viewing options such as Tencent Sports or pirate streaming sites, thereby signalling his personal commitment to the boycott. During the Xinjiang Cotton episode, Wang also attempted to boycott Nike products. However, after a brief effort, he found domestic alternatives inferior in quality and resumed purchasing Nike shoes. His experience illustrates that for some consumers, the continuation of a boycott depends on the balance between perceived costs and personal inconvenience. When costs are perceived as high and outweigh political or moral benefits, the boycott is likely to be short-lived.

Preferences for boycotted products

Preferences for boycotted products also affected respondents' boycott attitudes and behaviour. This was particularly evident in the cases of Dai Kun and Wen Lin, two non-participants. Both Dai and Wen expressed strong preference for NBA games and complained about the sanction against the NBA:

> I think if someone truly loves basketball and is passionate about the NBA, there's no way they would stop watching because of something like this, just like me. – Wen Lin

> To be honest, the boycott really stirred up my emotions and made me feel quite angry, because it actually affected my personal interests. I follow the NBA closely and really enjoy it. – Dai Kun

Preferences for boycotted products also influenced the degree of boycott among participants. Participants who were devoted fans of certain NBA players or teams were more likely to limit their boycott to Morey and/or Houston Rockets games (such as Wang Tianyu), and did resume watching games on the Tencent Sports platform after the initial ban. For instance, as a fan of LeBron James, Lin Chong said, "If the entire NBA is boycotted solely because of one person's remarks, while many players within the NBA do not share the same views, then I believe such an action is unreasonable." Similarly, Du Yiran said, "Although I am boycotting him (Morey), I will still choose to follow, admire, and support my favourite team and players." For such

participants, the perceived costs of boycotting the entire NBA were quite high. Therefore, their boycott behaviour did not persist, nor did it extend to other NBA teams.

Second, a group of participants expressed waning interest in NBA games. These individuals, who once considered themselves devoted NBA fans – regularly watching games and purchasing NBA merchandise – had become less engaged with the league over time. Many began following the NBA during their elementary school years but now felt that the quality of the games had diminished. Some criticised the NBA for becoming "overly commercialised," thereby losing its original appeal. Furthermore, several respondents indicated that their interest declined after their favourite players retired. As a result, they now only watch games sporadically or limit their viewing to brief highlight reels. One participant, Feng Yuan, stated:

> After Iverson retired, I stopped watching the NBA as much. Before he retired, I would watch almost all of his team's games and buy magazines and everything. But once he retired, I started paying less attention.

For these participants, boycotting the NBA involved little sacrifice. Similarly, Zheng Kang said, "Since I already watch less frequently, I find that in the end, it became dispensable."

Finally, one respondent stated that he was neither an NBA fan nor a regular viewer of NBA games. For him, boycotting the NBA was a low-cost action. Therefore, he was strongly committed to boycotting the entire league. He believed that it was important to "show attitudes" towards the NBA and other foreign entities and send a clear signal to them:

> Since I have taken a stand, before you express similar remarks or do anything that hurts our feelings in the future, you will surely think twice about whether you should do so.

Time

Time constraints were another frequently mentioned factor. Five out of twelve respondents noted that, due to work commitments, they rarely had time to watch the NBA. As such, CCTV's broadcast ban had limited impact on their daily routines.

> Actually, even if the NBA broadcasts weren't banned, I still wouldn't watch it often, even though I paid for a membership [to watch games]. That's because their games are always during my work hours. – Bai Yang

> [The reason I watch less NBA now] is also related to work. The games are usually in the morning, which conflicts with my work hours. – Zheng Kang

For Bai and Zheng, the time cost of watching live games outweighed benefit. This is partly due to time zone differences. As a result, for employed fans, watching live broadcasts entails a higher opportunity cost, further reducing the incentive to engage with the league.

6.5.2 Category 2: self-related considerations

6.5.2.1 Susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII) is defined as "the need to identify or enhance one's image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others" (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 474). In this study, several participants exhibited a strong inclination to conform to their reference groups. For example, when Feng Yuan was asked about his involvement in online discussions regarding the Morey incident, he explained:

> It was probably because the NBA-related topics were trending on Weibo at the time. When I clicked on it, I saw everyone discussing it, so I wanted to share some of my thoughts as well.

Here, Feng's reference group consisted of Weibo users who were engaging with NBA-related topics. Calls for boycotting Morey, the Houston Rockets, the NBA, and associated products were prevalent in Chinese social media platforms during the incident. Feng's decision to participate was influenced by digital peer networks. In his interview, Feng also mentioned that he had boycotted Nike products in response to the Xinjiang Cotton controversy:

For example, Nike was previously boycotted because of the Xinjiang issue. In fact, all the clubs in the e-sports tournaments were sponsored by Nike, and when they played, since they couldn't change the logo, they had to cover it with fabric. When I went out and had to wear Nike shoes, I was probably influenced by them too, so I used some tape or something to cover up the Nike swoosh. After that, I think I haven't bought any Nike products for quite a while.

Feng's act of concealing the Nike logo to imitate the actions of e-sports teams illustrates a high level of conformity to perceived group norms. These e-sports players served as an influential reference group, whose symbolic protest actions influenced the boycott behaviour of their followers. Whether driven by a desire to gain social approval or to avoid disapproval, Feng's case demonstrates that SNI plays a significant role in his boycott participation.

In addition to SNI, interview data also reveal that susceptibility to informational influence played an important role in the NBA boycott. Participants often perceived Morey's post to be 'intervening in China's inner affairs', 'insulting China' and 'hurting the feelings of the Chinese people'. These phrases circulated in Chinese news headlines and were repeated by official news outlets. This suggests that these participants may have had a high tendency to accept information from the mainstream media as authoritative. Beyond media influence, respondents like Cui Liang were also susceptible to informational influence exerted through personal networks. For instance, when asked how he reacted to the online boycott of the NBA, Cui said that he was not initially paying attention to the incident. He explained,

However, I did hear my friends and colleagues were discussing it. From what I briefly heard back then, I thought Morey probably just said something thoughtless in the heat of the moment. But due to public pressure, or maybe other pressures, I figured he would make a statement and issue a formal apology… However, it just fizzled out…There was nothing you could do, because the more you followed it, the angrier you got.

Cui's case suggests that susceptibility to informational influence did affect individuals' participation in a boycott.

6.5.2.2 Self-enhancement

Self-enhancement has been shown to be positively associate with the likelihood of participating in a boycott (Klein et al. 2004). It was the least frequently mentioned reason among respondents, accounting for approximately 2% of all coded motivations. Several participants viewed Morey's comments as deeply inappropriate, reinforcing their belief that boycotting the NBA was the correct course of action. One participant stated: "Boycotting the NBA is the right thing to do... If we don't boycott the NBA, I would be very angry." Another participant said that the boycott against the NBA indicates that "everyone has a sense of patriotism. Moreover, it demonstrates that everyone has a sense of distinguishing right from wrong."

Here, the sense of self-enhancement is closely related to another motivational factor – perceived egregiousness of the target. Participants viewed Morey, Silver, the NBA, or other involved parties as wrongdoers who had hurt Chinese people's feelings and harmed China's national interests. As a result, they believed that boycotting them was the right thing to do. Accordingly, their self-esteem increased when they sacrificed their personal interests to defend their country. As Qian Xiao said:

> I feel that I've already made my stance clear on the matter that Hong Kong is an inseparable part of China. Taking a stand in itself is a kind of achievement. Because by expressing my attitude on this issue, I've gained, how should I say it, a sense of emotional and psychological satisfaction.

These findings support Klein and colleagues' (2004) argument that engaging in a boycott can elevate an individual's self-esteem, as it aligns with the belief that they are acting as moral agents opposing brands or countries perceived to have negatively impacted society.

6.5.2.3 Perceived efficacy

In the NBA case, perceived efficacy emerged as the third most frequently mentioned motivational theme among respondents, accounting for 15% of all identified motivations. Within this theme, participants expressed divergent views regarding the boycott's efficacy. On the one hand, some participants demonstrated a high degree of self-efficacy, expressing

confidence that their individual actions could significantly impact the NBA's revenue. As Qian Xiao asserted:

> If we boycott the NBA market, its revenue will definitely decline in all aspects.

However, many respondents had lower expectations of their personal influence. They did not believe that their boycott behaviour would alter the NBA's stance. Firstly, respondents perceived the Chinese market as less critical to the NBA than the American market. It seemed unlikely to them that the NBA would risk alienating its home audience to appease Chinese consumers. As Feng Yuan remarked:

> It's unlikely to achieve the goal, to be honest. Most Americans are probably on their side. While the NBA faces pressure from such a big market like China, they definitely can't afford to offend the US government and the American people. So, I felt it would be quite difficult to get them to apologise.

Secondly, for individuals like Ren Peng, low efficacy stemmed from the recognition that their influence was constrained on Western social media platforms. The Morey incident originated on Twitter, but due to the Great Firewall, most Chinese citizens did not have access to the platform, let alone the ability to exert pressure through it. Therefore, these participants had limited expectations regarding the boycott's effectiveness.

Nevertheless, despite a diminished sense of personal influence, respondents like Feng and Ren still actively participated in the boycott. On one level, they were driven by expressive purposes – venting frustrations towards Morey, the NBA, the US, or Western countries more broadly. On another level, they pursued instrumental goals: attempting to send a warning or "teach a lesson" to the NBA and to other foreign companies or countries that similar actions would be punished by boycott campaigns. Friedman (2002) describes such instrumental-expressive hybrids as *punitive boycotts*, which fulfil expressive goals in the short term and instrumental goals in the long term.

> I still took part in the boycott. At least, it's important to express our stance and attitudes. Whether to apologise or not is their business. – Feng Yuan

Our boycott of the NBA has sounded an alarm for them. It's fine if you want to make money, because [...] We can cooperate, but we must not forget the fundamental condition: you cannot bring your so-called freedom of speech and political correctness here and misuse them. – Ren Peng

Even some non-participants interpreted the boycott as a warning. For instance, when discussing its impact, Xia Yipeng observed:

From the NBA's perspective, whether it's the general managers or the players, they definitely won't publicly talk about political matters anymore, especially those related to China, because it will certainly have an impact on them.

Although many participants reported low levels of personal efficacy, they often held strong expectations of overall participation. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that when consumers perceive their individual contributions to be limited, their willingness to participate relies heavily on their expectations about broader collective involvement (Sen et al., 2001). For example, when asked about whether he had thought about the outcome of the boycott, Meng Yu said:

From my personal point of view, as just an individual, my own boycott probably won't make any waves. It's like a grain of sand falling into water, maybe not even causing a ripple. But I believe there are many people like me who will consciously stop buying their products and boycott watching their games, and in the end, the impact will be economic.

Another example is Zhang Hong, who acknowledged the limited impact of his individual boycott but believed that "certain matters should be managed by the state." He expressed strong support for CCTV's decision to ban NBA broadcasts, as well as for domestic companies and celebrities who cut ties with the league. Zhang argued that these collective actions, especially those endorsed or coordinated by state-linked actors, had significantly influenced the NBA's commercial valuation and served as a form of economic sanction. Notably, Zhang also exhibited a high level of political trust, a vital factor explored in detail in the later section.

6.5.3 Category 3: Ethical Considerations

6.5.3.1 Perceived egregiousness

Perceived egregiousness was the second most frequently mentioned motivation by respondents, accounting for approximately 22% of all coded motivations. As mentioned earlier, some participants did not examine detailed information on the Morey controversy. Instead, they simply followed the official discourse and labelled Morey's tweet as supporting Hong Kong independence. For them, Morey was an antagonist who wanted to invigorate Hong Kong protesters, interfere with China's domestic affairs, and damage China's national interests. His post was considered "inappropriate", "racist", and/or "insulting China." Moreover, the NBA commissioner Adam Silver's defence of Morey's right to free speech was described by one respondent (Ning Yixin) as "white people's freedom of speech". As Lin Chong explained:

> The reason I'm boycotting is because Morey made inappropriate comments. His remarks may have contained racial discrimination, particularly against China and Asians. Since they are discriminating against us, why should we still shamelessly pay attention to their games?

Lin Chong was not alone in viewing Morey's remarks as racially charged. Another respondent, Zhang Hong, expressed a similar opinion:

> Actually, I think the statements made by these two people [Morey and Adam Silver] are essentially supporting Hong Kong independence. Moreover, I feel that this carries a tone of racial discrimination, which is completely unacceptable. Very unacceptable.

While some respondents did not view Morey's comments as racially motivated, they criticised him for allegedly "insulting China and the Chinese people (辱华)." For instance, Ren Peng said that during the boycott he was so angry because he felt that "spending money on people who insult China was a disgrace." Another participant, Du Yiran, said, "Morey's remarks, which insulted China or were unfavourable to us Chinese, in my opinion, go against the spirit of sportsmanship and professional ethics."

These findings are consistent with previous research highlighting perceived egregiousness of the target as a key motivation for boycott participation (Klein et al. 2004). In the NBA case, participants viewed Morey's comments as fundamentally inappropriate and perceived the boycott as a means of standing up against perceived wrongdoers.

6.5.4 Category 4: political considerations

6.5.4.1 Patriotism

Although many boycotters exhibited nationalist sentiment, in some cases respondents did not hold hostile attitudes towards the broader institution of the NBA or the US. As discussed in the literature review, patriotism reflects the degree of attachment to one's nation without necessarily holding hostility toward other groups (Druckman, 1994). A patriotic consumer may choose to engage in the boycott of the NBA to support their motherland, but need not reject American culture or harbour negative attitudes towards Americans. Feng Yuan is a typical example. Feng strongly opposed Morey's comments. He said:

> Even though I've watched the NBA for so many years, in situations like this, I'm sure every Chinese person will definitely side with their motherland. There's no way we would side with the NBA.

His words contained a strong sense of patriotism and a firm determination to protect the interests of the motherland. However, Feng's patriotic sentiment did not translate into animosity towards the US. He emphasised that it is important to differentiate between Morey and other NBA personnel and teams. "Banning NBA games would not change Americans' attitudes toward China", he said. Instead of banning the NBA, he suggested:

> In the future, [the government] needs to use other methods, such as external communication or propaganda, to show the Americans the right side of Hong Kong, so that they can understand the issue from the heart.

Similarly, Du Yiran also expressed that he only boycotted Morey and the Houston Rockets.

Personally, I am very patriotic, but I also love basketball very much because it is one of the biggest hobbies in my life. So, when it comes to watching the NBA or other basketball events, I will choose to resist rationally, instead of blindly opposing or not supporting the entire NBA or basketball as a whole.

Feng and Du, along with others who share their perspective, advocate for a moderate approach to boycotting, suggesting that such actions should be limited in scope. Their stance reflects a passive-style boycott. On the one hand, they do not actively boycott NBA games. On the other hand, they accept CCTV's ban, recognising the necessity of demonstrating a national stance:

It is necessary to show attitudes to the Chinese people and even the whole world… We need and like the NBA, but the prerequisite is that you must respect us. – Bai Yang

For these participants, boycotting the NBA is seen as a patriotic act and serves as a deterrent, potentially preventing similar incidents in the future.

6.5.4.2 Animosity

In the case of the NBA, nine out of twelve respondents exhibited different degrees of deep-seated animosity. Their hostility was associated with a series of political conflicts, such as the US-China trade war, the Xinjiang Cotton controversy, the Hong Kong protests, the Russia-Ukraine war, and the Meng Wanzhou incident. For some participants, their hostility towards the US had accumulated gradually over time. For instance, when asked why he no longer wished to watch NBA games, Zheng Kang explained:

I feel like they haven't fully understood the complete context of the Hong Kong protests. Over time, I've been gradually losing trust in what Americans say.

In his interview, Zheng said he believed that the Hong Kong protests were "illegal and criminal activities" and criticised Americans and the British for employing double standards in addressing the situation. He provided two examples to illustrate this inconsistency. First, he noted that while Western countries claim that "sports should remain separate from politics," Russian athletes were banned from the Olympics in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Second, he referenced the suspension of Donald Trump's Twitter account, contrasting it with the American defence of free speech in the case of Daryl Morey's comments about Hong Kong. For Zheng, these examples underscored a broader hypocrisy in how the US and other Western nations handle such issues, leading to his growing distrust of both the US and the West.

Similarly, Lin Chong also mentioned that Donald Trump is "unfriendly" and "hostile" toward China. "He leans toward white supremacy," Lin said. Therefore, when asked why he boycotted the NBA, he said that Morey's actions in tweeting support for the Hong Kong protesters contained a certain degree of "racism and discrimination." Lin's statement reflects a broader sentiment of discontent towards the US at the time. Notably, when this interview took place in April 2022, tensions between China and the US were heightened by the ongoing trade war and a series of political conflicts, including disputes over human rights issues, Huawei's 5G technology, and the Taiwan issue.

For some participants, these hostilities had a dual impact: while they led to a decline in preferences for American products, they simultaneously encouraged a stronger inclination to support domestic products. This linkage was noted in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.4.4.2). As Lin stated:

> I really didn't like iPhones or certain American products at the time. It's not that I was boycotting them, but I just felt deep down that we should support domestic products.

Lin's words echo broader online calls to boycott American products and to buycott national products during the NBA incident.

Notably, respondents' hostile attitudes towards Morey or the NBA had different impacts on their judgement of the quality of NBA games. While some criticised the quality of NBA games as "terrible," others argued that the NBA is irreplaceable as it represents the highest level of basketball. The latter supports the findings of Klein, Ettenson, and Morris (1998), which argue that animosity towards a foreign country will negatively impact the purchase of its products, but this effect is independent of consumers' judgement of the product's quality.

6.5.4.3 Nationalism

Nationalism was a key driving factor behind many respondents' decision to boycott the NBA. Unlike the participants in the Erke buycott, many interviewees in the NBA boycott case expressed strong nationalistic sentiments. They fully embraced the policies and practices of the Chinese government, asserting that any individual, group, or statement that failed to adhere to the code of conduct advocated by the Chinese government, or that "harmed" China's national interests, should be subject to punishment. This punishment could take the form of government sanctions, online censorship, or consumer boycotts. One respondent, Ren Peng, exemplifies this mindset, stating:

> I believe that anyone involved in *zimeiti* (自媒体, individual-operated online media accounts) or public media should be cautious about what they say. As long as it concerns harming national interests or offending national sentiment, I would call for a broadcast ban. This is a matter of principle, and in my view, it is a very appropriate way to handle such situations.

Individuals like Ren Peng expressed firm belief in government propaganda, without any outward sign of reservation. Influenced by China's patriotic educational campaign, many Chinese citizens regard Western countries, particularly the US, as holding a widespread and deep-seated hostility and disdain towards China. Although Morey's tweet did not explicitly support Hong Kong independence – after all, the five demands of the Hong Kong protests did not include calls for independence – that was how the official narratives framed it (Bai and Yue, 2019). Those who participated in the boycott rarely engaged in critical analysis of Morey's position, instead indicating belief in the official discourse that condemned Morey for interfering in China's internal affairs:

> After the Hong Kong rioters' actions, the people in mainland China were already filled with anger. Then, a few *baipizhu*[33] jumped out to support the rioters, advocating so-called freedom and democracy. Even the NBA commissioner isn't clean. It's about time to deal with all of this. – Ning Yixin

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[33] 白皮猪, white-skinned pigs, a racist slur against white people.

Notably, the above quote exhibits a strong sense of xenophobia and confrontational anti-foreign attitudes. Respondent Ning Yixin believed that Hong Kong protests were agitated by Americans seeking to create "a colour revolution" in Hong Kong, and that Western media were "using fake news to twist the story." Ning was already very angry at the Hong Kong "angry youth" (废青) rioters. Daryl Morey and Adam Silver's actions were the last straw for his nationalist sentiments.

In contrast, all three respondents who opposed the boycott of the NBA disagreed with the official stance. They believed that Morey's comments did not provide evidence that he supported Hong Kong independence. Some even expressed sympathy for the Hong Kong protesters, viewing the protests as a legitimate struggle for rights. This contrast highlights a key distinction between the boycotters and anti-boycotters: the former was predominantly driven by nationalist sentiments and displayed little tolerance for any criticism of China.

> Some of us ordinary people sometimes tend to confuse political issues with nationalism. This is partly because some of our upper-level media are willing to blur the lines. – Xia Yipeng

Xia's words demonstrate his lower trust in the "upper-level media", which refers to official Chinese media outlets in this context. Political trust played a significant role in shaping boycott decisions in this case, as discussed in the next section.

6.5.4.4 Political trust

In addition to nationalism, political trust, which accounted for approximately 8% of all coded motivations, further shaped the way participants interpreted the Morey incident and decided whether to join the boycott. While previous research has demonstrated that individuals with lower levels of trust in the government are more likely to engage in political consumerism (Stolle and Micheletti 2013; Copeland and Boulianne 2022), the results of this study suggest that this pattern may not hold in the case of Chinese boycotts. The majority of boycotters in this study exhibited a high degree of trust in the Chinese government, although one boycotter did express strong distrust of the government.

Most participants' boycott behaviour was aligned with the decisions made by China Central Television (CCTV). For instance, when CCTV banned NBA broadcasts, these participants complied and stopped watching the games. Similarly, when CCTV lifted the ban and resumed broadcasting, participants likewise ceased their boycotts. Several respondents pointed out that they "understood and supported CCTV and the government's decisions." Moreover, respondents not only showed a high level of political trust, but also interpreted the rebroadcasts of NBA games as driven by economic considerations.

As Ning Yixin remarked, "In the business world, there are no enemies or friends, only interests. The re-broadcasting of NBA games by CCTV is by no means an ideological issue, but purely a commercial one." Similarly, Wang Tianyu stated:

> My boycott of the NBA is in line with the boycott by our mainstream media. I've boycotted it for as long as they have. My stance is the same as theirs. If they don't broadcast it, I won't watch it.

Wang also emphasised that in his view, "CCTV's attitudes represent the Chinese government's attitudes," indicating that he equated following CCTV's decisions with following those of the government.

Nonetheless, a few respondents continued their boycott of NBA and refused to watch it, even after CCTV resumed the broadcast. They claimed that they understood and accepted the rebroadcast, but they personally would not watch the games again. For example, Meng Yu said that he would continue boycotting the NBA and its merchandise.

Particularly noteworthy is a notable exception among the participants: Cui Liang, who demonstrated a strong distrust of the government. He voiced strong opposition to the rebroadcast of NBA games, criticising government leaders for being overly conservative. According to Cui,

> The current leaders still tend to favour the older generation. Their way of thinking has become rigid… Even though it's just one rebroadcast, I still feel uncomfortable about it.

His remarks reveal his dissatisfaction with the political system and the incompetence of older government officials. Cui mentioned that he publicly shared his dissent on social media, but his comments were censored by authorities, prohibiting him from further discussing the topic of CCTV's NBA rebroadcast. Cui represented a group of people who do not trust the government and are dissatisfied with the current senior leaders' policy. They want the government to take a stronger stance in dealing with China's foreign affairs. In their article examining public opinion during the 2012 Diaoyu/Senkaku Island protests, Gries et al. (2016, p. 275) also found that among protestors, many were targeting the Chinese government for being too weak on Japan, not living up to its nationalistic promises.

However, those with low political trust are less likely to engage in the boycott against the NBA. Taking the three non-participants as examples, none of them showed a high level of political trust in the government. Moreover, one respondent, Xia Yipeng, exhibited a high level of distrust. He questioned the official narratives claiming Morey intentionally hurt Chinese people's feelings and supported Hong Kong independence. According to Xia:

> In mainland China, what we received was mainly news coverage from domestic media, but I also learned about the real situation through some foreign media outlets. Personally, I don't think Morey's comment should have been elevated to the level of a conflict between the Chinese government or the Chinese people. He was simply expressing concern or compassion for a particular group.

> Let me put it bluntly: Hong Kong is part of the Chinese nation too, isn't it? Morey supported them, but it was just a matter of different political demands. So what does his support have to do with being against the Chinese nation?

Xia's opinion is similar to the fourth group of netizens identified in the background section. These individuals distrusted the dominant narratives and disagreed with the government's sanctions on the NBA and the boycott.

In sum, during the NBA boycott, most respondents exhibited a high level of trust in the government. This is not surprising given the government's active role in the boycott. As demonstrated in the background section, official media outlets such as *CCTV News*, the Communist Youth League of China, and even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were all involved

in the NBA case. Their attitudes were well received by the Chinese public. In particular, CCTV's ban on NBA broadcasts sent a clear signal to domestic and foreign audiences that the Chinese government strongly opposed Morey's comments and believed that the NBA should punish Morey and issue an apology for his "inappropriate remarks". This signalling effect was also mentioned by Zheng Kang, Du Yiran, Ren Peng, Cui Liang, and Wang Tianyu. Just as Wang pointed out, "CCTV's attitude represents the government's attitude."

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the high-profile, high-impact 2019 boycott of the NBA in China. Adopting an inductive approach to analyse rich interview data, I identified nine motivational themes: *perceived costs (*including *availability of substitutes*, *preferences for boycotted products*, and *time*), *perceived egregiousness*, *perceived efficacy*, *animosity*, *nationalism*, *political trust*, *susceptibility to interpersonal influence* (*SII*), *patriotism*, and *self-enhancement*. Notably, the motivational typology developed in the previous chapter's Erke buycott case study is also applicable to the NBA boycott: boycott participants are influenced by political, ethical, self-related, and economic reasons.

In this case, economic considerations, particularly perceived costs, were the most frequently cited individual driver. When perceived costs were high, participants tended to limit their boycott to specific figures or teams; when costs were low, participants exhibited a strong determination to boycott the whole NBA and, in some cases American products more broadly. The ethical consideration of perceived egregiousness also played a critical role. Respondents believed Morey's posting was malicious and discriminatory against Chinese people. Political considerations were, not surprisingly, the most cited category of motivations, accounting for 31% of all coded references. Yet, in contrast to the previous literature on political consumerism in the West, this study finds that most participants held high levels of political trust. Their actions were in sync with the government's attitude towards the NBA. Compared with the Erke buycotters, NBA boycott participants also exhibited higher levels of animosity and nationalist sentiment. Finally, although many participants believed their individual actions would have little impact, they still participated, which suggests they were more likely driven by expressive motivations. At the same time, overall participation expectation and political trust appear to

have mediated low levels of personal efficacy. That is, participants trusted that their actions, when synchronised with state and collective sentiment, would be meaningful.

This study contributes to existing literature in three specific ways. First, my results suggest earlier research may have overemphasised, or at least underspecified, the conditions under which political trust influences consumers' boycott participation. This study finds that most boycotters exhibited a high level of political trust in the government, with only one participant expressing a lower level of trust in the Chinese government. Consumer boycotts, as a form of political consumerism, are often understood as a response to a decline in public confidence in governments' ability to address global issues such as climate change, animal rights, forced labour, and other socio-political concerns (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Gundelach, 2020). However, this study shows that Chinese consumers may join a boycott to express support for the government's political stance. In such cases, participants often regard themselves as part of a collective action endorsed by the government. This finding indicates that the role of political trust may be conditional on regime type and state involvement. Future research could investigate the extent to which the relationship between political trust and boycott participation is shaped by regime type, particularly comparing democratic and authoritarian contexts.

This study also sheds light on the characteristics of non-participants, who tend to express lower levels of political trust and a greater scepticism towards state-led narratives. This highlights that even in an authoritarian context, individuals' perceptions of state-led nationalist discourse vary.

Second, although prior research suggests a positive association between perceived efficacy and consumers' willingness to participate in boycotts, this study finds that many respondents with low perceived efficacy nonetheless engaged actively in the boycott. *Why do they still choose to stop watching NBA games, avoid buying NBA merchandise, or in some cases even extend their boycott to other American products?* Four possible explanations are offered. First, some participants appear to have been mainly driven by expressive purposes. For them, expressing a patriotic stance and showing attitudes to foreign countries were more important than achieving tangible economic outcomes. Second, despite low perceived efficacy, many participants expressed strong confidence in overall participation, believing that widespread public participation would collectively exert meaningful pressure. The third reason is related to political trust, as most participants believed in the government's capacity to deal with the NBA

controversy. This could potentially mitigate the influence of low efficacy on individual's boycott decision. Fourth, the role of perceived efficacy may be mediated by perceived costs. As discussed in the results section, many participants reported that the personal costs of continuing to follow NBA games outweighed the benefits because (1) there were a variety of alternative forms of entertainment; (2) their interest in NBA games had waned over time; and (3) the time cost of watching live games was too high, particularly for young professionals.

Finally, the findings suggest that in the case of Chinese boycotts of foreign products, political and ethical considerations are significant drivers of participation. Yet, they also show that instrumental concerns such as perceived costs, perceived efficacy, self-enhancement, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence, coexist with political and moral drivers. This underscores the analytical value of the four-category model – economic, ethical, political, and self-related motivations – developed in this study. Such a framework may also prove analytically useful in cross-national or cross-regime comparisons. Future research could apply the four-category model to political consumerism in democratic contexts, where consumers may place greater emphasis on ethical or socially progressive values, or to cases with minimal state involvement, where political trust may be less likely to mediate individual behaviour.

Chapter 7.
Conclusion

This thesis set out to answer four key research questions: (1) what is the historical development of China's political consumerism?; (2) who engages in contemporary political consumerism in China?; (3) does political consumerism crowd out or expand the repertoire of political participation in China?; and (4) what motivations drive individuals to engage in nationalist political consumerism in China? In this concluding chapter, I begin with a brief summary of the main findings before discussing their broader implications for both political consumerism and political participation research. The final section sketches the study's limitations and outlines an agenda for future research.

7.1 Summary of findings

7.1.1 Historical evolution of China's political consumerism

This thesis identifies four key historical transitions in the evolution of China's political consumerism, drawing on archival sources such as *Shenbao*, government documents, news reports, and scholarly literature. These transitions demonstrate that political consumerism in China has long served as a tool both for state mobilisation and individual political expression. In the early twentieth century, consumption emerged as a weapon against foreign oppression and as a means of pursuing national salvation, initially led by merchant groups, particularly national product associations, and later adopted by political forces such as the Nationalist Party. During the Maoist era (1949-1976), political consumerism became primarily state-sponsored, characterised by the promotion of socialist consumer goods and campaigns targeting "toxic" capitalist products. The Clear Away Hollywood Films campaign and the frenzied buycotting of Mao badges are notable examples. The market reforms of the 1980s established a concrete foundation for the revival of Chinese political consumerism in the post-1999 era. In the fourth period (1999 to the Xi Jinping era), the concerns driving China's political consumerism expanded beyond geopolitical conflicts to encompass a broader range of socio-political issues, including social injustice, gender inequality, food security, environmental issues, labour rights, cultural appropriation, and animal welfare. Chapter 2 thus offers a structured periodisation of

China's political consumerism. It shows that while contemporary movements remain deeply entangled with nationalism and state power, they also reflect emergent forms of politicised consumption that may carry democratising implications within an authoritarian context.

7.1.2 Socio-demographic profile of political consumers in China

Having examined the historical evolution of political consumerism in China, I then explored its contemporary socio-demographic profile. Drawing on data from the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (WVS) in China (Haerpfer et al., 2020), I found that Chinese boycotters differ from their Western counterparts in a number of significant respects. First, unlike in the West, where political consumerism is often positively associated with higher levels of education and income, in China these socioeconomic factors show no significant association with boycott participation. This distinction may stem from the unique characteristics of Chinese boycotts. On the one hand, most boycotts in China are triggered by actions of foreign companies or public figures crossing political red lines, such as perceived acts of questioning China's territorial integrity, bringing up human rights violations, or raising the Taiwan issue. Boycott participants do not need to obtain a certain level of education to find relevant information, as such information has already permeated everyday life through propaganda. On the other hand, the availability of low-cost domestic alternatives reduces the financial barrier to participation. As such, political consumerism in China appears less constrained by socio-economic factors than institutionalised political channels that are stratified by education and income levels.

Second, I found that gender had no significant association with boycott participation, diverging again from both Western patterns and China's own gendered imbalances in formal political engagement. Whereas women remain underrepresented in institutionalised forms of political participation in China, such as party membership or contacting government officials, they appear to participate in boycotts no less than men. This suggests that political consumerism, such as boycotts, may serve as an alternative political avenue for women in China. Moreover, Chinese women's willingness to participate in boycotts might be part of a larger trend of rising interest in non-institutionalised political participation forms.[34]

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[34] The White Paper Movement of late 2022 is a recent example as it was started from a female university student's protest.

Finally, my analysis indicated that younger people are significantly more likely to participate in boycotts. While this aligns with some of the existing literature (Micheletti, 2003; Newman and Bartel, 2011), it contrasts with research suggesting that middle-aged individuals are the primary boycotters in Western democracies (Baek, 2010; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013; Stolle and Hooghe, 2011). In China, youth-led digital culture plays a key role in disseminating boycott messages, and the low cost of entry into such acts makes them particularly accessible to younger citizens. Consequently, political consumerism may be mitigating age gaps in political engagement by offering an expressive, low-threshold form of participation. Together, these findings suggest that political consumerism in China is less constrained by socio-economic resources than its Western counterparts and more inclusive across age and gender lines than many forms of institutionalised participation in China.

7.1.3 The relationship between boycotts and political participation in China

Building on the descriptive findings in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 engaged with the ongoing debate about the relationship between political consumerism and conventional forms of political participation, with a particular focus on the Chinese context. Specifically, I addressed two core questions: 1) Does boycott participation crowd out other forms of political participation in China? 2) Is boycott participation a substitute for or a supplement to conventional political participation in China?

With respect to the first question, I found that higher levels of boycott behaviour are significantly associated with increased likelihood of engaging in all listed contentious participatory actions, including signing a petition, attending peaceful demonstrations, joining a strike, signing an electronic petition online, and organising political activities and protests online. However, the association between boycott behaviour and institutionalised forms of participation is more complex. While boycott participation is positively associated with contacting government officials, it shows no significant relationship with voting in local-level elections or with party membership. These findings suggest that political consumerism in China does not crowd out other forms of political participation, particularly not contentious ones. Rather, it coexists with, and may even reinforce, certain participatory practices.

I investigated the second question by examining boycott participation and conventional political engagement in China. The results indicated no significant relationship between the two. However, given that institutionalised and contentious forms of participation operate differently in authoritarian regimes compared to democracies, I found that a cancellation effect may obscure the true relationship between boycott participation and conventional political engagement when the latter is treated as an aggregate category. Specifically, the positive association between age and institutionalised participation and its negative association with contentious participation effectively offset one another, resulting in an insignificant relationship when combined.

To address this, I disaggregated participation types and examined the relationship between boycott participation and each form separately. The results suggest that boycott participation is a supplement to contentious participation and a substitute for institutionalised participation. Boycotts and contentious participation both appear to be more common among the younger generation, pointing to shared generational dynamics. Moreover, political consumerism may be serving as an accessible avenue for younger citizens who tend to be underrepresented in formal institutional arenas to express political preferences. As discussed in Chapter 4, the average age of the 2,980 delegates in the 13th National Party Congress was 52, with only 1.4% of delegates aged between 22 and 29 (Wei, 2023). This generational underrepresentation within China's institutional structures may help explain why many recent boycotts and buycotts, such as the NBA boycott and the Erke buycott, have been primarily sparked by social media platforms where younger participants are particularly active. In this sense, the results of Chapter 4 suggest that boycott participation extends the conventional political repertoire by mobilising demographics otherwise marginalised within traditional political structures.

7.1.4 Motivations for buycotting national products in China

Chapter 5 employed a mixed-method approach to explore the motivations behind buycott participation, with a focus on the most prevalent type in China – buycotts of national products. While such acts are often framed through the lens of ethnocentric consumption, this perspective risks overlooking the complex interplay of political, ethical, economic, and self-related factors that drive such behaviour. Drawing on in-depth participant interviews, the case study of the

2021 Erke buycott uncovers a diverse array of motivations that align with this four-part framework.

First, and perhaps counterintuitively, political factors were the least frequently cited by respondents, challenging the conventional view that Chinese buycotts of national products are primarily rooted in nationalist sentiment. Second, self-related factors, especially susceptibility to interpersonal influence (SII), play a substantial role. Normative influence drives individuals to align with the prevailing social expectations by supporting a socially responsible domestic brand, while informational influence shapes consumer perceptions of Erke's charitable donations and financial hardship, amplifying its moral credibility. Third, ethical considerations were a direct motivator for many respondents. For some participants, especially those with connections to Henan province, Erke's donation during the floods resonated personally, promoting expressions of altruism and emotional solidarity. These individuals interpreted their consumption as a morally meaningful act (self-enhancement) in support of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

All respondents acknowledged economic considerations during the buycott process, though the salience of such factors varied. Some abstained from purchasing due to dissatisfaction with product design, while others consistently prioritised buycott participation over personal preference. Importantly, every respondent mentioned political or ethical considerations, or both, confirming that the Erke buycott was not apolitical. While political factors were least frequently emphasised overall, they nonetheless formed part of a broader landscape of purposeful, value-driven participation.

In sum, my analysis indicated that the so-called "Wild Consumption of Erke (野性消费鸿星尔克)" was not merely a wave of impulsive spending, but an instance of political consumerism shaped by political, ethical, economic, and self-related motivations. This underscores the value of the four-part motivational framework developed in this thesis, which captures the complexity of political consumerism in China and challenges the view that it is simply an expression of nationalist sentiment.

7.1.5 Motivations for boycotting foreign products

Chapter 6 investigated the motivations behind Chinese consumers' participation in the 2019 NBA boycott. Drawing on in-depth semi-structured interviews, I identified nine distinct motivational themes, all of which were successfully categorised within the four-part motivational framework developed in Chapter 5. The framework's successful application to two contrasting cases indicates its potential for broader analytical use.

As expected, political considerations emerged as the most frequently cited motivation. However, in contrast to the West, where political consumerism often signals distrust in the state, most participants in the NBA case exhibited high levels of political trust. Their boycotting actions aligned closely with the government's stance, suggesting that political consumerism in China may operate not as resistance, but as an act of alignment with state-led political objectives. Second, economic considerations, specifically perceived costs, also played a significant role. Most participants reported low perceived costs in abstaining from watching NBA games, often reducing costs by selectively targeting teams or individuals rather than the entire league. While this reflects the strategic flexibility of consumer activism in China, it also raises questions about the efficacy of such boycotts.

Third, ethical considerations, particularly perceived egregiousness, were also influential. Participants believed their actions were moral responses to perceived wrongdoing, interpreting boycott participation as a moral obligation. Fourth, in contrast to what previous studies suggest, although most participants expressed limited confidence in their individual impact, they nonetheless engaged in the boycott. This apparent contradiction suggests that low self-efficacy may be mitigated by high collective efficacy or political trust. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that political consumerism in China does not necessarily mirror the bottom-up, confrontational activism observed in liberal democracies. Rather, it often reflects an interplay between bottom-up consumer activism and top-down political mobilisation.

7.2 Implications

7.2.1 Political consumerism as atomised participation

This thesis contributes to the scholarship on Chinese politics and, more broadly, on political consumerism in authoritarian contexts. While a considerable body of research has explored

early political consumerism movements in China, the boycott of foreign products and the buycott of national products in the early twentieth century (Gerth, 2003; Pan, 1998; Wang, 2007), little attention has been paid to its historical evolution from the Mao era to the Xi Jinping era. This study addresses that gap by offering the first systematic account of political consumerism in China from the Late Qing period to the present, providing a longitudinal perspective on its transformation over time.

The findings suggest that political consumerism in contemporary China has become increasingly atomised. On the one hand, individuals now enjoy greater autonomy in deciding when, where, and how to participate in boycotts or buycotts. This makes it more difficult for the state to monitor, control, or suppress such activities. Particularly in cases of regime-challenging political consumerism, participants often act spontaneously, flexibly, and privately, which makes such participation relatively low-risk. On the other hand, this atomised nature of the activity may limit the potential for political consumerism to develop into large-scale, sustained movements. The absence of organisational infrastructure, such as civil society groups, undermines the possibility of sustained collective mobilisation. Although social media platforms offer channels for communication and coordination, these are inherently unstable due to pervasive online censorship. In this sense, political consumerism in China represents a double-edged phenomenon: while it expands opportunities for individualised, low-threshold political participation, it also faces structural constraints that hinder long-term collective impact.

7.2.2 Reframing political consumerism's role in authoritarian political participation

This study advances ongoing debates about the relationship between political consumerism and conventional forms of political participation by extending the empirical lens to an authoritarian context. Existing research, primarily focusing on democratic countries, offers three main interpretations: political consumerism either (1) crowds out institutionalised participation (Szasz, 2012); (2) serves as a substitute for marginalised actors (Micheletti et al., 2004); or (3) complements the participatory repertoire (Clarke et al., 2007; Strømsnes, 2009). Yet little is known about how these dynamics manifest in authoritarian regimes, where formal political channels are highly constrained.

By examining the Chinese case, I find that political consumerism plays a dual role. It operates as a substitute for institutionalised participation by mobilising the younger groups who are underrepresented in formal participation channels, while also serving as a supplement to contentious participation, drawing on similar sociodemographic features.

This is particularly important in authoritarian contexts, where institutionalised and contentious participation differ sharply in form, risk, and meaning. By disaggregating conventional participation and examining boycott participation's relationship with each type separately, this thesis provides a clearer, more nuanced understanding of how political consumerism interacts with other forms of participation under authoritarian constraints. It demonstrates that, in an authoritarian context, political consumerism can fill gaps in participation, offering an accessible and low-risk channel for political expression.

7.2.3 Political (dis)trust as a predictor of political consumerism

This thesis challenges the widely accepted assumption that political distrust is a key predictor of political consumerism (Graziano et al., 2012; Gundelach, 2020; Newman and Bartels, 2011; Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). Existing research suggests that processes of globalisation have increasingly exposed the inadequacy of governments in managing contemporary risks and challenges, leading to institutional distrust and the rise of market-based activism as an alternative channel for political expression (Stolle and Micheletti, 2013). However, this study reveals a contrasting pattern in authoritarian China, where participants in state-sponsored boycotts tend to exhibit high levels of political trust and closely align with official narratives. In such contexts, political consumerism may act not as a challenge to political authority, but as an instrument for reinforcing state legitimacy.

This finding calls for a more nuanced framework for understanding the relationship between political trust and political consumerism in non-democratic settings. First, when the state actively mobilises or endorses a boycott, such as in the cases of the NBA, H&M, or Lotte, individuals are more likely to participate, aligning their consumer behaviour with official narratives. These participants often exhibit strong political trust and view their actions as acts of defending national interests.

Moreover, the limited political opportunities in China may motivate both politically trusting and distrusting individuals to engage in political consumerism, which remains one of the few available avenues for political expression. For instance, the buycott of Paris Baguette illustrates how participants with lower levels of political trust used consumption as a means of expressing dissent. Unlike state-sponsored boycotts, this grassroots buycott was driven by opposition to local government policies, demonstrating how political consumerism can function as a tool of resistance rather than compliance.

I argue that in authoritarian contexts such as China, where political consumerism is often state-sponsored, participants tend to exhibit high levels of political trust. Rather than using political consumerism as a form of dissent, individuals actively engage in boycotts and buycotts to express their support for the government's political stance and to condemn actors perceived to have crossed political red lines. However, in cases of spontaneous or grassroots political consumerism, the relationship between political trust and participation may differ. Individuals may engage in political consumerism either to align with or to challenge state policies, depending on the political context and the perceived legitimacy of the government's actions. This suggests that in authoritarian regimes, the link between political consumerism and political trust is not uniform but varies depending on the degree of state involvement in mobilising consumer action. Future research should further investigate the distinction between state-sponsored and spontaneous political consumerism in authoritarian regimes, as well as its implications for political participation.

7.2.4 Motivational framework on political consumerism

This study contributes to the political consumerism literature by developing and applying a four-part motivational framework that captures the drivers of both boycotts and buycotts in China. Existing literature investigating motivations of political consumerism has either failed to distinguish between boycotts and buycotts or has focused disproportionately on boycotts. Consequently, why individuals engage in buycotts remains underexplored. Drawing on two case studies, the 2019 NBA boycott and the 2021 Erke buycott, this thesis systematically investigates both forms of political consumerism in the Chinese context.

In the NBA boycott case, the most salient motivations were perceived costs, perceived egregiousness, perceived efficacy, animosity, and nationalism. In contrast, the Erke buycott case revealed the importance of product evaluation, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, patriotism, and perceived CSR. The findings demonstrate that while participants in the two cases had a different set of individual reasons, both forms can be effectively categorised using the four-part motivational framework: political, ethical, self-related, and economic considerations. This analytical consistency across divergent cases reinforces the conceptual applicability of the proposed four-part motivational model. It offers a novel framework for analysing political consumerism across different forms and contexts.

Importantly, this thesis does not reject the emphasis in existing scholarship on political and ethical motivations as the essence of political consumerism. Rather, it builds on existing work by recognising their significance while demonstrating that they constitute only part of a broader motivational mechanism. By incorporating economic and self-related considerations, it offers a more complex account of what drives political consumerism in China.

Furthermore, this thesis makes a novel empirical contribution by examining the motivations behind consumer buycott behaviour in China. Despite the growing popularity of Chinese buycotts in recent years, there remains a striking lack of empirical research into the motivations behind such activity. The Erke case demonstrates that buycott participation is shaped by both unique and overlapping motivations compared with boycotts. By applying the four-part model to buycott behaviour, this study fills a significant empirical and conceptual gap in the literature.

7.3 Limitations and future research

While this study contributes to the emerging literature on political consumerism in authoritarian contexts, several limitations should be acknowledged. These, in turn, can suggest avenues for future research. First, given resource constraints and the exploratory nature of this thesis, the quantitative analysis draws on secondary data from the most comprehensive and nationally representative source currently available – the seventh wave of the World Values Survey China dataset. While this dataset offers valuable insights into boycott participation, it also has several limitations. Notably, it does not differentiate between pro-government and anti-government boycotts, between domestic and foreign targets, or between ethically and non-

ethically motivated consumer actions. Presumably, the profiles of participants engaged in these different boycotts are likely to vary substantially. Future research should differentiate these categories and investigate them separately to provide a more nuanced understanding of political consumerism in China.

Additionally, although this study has investigated the relationship between boycott participation and several conventional participation forms in China, data limitations prevented a broader examination of other forms of political consumerism, such as buycotts. As a result, it remains unclear whether buycott participation acts as a substitute for, or a supplement to, conventional participation in China.

As mentioned before, recent years have witnessed a surge of political consumerism in China. Participants employ diverse methods, such as boycotts, buycotts, discursive political consumerism, and lifestyle political consumerism, to articulate their political and ethical concerns. The range of issues that trigger such activism has expanded beyond geopolitical conflicts to include domestic social and political matters such as gender equality, environmental protection, animal welfare, labour rights, and corporate social responsibility. Moreover, targets of political consumerism now span both domestic and foreign companies across a wide array of sectors, including retail, food and beverage, automotive, electronics, aviation, entertainment, clothing, technology, e-commerce, hospitality, and cosmetics. This diversity of tactics, areas, and targets highlights the complex nature of political consumerism in China.

Given its growing prominence, there is a pressing need to conduct nationally representative surveys that systematically investigate the characteristics, motivations, and dynamics of political consumerism in authoritarian contexts. Such surveys could include detailed questions on frequency of various forms of political consumerism, including boycotts, buycotts, discursive political consumerism, and lifestyle political consumerism. They should also capture citizens' engagement with conventional political participation, both contentious and institutionalised, across online and offline spaces. This would allow researchers to analyse the relationship between political consumerism and other participatory repertoire, contributing to debates on political participation under authoritarian rule.

Future surveys should also investigate how post-materialist values and broader political orientations influence political consumer behaviour. Additionally, they should incorporate

items that measure self-related considerations (such as susceptibility to normative influence and perceived efficacy), and economic considerations (such as product evaluation and perceived costs). Finally, researchers should examine how information sources and media usage shape citizens' engagement in political consumerism in China.

Second, given that nationalistic forms of political consumerism often, but not always, involve exclusive or discriminatory factors, interview participants may conceal certain motivations due to social desirability bias. As a result, their responses may not fully reflect their underlying reasons for engagement. To mitigate this risk, most interviews were conducted online via audio calls, ensuring full anonymity of participants. In addition, online observation data were collected to cross-validate the interview findings. Future research should continue to address this methodological challenge by employing a range of data collection techniques, including fieldwork, (online) participant observation, and laboratory-based experiments. These approaches may offer further insights into underlying motivations – particularly when participants partake in exclusionary or regressive forms of political consumerism.

Third, this study's interviews focused on individuals who participated in either the NBA boycott or the Erke buycott. However, future research would benefit from systematically investigating non-participants and individuals who actively oppose political consumerism. Such an approach would help identify both the barriers to participation and the motivations behind opposition. For instance, in the case of the NBA boycott, anti-boycotters may have chosen not to participate because they disagreed with the prevailing discourse surrounding the Daryl Morey incident. Some may have continued watching the NBA, or even increased their consumption of NBA-related products to express dissent. Exploring such behaviour would deepen our understanding of political consumerism in an authoritarian context and offer insights into how political participation manifests through resistance as well as compliance.

Fourth, due to methodological limitations, the survey data did not fully reveal how women in China engage in political consumerism, leaving this as an important avenue for future research. This gap is particularly significant given the emergence of high-profile, women-led boycotts in recent years, targeting sexism across industries ranging from clothing and cosmetics to automotive and gaming. These campaigns have held both domestic and foreign brands accountable for gender-based discrimination and have promoted greater public awareness of

gender issues. Notably, slogans like *"My money is my vote (钞票就是选票)"* have gained traction among female consumers, signalling how political consumerism is increasingly used as a form of expression and resistance within an authoritarian context. Women, historically underrepresented in institutional politics, are emerging as vocal and influential political consumers. How do Chinese women respond to online boycott calls against sexist advertising? How do they evaluate the effectiveness of consumer boycotts? To what extent do these campaigns influence corporate branding strategies and reshape gender discourse in China's public sphere? How do women navigate boundaries between market-based activism and conventional political participation under authoritarian constraints? These questions point to a critical area for future research that bridges gender studies, political consumerism, and authoritarian politics.

Fifth, the difficulty of recruiting female participants in the NBA boycott case suggests a potential gendered division in political consumerism, particularly in boycotts. It is possible that women are less likely to engage in direct boycott actions than in buycotts, or may participate through discursive practices such as online commentary rather than behavioural refusal. This highlights the need for comparative research on how gender influences participation across different forms of political consumerism, including boycotts, buycotts, discursive engagement, and lifestyle activism, especially in male-dominated domains such as sports.

Finally, scholars often argue that post-materialist values, such as freedom of expression, quality of life, a better, unpolluted environment, gender equality, social trust, and social justice, are closely associated with political consumerism (Copeland, 2014b; Dalton 2008; Micheletti et al., 2004; Stolle et al., 2005). According to some studies, consumers with stronger post-materialist orientations are more likely to participate in political consumerism (Copeland, 2014b; Stolle et al., 2005). However, these empirical studies are primarily conducted in advanced industrial democracies, such as the U.S. or Scandinavian countries, where materialist values are comparatively less prevalent. For example, Copeland (2014b) reports that in the U.S., only 13% of adults can be classified as materialists.

China presents a markedly different picture. As shown in Table 1 (Chapter 1), the prevalence of post-materialism in China remains extremely low. This raises the question of whether post-materialist values meaningfully influence political consumerism in such contexts. Existing

studies tend to focus on environmentally or ethically motivated political consumption (Copeland, 2014a; Micheletti et al., 2004), while politically driven or regressive forms of political consumerism, such as nationalist political consumerism, remain largely understudied. Future research should explore this relationship further, particularly in non-democratic contexts.

7.4 Conclusion

The rise of political consumerism, especially in the form of nationalist consumption, in China has attracted widespread attention from the media, industry actors, academia, and the government. Most observers interpret China's political consumerism as a manifestation of consumer nationalism or economic statecraft (Callahan, 2006; Kwon, 2020; Lim and Ferguson, 2022; Wong et al., 2023). However, few studies have systematically examined this phenomenon from the perspective of individual political expression.[35] This study fills that gap through the micro-foundational account provided in Chapters 5 and 6. It has conceptualised political consumerism as a form of political participation. Despite living in an authoritarian regime where both contentious and institutionalised participation channels are highly constrained, Chinese individuals, especially under-represented groups, are increasingly using market-based tools such as boycotts and buycotts to exert political influence.

A key theoretical contribution of this study is the development and application of a four-part motivational framework that categorises political consumer motivation into political, ethical, self-related, and economic considerations. Based on two contrasting cases, the NBA boycott and the Erke buycott, the analysis demonstrates that, despite variation in specific motivational themes across cases, both forms of political consumerism can be analytically mapped into this common framework. This not only advances conceptual clarity in a field often dominated by Western-centric typologies but also underscores the complexity of political consumer behaviour and its embeddedness in China's authoritarian context. Consequently, both Western-centric accounts focused on post-materialist values and China-specific interpretations that reduce political consumerism to nationalist consumption are undermined.

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[35] There is a small emerging literature investigating the Hong Kong people's political consumerism practices, see (Chan, 2022; Wong et al., 2021).

Moreover, this thesis sheds light on the dual nature of political consumerism in authoritarian China. Given the state's extensive control over social organisations and media, political consumers in China often lack organisational support and an autonomous space for information exchange. As a result, their actions, particularly in cases not directly aligned with state interests, tend to be atomised and fragmented. Nonetheless, social media offers limited but significant space for individuals to engage in agenda-setting and mobilisation. In state-sponsored boycotts and buycotts, political consumerism becomes a tool for reinforcing state legitimacy; in spontaneous boycotts and buycotts, it may function as an outlet for expressing grievances or criticisms of the government. These hybrid dynamics reveal the interplay between top-down state mobilisation and bottom-up consumer activism.

While nationalist campaigns dominate the public visibility of political consumerism in China, this study shows that an expanding range of issues such as gender equality, animal welfare, labour justice, and environmental sustainability are increasingly shaped by consumption choices. Traditionally under-represented groups, such as women, lower-income earners, and individuals with less formal education, are becoming increasingly aware of their consumer power and are actively utilising market tools to express political or ethical values. This evolution suggests that, alongside the various distinctive features of Chinese political consumerism highlighted in this thesis, China's political consumerism also shares some key similarities with Western patterns of consumer activism. In this regard, political consumerism in China reveals a latent democratic potential that warrants further exploration.

Appendices

Appendix A. Boycott cases in China (2010 - 2024)

Date	Target	Country of Origin	Theme
2000	Zhang Huimei	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2003	Toyota	Japan	Nationalism
2004.6	Zhang Huimei, Master Kong	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2004	Nippon Paint	Japan	Nationalism
2004	Nike	US	Nationalism
2005	Japanese products	Japan	Nationalism
2005	McDonald's TV Commercial	US	Nationalism
2006-2007	Yang Chenglin	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2007	McDonald's	US	Cultural Protectionism
2008	Citroën	France	Perceived Prejudice
2008	Sharon Stone	US	Tibet Issue
2008	Carrefour	France	Tibet Issue
2008	Citroën	France	Tibet Issue
2008	Peugeot	France	Tibet Issue
2008	Coca-Cola	US	Tibet Issue
2008	Coca-Cola, Huiyuan	US, China	Economic Security
2010	Japanese products	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2011-2012	Chinese vegetable vendor	China	Social Justice
2012	Toyota	Japan	Territorial Disputes

2012	Canon	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Panasonic	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Honda	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Nippon Airway	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Aeon	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Uniqlo	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Ito Yokado	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Nissan	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Mazda	Japan	Territorial Disputes
2012	Zadig & Voltaire	France	Perceived Racism
2013	Desert Chang (Zhang Xuan)	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2014.3	Malaysia Airline	Malaysia	MH370 Incident
2014	Rock band Mayday	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2015.11	Lu Guangzhong	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2015	Philipp Plein	Germany	Perceived Racism
2016	Wang Xi	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2016	Chou Tzu-yu, JYP Entertainment	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2016	KFC	US	Territorial Disputes
2016	Apple	US	Territorial Disputes
2016	Nike	US	Territorial Disputes
2016	McDonald	US	Territorial Disputes
2016	Philippine	Philippines	Territorial Disputes
2016	Leon Dai, No Other Love, Zhao Wei	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2017	United Airlines	US	Perceived Prejudice

2017	Lotte	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	Samsung	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	KIA	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	Hyundai	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	LG	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	Tourist products	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017	Emart	Republic of Korea	National Security
2017.3	Spreadshirt	Germany	Perceived Racism
2017	APA	Japan	History Textbook Issue
2017	Audi	Germany	Territorial Issue
2017	Audi	Germany, China	Perceived Misogyny
2017	POLA	Japan	Perceived Racism
2018.1	Marriott Hotels	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Medtronic	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Christian Dior	France	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Hermes	France	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Cartier	France	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Armani	Italy	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	ZARA	Spain	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Huajiao App	China	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Delta Airlines	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	ŠKODA	Czechia	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	Mercedes Benz	Germany	Tibet Issue
2018	Balenciaga	France	Perceived Racism

2018	GAP	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2018	85 Degrees Celsius Bakery	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2018	Taiwan Golden Horse Award	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2018	Dolce & Gabbana	Italy	Perceived Racism
2018	Lil Pump	US	Perceived Racism
2018	Apple	US	US-China Trade War
2018	Canada Goose	Canada	US-China Trade War
2019	Devotion (还愿)	Taiwan (China)	Alleged Assulting Chinese Leader
2019	Heytea	China	Perceived Sexism
2019	McDonald	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	UBS	Switzerland	Nationalism
2019	Pocari Sweat	Japan	Hong Kong Issue
2019	Yifang Taiwan Fruit Tea	Taiwan (China)	Hong Kong Issue
2019	Coco	Taiwan (China)	Hong Kong Issue
2019	Versace	Italy	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Swarovski	Austria	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Coach	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Givenchy	France	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Asics	Japan	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Calvin Klein	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Samsung	Republic of Korea	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Valentino	Italy	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Fresh	US	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2019	Taipan	Hong Kong (China)	Hong Kong Issue

2019	Christian Dior	France	Taiwan Issue
2019.10	Apple	US	Hong Kong Issue
2019.10	NBA, Daryl Morey	US	Hong Kong Issue
2019.12	Arsenal, Ozil	UK	Xinjiang Issue
2020.4	Thai products	Thailand	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2020	Australian products	Australian	China-Australia relations
2021.1	Purcotton	China	Perceived Misogyny
2020	TY Lawson	US	Perceived Racism & Sexism
2020	Black Myth Wukong	China	Perceived Sexism
2021	Purcotton	China	Perceived Sexism
2021	Chayan Yuese	China	Perceived Sexism
2021	Li Dan, Ubras	China	Perceived Sexism
2021.3	Ting Zhao, Nomadland	US, China	Nationalism
2021	BCI	International	Xinjiang Issue
2021.3	H&M	Sweden	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Nike	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Adidas	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Uniqlo	Japan	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Lacoste	France	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Tommy Hilfiger	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	New Balance	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Ralph Lauren	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Asics	Japan	Xinjiang Issue
2021	PUMA	Germany	Xinjiang Issue

2021	IKEA	Sweden	Xinjiang Issue
2021	LEGO	Denmark	Xinjiang Issue
2021	GU	Japan	Xinjiang Issue
2021	MUJI	Japan	Xinjiang Issue
2021	The North Face	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Hugo Boss	Germany	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Calvin Klein	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Converse	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Under Armour	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Burberry	UK	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Decathlon	France	Xinjiang Issue
2021	GAP	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021.7	Sony	Japan	Historical Disputes
2021.7	Vitasoy	Hong Kong (China)	Hong Kong Issue
2021	Gigabyte	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2021.11	Chen Man, Christian Dior	US, China	Nationalism
2021	Xu Xidi	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2021	Jolin Tsai	Taiwan (China)	Taiwan Issue
2021.11	Canada Goose	Sweden	Perceived Racism
2021	Sam's Club	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Walmart	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	Intel	US	Xinjiang Issue
2021	YH.Tea	China	Perceived Sexism
2021	Three Squirrels	China	Perceived Prejudice

2022	Korean products	Republic of Korea	Nationalism
2022	Liu Zaishi	Republic of Korea	Nationalism
2022	Starbucks	US	Nationalism
2022.3	Orion Choco Pie	Republic of Korea	Nationalism
2022.3	Apple	US	Nationalism
2022.3	Ladycare	China	Perceived Sexism
2022.4	Ulike	China	Perceived Sexism
2022.4	Henan Qinyang Zoo	China	Animal Rights
2022.7	Dior	France	Culture Appropriation
2022	Zhang Xiaoquan	China	Consumer Rights, National Pride
2022.9	Haitian Soy source	China	Food Security
2022.10	Home coming	China	Discontent Over Covid Policies
2023.3	Maia Active	China	Perceived Sexism
2023.3	Hao Huan Luo	China	Perceived Sexism
2023.4	BMW Mini	Germany	Perceived Discrimination
2023.5	Cathay Pacific Airways	Hong Kong	Perceived Discrimination
2023.6	Japanese products	Japan	Environmental Issues
2023.7	BVLGARI	Italy	China's Sovereignty and Integrity
2023.9	Li Jiaqi, Hua Xi Zi	China	Social Inequality
2024.3	Nongfu Spring	China	Nationalism
2024.5	Blue Moon	China	Perceived Sexism
2024.5	Xiangpiaopiao Milk Tea	China	Nationalism
2024.6	Real Madrid	Spain	Perceived Sexism
2024.6	Goodme	China	Perceived Sexism

2024.6	Heytea	China	Perceived Sexism
2024.7	Jinlongyu Oil	Singapore	Food Security, Nationalism
2024.8	Evergreen International Hotels	Taiwan	Nationalism
2024.9	Black Myth Wukong	China	Perceived Sexism
2024.9	Luckin Coffee	China	Gender Issues
2024.9	Flortte	China	Perceived Sexism
2024.9	HYNTOOR	China	Perceived Sexism
2024.19	JD.com	China	Gender Issues
2024.10	Yang Li	China	Gender Issues
2024.11	Fenghua	China	Gender Issues
2024.11	ABC	China	Women's right
2024.11	Uniqlo	Japan	Xinjiang Issue

Appendix B. Buycott cases in China (2013 – 2024)

Date	Target	Country of Origin	Theme
2013	Exception	China	First Lady Effect, cultural confidence
2013	Pechoin	China	First Lady Effect, cultural confidence
2018	Li-Ning	China	Patriotism
2018	Huawei	China	US-China Trade War
2019	Luckin Coffee	China	Hong Kong Protest
2019	Master Kong's Ice Tea	China	Hong Kong Protest
2019	Maxim's	China (Hong Kong)	Hong Kong Protest
2020	Home Original Chicken	China	Labour Rights
2020	Luckin Coffee	China	Nationalism
2020	Blue Moon	China	CSR
2021	Li-Ning	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Anta	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Pike	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	FILA	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	PurCotton	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Xtep	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	361 Degree	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Semir	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Metersbonwe	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Erke	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Nanjiren	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Hailan Zhijia	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	UNIFREE	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	GXG	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Grace	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy

2021	Ubras	China	Xinjiang Cotton Controversy
2021	Erke	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Mi Xue Bing Cheng	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Anta	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Nanjiren	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Gui Ren Niao	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Hui Yuan	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Erke	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Xiao Mi	China	Natural Disaster
2021	Pangdonglai	China	Natural Disaster
2022	Daliyuan	China	Consumer Rights
2022	Baixiang Noodles	China	CSR
2022	Paris Baguette	South Korea	Shanghai Lockdown
2022	Made with Bravery	China	Russia-Ukraine War
2023	Pangdonglai	China	Labour Rights
2023	Zhong Tu Wang (bookschina.com)	China	Natural Disaster
2023	Baixiang	China	Natural Disaster
2023	Shanghai Soap	China	Social inequality, CSR
2023	Fenghua Shampoo	China	Social inequality, Nostalgia
2024	Xiangpiaopiao	China	Sino-Japanese Relations

Appendix C. The joint decision of Pingjiang County's cultural and tourism industry to support ethnic brands.

平江县文化旅游广电体育局

平江县文旅行业关于支持民族品牌的共同

决　　定

平江是革命老区，在民族复兴的道路上平江人义不容辞。为支持民族品牌、支持中国制造，经我县文旅广体局倡导，全县文旅行业一致同意，自即日起至 2021 年 7 月 31 日，凡是符合以下条件的游客：

1、穿戴"鸿星尔克"和"贵人鸟"品牌衣服、裤子、鞋子、袜子、帽子、护腕、头带的；

2、吃白象方便面或喝汇源果汁的；

均享受以下优惠：

景区名称	优惠措施
平江石牛寨（4A）	免大门票、高空玻璃桥、网红佛手、悬崖玻璃栈道
天岳幕阜山（4A）	免大门票和上山索道
长寿秘境（3A）	免大门票
仙姑崖-红军营（3A）	免大门票
北罗霄芦头境谷（3A）	免大门票，额外延期至 9 月 30 日
杜甫墓祠（省保单位）	免大门票
连云山大峡谷漂流（3A）	漂流票买一赠一

另外：至 2021 年 12 月 31 日前，全县所有星级酒店：钦天大酒店、阳光大酒店、荣和大酒店、神帆大酒店、将星大酒店、星天酒店、莫林酒店、麓尚酒店、景尚酒店、南江镇福隆酒店、长寿镇心悦国际大酒店、长寿宾馆住宿全部八折

刚从疫情中喘口气的我们，在旅游旺季做这个决定确实有点疯了，千丢万丢，但老区的革命优良传统不能丢。这次平江文旅人把最硬的鳞都拿出来了，愿国货们从此鹏程万里，闪耀星河！

加油，国货！加油，中国制造！

平江县文化旅游广电体育局
2021 年 7 月 26 日

Appendix D. Erke buycott participants profile.

Participant	Age	Gender	Specific actions	Have buycotted Erke products	Participated in online discursive political consumerism	Other buycott of national products	Occupation
Li Hui	30	Male	Bought a pair of shoes.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Factory worker
Gao Shuang	25	Male	Online discursive political consumerism. No consumption need.	No	Yes	No	Not specified
Wu Kai	26	Male	Purchased but did not receive the product.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Private company employee
Lu Shu	29	Male	Bought a pair of shoes but then had to refund.	Yes	No	Yes	State-owned enterprise employee
Wang Ping	29	Female	Bought 3 pair of shoes for her father.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Private company employee
Chu Tian	26	Female	Onlinediscursive political consumerism. Failed to purchase favourable Erke products.	No	Yes	Yes	State-owned bank employee
Cao Linxi	28	Female	Bought a pair of shoes.	Yes	Yes	No	Private company employee
Duan Peng	28	Male	Bought two pairs of shoes, t-shirts, and trousers.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Private company employee
Jin Fu	31	Male	Bought a pair of shoes.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Private company employee
Hua Chenglu	30	Female	Bought one t-shirt and one jacket for her husband, one pair of shoes for her, and one pair of shoes for her friend.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Not specified
Kong Yu	28	Female	Onlinediscursive political consumerism. Failed to purchase favourable Erke products.	No	Yes	Yes	Small business owner
Zhou Xiaoli	29	Female	Bought a pair of shoes.	Yes	Yes	No	Small business owner
Mu Rong	20	Female	Onlinediscursive political consumerism. Intend to buy several months after the incident.	No	Yes	Yes	University student

Appendix E. Erke Buycott Participants Motivations Profile

	Li Hui	Gao Shuang	Wu Kai	Lu Shu	Wang Ping	Chu Tian	Cao Linxi	Duan Peng	Jin Fu	Hua Chenlu	Kong Yu	Zhou Xiaoli	Mu Rong	Average
Patriotism (N)	5	2	6	2	2	7	6	8	6	5	0	2	0	
(Percentage)	29%	6%	21%	9%	6%	23%	18%	17%	18%	15%	0%	7%	0%	13%
Animosity	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	
(Percentage)	0%	9%	0%	5%	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	9%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Altruism	0	1	3	0	5	3	3	4	1	1	2	0	1	
(Percentage)	0%	3%	10%	0%	15%	10%	9%	8%	3%	3%	11%	0%	4%	6%
Perceived CSR	5	11	0	0	7	2	6	4	4	4	1	0	4	
(Percentage)	29%	32%	0%	0%	21%	7%	18%	8%	12%	12%	5%	0%	15%	12%
Perceived efficacy	1	2	1	0	0	2	2	4	0	1	2	1	4	
(Percentage)	6%	6%	3%	0%	0%	7%	6%	8%	0%	3%	11%	4%	15%	5%
Self-enhancement	1	4	0	0	4	3	0	3	0	0	0	3	2	
(Percentage)	6%	12%	0%	0%	12%	10%	0%	6%	0%	0%	0%	11%	8%	5%
Susceptibility to interpersonal influence	2	1	5	7	5	7	5	2	6	2	3	16	4	
(Percentage)	12%	3%	17%	32%	15%	23%	15%	4%	18%	6%	16%	59%	15%	18%
Consumer demand	0	2	2	3	1	4	3	8	2	4	0	0	2	
(Percentage)	0%	6%	7%	14%	3%	13%	9%	17%	6%	12%	0%	0%	8%	7%
PE: design	2	1	5	0	3	0	1	4	4	1	4	1	6	
(Percentage)	12%	3%	17%	0%	9%	0%	3%	8%	12%	3%	21%	4%	23%	9%
PE: price	1	2	5	5	2	1	2	6	5	3	4	4	2	
(Percentage)	6%	6%	17%	23%	6%	3%	6%	13%	15%	9%	21%	15%	8%	11%
PE: quality	0	5	2	4	3	1	5	5	5	9	3	0	1	
(Percentage)	0%	15%	7%	18%	9%	3%	15%	10%	15%	27%	16%	0%	4%	11%

Appendix F. NBA boycott participants Profile.

Participant	Age	Gender	Occupation	Specific actions	Have boycotted NBA	Participated in discursive boycott	Other boycott of foreign products	Buycott national products
Bai Yang	33	Male	Not specified	Boycotted Morey and Adam Silver. Boycotted NBA peripherals	YES	Yes, posted Weibo criticising Daryl Morey.		Yes. Buycott LiNing, Anta, etc.
Ning Yixin	37	Male	SOE employee	Stopped watching NBA games after the CCTV's ban. Boycott Morey and his team.	YES	YES.	Boycott foreign sports shoes.	Yes. Buycott LiNing Anta and Pike.
Zheng Kang	29	Male	Media engineer	Stopped watching NBA games.	YES		Boycotted Lotte, Orion Pies, Vita Lemon Tea.	
Du Yiran	20	Male	University student	Stopped watching NBA games after the CCTV's ban. Buy less American products.	YES	NO	Boycotted Nike, Under armour, Adidas, etc.	
Lin Chong	21	Male	University student	Stopped watching NBA games for a while. Boycotted iPhone and buycotted domestic brands.	YES	NO	Boycott iPhone, boycott Adidas/Nike, Boycott Korean pop stars.	
Meng Yu	27	Male	Civil servant	Boycotted Morey and his team. Boycotted Harden and Huston Rocket. Stopped buying VIP membership to watch their games. Buy less NBA peripherals.	YES		Boycotted Korean products (cookies). Boycotted NIKE and Adidas.	
Ren Peng	22	Male	University student	Stopped watching NBA games after the CCTV's ban. Stopped buying NBA peripherals.	YES	YES. Engaged in online discussion in Hupu.com.	Boycotted Korean idols. Boycott iPhone. Boycott Uniqlo	
Wen Lin	21	Male	University student	NO	NO	NO	Boycotted Dolce & Gabbana	
Wang Tianyu	20	Male	University student	Stopped watching NBA games after the CCTV's ban.	YES	NO	NO	
Zhang Hong	20	Male	University student	Stopped watching NBA games after the CCTV's ban. Stopped watching games by Morey's team.	YES	NO	Boycotted H&M.	
Qian Xiao	26	Male	Pharmaceutical industry employee	Stop paying attention to NBA.	Never watched NBA before	YES	Boycotted Running Man for listing Taiwan as an independent country.	
Xia Yipeng	29	Male	Media professional	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
Dai Kun	28	Male	Media professional	NO	NO	NO	NO	
Feng Yuan	27	Male	Not specified	Stopped watching NBA games after CCTV's ban.	YES	YES	Boycotted NIKE.	
Cui Liang	30	Male	Media professional	Stopped watching NBA games after CCTV's ban.	YES	YES	No	

Appendix G. NBA Boycott Participants Motivations Profile

	Bai Yang	Ning Yixin	Zheng Kang	Du Yiran	Li Chong	Meng Yu	Ren Peng	Wang Tianyu	Zhang Hong	Qian Xiao	Feng Yu	Cui Liang	Average
Animosity (N)	0	7	3	3	8	4	4	0	0	3	2	2	36
(Percentage)	0%	37%	10%	7%	24%	16%	10%	0%	0%	7%	7%	10%	11%
Patriotism	0	0	0	4	0	2	1	0	0	5	5	0	17
(Percentage)	0%	0%	0%	10%	0%	8%	3%	0%	0%	11%	17%	0%	4%
Nationalism	0	2	2	2	6	4	7	0	3	4	0	3	33
(Percentage)	0%	11%	7%	5%	18%	16%	18%	0%	13%	9%	0%	14%	9%
Political trust	3	3	4	6	0	1	2	2	2	0	0	0	23
(Percentage)	23%	16%	14%	15%	0%	4%	5%	9%	9%	0%	0%	0%	8%
PC:Availability to substitutes	0	1	1	2	2	1	3	3	1	1	4	0	19
(Percentage)	0%	5%	3%	5%	6%	4%	8%	13%	4%	2%	13%	0%	5%
PC: Preferences on the boycotted products	2	2	9	10	2	2	5	3	3	2	11	2	53
(Percentage)	15%	11%	31%	24%	6%	8%	13%	13%	13%	4%	37%	10%	15%
PC: Time	2	0	2	2	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	10
(Percentage)	15%	0%	7%	5%	0%	4%	5%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Perceived efficacy	3	1	2	2	5	5	6	5	8	5	2	4	48
(Percentage)	23%	5%	7%	5%	15%	20%	15%	22%	35%	11%	7%	19%	15%
Self-enhancement	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	6
(Percentage)	8%	0%	3%	0%	3%	4%	3%	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	2%
SII	1	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	7
(Percentage)	8%	5%	7%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	2%
Perceived egregiousness	1	2	3	9	10	4	8	5	6	23	5	10	86
(Percentage)	8%	11%	10%	22%	29%	16%	21%	22%	26%	51%	17%	48%	23%

Appendix H. May Ninth Facial Cleaning Tooth Powder (五九牌擦面牙粉).

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