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Book Review on *Privilege: The Making of an Adolescent Elite at St. Paul's School*:

**Becoming a Girl or Becoming an Elite? Comparing Female Students at St.
Paul's School with Contemporary Chinese High Schools in Coping with the
'Girl Elite' Paradox**

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1. Book Overview: From the Perspective of Sociological Imagination

Since the 1960s, US society has experienced a shift from old elite reproduction to new elite making, showing upward social mobility and the American Dream's emphasis on individual efforts. Besides, the rise of civil rights and feminist movements has brought more opportunities for minorities, increasing the openness in society. However, wealth disparity and institutional inequality (e.g., education) are still growing, further creating the democratic inequality paradox.

As a microcosm of US society, St. Paul's School also embraces openness and emphasizes individual talents in the new era. It aims to provide students with new elite education through daily experiences that help accumulate cultural and social capital and, most importantly, embodied ease. The embodied ease features relaxed attitudes under formal occasions, which is derived from the internalized elite appreciation learned from experiences. Apart from the sophisticated course curriculum that cultivates new elites' cultural egalitarianism (e.g., the comparison task of *Beowulf* and *Jaws*), St. Paul also reinforces hidden curriculums through discursive discourses. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, the weekly formal dinners at St. Paul convey rich symbolic disciplines that foster new elites. First, formal attires are required to attend dinners. Besides, appropriate table etiquette is highly valued. Most importantly, students are expected to show ease and comfort during dinners. Through actively performing the expected elite behaviors and internalizing them into embodied ease, they finally treat these status signals as daily routines. Apart from accepting disciplines, some "rebel" behaviors also show students' embodied ease. For example, both senior male students' casual attires and female students' attractive dressing challenge the expected "appropriate" dress code, showing their de-emphasis on elites' distinctiveness.

However, acquiring embodied ease is not equally easy for every student at St. Paul. The existing democratic inequality makes some groups more difficult during the process. First, special rituals at St. Paul, like occupying the seats and sexual games over freshmen, reflect the hierarchical order among students, showing the upward mobility possibility while invisibly reinforcing the class system. Second, traditionally disadvantaged groups need to work much harder to achieve embodied ease. Black students show more status anxiety compared with white upper and middle-class students since many of them are "new money", while female students face the 'Girl Elite' paradox due to the contradictory relationship between sexuality expression and control.

2. Discussion on the Selected Chapter: *Gender and the Performance of Privilege*

Though St. Paul School provides rich opportunities for students to accumulate new elites' social and cultural capital, it is much more difficult for girls to acquire these resources compared with boys. This section focuses on the book's fourth chapter and discusses the 'Girl Elite' paradox, aiming to deconstruct the gendered elite gap at St. Paul.



The first reason for the ‘Girl Elite’ paradox lies in female students’ dilemma of sexuality expression. During formal dinners, girls are required to obey the “no bare shoulders” rule, wearing decent and unrevealing attire. As a symbol of sexuality, the requirement for girls’ dress code reflects society’s expectation for “appropriate” femininity, guiding their behaviors through discursive discourse. Though some girls may ignore these rules and dress as they want, they are very likely to be criticized by teachers and judged by boys since they think these girls do not control their sexuality well, which may seduce men. This embedded “slut-shaming” reveals the stigmatization for failure to comply with societal gender norms (West & Zimmerman, 1987), greatly limiting women’s free expression of sexuality. However, sexuality, which can be expressed by impression management (e.g., appearances and figures), is an important social network resource for girls since beauty generates popularity. Under this contradictory relationship, it is harder for them to acquire social capital since freely expressing sexuality is riskier for them than for boys.

Besides, girls have fewer alternatives to choose from than boys if they give up sexuality expression due to the unequal opportunity distribution in various fields (e.g., many important positions in the Student Union are held by boys). Boys can accumulate popularity by developing their talents in these fields, while girls have to study much harder for college applications and become elites. Thus, the sexuality expression dilemma and unequal development chances combined to create the ‘Girl Elite’ paradox. Girls like Mary who work extremely hard show great stress, resulting in peers’ ridicule and low popularity, while being lesbians may be regarded as a way to escape from social and status anxiety. To narrow this gendered elite gap, effective ways are needed to deconstruct the ‘Girl Elite’ paradox and encourage free sexuality expression, which is especially important in the modern world that emphasizes gender equality.

3. Breaking the ‘Girl Elite’ Paradox: Practices of Contemporary Chinese High School Girls

3.1 Background: Being ‘strong women’ in the neoliberal era

Entering the 1990s, the reinforcement of neoliberalism in China greatly changed the education scope and societal expectation of femininity, constructing a new ‘ideal womanhood’ (Croll, 1995). The commercialization of higher education intensified individual competition. Meanwhile, the emerged images of economically independent ‘strong women’ in media emphasized women’s autonomy. Under these two intersectional discourses, becoming a ‘Girl Elite’ means working hard to enter prestigious universities that provide bright careers. Liu’s (2014) study investigated Beijing’s secondary ‘key school’ girls’ views of modern womanhood. Similar to some girls at St. Paul, many of them participate in fierce academic competition with peer students despite gender. However, unlike Mary, who de-sexualized herself and gave up popularity, some interviewees reported having boyfriends and treating them as motivation (i.e., supervising each



other and aspiring to enter the same university). This may derive from the rise of “success in both career and romance” in 21st-century China, showing women’s greater empowerment in the new era. However, some of them deliberately masculinized themselves and rejected traditional ‘girlie’ behaviors because they thought boys were biologically superior to girls. This study revealed that under the mainstream discourse of ‘strong women’, young Chinese girls tended to meet the societal expectation of men, significantly different from Western feminists’ emphasis on women’s autonomy and gender equality.

3.2 Paradigm shift: From ‘Strong women’ to ‘Excellent beauty’

Since 2015, the explosion of multiple social media platforms (e.g., RED, Douyin) in China has dramatically facilitated information sharing and social comparison, contributing to the paradigm shift of ‘ideal womanhood’ from de-gendered ‘Strong women’ to re-gendered ‘Excellent beauty (美女学霸)’. ‘Excellent beauty’ usually features a high education degree in prestigious universities / high schools (domestic or overseas). Many of them develop special skills (e.g., playing various instruments) and show unique cultural and aesthetic tastes. Besides, they have high self-discipline in academic achievement and impression management (e.g., fitness). They also deeply believe in ‘work hard, play hard’ and share colorful life experiences (e.g., dining at fine restaurants, traveling, and romantic relationships) on social media platforms.

3.3 An empirical study at Shenzhen College of International Education (SCIE): Breaking the ‘Girl Elite’ paradox at St. Paul within the Chinese Context

To better analyze the new-making of ‘Girl Elite’ among young Gen Z girls under the societal expectation of ‘Excellent beauty’, three interviews were conducted among female students currently at or graduated from the Shenzhen College of International Education (SCIE). SCIE was chosen because, like St. Paul, it positions itself as a platform that cultivates elites for prestigious colleges in the US and the UK (see Appendix 1 for more details). Besides, it also provides a diverse course curriculum for students to freely choose their development directions and cultivate inclusive cultural tastes. Some hidden curriculums can also be revealed by SCIE’s extracurricular activities like fashion shows, proms, sports events, etc. (see Appendix 3 Section 1 for more details). Unlike St. Paul’s hidden curriculum (e.g., formal dinners), these activities focus more on individuality, creativity, and talents than elite etiquette.

Three interviewees were chosen to analyze different responses to the societal making of ‘Excellent beauty’ (see Appendix 2 for interviewee information). The first interviewee, Qing, is a 20-year-old lesbian. Back at SCIE, she employed de-sexualization to accumulate popularity and resist the ‘Excellent beauty’ discourse, significantly different from the de-sexualization strategy of St. Paul’s girls. The second interviewee, Hanni (17 years old), is a typical ‘Excellent beauty’ with



good academic performances, popular social circles, an enviable appearance, and a sweet romantic relationship. The third interviewee, Fiona (16 years old), was chosen to dilute the selection bias. She showed a relatively indifferent attitude toward being an “Excellent beauty”.

Under the SCIE’s elite education, all interviewees agreed that the peer pressure derived from academic competitions was evident. Besides, they also mentioned other peer pressure resources. Consistent with St. Paul, becoming popular and making many friends at SCIE is an important presentation of social abilities, vividly shown in Fiona’s recall of the ‘shouting (喊楼)’ ritual for popular graduates during senior week. Engagement in romantic relationships is also associated with popularity. Many SCIE girls also highly value impression management, but unlike St. Paul, no appearance regulation exists. While some girls can freely express themselves, others may feel anxious about their appearances and figures, resulting in anorexia and depression. These peer pressure resources greatly echo the personalities and features of ‘Excellent beauty’ mentioned above.

Three interviewees showed different opinions about becoming ‘Excellent beauty’, separately. Qing thought it was essential for her to deconstruct the elite identity and the discourse of ‘Excellent beauty’. She actively participated in sports events to become popular instead of competing in academic fields. Besides, she cut her hair short to become unique. This ‘de-sexualization’ strategy helps Qing express her sexuality while earning popularity, significantly different from lesbians at St. Paul. Hanni worked hard to maintain excellent academic performances while spending much effort on socializing to construct an impression of ‘work hard, play hard’ in others’ minds. Fiona’s relatively indifferent attitude toward ‘Excellent beauty’ may derive from her relatively fixed friend circles. Though Qing and Hanni showed reverse attitudes toward ‘Excellent beauty’, both practices have broken the ‘Girl Elite’ paradox in St. Paul since they successfully balanced the relationship between sexuality expression and becoming popular.

Some institutional reasons can be found to explain the practicability of becoming ‘Girl Elites’ at SCIE. Different from St. Paul, SCIE provides more equal development opportunities for students. They are encouraged to find their interested field and equally participate in activities despite their gender. For example, many boys participate in fashion shows, while girls actively participate in various sports events. The leadership position is always equally distributed based on gender. Qing’s popularity in sports events can greatly show the positive effect. Besides, there are several platforms (e.g., the feminist club) to encourage girls’ expression, promote gender equality, and show respect for minorities. The differences in sexuality have little impact on individual development. Hanni’s example also showed SCIE’s openness in encouraging girls’ free sexuality expression (i.e., no regulations on dress codes, makeup, hairstyles, etc.) without worrying about



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others' judgment.

In conclusion, the deconstruction of the 'Girl Elite' paradox at SCIE was achieved by the dynamic interactions of societal expectation of 'Excellent beauty', individuals' efforts on balancing sexuality expression and popularity, and institutional protection of gender equality. It is important to enhance the institutional forces to provide more equal development opportunities for girls and encourage them to strive for their dreams. Only in this way can the 'Girl Elite' paradox be overthrown on a broader scale in today's world.



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Appendix 1

Basic information about Shenzhen College of International Education (SCIE)

Established in 2003, Shenzhen College of International Education (SCIE) is a four-year high-school program (G1-G2, A1-A2: College preparatory) that adopts English as the medium of instruction (EMI) and Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE). It aims to provide an international education for students, and more than 90% of graduates will go further study in the UK and the US. In 2020, SCIE's G5 offers achieved 249, with 8 for Oxford and 22 for Cambridge, ranking first in mainland China's high schools.

The school entrance examination opens to students all over the country. Most students come from first-tier cities and middle-class (including upper-middle-class) families since tuition fees are relatively expensive (¥ 2,600,000 per year). The male-female student ratio is almost even. More information about the curriculum will be shown in follows.



Appendix 2

Basic information about Interviewees

Interviewee 1: Qing, 20 years old, currently a sophomore at CUHK (SZ)

After finishing the first year in a regular senior high school in Shenzhen, Qing attended SCIE in September 2019 and started A1-A2 study there. Though her mother was not that willing to send her to SCIE, she insisted on applying for the school exam and successfully entered the school. She thinks Western elite education can let her focus on what she likes. Meanwhile, she wanted to apply to overseas colleges and keep a distance from her family since she had a bad relationship with her father. Initially, she planned to apply for psychology programs in the US. However, she attended CUHK (SZ) in 2021 due to COVID-19. Currently, she is a sophomore student majoring in Applied Psychology. It is worth mentioning that she has identified herself as a lesbian since she was 15, which is related to the way she copes with the “Girl Elite” paradox.

Interviewee 2: Hanni, 17 years old, currently an A1 student at SCIE

Hanni attended SCIE in September 2020 as a G1 student. Her family believes in international education, and she spent her kindergarten and first four years of primary school in Germany. She was not used to regular education when she came back to China. Though she spent two years at Shenzhen Senior high school, she applied for SCIE based on her willingness and the recommendation of her mother’s close friends. Currently, she is an A1 student at SCIE, and she plans to apply for Psychology and Marketing programs in the US.

Interviewee 3: Fiona, 16 years old, currently a G2 student at SCIE

Fiona attended SCIE in September 2021 as a G1 student. She spent two years of her middle school at an International middle school in Shenzhen. Both she and her twin sister attended SCIE because of the severity of the pandemic. Otherwise, they would go to America for high school study. Currently, she is a G2 student at SCIE, and she is still exploring the potential programs she may apply to in the future. She loves ballet dancing and playing dramas. It is worth mentioning that she has founded a running club at SCIE since she loves running.



Appendix 3

Interview protocol and transcripts

**The answers to Q1 & Q2 in the protocol are summarized in Appendix 2, thus excluded here*

**The other two questions in the basic information section are presented in summarized forms*

Section 1 Basic Information

1. What kind of curriculum does SCIE provide for students at your school (i.e., course arrangement, college application counseling services, networking opportunities, etc.)?

- Course Curriculum:

a) Content:

- *G1-G2*: Chinese, math, English, science, physics, chemistry, biology; General education (free electives) like history, literature, arts, music, drama, etc. Students can explore the things they like.
- *A1-A2*: English + 4 College preparatory courses: Psychology, Economics, Business, etc.
- *Gifted & Talented*: Select students qualified for Oxford, Cambridge, etc., based on their comprehensive performances, and provide them with advanced application knowledge.

b) Teaching mode:

- English as the medium of instruction (EMI); English textbooks; foreign instructors
- Small class teaching: 11-12 students per class, discussion-based

- Counseling services:

Every student has a counselor for college applications. Each counselor has 10-12 students. The counselor is responsible for students' paperwork, application material submission, program selection suggestions, etc.

- Networking opportunities:

- *College application lectures*: SCIE invites guest speakers from reputable overseas universities to share college information and school lives
- *Application experience sharing*: SCIE invites graduated students from different colleges and programs to share their unique application experiences. Students can feel free to ask them about application advice during the Q & A session

2. Apart from the course curriculum, what kind of activities does SCIE provide?

- Arts & aesthetic activities:

- ***Fashion show***: Providing a platform for art students to design clothes and show talents
- ***Drama show***: Providing a platform for students who like playing dramas to show

- Cultural & festive activities:

- ***Charity food festival***: Students make various kinds of dishes and sell them. The money they earn will be donated to the disadvantaged.
- ***Halloween & Christmas events***: Makeup and celebration

- Social networking activities:

- ***Prom***: It holds to celebrate graduation every year at "senior week", while students from every grade can participate. Students dress formally and actively participate in social networking with others.
- ***Freshmen campaigns***: Students will be bonded to participate in outdoor activities (e.g., seaside) to have fun and make friends with peers.

- Sports events:

SCIE highly values sports spirit and has divided students of each grade into four "houses". Students are encouraged to represent their houses and participate in various sports events throughout the semester. A semester is usually divided into 5-6 units, each with a specific sporting



event (e.g., dodgeball, basketball). Both boys and girls actively participate in sports events.

Section 2 Elite Education and Peer Pressure

3. Do you think SCIE provides an education that can make you become an elite throughout your high school year? What is the most important “Elite personality” during learning and experiencing?

Qing: *I agree that SCIE features an elite education mode. However, I still think the term “elite” indicates competition among students. I think the most important thing SCIE has taught me is to find the field you love and compare it with your previous self. I never thought of becoming someone superior to others (人上人). As for the “Elite personality”, I acknowledge SCIE’s comprehensive and fruitful learning experiences, mainly achieved by its diverse knowledge. The most important “Elite personality” for me is to deconstruct the elite’s exclusivity and achieve the ideal position in the field you like.*

Hanni: *I think SCIE actually serves as a platform to connect better education opportunities (i.e., overseas colleges) for us in the future because of its reputation and whitelist effect. In my opinion, SCIE’s high enrollment rate is achieved by highly competitive students. Since some counselors are not responsible (e.g., deliberately refusing to help apply for certain programs), students may need to select and apply to programs themselves. However, I think SCIE provides many activities to cultivate the “Elite personality”. For example, some sports events and social networking activities like prom. The most important “Elite personality” for me is to balance hard-working with ‘Carpe Diem’, which means you work hard and play hard to show your comprehensive abilities in a chill way.*

Fiona: *Yes, SCIE is a typical elite education school since most students will attend universities in the US and the UK. Students have high requirements for themselves as well as their parents. Besides, SCIE highly values students’ academic performances and the acceptance rate of top universities every year. The most important “Elite personality” for me is insistence, that is, to survive in the competition and successfully enter the dream school. However, I also think it is important for us to explore the field we really have an interest and maximize our values in that field.*

4. Do you feel that the study environment at SCIE is competitive (i.e., the peer pressure is evident)?

Qing: *Though SCIE students work hard to achieve their goals, the multiple development directions and the student size (about 250 students back to Qing’s time) greatly facilitated each of us to find the field we are good at. Besides, the out-come based grading system de-emphasizes ranking and absolute scores. Students do not know about others’ academic performances if they do not ask. Even if some students may apply in the same direction, I did not feel much competition among individuals since many of us are really devoted to what we like. Students also help each other when preparing for interviews for dream programs. Overall, I think the peer pressure is not that evident compared to the situation I’m in now at CUHK(SZ).*

Hanni: *I think the study environment is very competitive. Lately, we have been preparing for the international exams (the grades will be reviewed during application). There were barely any*



empty classrooms since each was occupied by students who studied hard. Since we have greatly increased the enrollment number of students (about 500-600 students per grade now), the competitive atmosphere is much more evident than before. Some students even inquire about their friends' grades and calculate their GPA, treating them as competitors. Though I still think it is more important to compare with myself, I also have high expectations. During the fall semester, which is graded on the GPA system, I would like to achieve above 3.7. During the spring semester emphasizing the international exam, I would like to get an A* (the highest grade) for each subject.

Fiona: Yes, the study pressure at SCIE is very evident since almost everyone has high expectations for themselves. Though SCIE adopts a loose regulation method (e.g., does not regulate students' dress codes), the students still intensively compete with each other under the intangible pressure of enrollment rate and SCIE's high expectations. Apart from studying, many of us participate in various competitions (e.g., academic/business competitions, research, and internships) to accumulate background experiences.

5. Apart from the study, do you feel there are other sources of peer pressure?

- Social networking pressure:

Qing: I think social networking pressure is much more evident at SCIE compared with other high schools. Knowing more people means being more popular and social, which can naturally help you become a leader among peer students. Besides, I think being popular in activities (e.g., sports events) can help generate more social networking capital than having good academic performances.

Hanni: Many students strive to become popular at our school since social abilities indicate many important personalities that the majority acknowledges in today's world. I also highly value popularity, especially during my G1-G2 years. That is why I keep running my social media platforms like RED and Instagram. We interact with our friends on these platforms, and it is easy for others to tell if you are popular by the number of likes and comments. But I actually did not try very hard to become popular, I always feel very relaxed, and easy to make good friends in a new environment. Maybe this is because I am really extroverted and open to new experiences.

Fiona: Some of my friends think it is important to make as many friends as possible because popularity also counts a lot at SCIE because of the open education mode that encourages free expression. I remember when senior week approached (i.e., the week to celebrate graduation), we had 喊樓 activities. Students from each grade held light sticks and sang for graduates. At the time, the rolling screen showed photos of students who were very popular. Most of them have good academic performances and are also popular among peers, conforming to the aesthetic standards of the mainstream.

- Impression management (i.e., appearances, body shapes, etc.):

Hanni: I think good appearances are highly related to popularity, especially for girls. Most popular girls at our school make up every day and show high emphasis on dress styles and hairstyles. Since SCIE does not have any regulation on these dimensions, the impression management competition among students is becoming increasingly evident, though not bad.

Fiona: I know some students, especially girls, care a lot about their appearances. And I think there exists polarization. Because there are many beautiful girls in our school, many of them



can freely express themselves without much pressure. However, others may be much more anxious about their appearances and body shapes. In some situations, some girls who are already fit want to become slim. They keep recording their weights and sharing their diet and training photos on social media platforms.

- Romantic relationship:

Qing: Since SCIE does not regulate romantic relationships, many students are eager to find boyfriends or girlfriends. Even our principal encourages free love, and parents are open-minded as well. Though I am a lesbian, I also want a romantic relationship, even if I know the majority is heterosexual. I think this is because of conformity thinking. When you see others do, you also want to do the same thing.

Hanni: I think students also care a lot about whether they have a partner. Because it is much easier for popular students with good appearances to find love, a romantic relationship can actually indicate one's social networking ability. It was so crazy that senior students tended to focus more on this because, at the beginning of this semester, 15 couples suddenly revealed their relationships in my friend circle. This is an insane number.

Section 3 Being a Girl at SCIE

6. What is your understanding of society's expectation for 'Excellent beauty' (美女学霸)? As a girl, do you think apart from hardworking, it is necessary to become popular and accumulate sufficient social network capital through impression management (i.e., including appearances, behaviors, etc.)? If so, how did you do this?

Qing: 1) I think 'Excellent beauty' is becoming more popular today. People focus not only on girls' academic performances but also their appearances and social abilities. This is maybe because of society's expectations for all-round talents and stereotypes of nerds. 2) I acknowledge that when I first attended SCIE, I felt stressed about social because the students around me were very popular. I also wanted to become popular at that time. I don't care how boys view me, but I want girls to acknowledge my popularity. 3) I found that I became more unique and popular among girls when I cut my hair short. I don't think I am escaping from being a girl. It is more like a way to embrace my true self. Besides, I actively participated and showed leadership in many sports events, which accumulated many fans for me and facilitated me to make friends with many people. In this way, I would not emphasize impression management since I think I am popular enough and too sophisticated appearance does not fit my style. As for romantic relationships, since most girls are heterosexual, I can understand why they care much about appearances to attract boys. However, as a lesbian, I do not think appearances count a lot for me to find an ideal partner. Some girls may like the typical type of me (i.e., tomboy) without traditionally feminine features.

Hanni: 1) I think 'Excellent beauty' is not a suddenly-appeared term. Initially, it may mean girls who appear in inspirational stories that still emphasize academic performance. Girls in these stories happen to be good-looking. Nowadays, 'Excellent beauty' is becoming a tag that describes excellent girls in many dimensions, including academic performance, strong hobbies (e.g., good at playing the piano), good aesthetic tastes (including appreciation and fashion tastes), etc. Most of these girls have prestigious family resources and educational opportunities. 2) I think it is necessary for girls to become popular. At least popularity is important for me since I've mentioned



that I highly value people who work hard and play hard. This was especially important for me when I was in G1 and G2. Back then, I admired beautiful girls with good academic results and many friends, and I wanted to become part of them. 3) I spent much effort in my academic performance and tried to make as many friends as possible. I shared my grades and photos that show my colorful life on social media platforms like RED and WeChat moment. The purpose is to create an impression in others' minds that I can balance study and social.

Fiona: *1) I do not think I have encountered many tags about being an 'Excellent beauty'. Maybe this is because the recommendation algorithm on my social media platforms tends to provide me with information about my hobbies, like ballet, running, and tasty food. But I think there are indeed many 'Excellent beauties' who study hard and keep a beautiful appearance every day at SCIE. 2)& 3) I am not that stressed by social networking or impression management because I think the most important thing for me is still to focus on myself. I make friends naturally because I believe people always click at first. I show evident attitudes toward those I like and don't like. It is definitely not my style to make friends with someone I don't like.*

7. Do you think SCIE provides boys and girls with equal development opportunities? As a girl, do you think you need to spend more effort to become elite compared with boys?

Qing: *I think the development opportunities for boys and girls are equal, and the atmosphere is open. Students always feel free to choose the field they like. There is no specific field regarded as boy-dominant or girl-dominant. Girls actively participate in sports events, while boys also actively participate in the designs for fashion shows. I think an important reason is that our generation has a more distinct gender equality perspective, and students tend to actively break traditional gender stereotypes. I don't think girls need to spend more effort since our school acknowledges students based on their performances instead of gender.*

Hanni: *Yes, I think the development opportunities are equal. It is evident that both boys and girls can equally acquire knowledge and freely choose the courses they like. When school organizations or events need to select leaders, the rule is always to choose one boy and one girl and equally distribute the positions based on gender. Besides, both boys and girls actively participate in the weekly house sports events.*

Fiona: *Yes, there are many activities suitable for both boys and girls. Our school also has a feminist club that encourages girls to discuss gender and feminist issues. Some boys also participate in this club and contribute their efforts. Besides, there are free tampons and sanitary pads in the ladies' room, showing humanistic caring for girls.*

8. Do you think SCIE encourages girls to express themselves freely?

Qing: *Yes. SCIE has many platforms to encourage girls to conduct free speech. For example, the feminist club is an influential platform to convey girls' thoughts. It also holds some celebrations on May 17th (International Day Against Homophobia).*

Hanni: *Yes. SCIE does not have regulations on girls' makeup, wearing, or hairstyle. Many girls have sophisticated makeup, bold outfits (like corsets and miniskirts), and flaming hairstyles. We are encouraged to express ourselves and our beauty. People won't judge you, the only thing you need to overcome is whether you are brave enough to dress that way. We also have a pajama's day on which you can wear pajamas to the class. It is funny and chilling.*



Fiona: Yes. SCIE encourages us to dress what we want. We also have the feminist club to express our thoughts. Besides, though we have mainstream trends and circles, minor circles are also respected and encouraged to express themselves. Thus, each of us can feel comfortable and free in our own circle while keeping a balanced relationship with people outside our circle.

9. Do you think it is contradictory to become a girl and become an elite? (When revealing this question, I explained the “Girl Elite” paradox to interviewees in St. Paul’s School)

Qing: I think it is not contradictory because the environment encourages us to find the things we love and express ourselves. There are many ‘Excellent beauties’ around me. Besides, individual intelligence does not have differences in terms of gender. Individual efforts count a lot.

Hanni: Not at all. I think freely expressing sexuality can actually add extra points and make you more popular. This can make someone who is good at study more shining and welcomed by peers. The environment encourages extroverts who show comprehensive abilities.

Fiona: No. Since entering college is based on individual abilities, there is no evident gap between boys and girls (i.e., girls don’t need more effort than boys). Though people may have the stereotypes that beautiful girls do not like to study, this is different at SCIE because many girls have proven that excellent academic results, popularity, and freely expressing sexuality can co-exist.