

# **Limited McDonaldization as a Success Recipe: An Ethnographic Study of Yili Driving School in Jinan, China**

**Ping Shu**  
**Shandong University**

*Current corporate culture studies mainly emphasize the management and motivation of employees within an enterprise, while little consideration is taken of the interaction between the enterprise, employees and customers. Based on an ethnographic study of Yili Driving School in Jinan, this article explores the success recipe of service-oriented enterprises. It argues that the success of the driving school can be attributed to its corporate culture of limited McDonaldization, consisting of two contradictory but coexisting models, i.e. a rationalized and standardized management model and a relational and emotional work model, in which corporate management, employees and consumers are all involved. So far as the driving school is concerned, the school administrators, coaches and students selectively use cultural resources to adopt different action strategies which enable the participants of the corporate culture to achieve a win-win situation. This study highlights not only the McDonaldized management of the enterprise, but also the mechanism of emotional cultivation between the driving school, instructors and trainees. The result of this study is hoped to contribute to research on corporate culture and enterprise anthropology by breaking with the previous approaches from within the company.*

*Keywords: corporate culture, limited McDonaldization, standardization, emotion, Chinese service-oriented enterprise*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Private cars have become one of the primary consumer goods in Chinese families in recent years. The car ownership per 100 households was 16.9, 19.2, 22.7, 27.7 and 29.7 respectively from 2013 to 2017, with an ever-increasing trend year by year.<sup>1</sup> Driver training has constituted an integral system of modern society along with the accelerating motorization (Bonham 2006: 26). Most driving learners would prefer training in driving schools in China even though the government has approved self-taught training and direct testing.<sup>2</sup> Driving schools thus remain as the main path for people to get driving licenses. Customer satisfaction should be the cornerstone of the development of driving school as a service-oriented enterprise. However, the reality of driving schools seems different: people have almost always given a negative evaluation on driving schools and their instructors,<sup>3</sup> while, paradoxically, the business of driving schools is on the rise. It seems that the social reputation of driving schools is quite a mismatch with the economic benefits they gain. How should we then understand the success of driving schools in such a context?

Companies have presented the characteristics of rational calculation, obedience to authority, and dehumanization as China entered the era of industry and commerce (Tian, Zhou and Ma 2018:163-164). This may, to certain extent, apply to driving schools as modern enterprises. Driver training is a fee-based

service on the one hand, in which learners are consumers who pay for the services such as the information related to driving tests and driving skills training offered by driving schools. And, on the other hand, driving schools can be regarded as what Bourdieu calls a field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 96). In this field, the national driving testing standards regulate the site design of driving schools, training programs, and the examination procedures. In this sense, state power is embodied in both driving schools' management and students' learning. In addition, the management, instructors, and students have formed different social relations, which not only reflect a hierarchical structure in enterprise administration but also the win-win cooperation among actors. Therefore, it is useful to analyze the success of driving schools from the perspective of the actions of individuals and groups and their relationships, rather than solely the supply and demand market. Culture, as Swidler (1986) argues, provides resources from which individuals and groups construct strategies of action.

The success of the service-oriented enterprises like driving schools is attributed to what I call "limited McDonaldization", namely a corporate culture embracing both routinized and rational management, and emotional and relational operation, in which corporate management, employees and consumers are all involved. Limited McDonaldization enables the participants of the corporate culture to achieve a win-win situation. As a training institution, a driving school is subject to formal and official policies and conventions, so it must take a standard and rational approach to train students. Moreover, it must encourage diversification and emotional labor to meet customer satisfaction in order to make better benefits.

In what follows, I will provide a brief overview of the literature on McDonaldization and corporate culture and then, present an in-depth examination of Yili Driving School in Jinan city based on 16-months ethnographic study, followed by a discussion of limited McDonaldization. Finally, I will conclude with the success recipe for service-oriented enterprises.

## **MCDONALDIZATION OF THE CORPORATE**

McDonaldization, a concept put forward by George Ritzer (1993), refers to a rationalized production-to-consumption operation model that became prevalent in the late 20th century. Ritzer attributes the rapid expansion of McDonald's chain stores around the globe to its rational operation in respect of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. Efficiency means that McDonald's offers an efficient method to satisfy consumers' needs; calculability stresses the quantitative aspects of products sold and services offered; predictability emphasizes that McDonald's provides the same products and services over time and in all locales; control means that McDonald's controls employees as well as customers by nonhuman technology. In Ritzer's view, McDonaldization weakens interpersonal communication. For instance, a typical dining at a McDonald's, described as "eating fast and leaving fast", renders the contact between workers and customers quite limited and uniform which generates a negative impact upon interpersonal relationship. In brief, McDonaldization has commercially succeeded around the globe and led to a system that features homogeneity, standardization and dehumanization.

Bryman (2004), however, suggests that in addition to McDonaldization, emotional labor is another key to the commercial success of McDonald's restaurants. Such emotional labor is reflected in two dimensions: first, counter clerks treat customers with smile and good manners. Instead of mechanically repeating a standard behavior, they entrain customers out of true feelings. Second, emotional labor enhances the loyalty of managers and workers and boosts the emotional appeal of corporate culture. Bryman underlines emotional labor as also a way to make the company differentiated from others for a service-oriented company. Regarding the impact of emotional labor on workers, scholars hold two viewpoints: one insists that emotional labor has a negative impact because it will separate the behavioral mode of workers from their true feelings, which in turn hurts them in spirit and weakens the sense of self (e.g., Hochschild 1983); the other argues that whether emotional labor can be performed without hurting the feelings of workers is somewhat related to the personal character of every worker and the type of the work proper (e.g., Leidner 1993), and affective workers can even get satisfied from it (e.g., Wouters 1989).

## **CORPORATE CULTURE**

Corporate culture is a complex evolutionary system (Sackmann 1997: 79). According to Hofstede (1990), factors that influence the evolution of a corporate culture contain values, rituals, heroes and symbols. From a horizontal perspective, corporate culture can be divided into CEO culture, engineer culture and operator culture (Shein 1996). Vertically, corporate culture can be separated into three levels. The bottom level is expressed as the workplace layout and staff behavior, the middle level refers to the employee vision and behavior influenced by their values, and the top level is the company vision and belief (Serrie 1986). With regards to employee behavior and roles, Grant McCracken (2009) points out that a company should have a chief cultural officer (CCO), who plays an important role in optimizing products and creating efficiencies, to actively address the changing culture. Kotter (1992) believes that everyone serves a specific role in the company and that their role positioning conveys status information connected with that role in the company's social hierarchical structure. In the view of Nakamaki (2001), it is important to examine the ethnography of the company as a collective or communal organization and the "common people" of wage earners.

Chinese scholars have mainly explored corporate culture in terms of its dimensions, components and evolution process in a theoretical and discursive way (Xin and Xu 2004; Wang and Liu 2013; Wang 2015). In recent years, the literature exploring corporate culture from the perspective of business anthropology has increased. For example, Lou and Chen (2018) combine both qualitative and quantitative approaches to study state-owned service-based enterprises and suggest that enterprises need to regulate employee behavior, enhance the popularity of corporate culture, and deepen employees' understanding and acceptance of the corporate business strategies and philosophies. Taking private businesses as case studies, Liu and Hao (2021) argue that brand management represents an interactive bridge between corporate culture and consumer culture, and that the cohesiveness of corporate culture can enhance employees' loyalty and sense of responsibility to the company. Regarding the brand management, Tian (2018) contends that personal life histories, health conditions, and religious beliefs of the entrepreneurs have a direct and profound impact on the brand positioning of private eateries which focuses on the quality of the product rather than brand image and consumer experience. Some scholars point out that traditional Chinese culture such as Confucianism and family-oriented culture, emphasizing on responsibility, collectivism, relations, and a solid attitude toward work, is regarded as a core component of corporate culture in especially Chinese family-controlled enterprises (Cao 2008; Wang 2010; Zhang 2019).

The above research shows that scholars have emphasized the important role of anthropology in studying corporate culture. Some focus on top-down analysis of the cultural characteristics within an enterprise, while others on bottom-up analysis of the role of individual managers or employees in the company. Although all of them provide useful references, they do not reveal to a convincing recipe for the success of driving schools, for example, because these studies mainly emphasize on the management and motivation of employees within the enterprise, while driving schools are service-oriented enterprises and thus the formulation of their corporate culture also needs to take into account the interaction between driving schools and customers; in other words, how people outside the enterprise are involved in the corporate culture and contribute to the well-run of the company needs to be considered. In using an ethnographic approach, this study highlights not only the McDonaldization management of driving schools for instructors and students, but also the mechanism of emotional cultivation between driving schools, instructors, and students. By doing so, the study is of more use to go beyond the research of exploring corporate culture from within the company, thus enriching the existing literature on corporate management and corporate anthropology.

## **RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS**

Jinan, in eastern China, is the capital city of Shandong province, whose GDP ranked the third in the country (National Bureau of Statistics 2023). In recent years, the number of driving schools in Jinan has increased rapidly. For example, there were 50 in 2012 and 60 in 2016, an increase of 20 percent over four years. Yili Driving School, object of my research, began its business and underwent rapid development

during this period. At the end of 2012, the construction project of this private enterprise kicked off. It opened for business in early 2014. Yili Driving School has two campuses, over 40 coaches and 60 coach cars. Concerning the data of Jinan Vehicle Administration, Yili Driving School has maintained a good record, the third highest pass rate in Jinan since it started.

In February 2017, I registered as a driving learner in Yili Driving School. After experiencing two rounds of driving test, I was granted a driving license in June 2018. The survey was conducted in Daqiao, the larger learning ground run by Yili Driving School, with a covered area of about 33,000 square meters. In the process of learning to drive, I personally felt how my body actions were disciplined, the differences in teaching styles between instructors, and the “brotherlike” emotion among students. I conducted in-depth interviews with the general manager of the school, my coaches, and fellow learners. I also observed how other coaches taught students, how they communicated with learners and had random interviews with them in between learning to understand the operation of the driving school, the working philosophy of coaches, and the students’ feelings towards their coaches and the driving training. The gathering and sorting of these first-hand data provide the basic source for writing this article.

## **MCDONALDIZATION AND DE-MCDONALDIZATION OF YILI DRIVING SCHOOL**

### **McDonaldization of Yili**

Family car drivers usually take tests to obtain C1 or C2 driving license in China which are granted by a local Vehicle Administration affiliated with the Public Security Bureau.<sup>4</sup> The driving schools offer students a series of training programs designed in line with the requirement of the tests. The process of the driving test is roughly as follows: students, after registering in the driving school, will be arranged to a designated medical examination for physical checkup and enter his or her personal information in the Vehicle Administration computer system by the driving schools. Next, every student needs to pass a four-subject test. Subject One and Four contain theoretical items, which are based on students’ self-study from books. Subject two is in a fixed site without interference from other cars, testing the driver’s basic skills, including backing into a garage, side parking, parking, and starting on ramp, right angle turn, and S-curve driving. Subject Three is to examine whether the driver can drive on a road with social vehicles driving normally. Subject Two and Three are the main content of training. To ensure a high pass rate, Yili Driving School requests its students to take practice tests for each subject. Those who score above 90 in Subject One and Two and get approved by their instructors can make an appointment for the official test.

In Yili Driving School, the personnel management and the driving training can be characterized with what Ritzer (1993) calls “efficiency, calculability, predictability and control”. First, the pursuit of efficiency provides an important way for driving schools to earn profits, so coaches are expected to try their best to help students pass the driving test in the shortest possible time. For the sake of higher efficiency, Yili Driving School divides the instructors into two groups: one comprises experienced coaches and each of them can complete training students for Subject Two and Three. The other consists of coaches only specializing in teaching driving skills for Subject Two or Three and these two types of coaches are paired together to student training. Such a grouping strategy is tailored for Subject Two and Three exams to improve the training efficiency and keep a high pass rate of the driving test.

Secondly, the calculability of driving schools is reflected in two aspects: first, a quantified assessment of every coach in respect of attendance. Under the regulations of Yili, working hours per day for coaches are from 8:00 am to 11:30 am and 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm. Coaches are required to punch the clock in and out of work and have lunch with signing the signature book in the school’s cafeteria. The driving school pays for the lunch according to the list in the signature book, which can be deemed as an indirect way of monitoring whether a coach is on duty or not. Second, the driving school evaluates the performance of every coach from four aspects every three months. These include the number of students an instructor is teaching, the pass rate of the students in Subject Two and Three respectively, and the overall pass rate on a quarterly basis. The school posts the assessed results in the WeChat Group of coaches every time. The coaches with top three overall pass rates are awarded as five-star coaches and their names and pictures will appear on the bulletin board at the entrance of the driving school.

Thirdly, the training process of the driving school is routinized and thus predictable. Routinized training refers to the five fixed procedures that students must go through in turn: physical checkup, Subject One, Two, Three and Four exams. My coach informants hold a similar viewpoint that a good instructor can predict the progress of a student and even the pass rate by considering the characteristics of the student, so the student usually takes the subject exams only after consulting with the coach. The students, on the other hand, due to the coaches having a fixed plan of training, can also predict their learning program, and thus make a personal schedule such as taking leave from work in advance.

Lastly, every step, from physical checkup to being granted a driving license, is monitored by electronic means. If there is a power outage or computer failure, all work will stop. For students, electronic devices such as computers and cellphones are used throughout the whole process of learning to drive and sitting for tests. Students need sign up on the “Traffic Control 123” app platform on their own or via the driving school to book an official driving test. However, each test has a limited number of participants, so it does not mean any student who has signed up successfully can attend the test but must wait for the computer to sort things out according to the predefined rules. The computer system usually automatically notifies the applicants in the form of a text message one week before the test.

### **De-McDonaldization of Yili**

During my fieldwork, I found an interesting phenomenon, i.e. the corporate culture of Yili also features what I call “de-McDonaldization”, the opposite side of McDonaldization, embedded in the daily practice of the driving school management, instructors, and students. De-McDonaldization here refers to the relational and humane management and training in the driving school, mainly manifested in two aspects: one is the construction of various types of relationships; the other is the emotional labor of the instructors.

#### *Constructing Relationships in Yili*

Various types of relationships have been intentionally established and maintained within Yili, of which is that between the driving school, coaches and students. The driving school tries hard to foster in their coaches’ feelings for and recognition of the company to which a school belongs. On the one hand, there exists a clear hierarchical structure in the driving school administration. Coaches address the administrators, such as president, general manager, and director, as leaders. Coaches are bounded by regulations. For example, Yili convenes regular meetings that all coaches are required to be present.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Yili intends to provide coaches with humane benefits to create a harmonious atmosphere. For instance, the company usually sends a cake to a coach on his or her birthday; it also organizes a group trip for coaches (with their family members) on a weekend every year; the coach can drive training cars to and from work and get a refund of a certain amount for the gasoline fee from the company.

The driving school divides their instructors into different squads to strengthen the responsibility and mutual assistance between the members of a squad. Each squad is composed of one team leader and six to eight members. The leader takes care of the driving test pass rate of the whole team, deploys the team’s coach vehicles, and handles the problems encountered by the team members. Generally, a new coach will follow the squad leader to learn how to train students. For instance, a new coach learns how the leader gets along with students and instructs them on driving maneuvers and skills. The leader and the new coach thus form a mentor-apprentice relationship. Coaches as team members will take turns inviting others to eat and drink at intervals, which provide an opportunity to enhance their solidarity.

The coach forms a temporary teacher-apprentice relationship with a student in the training ground. The instructor teaches students basic driving knowledge and skills, such as recognizing the main parts of the car, starting the car, and coordinating head, hand, eye, and foot movements in driving the car, through words and action demonstrations. A coach once told me:

“No matter what kind of work the students are doing, I treat them all equally. Some learn quickly, some learn slowly, it does not matter, but they must learn well enough to pass the test. The slow learner will practice more, and I will accompany with him/her.”

In the process of learning to drive, if the students' actions are not done properly, they are often scolded by the coach, which is pronounced *ai xiong* in the local dialect by students. Some students therefore might be afraid of the coach.

"I am nervous about getting on the car, and I am afraid of *ai xiong*."  
Some students, however, favor this approach of the coach,

"I am afraid of being scolded by the coach, but he can point out my problems. It's better for the coach to be strict with the students."

The students form a community of interest to help each other in learning to drive. There are usually five to eight students practicing driving together for the test of Subject Two or Three simultaneously under the guidance of the same instructor, and they make appointments to take the tests together as well. After the successful appointments for the official tests, the coach will take students to the test site for a practical or simulated test. The test site belongs to Jinan Vehicle Administration and is used for testing during the day and is rented out to candidates who need practice training at night at an hourly rate. The students usually actively participate in the simulation training to improve their chances of passing the test. They discuss together the total length of the rented venue and then make online reservations to share the cost equally. Additionally, because all test sites are fixed in the suburbs of Jinan, it is common for students to stay overnight near the test sites on the day of the practical test and share the cost of the meals and accommodation. They often add each other's WeChat identity and then create a WeChat group to transfer money and share information between them, by which they will also be able to keep in touch after obtaining driving licenses.

#### *Emotional Labor: A Case Study of Coach L*

Coach L joined Yili in May 2014 and started to receive training for Subject Two with Mrs. Yang, a master appointed by the driving school. He has been awarded the title of a "five-star coach" continuously from the beginning of the quarter in July of that year. He trains students in a quick and efficient manner, which in turn confers him a good reputation in the school and among students. L is my coach. Before signing up for driving training, I searched on the internet and found that Yili Driving School being ranked the first place in Jinan and L enjoying a good reputation online, so I called the school and asked him to be my coach. After joining L's army of learners, I held an interview with 40 students of L, from whom I learned that there were few students "knocking on the door" like what I did. Most of them were either introduced by L's relatives and friends, such as an 18-year-old boy who is a relative of L's neighbor; or recommended by L's students who had already graduated. For instance, Xia, after learning, introduced more than ten relatives including her sister-in-law and cousin to follow L; and then Xiaoxiao, who works in an engraving machine company, introduced a dozen colleagues to L after finishing learning. The snowballing growth of Coach L's students is inseparable from his active emotional labor, as shown in the following two aspects.

First, the coach performs emotional labor at work. During the interview, L told me that a coach should maintain a good mindset; otherwise, he would be incompetent for this job.<sup>6</sup> The most obvious behavior of his emotional labor is entertaining himself and others during working hours. L often shares some funny stories about driving tests with students rather than deliberately makes a straight face or scolds them, as quite a few of coaches usually do. I was impressed by the "coach wearing flowers" photo. When the peonies were blooming in the driving school, he picked one and put it to his ear, which was photographed by the students and uploaded to L's students' WeChat group. However, L believes that he does not intentionally please students by doing this but entertains others as well as himself. Meanwhile, he admits that a coach should be also strict with the students when necessary.

“Otherwise (students) cannot remember the mistakes they made and cannot pass the test. There is a coach in our school, who has a good temper, but the pass rate of his students is not high, and that is useless.”

Coach L also defines the teaching relationship between himself and the students in terms of “teacher and apprentice” and takes individualized method in training practice. He said:

“When learning to drive, no matter what you do (your job), every student is equal in my eyes. Some people have a good feel for driving and learn fast, but some are not, and this is very normal. For those slow learners, I encourage them to practice more with no worry of consuming extra petrol, because practice makes perfect.”

For those with a poor driving feel, L offers them “special favor” for more practice during his commuting hours at no cost. His “devotion to work” is a non-mandatory emotional payout which has won the praise of the students. To express their gratitude, students will custom-make a banner and give it to Coach L, and take a group photo after the driving test, which has become a ritual like a “school commencement”.

Secondly, the coach maintains friendships with students out of working hours. L also interacts with the trainees during his off-hours. For instance, he usually drops off two to three students, who are close to his home when he goes to and from work, which is equivalent to free shuttle service. Students chat like friends in his car. I once heard a male student tell Coach L about a love-related problem and ask him for advice, which implies the close personal relationship between L and the student. The coach’s willingness to spend time to listen and give ideas is more than an emotional labor for the purpose of economic exchange. Coach L also chats with students online. He adds in the students he has ever taught or is currently teaching to a WeChat group called “6721 Big Family”, named after the license plate number of his coach car. This group consists of 496 members now. L hands out red envelopes (with cash inside) in this group during holidays, responds to questions about driving practices, and encourages students to seek help in the group. He also organizes and attends offline gatherings with students. He thinks that having a meal or a drink together after work is a similar behavior as friends usually do. The most recent and largest-scale gathering is the “New Year’s Party of L and His Students” held on the New Year’s Day of 2019, with 70 persons (all of them had been granted driving licenses) present. L believes “all students will be friends that can help each other.”

## **DISCUSSIONS: LIMITED MCDONALDIZATION AND STRATEGICAL ACTIONS**

The national examination standards play a fundamental role in regulating the behavior of the actors involved in a corporate culture. For example, the state has promulgated a series of regulations that govern the size of a driving school’s site, instructor qualifications, training hours, training content, and the type and number of vehicles used for training. The driving school thus constructs its campus(es) and develops its training programs based on the national regulations. In addition to this, the state regulates the testing behavior of students, who are required to follow a computer program to register the test and get a driver’s license issued by the state. Under the state regulation of the behavior of driving schools and students, three types of controllability are generated: control of driving schools by the Vehicle Administration, control of coaches by Vehicle Administration and driving schools, and control of students by coaches. The meanings of control mainly embrace electronic technology (such as the application of computer and related programs) and standardized requirements (such as test taking procedure and disciplined body movements). The three dimensions of controllability then improve the calculability and predictability of the driving school management and driving skill learning.

The case of Yili Driving School shows that an emerging service-oriented enterprise takes both the characteristics of McDonaldization and de-McDonaldization, which I call “limited McDonaldization”. It refers to a corporate culture of China’s emerging modern service-oriented enterprises in which corporate management, corporate employees and consumers are all involved. It has both the rational and standardized side of modern Western enterprises and the traditional Chinese side that values relationships and emotions,

with the latter complementing the former. Limited McDonaldization enables the participants of the corporate culture to achieve a win-win situation. Every student is concerned about how long it will take to get a driving license, and coaches or the driving school will allow an approximate time according to the assembly line of the training and testing procedure. For the driving school, the more and faster it can train the students to get their licenses, the better its reputation, and the more students it can enroll, and the more money it can make. In the field of driving school, different groups selectively use cultural resources to adopt different action strategies (see Table 1).

Groups	Strategical action	Relationship	Cultural resources
Driving school management	Hierarchical administration, regulations	Superior-subordinate	Interest-maximizing
	Humane benefits		Efficiency Loyalty
Coaches	Mutual assistance	Team leader-members	Interest-maximizing
	Teaching in driving knowledge and skills	Teacher-apprentice	Mutual help
	Emotional work at and off work	Friend-friend	Traditional Chinese social network
Students	Forming a temporary community	Student-student (Students under the guidance of the same coach)	Interest-maximizing Mutual help

Table 1. Strategical actions and cultural resources of different groups

Scholars studying modern Chinese companies point out that traditional Confucian values and relationship networks as integral components of corporate culture cannot be ignored (Cao 2008; Tian 2018; Wang 2010; Zhang 2015; Zhang 2019). For instance, Zhang Jijiao (2015), based on a survey of Chinese private companies, finds that the operators of private firms, especially those that rely primarily on their own efforts to gain market opportunities, intentionally create honeycomb-like networks. Innate resources (e.g., blood and marriage ties) and traditional behavior rules (e.g., family moral ethics of helping each other) are the basis of these networks. In contrast to Zhang’s study, the case of the Yili Driving School shows that the enterprise represents a vertical and one-way (top-to-bottom) relationship rather than kinship relations in terms of corporate management. On the one hand, Yili establishes a clear superior-subordinate relationship in respect of the organizational structure (such as management-employee, teacher-apprentice, and reward-punishment system), and, on the other hand, Yili enhances the staff’s cultural identity with the driving school (such as using uniform clothing, giving birthday cakes and year-end dinner, etc) to reduce the frequency of instructor turnover and inspire the enthusiasm of instructors.

However, if we look at individual coaches, a coach regarded as a “competent” in Yili refers to a person who is good at teaching and creating a self-centered network. His or her “competence” includes teaching skills, personal character (such as being patient, humorous but also strict) and social acceptability. Students who complete the training will be happy to recommend the “competent” coach to other prospective learners. In this way, the coach can maintain an adequate supply of students, a good training record and a larger bonus awarded by the driving school. The administrators of the driving school admit:

“coaching is a repetitive job that has a strict personality requirement, so there is a saying that goes ‘a well-educated man is reluctant to be a coach; a poorly educated man is not competent to be a coach’.”



A coach doesn't have to be well-educated because the repetitive instructions given to every group of students are standard and routinized. In this sense, it would not be difficult to be a coach; but a coach should work at least eight hours a day, and moreover, the receptivity and personality varies greatly from student to student. Therefore, a coach must have patience and good psychological endurance.

The process of teaching and learning driving requires frequent meetings and interactions between instructors and students over a period of time. Aside from teaching driving test-taking skills, coaches also share funny stories with students to reduce the boredom and anxiety arising from repetitive actions in practice. Such scenarios make it impossible for instructors and students to have the same kind of instant contact relationship as that between an employee and a customer in a McDonald's outlet, but it is necessary to form a long-time interaction. Some scholars (e.g., Li et al. 2013) argue that social relationships in new Chinese enterprises have both emotional and instrumental characteristics, the former referring to the emotional exchange between related parties in business activities under the influence of Confucianism, mostly expressed as affection and trust, and the latter to a market relationship of resource exchange between relevant actors in business operations under the influence of the profit-driven value, which is mostly embodied in the principle of reciprocity. The studies by these scholars have inspired us to analyze the instructor-student and student-student relationships in Yili Driving School. In the process of teaching and learning, coaches and learners have established different degrees of trust in each other and use the reciprocity principle to benefit everyone. For example, students believe that instructors can judge whether they can take the driving test or not, and they negotiate with each other to share the rental fee of the test site, etc. However, I think these relationships cannot be absolutely divided with regards to emotions or instruments as revealed by Li et al., because the relations all have the characteristic of de-rationalization given their formation process and actual efficacy. For example, students may confide their emotional problems in the instructor, and the instructor actively organizes a dinner gathering for students who have already got their driving licenses, etc. These interactions occurring inside and outside of the teaching scenes constitute a complex picture of the relationship between employees and consumers as well as between consumers.

Coach L's emotional labor inside and outside of the workplace is so productive that students not only take the initiative to help him make promotional materials for enrolling new students, but also would offer help when the coach was moving to a new house. In return, L personally cooked dinner for the helpers in the new house. Emotional labor ultimately leads to a kind of friendship between the coach and students. Scholars' research on emotional labor takes the view that this kind of labor force workers put on fake masks to keep customers in good mood even if some customers are ill-mannered (Guo 2008; Hochschild 1983). However, the case of Coach L reveals that such emotional labor is not only intended to satisfy the spiritual needs of students, so that the latter can learn driving in a pleasant atmosphere and boost their confidence in getting their driving licenses; more importantly, emotional labor would also satisfy the mental demands of the coach himself, that is, to help realize his personal values, both social and economic. Gaining recognition from students and making friends with them are crucial manifestations of the realization of the social values of a coach. In return, the achievement of the social values brings potential students to the coach, which indirectly generates economic values and develops a positive interaction between a coach and his trainees.

## **CONCLUSION**

As a newcomer into the driving school industry, Yili, from its site setting to driving training, not only implements a rational model that features standardization and routinization but also shows irrational aspects such as relationship construction and emotional payout. The driving school management and training are highly inclined to McDonaldization, both for coaches and students. Yili improves the efficiency, predictability, calculability, and controllability of the training by a modularized management of the working hours, meal sign-in, instructor division and student learning process. On the other hand, the driving school tries to create a hierarchical but also humanized relationship between different groups of people. During the ongoing face-to-face interactive teaching and learning, coaches are engaged in emotional labor to attain personal social and economic value, signifying the tendency of de-McDonaldization in Yili Driving School.

The ethnographic study of Yili Driving School showcases that the success of the enterprise cannot only be attributed to its McDonaldized management but also to the good relationship cultivated between the company, coaches and students. At the same time, we should at least pay attention to the existence of four kinds of irrational “relations”, i.e. the humane management of the enterprise to employees, the emotional labor of employees to consumers, the friendship between students and coaches, and the mutual help and friendship between students. These constitute part of the corporate culture and are indispensable for maintaining the continuous healthy operation of the enterprise.

Ritzer (1993) argues that the McDonaldization of a society is closely related to the global expansion of multinational corporations and American culture, implying an overriding power of capitalism. This McDonaldization, characterized by standardization in the pursuit of efficiency, also affects modern service-oriented enterprises such as a driving school. But what’s different is that the state power plays a crucial role in shaping the corporate culture of driving schools in China, which needs set up training sites and develop training programs according to the testing requirements formulated by relevant state agencies. Coaches should align their teaching with official test rules to achieve a high pass rate of their students. Whenever a person needs to take a driver’s license, they are to be familiar with national regulations and authority through driving schools and instructors.

Since its establishment, Yili Driving School has been sitting in the top three driving schools in Jinan, and its corporate culture of a “limited McDonaldization” has enabled it to stand out of many of its peers. On the one hand, as an organization that trains its customers to pass the driving test set by the state authorities to make a profit, a driving school by nature needs to follow the same norms in delivering training sessions. In this sense, the training content must be consistent with the unified norms. On the other hand, as its administrators say, a driving school is a service-oriented entity where employees must cater to its consumers and meet their needs, so consideration must be taken of how coaches and customers feel. For a driving school, a higher base salary, transparent reward and punishment system, and human-based management can enhance the degree of loyalty of coaches to the company. For coaches, the driving school does not necessarily require them to offer “service with a smile”, but some coaches nevertheless perform emotional labor in and out of working hours, develop productive and continuous interactions with students, and make friends or intensify close ties with them. This kind of coaches, with their excellent knowledge and ability in teaching, becomes stars in a driving school, and they can be counted as “elites” who stand out of the employees and guide other colleagues, thus resulting in promoting the development of both the coach and the student group. As a training institution, Yili Driving School mirrors both the necessity of competition, modeling and rationality in modern enterprises and the importance of relationship, emotion, and elite cultivation in service-oriented enterprises. In this regard, the Yili case provides a very useful reference for us to explore the success recipe of service-oriented enterprises in terms of corporate culture and management model.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Data collected from the “2018 China Statistical Yearbook” published by the National Bureau of Statistics. For more details, visit the National Bureau of Statistics of the People’s Republic of China at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2018/indexch.htm>.
- <sup>2</sup> In November 2015, the General Office of the State Council circulated the “Opinions on Promoting the Reform of the Training and Testing System for Motor Vehicle Drivers” issued by the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of Transport. This notice first mentions the pilot program of the self-learning and self-test reform for car drivers, namely “individuals are allowed to use their own cars equipped with safety aid devices, to learn how to drive under the guidance of an accompanying person with proven experience of safe driving along the specified lane and within the time frame, and can directly apply to sit for tests.” For more details, visit [http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-12/10/content\\_10391.htm](http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-12/10/content_10391.htm).
- <sup>3</sup> Before 2010, the coach had a lot of authority in the driving test, such as himself being the examiner, or close to the examiner in function and could decide whether a student had passed the test, and the coach often asked the student to invite himself to dinner and give gifts to himself, otherwise he would not let the student get the license. For this the coach in those times always presented a very negative image to the society. After 2010,

the driving test was reformed. The electronic monitoring replaced the examiner, that is, the electronic equipment scores each operation of a tester, greatly reducing the role of the coach in judging a test and the possibility of fraud. Despite this, people's negative impression of the coach was not able to disappear quickly with the reform.

- 4 According to the "Specifications for Motor Vehicle Driving Licenses" released by the Ministry of Public Security, motor vehicle driving licenses can be categorized into three classes based on the driving difficulty and safety requirements of vehicle model: Class A driving license (large passenger bus), Class B (large truck), and Class C (compact car). And Class C can be subdivided into C1, C2, C3 and C4, in which C1 is granted for manual transmission compact car, C2 is for automatic transmission compact car, C3 and C4 is for small truck and four-wheeled agricultural transport vehicle respectively.
- 5 Coaches can share teaching experience and learn company rules in the regular meetings.
- 6 Coach L told me an extreme example: There was a coach in the driving school often feeling exasperated at seeing some slow learners during training. In the second month after taking up this job, he started taking some traditional Chinese medicine to relieve his anxiety. And he had been taking medicine for six months, ending up with resignation.

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