3.

Qualities of Desire

Imagining Gay Identities

By the latter half of the 1990s, the public culture production of “desiring China” became more expansive and abundant than earlier in the decade and more self-consciously about encounters with multiple geopolitical others. The art of longing to which Yearnings had lent such force and the singular postsocialist gender identity that the women’s museum had crafted both became attached to and subsumed by multiple desires and nonsingular, nonnormative gender identities. Government policies after Deng’s Southern Tour had created dense nodes of transnational investments in China’s major cities along the eastern and southern coasts. Emphasis on consumer and mass culture created new experiences of urban life, even as the gap between rich and poor widened significantly. Peasant migration to the cities increased as infrastructure projects to build urban cosmopolitan environments took off. An emergent bourgeoisie constructed gated communities, initiating new forms of postsocialist class segregation. The Chinese state increasingly embraced the neoliberal policies of international institutions such as the WTO to salvage a “desiring China” from the contradictions that had emerged so explosively in the June 4th movement. How did public culture join their stagings of sexual, material, and affective self-elaborations to these state and corporate policies? How did they make these various desires seem like they cohered with one another? Conversely, how did government reform packages and corporate strategies translate into popular desires? This chapter and the two following ones ad-
dress these questions by tracing the overlapping public culture phenomena of emergent sexual identities, the constitution of "cosmopolitanism," and legal debates about the proper regulation among interest, desire, and passion. This chapter focuses on the emergence of gay identities. As I argued in the introduction, lesbians and gay men provide both a compelling and ambivalent challenge to postsocialist constructions of desire. Discussions among gay men about how to properly gay signaled a transnational dialogue that translated the terms of cosmopolitanism and quality (suchi) into one another even as it divided gay men along urban/rural and class lines.1 Aspirations to cultural citizenship in the new "desiring China" compelled gay men to domesticate the meaning of transnational cultural texts of sex, desire, and sexual identities. As with my other trackings of "desire" in China, my methods for interpreting the emergence of gay identities were part serendipity, part reflective of the implications of my own presence in China, and part the very means by which I came to understand the critical importance of public culture for life in post-Mao China.

In the mid-1990s, Chinese metropolises witnessed a veritable explosion of people who call themselves gay.2 Semi-public spaces marked as gay proliferated. By the end of the decade, Beijing had at least five gay bars; weekly salon discussions; a national hotline; books, magazines, and videos from abroad; conferences; and more informal gatherings in people's homes. Not a few gay men conversed with other gay men from all over the world through the Internet. This emergent gay scene is decidedly transnational. Gay men and lesbians from every corner of the world reside in China's major cities, especially Beijing and Shanghai. The influx of foreign-born residents brought not so much gay tourism, which barely exists in China (in contrast to Thailand), as gay men who came to stay. At first blush, then, it appears to be a foregone conclusion that a global convergence of people now embraces a gay identity. Perhaps Michael Warner's queer planet (1993) has spun out its inexorable prophecy after all.

The Chinese women and men who call themselves gay in Beijing have both urban and rural origins; diverse occupations, ranging from factory workers to accountants and computer engineers; educational backgrounds from high school to Ph.D.; and class positions from those who use their elite cadre parents' power to acquire for themselves a nouveau riche status to those who see themselves as "ordinary folk." A few have traveled outside China, either as tourists to the sex mecca of Thailand (in their imagined sexual geography) or as students to North America and Europe in pursuit of advanced degrees. Yet one characteristic was shared by these women and men who described themselves as gay: they were predominantly young—thirty or under. Their narrow age range meant that most of them came of age after socialism had been dismantled in China.

Perhaps the following caveat is superfluous: the argument I present here does not eschew the fact that older women and men engage in homoerotic sex, nor does it promote the idea that only in the current era do people have a desire for or engage in sexual acts with someone of presumably the same gender.3 What was strikingly different in the latter half of the 1990s was the construction of an identity based on these acts. Listen to these remarks by Ah Zhuang, a friend of mine in China, then forty years old, who around 1995 began to call himself gay:

[Other gay men] don't have time to talk with you. They just want a sex relation.4 'Let's find a place, hurry up and fuck'... For many years this problem has made my head ache. To be a gay they [other gay men] are not capable of recognizing what, finally, this is all about. What should one need? This [question] gives other people an especially bad feeling: [imitating a voice of disapproval] 'You people, all you want is a sex relation with other people. You aren't able to think about anything else.' So I was like that, too. But after a period of time, I didn't especially want to go [to the park]. Also, I myself thought, as I was getting more mature and more cultured (wenhua), that gay should have a culture (wenhua), it is a kind of culture.

The emergence of gay identities and practices in China is tied, in certain critical respects, to transnational networks of lesbians and gay men. The initiation in China in 1994 of work on AIDS, with specific outreach to gay men, by one courageous individual who was subsequently sacked by the government led to networking both in and outside China. The arrival of hundreds of lesbians from around the world at the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Women's Conference, held in Beijing, also galvanized semi-public explorations of gay identities. The opening of the national gay hotline in China in the summer of 1997 by a diverse group of Chinese and Western gay men dramatically enabled conversations across China and the world. The presence of foreign gay men and les-
bians in China who both create and participate in gay networks means that the transnational quality of gayness in China is both visible and visceral.

Not all Chinese women and men who identify as gay pass through these transnational spaces. Many deliberately stay away, either because they are wary of foreigners or because they believe that these spaces are themselves tainted with unrespectability. Some find it impossible to have equal or deep relationships with foreigners. Lou Wei, twenty-five years old when I met him, had trained in business economics. We met through an American friend in China and spent some time together informally before he agreed to be interviewed. Lou Wei emphasized in the interview that foreigners use Chinese people. "If the police were to surround the [café], you have a foreigner's passport. Who takes responsibility? If, for example, they find something written on human rights, who takes responsibility? It devolves onto everyone Chinese." Conversely, not all foreign gay men who live in Beijing want to be with Chinese men. Some rarely have erotic interchanges with Chinese men. Other gay foreigners lead lives reminiscent of colonialism, occasionally engaging with native Chinese men as sexual partners but having little interest in what the encounter means for these men. This transnational scene is not, in any case, simply about bodies marked by nation and race that mingle indiscriminately. Most important, these interactions are embodied ways of performing gayness, and they entail competing notions of what it means to be gay.

Still, the temptation to conclude that a singular "global gay identity" has come into existence and that China offers one more instantiation of it appears virtually irresistible. This essay is an effort to forestall the rush toward a discourse of homogeneous global identities, or at least to reconfigure our understanding of sex and neoliberalism. My concern is at once theoretical and political. The manner in which we imagine transcultural processes of identification shapes the kinds of alliances we create—or fail to create—to address the protean forms of homophobia around the world and, in related fashion, the culturally specific normalizations imposed through sex. I begin, then, with a deliberately provocative problematics: what kinds of investments lead to the assumption that such a subjectivity—a global gay identity—exists? To address that problematics, I examine one prominent assertion of this position. I then argue that the emergence of gay identities in China occurs in a complex cultural field representing neither a wholly global culture nor simply a radical difference from the West. Rather, Chinese gay identities materialize in the articulation of transcultural practices with intense desires for cultural belonging, or cultural citizenship, in China.\(^3\) This articulation leads to doublings in which neoliberalism is haunted by reminders of cultural difference even as desires for cultural belonging face the spectral undoing of discourses launched in the name of globalization.

Chinese gay men index neither another exemplar of a global gay identity nor mere local particularity. Transcultural processes of gay identification shape the contours of cultural citizenship in China for gay men; conversely, desires for cultural belonging shape the way in which gay men in China construct the meaning of transcultural practices of sex, desire, and sexual identities. In developing this argument, I wed Foucault to anthropology, linking questions about the relationship of knowledge, sex, and truth and the historical contingencies of sexual identities to analyses that problematize culture and space.\(^4\) Drawing one map of a sexual "geography of imagination," to paraphrase Jacqueline Nasy Brown (2005), I hope to invert the premises of sex and globalization that have so quickly colonized our imaginations.

**GAY WESTERN ORIGIN STORIES**

Before turning directly to China, I clear some conceptual space for future discussion by taking a somewhat lengthy detour through arguments that assume a global gay identity. One such argument is Dennis Altman's "Global Gaze/Global Gays" (1997).\(^7\) I address Altman not because I find his essay the most exemplary but because his position in gay politics has enabled him to garner a large audience. Moreover, I believe that we share a concern with building alliances that do not quash diversity.

Altman addresses "the emergence of a western-style politicized homosexuality in Asia" (417). His essay purports to demonstrate that the ubiquity of Western rhetoric means that many Asian gay men describe their realities and their own feelings through this rhetoric. Altman alludes to the problem of Western gay theorists and activists positing the universality of an identity that developed out of certain historical specificities. Yet this initial recognition quickly recedes as he advances the claim that the universality of gay identities is emerging most significantly among groups in Asia. To make sense of his proposition, Altman places
different sex/gender orders in Asia on a continuum from tradition to modernity. While acknowledging their coexistence, he denies their co-

validness, placing the forms that are culturally marked for him into the
category of the traditional and the ones that approach what he conceives of as “western-style” into the category of the modern. Altman then
collects that in Asia “self-identified homosexuals” view themselves as part of a “global community” whose commonalities override cultural
differences.

For the most part, Altman invokes “modern” and “western-style” as
tropes whose content is self-evident. At various points, however, he
alludes to the characteristics of what constitutes a presumably universal
gay identity: it contests sexual rather than gender norms; replaces
the idea of male homosexuals as would-be women with new self-concepts;
leads to primary homosexual relationships rather than to marriage with
homosex on the side; expresses sexual identity openly; develops a public
gay political consciousness; and creates a sense of community based on
sexuality (422–23).

Significantly, while Altman stresses the global, he never questions the
fact of globalization or how to represent it. He merely reads globalization
as the spread of Western models of homosexuality. This reading
allows for a contradictory conclusion. Rejecting, on the one hand, the
idea that “modern” homosexuality in Asia can be understood in terms
of “cultural tradition” and allowing that new gay groups in Asia will
“adapt” ideas of universal discourse and Western identity to create
something new, Altman concludes, on the other, that the “claiming of
lesbian/gay identities in Asia or Latin America is as much about being
western as about sexuality” (430).

Altman’s rhetorical strategy might be reduced to a mere problem
of contradiction. Yet the predicament of his argument lies more pro-

foundly in the ambivalence of his desire: to assert cultural diversity and
the need to respect it while also recuperating identification in a monu-

mental history of gay identity. Conversely, he wants to further gay
rights yet, in pursuing this goal, elides diversity, articulation, and al-
liance with radical cultural difference, thereby occluding the fault lines
of power that emerge in global gay discourses and practices. Four prob-
lematics suggest themselves: the dynamics of colonial discourse that
structure Altman’s argument; his concept of culture; his understanding
of meaning and referentiality; and finally, his vision of globalization or
universalisms.

First, Altman draws lines of radical cultural difference between the
West and Asia. His occasional rhetorical gestures to the contrary fade
away because he has no way to incorporate them into the main frame-
work of his argument. Altman states, “On the one hand, Asian gay men,
by stressing a universal gay identity, underline a similarity with west-
erners. Against this, on the other hand, the desire to assert an ‘Asian’
identity, not unlike the rhetoric of the ‘Asian way’ adopted by authori-
tarian regimes such as those of China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, may
undermine this assumed solidarity” (428–29). Asianness, or a reputed
claim to Asianness, can never be more than a distraction, a power move,
or a distortion from the originary truths of gayness. Gay men in Asia can
be either universal or Asian but not both, even as their Asianness con-

continues to leave them in the place of otherness to global gayness. Altman’s
Western origin story of gay liberation places Asian gays forever in the
place of deferred arrival. This universalization of particular stories of
gay liberation establishes temporal hierarchies that, ironically, forget
that the West is an imaginary location that can interpret its located
concerns as a world-historical origin point. For Altman, invocations of
universalism, whether by Westerners or by Asians, appear to be
self-evident and self-referential rather than rhetorical strategy, double-
voiced dialogism, the locational politics of representation, or strategic
essentialism. Martin Manalansan IV (2003) brilliantly analyzes this
story as a Western developmental narrative that begins with a “pre-
political” homosexual practice—the “cultural traditions”—and culmi-
nates in a liberated “modern” gay subjectivity. His rich ethnography
convincingly argues that Filipino diasporic gay men in the United States
are not passively assimilating into a mature or self-realized state of gay
modernity, but rather are contesting the boundaries of gay identity and
rearticulating its modern contours” (2003, x). Thus Manalansan es-
chews what he calls the “McDonald’s” notion of a homogenizing global
gay identity, with its redemptive narratives.

Altman’s concept of culture similarly derives from colonial anthropol-
ogy. One might almost say that he offers a parody of the notion of
culture as timeless, bounded, homogeneous, and unchanging. Only a
radical imposition of modernity from the outside seems to change these
Asian cultures. Moreover, to paraphrase Renato Rosaldo (1989), there appears to be a “stepladder” version of culture and modernity here such that the more one looks like the West, the more one sheds any markers of culture. The critique of this notion is so well rehearsed in anthropology and cultural studies that I need point out only that Altman’s conception of culture is undergirded by an imperial political economy of the sign that renders meaning stable and solidly referential. We all know what people mean when they call themselves gay or engage in gay practices because there can be only one, unified meaning. This aspect of Altman’s argument is especially ironic because his list of stable signs of a gay identity and his examples of a public gay consciousness are at this moment in the United States fueling an intense debate among gay men and lesbians precisely over their appropriateness for gay people.

Certainly, I do not wish to deny the coming into existence in recent years of commitments to gay identifications or gay liberation that extend beyond national and cultural borders. On the contrary, I fear that the following discussion on cosmopolitan gay life in Beijing will disappoint some in queer studies who seek a cultural logic of absolute difference—and turn to anthropologists to provide it. Anthropological studies featured prominently in gay and lesbian anthologies have often been taken up as reassurances that “we” have always been everywhere or that a dream space of possibility exists where homophobia finally meets its limits. Or they have been allowed to stand in as gestures toward difference that, by resting on the exotica of sexual practices in other places, continue to allow Western gay identities to represent themselves as the teleological self of modern sexuality. Thus, they have not decentered the universalism of Euro-American notions of what it means to be gay. Nor have they addressed relations of power that link the latter with political and cultural hegemonies. Such a project would instead emphasize distinctions forged in unequal dialogues but not in archaic isolation and unequal subject positions produced in common fields of power and knowledge. Other problems with these studies have been spelled out elsewhere, such as their inattention to meanings of gender and relations of power. To move toward a study of transcultural practices, we need to emphasize the complexity of cultural production in the interactions of the West and non-West—with attention, that is, to transcultural practices and representations.  

We might begin by following how postcolonial scholars, anthropologists, and those in cultural studies have reconfigured the concept of culture in the last two decades. These scholars approach culture not as a set of shared meanings found in a bounded space but rather as ongoing discursive practices with sedimented histories that mark relations of power. Thus, it becomes important to attend to how, by whom, and in what context “Chinese culture,” for example, is invoked—that is, to the discursive effects of Chinese culture as an object of knowledge in (neo)orientalist geopolitics as well as in specific power-saturated contexts within China. Additionally, it becomes critical to examine how people live out these imagined invocations of culture—how they are pulled into normalizing practices that establish hegemonic cultural logics kept in place by ongoing iterations even as these logics reveal traces of displacements, instabilities, and engaged resistances.

The relationship between culture and space has also been reconfigured. Rather than assume that locality is an ahistorical given—that space exists outside meaning (or that we forget the meanings given by the nation-state)—or assume that the local and the global refer to transparent spatial arrangements, we might conceive of it, to quote Brown “as the power-laden symbolization process itself: the production of frameworks for defining and debating the edges and outer bounds of processes, practices and phenomena” (2000, 342). The local and the global are both acts of positioning, perspectives rather than merely locales, used as signifiers of difference. The local, rather than a synonym for particularity, is a spatial category given meaning through specific signifying practices. Similarly, the global does not exist above and beyond the cultural processes of attaching meaning to places. Far from a deterritorialized phenomenon, it has been discursively produced in various contexts and has taken on specific imaginative appeal of which we might want to be wary (see Tsing 2005).

This approach to culture and space might help us move beyond invocations of similitude versus difference in our discussions of cosmopolitan gay identities outside the West. It also moves in tandem with approaches that view gayness not as autonomous but as an imaginary site that stabilizes heterosexual identity, a “flamboyant ‘difference,’” in David M. Halperin’s words, that “reflects attention from the contradictions inherent in the construction of heterosexuality” (1995, 43). To
comprehend sexual identities in places outside the United States, then, entails examining how they articulate with discursive productions of culture and place.

In what follows, I propose to trace not a singular global gay identity but a social process of discrepant transcultural practices. My analysis emphasizes articulation, between Chinese gay men’s desires for cultural belonging in China and transcultural gay identifications, in which these men nonetheless continuously discern and imagine differences compelled by China’s colonial and socialist political histories with other nations. Transcultural practices resist interpretation in terms of either global impact or self-explanatory indigenous evolution. Instead, they open inquiry into contingent processes and performative evocations that do not presume equivalence but ask after confrontations charged with contentious claims to power. This uneven process of constructing Chinese gay identities illuminates how “desiring China” begins to appear as if it exists as a coherent project. It further reveals how neoliberal policies become wedded to subjectivity.

CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

To be sure, what it meant to be gay in 1990s China was nothing if not about crossing cultural and national borders. Yet to understand the transcultural nature of gay life in China, we must begin with the simple question that Altman never asks: what motivates women and men in China to seek out, with some urgency, what it means to be gay in other places? What has allowed gayness to emerge visibly in China that cannot be reduced to the presumably inexorable power of global flows of images and ideas? And what do Chinese gay men do with the representations of gayness that they receive or seek from foreigners?

The answers lie in the realm of cultural citizenship. In postsocialist China cultural belonging, as connected to practices of desire, has replaced political struggles over class identity as the site on which citizenship is meaningfully defined, sought, and conferred or denied. Cultural citizenship creates “desiring China” as a coherent entity to which one must prove one’s allegiance. By cultural citizenship, I mean to highlight how citizenship, or belonging, is not merely a political attribute but also a process in which culture becomes a relevant category of affinity. It is a process of self-making and being made, of active modes of affinity as well as techniques of normalization (Ong 1999). Cultural citizenship is a rubric or trope I use to convey novel processes of subjectification and new modes of inclusion and exclusion. Struggles over cultural citizenship are contests over new schemes of hierarchical difference, over who represents the cultural competence to carry China into the future and to create wealth and power for the nation under neoliberal capitalism. Cultural citizenship also signals blurred borders with Hong Kong and Taiwan, and with overseas Chinese in southeast Asia and the West. Sex is a critical site where the normalizations of cultural citizenship are being reformulated. If the passion to pursue the meaningfulness of sexual desire propels Chinese men into transnational networks, it also lies at the heart of cultural citizenship. Cultural citizenship, perhaps more so than legal subjectivity or theories of psychological personality, establishes proper and improper sex in postsocialist China.

Throughout the twentieth century the category of sex in China was the site of cultural production in discrepant dialogue with Western power. In postsocialist China of the 1990s, various Chinese cultural producers narrated alternative visions of the universal human as well as modes of cultural belonging through the category of sex. As I described in the previous chapter, the allegory of postsocialism told a story of how communism repressed human nature. Diverse public discourses put forth the view that the end of socialism meant that human nature—whether the human nature of the neoliberal free-market economy or of gender traditionalism—had emerged to find its freedom of expression. The allegory implied the overt and self-conscious expression of a range of sexual desires that, paradoxically, both subvert and uphold normalization. In the latter half of the 1990s China has witnessed the emergence of a bourgeoisie whose quest to mark its distinctiveness and justify its wealth involve the cultivation of bourgeois bodies, tastes, rights, freedoms, and desires. This emergence, tied to a desire for postsocialist humanity, has complicated the field of sex and its normalizations, for the bourgeoisie in China hopes to overcome the colonial division of particularity versus universalism that has haunted China since the early twentieth century.

Thus human nature is one trope through which many in China hope to move beyond the belatedness that socialism represents in the post-cold war era. At times, seemingly confirming Altman’s observation, gay men in mainland China invoke an unmarked universalism of gay iden-
tity. For gay men, this terrain appears to hold out great promise, as well as potential danger. The promise lies in using the notion of a gay human nature in China to forestall the installation of homophobic normalizing techniques. The danger, of course, is that fixing an essential gay identity will not eliminate normalizing punishments but will merely install more insidious techniques for carrying them out. In either case, the universal humanness of homosexuality does not preclude a concern with Chineseness, for the very emphasis on universality makes sense only in a conversation about what Chineseness might mean.

The government has no law prohibiting homosexuality per se. Under socialism, homoerotic sex, together with a broad range of actions condemned as immoral and antisocial—as well as antisocialist—was swept under the rubric of "hooliganism," or activities that involved "roaming" beyond appropriate social borders or relations. The government has excised this category partly, I suspect, because of its associations with socialism but also because sweeping social activity out of public space no longer makes sense. Thus sex, once a political crime, has been redefined as a crime against social nature. The "sex criminal" has appeared as a figure in the law and psychology, but the label refers not at all to homoerotic activity. (This figure is most often arrested for rape, exhibitionism, and voyeurism.)¹⁴

This absence of criminalization does not mean that gay life in China follows a carefree course. Government officials have periodically invoked "public morality" to close bars, shut down publications, and arrest people. This form of repression should not be mistaken for a special type of communist repression but rather should be seen as quite similar to what continues to happen in the United States. Police harassment, for example, often slides into garden-variety corruption. Social disapprobation is keenly felt. Finally, cognizance of what the government might do—and power always works most effectively in its phantasms of presence-absence effect—makes people careful about how to organize. The state has provisions covering anything that might be construed to threaten its state interests, including public social organizations. Yet unlike gay men in the United States, gay men in China do not face random street violence.

Cultural affinity as compelling a project for gay men in China as for everyone else. Their invocations of a global gayness articulate with the need to place themselves within Chinese culture in temporal, spatial, linguistic, and substantive terms. I turn to three moments in which these articulations have appeared: debates about family and kinship, appropriations of linguistic terminology, and the semiotic practices of the term "quality" that have led to divisions among gay men. Each of these moments displays specific and different kinds of transcultural articulations, none of which can be reduced to a global gay identity.

Gay Kinship It was a Saturday afternoon and the weekly salon had begun. Men and women had been drifting into the discreet café on the west side of the city for two hours. Many were Beijing residents and regulars at the salon, but each week brought a few new faces, often men from out of town who traveled to Beijing on business for one of the proliferating number of capitalist companies seeking larger networks or government favors in the capital. They learned about the salon from the national gay hotline that operates out of Beijing. Somehow everyone packed into the one-room café and by the time the discussion began there were about twenty participants, most of them young men. The gay café owner, Mr. Wu, welcomes the salon and does not mind doing business besides. Groups of three and four pored over the latest cache of magazines and books that foreigners (including myself) had brought from the United States, England, or Hong Kong, as well as information downloaded from the Internet in China. Xiaolan, an economist who holds a high-level government post and knows how to run a meeting, called the group to order. She asked everyone to introduce themselves. The newcomers were nervous, for introducing oneself is a virtual admission that erotic interest in one's own gender has propelled one into the room. (It is also an astute way to assess who might be there for other reasons.) While everyone tried to decide the topic of discussion, those who had tired of the burden of political meetings over the years continued to chat with their neighbors or rustle papers and ignore the proceedings; they wanted socializing, not serious discussion.

We settled on the topic of family. Should you tell your parents that you are gay? Should you take care of your parents by marrying and having a child? It struck me that the focus was parents—there was no mention of siblings—and I wondered if these young men were eldest sons or only sons. The need for them to carry on the patrilineal family line seemed to be the implicit cultural common sense. Before this meeting many young men who identify as gay had told me that they felt a keen responsibility...
to get married, not because of what others in their social worlds might think but because they did not want to disappoint their parents. They felt an obligation to have a son. I rarely heard the same sentiments from women, who seem to feel freer to assert that they will never marry.

A few men jokingly asked if anyone there knew any lesbians they could marry. Then one young man bravely began. “We should all try to tell our parents that we are gay,” he said, in something of a proclamatory tone. “If Chinese gays were more open with our parents in this way, then things would improve for gay people in China.” In this way, he averred, he could find more personal freedom. Immediately Ah Zhuang interrupted. Ah Zhuang was one of the “elders” in the group, as a man in his forties. Many gay men turned to him for advice or to mediate conflicts with their parents. Ah Zhuang had spoken with me many times and I knew he advocated “harmony” with one’s family, which he saw as the Chinese way of maintaining social relations. “Many of you know that I have worked for a long time on the hotline,” he began. “I have talked with so many people through the hotline, and they like to talk to me for hours. And many of you know that I have been called on to deal with conflicts that some of us gays have had with our parents.” Having reminded everyone of his authority to speak on the subject, he continued. “My whole family knows I am a gay. But we have never discussed it. In my experience, dealing with so many Chinese gays, it is wrong to tell your parents. This is not part of Chinese culture. We Chinese must look after our parents and not bring them so much grief. What can be the result of telling your parents? Only grief for them. It is selfish to think only of yourself. Perhaps that kind of thing works elsewhere, but not here in China.”

Wang Tao, a young academic from Hong Kong, concurred. His position was well known through his books: Chinese people should not follow the “Western” individualist, confrontational mode of being gay. Like Ah Zhuang, Wang Tao advocates creating practices of gayness that conform to Chinese culture. He regaled the other participants with stories of Chinese men who live “harmoniously” with their parents without ever confronting them with their sexual lives. A fine storyteller, he humorously depicted (in a manner reminiscent of the movie The Wedding Banquet) how the parents finally revealed to their sons that they had known all along. One even encouraged the son to participate more in AIDS activism!

Wan Yanhai spoke vehemently against Wang Tao. A rather infamous figure on the gay scene because of his run-ins with the government, Wan Yanhai was one of the first in China to work on AIDS. In the early 1990s he had begun discussion groups for men about safe sex. He had also taken it on himself to hand out safe-sex information in Dongdan Park and other cruising areas. The Central Ministry of Health—his boss—fired him and made it impossible for him to get a job in the health field for some years. Wanzi, as he is affectionately called, had become even more politicized. He feels that homosexuality in China is a human rights issue. In previous discussions with me he had argued that those who frame sexual practices under the sign of Chinese culture are toeing the government line. For Wanzi, Chinese culture is an ideological phenomenon open to interpretation. “Society always changes and our ideas and practices should change with it,” he once told me as we were driving through Beijing in a taxi. Wanzi was upset with Wang Tao over what he considers his apolitical position, motivated—as Wanzi sees it—by cultural nationalism. For his part, Wang Tao—like many others—has accused Wanzi of wanting to bring the human rights issue into gay life in China, thereby exposing everyone to a government crackdown. During the salon discussion, Wanzi once again sparred with Wang Tao. In the West, he said, people advocated telling one’s parents as a way to improve life for gay people. The outcome, he averred, was not always negative.

Xiaolan decided to cut the argument short. If we want to know what happens in the West, she interjected, we should turn to our foreign friends. There were three of us “foreigners from the West” there that day: Jorge, a young man from Spain; Miriam, a lesbian activist from San Francisco; and I. Xiaolan turned to us expectantly. Jorge declined to speak, but I agreed to say something, fearing that it would be rude for all of us to decline. I quickly decided to direct my response toward destabilizing a monolithic view of the West and puncturing the fantasy that it stands for greater freedom, even though I sympathized with Wanzi’s critique of cultural nationalism. Indeed, I felt caught in the delicate economy of transcultural politics. I briefly explained that I, too, had been wary of confronting my parents, though things turned out well, and I humorously suggested that perhaps the reason was that Jewish culture—which I marked to signal difference from within the West—and Chinese culture had certain things in common.

Miriam’s response was to counter my approach. She presented what
she viewed as the appropriate activist possibility. “I’m Jewish, too,” she began. “When I came out to my family, they were wonderful. My father was very excited, because, he told me, a woman friend of his, who I thought of as an aunt, was a lesbian, and he was happy at the thought I would turn out to be like her. My mother didn’t know how to deal with it. She said, ‘I’m watching television right now. Tell me later.’ I have always told my parents all about my girlfriends, and they never had any problems with it.”

The discussion continued, with others sharing their stories of pain or confusion or harmony. No consensus was reached on the appropriate way to reconcile one’s gay identity with respect for one’s parents.

One can see how compelling the project of negotiating cultural citizenship is for gay men and how it articulates with transcultural discourses in the salon arguments about family. Family is the metonym for belonging, not simply to the nation-state but to Chinese culture writ large. In China ongoing discursive productions of family are indispensable sites for establishing one’s humanness as well as one’s social subjectivity. For gay men to establish their normality as men, they must marry, not to prove their virility but to produce heirs. Then, too, family still provides men with moral privilege and access to social power, which is not true for women and, I suspect, is the reason it has been easier for lesbians in China to renounce marriage.

Two complications persist in the meanings of family. One is that the Chinese culture that underlies the functions of family as metonym is itself under debate even as the rhetorical construction of a singular Chinese subject underlies the assertions by several prominent men in the group at Mr. Wu’s café. The distinctiveness of this subject operates in the name of Chinese culture, which in turn hinges on repeated appeals to harmony and family. Yet the investments made in the discursive production of Chinese culture varied in the café. Wang Tao, from Hong Kong, produces a Chinese culture that erases the colonial history of division between Hong Kong and mainland China. In Hong Kong, a British colony until recently, gay white expatriates and Chinese gay men and lesbians have created distinct communities that mirror this colonial division (along lines of race, language, and culture). Chinese gay men from Hong Kong bring this split subjectivity with them to Beijing. More than many gay men in Beijing, gay men from Hong Kong tended to argue for separations between “Chinese” and “foreign” ways of doing things.

Ah Zhuang, by contrast, envisions a Chinese culture that creates a homology between family and nation and, while different from Western culture, does not stand in a mutually exclusive relationship to it. The transcultural conversation in the room betrayed tensions between diasporic and transnational identifications and avowals of difference. Are gay men from Hong Kong self-identical with mainland Chinese gay men, or do they bear the mark of some kind of difference? Are they diasporic or transnational? (Even though Hong Kong has been returned to China, residents of each still need visas to enter the other.) The (other) foreigners in the salon clearly reflect a difference of some kind, but for us, too, both identification and difference are not as stable as a global gay identity might lead one to assume. The undecidability and slippage in the term “Chinese culture” are dramatically evident. Contradictory normalizing forces—the need to assert culture, harmony, and family and the need to disavow the instabilities in such seemingly transparent assertions—enter into the fashioning of this figure.

The second complication is that a certain unintended political irony characterizes this subjectivity. Under socialism, the state had dedicated itself to a revolution that split the Chinese subject along agonistic class lines that overrode kinship obligations and, especially during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76), encouraged youth to denounce their parents. Under socialism, then, Chinese culture was not a relevant category of affinity. When invoked, it often served the purposes of repudiation. The family continued as a social force in constituting someone as a social being but it did so in a different form: the inheritance of one’s family class label. Yet invocations of culture in the salon tended to be ahistorical—or, rather, as in China at large, to disavow that history and thus reveal its own historicity.

The salon discussion implicitly rests on an economy of sex and sociality that is distinct from an economy of the closet. Verbalizing one’s gay identity to one’s parents poses a dilemma less in a metaphysics of psychologized sexual subjectivity than in a social diacritics of face and status. This is not to support the assertion that in China the psyche is irrelevant and certainly not to affirm the colonial denial of depth in Chinese humanity. The discursive production of the psyche in China proceeded apace throughout the twentieth century, especially in urban areas in the 1990s. Nonetheless China does not have a history of Christian pastoral care or confessional therapy. The speak bitterness sessions
of the socialist revolution and the self-confessions of political wrongdoing during the Cultural Revolution resembled Western modes of confession but did not indicate a separable, inner aspect of the self at the heart of these confessions. Rather, such confessions pointed to wrongdoing or perversity in social relationships or through a person’s entire political life.

The relevance of “face” is not that it constructs an antinomy of surface and depth but that it marks the relevant boundary that articulates the self in social life (Zito 1994). There are two aspects of face: lian, referring to physiognomy, the fundamental layer that all human beings have, and mianzi, indexing the social layering on top of lian. Both lian and mianzi depend on interactions with others for their construction. But lian tends to be an all-or-nothing aspect of the self, while mianzi can expand or contract, depending on one’s social status. Indeed, mianzi is indispensable to social status, and if others take the former away from someone, as they are able to do, they simultaneously unravel the latter. Thus, the economy of face and status means that gay men shy away from telling their parents that they are gay not because of an underlying antinomy of secrecy versus truth but because they fear that they will take away their family’s mianzi, and with it their own humanity. In this regard, sexual identity is not about the existence within the self of a separate sexual domain that is a constitutive principle of the self.

Linguistic Appropriations of Affinity If debates among gay men about Chinese culture and family highlight the importance of cultural citizenship that is at once transcultural, diasporic, and not so much local as located specifically in China, then the linguistic heterogeneity of terms for gayness equally exemplifies this complex terrain for an identity that refuses the opposition of global and local.

A compelling irony by which gay men offer up forms of identification to gay men and lesbians not simply in China but also in Hong Kong and Taiwan occurs through their appropriation of the term tongzhi (comrade). Indeed, the appropriation originated in Hong Kong. Chou Wah Shan, a Hong Kong sociologist, explains:

The word [tongzhi] . . . has very positive historical references . . . After 1949 [when the socialist government came to power] tongzhi (comrade) became a friendly and politically correct term . . . as it refers to the most sacred ideal of a classless society . . . Since the opening up of the market economy of China . . . the term has dropped its popularity . . . now giving way to a more capitalistic and individualistic way of using personal names . . . It is a telling point that as Hong Kong approached 1997, tongzhi adopted the most sacred term in Communist China as their identity, signifying both a desire to indigenize sexual politics and to re-claim their cultural identity. (1998)

Many gay men in Beijing have adopted this term since it was introduced by those from Hong Kong and Taiwan. They use it interchangeably with the English term gay and the Chinese medicalized term for homosexuality, tongxinglian (same-sex love). The interchangeability of these terms speaks of the fraught moments of identification and division that occur both di澳orically among three political antagonists each of which sees itself as representing Chinese culture (Hong Kong, Taiwan, mainland China) and transnationally, across novel forms of sameness and difference produced out of neo-orientalisms in rhetorics of globalization. The term tongzhi can signal an emphasis on a characteristic Chineseness but can also slip into inclusion of Western foreigners and thus into universal applicability. Gay can begin as a gesture toward universal identification but can also pinpoint gay people in China. Tongxinglian indexes a conversation with people outside gay networks. Although the term “queer” was not used in mainland China in the late 1990s, it had become popular—transliterated as “qu er”—in Taiwan, where it does not evoke the history of abjection that it does in the West. Consequently, it has been taken up to refer to a broad range of transgressive possibilities, including the rearrangement of racial-ethnic hierarchies in Taiwan. In the last several years, however, Cui Zi’en, a prominent gay filmmaker and novelist in mainland China, has tried to displace the term tongzhi with the term “queer.”11 He explained to me his views one evening as we sat watching his films. Tongzhi normalizes gay desire as much as tongxinglian, he stated. It leads gay men to try to be good citizens of the state.

Qualities of Desire The issue of suzhì (quality) is pervasive in discussions among gay men and the society at large. The term indicates a broad-ranging semiotic politics in China. It arises in discussions about population control and desired kinds of children (Anagnost 1995), about neoliberal capitalism and the kind of Chinese subject capable of
making wealth, as a way to constitute proper bourgeois subjects, and to mark the divisions between urban and rural (Yan 2003a). Having heard the term at several salon discussions, I turned one day to Lou Wei to ask what it meant. He said:

It’s a sweeping idea. It means your level, for example, your family environment, ever since you were a little child growing up, your educational environment, the people you have come into contact with — these lead you to become a kind of person. [It means] how you interact with people, how you talk. Then people will have an evaluation of you. For example, there a lot of people from the countryside who come to the city to work. Perhaps one of them is gay. He goes to Dongdan Park because he needs to survive. He isn’t willing to rely on his labor to earn money — he goes this way to ask for money. A lot of people have a hard time accepting this … because homosexuality is a kind of culture (wenhua). You meet people and you want to be able to communicate with them, to talk with them, including sexual communication. But once you bring money or materiality into it, you have polluted it.

When gay men use the term suzhi, they do so most often to express displeasure with or anxiety about male prostitution for men. Indeed, one heated debate among gay men in Beijing is what to do about males referred to (in English) as money boys. Gay men who have legal residency in Beijing assume that money boys come from the countryside and that they pollute city life with their transgressions of the social divisions between mascuine wealth and masculine love, between urban propriety and rural excess, and between proper and improper expressions of gay identity. The passion focused on this issue draws its significance from the cosmopolitics of China. Money boys and the question of what “quality” will be ascribed to gay men if they are confused with money boys — or if homosexuality becomes symbolically associated with male prostitution in the popular imagination — connect an emergent bourgeois subjectivity, the proper expression of sexual desire, and a transnational capitalism that makes Beijing the object of transnational interest and the subject of a network of transnational bourgeois cultural life. Suzhi divides gay men even as it is used to exclude them from proper Chinese cultural citizenship. Suzhi means that the category “Chinese gay” is also based from its inception on exclusions. The primary exclusion of money boys signifies a rejection of the rural. Many urban-born gay men have anxieties, paradoxically, about exploitation by rural migrants and associate money boys with rurality (and also with effeminacy, since in their view acts of prostitution effeminize men). Thus, suzhi, like discourses of family and Chinese culture and like various linguistic terms of self-identification among gay men, imbricates desires for proper cultural citizenship and transcultural discourses, in this case those that constitute class subjectivity. The following scene is one example of this articulation.

Many had gathered for another weekly discussion at the salon. There was no particular topic but at some point the issue of suzhi arose. Several gay men declared it to be a serious problem that plagued gay life in Beijing, because it made it difficult to know where to hang out and how to meet the proper people. There should be suzhi requirements, one man stated, for letting people into these places. Xiaolan, the government economist, got fed up and responded: “Well, I’m not sure what you mean by suzhi. Take me. I’m someone of low quality. I think all of us low-quality people should form a group and talk about our problems being low-quality. Then all of you who are high-quality can form your own group. Then you can come and visit our group and learn about what it is like to be a low-quality person. Then we can have some mutual discussions.” Xiaolan had left the meaning of “low quality” vague, perhaps to provoke a more pointed discussion of which people were meant to be excluded. The perplexity that Xiaolan’s irony caused effectively ended that discussion.

Over several years during the late 1990s, I met men whom others designated as money boys. Several whom I met in Dongdan Park in downtown Beijing were clearly soliciting sex in the more conventional manner one might associate with prostitution. But others were more equivocal about the meaning of their sexual activities. Zhuang Zhuang and I met one afternoon in Starbucks. He was then twenty-six years old. I had been introduced to him through Zhang Yi, a gay friend then involved with a Chinese American lawyer living in Beijing. Zhuang Zhuang was more than happy to discuss his sexual prowess with me. He relished telling stories of the numerous men, especially foreigners, who had invited him back to their rooms. But when the conversation turned to the relationship between sex and money, Zhuang Zhuang was adamant that he was not a money boy. He insisted that he never demanded money for sex, instead allowing the other man to decide whether he was
pleased enough with Zhuang Zhuang to give him a gift. Zhuang Zhuang appreciated receiving gifts. But he placed this relationship between sex and gifts in a heterosexual economy of exchange not unlike that of girlfriends and wives. Ironically, such a model had only recently been reintroduced in China after nearly forty years of socialism in which all women were taught to have public work lives.

Ah Mo held a similar interpretation of his sexual life. Ah Zhuang had introduced me to Ah Mo one evening after I said I was interested in meeting money boys. He brought Ah Mo to my room and said I should feel free to ask him anything. Ah Zhuang said he, too, would stay because Ah Mo’s working-class Beijing dialect might be difficult for me to understand. Ah Zhuang, a highly educated doctor, also thought that Ah Mo might be rather inarticulate. But as I began interviewing Ah Mo, Ah Zhuang repeatedly interrupted, rolling his eyes and angrily accusing Ah Mo of lying. Ah Mo never contradicted Ah Zhuang, who managed to make Ah Mo fairly tongue-tied. It turned out that Ah Mo had lived with Ah Zhuang for several years until he had left him for a wealthy French man. To Ah Zhuang, this behavior clearly marked Ah Mo as a money boy, who only goes after men with the means to support him. But Ah Mo had a different explanation. One evening we ran into one another at a gay bar when Ah Zhuang was not around. Ah Mo approached me and began to describe how he saw his life. He explicitly compared himself to wives, those who need and deserve their husband’s financial support. The French man was teaching him how to drive and helping him to better himself. Some years later, Ah Mo left with his lover for France, only confirming Ah Zhuang’s view of him.

**DISCREPANT TRANSTATIONALMS**

If the passion to pursue the meaningfulness of sexual desire lies at the heart of creating cultural citizenship, the same passion propels some Chinese gay men into transnational networks. Cultural citizenship, as I argued, is constructed by articulating desires for cultural belonging, including invocations of universality, with transcultural ideas and practices. We can now return to the more self-conscious moments in which the transnational terrain of gay networks comes into existence in Beijing and view it not as an exemplar of a global gay identity but as a rich, contested field of diverse ways of imagining gayness. The foreign men who move in and out of gay networks in Beijing are from the United States, Canada, England, France, the Netherlands, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, the Philippines, Malaysia, Ethiopia, and Russia, as well as Hong Kong and, occasionally, Taiwan. They come on business, as students, or as representatives of international nongovernmental organizations. These spaces both reflect and exceed the hegemony of Euro-American sexual identities. They are both contingent and overdetermined, both discrepant and invoked as if gayness were universal.

One might describe Chinese lesbians and gay men as doing anthropological work in Beijing on what it means to be gay in other places, not so much to construct a singular global identity as to place Chinese gayness within transnational networks. This work of locating sexual identity means forming historical divisions at one moment and revoking them in another. Thus the importance of transnational networks in China lies in their production of spaces of identifications, rather than of identity, in the sense that Diana Fuss (1995) distinguishes those terms. Chinese gay men trace the unequal contours of various self-fashionings of gay identities that offer them the occasion to engage in debate about the best way to fashion their own identities. While “Western” modes of gay identity might predominate, the mode that Westerners bring with them is by no means homogeneous. Moreover, as I have indicated above, “Western” models of gay identification mingle with diasporic identifications and divisions among Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland Chinese gay men. Finally, men from elsewhere—Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia—are viewed neither as exemplary of their cultural locations nor as models to follow. This fact, too, is tied to China’s colonial and socialist histories, which have occasioned the force wielded by certain global identifications over others.

For example, several gay men and lesbians from the United States and England who live in Beijing have been prominent in advancing an activist agenda. Jamie, a twenty-eight-year-old from England, originally came to China to conduct his Ph.D. research on sexually transmitted diseases and the semi-underground private health system in China. In England he had been active in queer street actions and had taken up the study of Chinese serendipitously. Jamie remained in Beijing to research AIDS for a foreign development agency and was a central figure in maintaining the gay hotline. Sally, a twenty-seven-year-old also from England, had studied Chinese since she was thirteen and worked for the
United Nations in China. One of the first to organize bar gatherings, she was willing to be outrageously and publicly a lesbian. Sam, a Chinese-American who was active in the United States fighting the ban on gays in the military, lent his home for parties and meetings. He moved to China to help his father's business. Others, such as Miriam and myself, consistently brought videos, such as The Life and Times of Harvey Milk, which describes gay life in San Francisco.

These foreigners have brought with them a certain imagined way of enacting a gay identity. It presumes that gay men ideally have relationships with other gay men, even as sexual desire for a variety of men is seen as natural; that gay identity therefore refers to all forms of homoeroticism; that sex lies at the crux of one's identity; that for this identity to signify, others must know about it and recognize it in public space; that one builds community around sexual identity; and that this community supersedes other forms of community. Yet Jaimie and a few other Western gay men also playfully displayed drag queen behavior, deliberately and self-consciously destabilizing gender dichotomies. Moreover, Jaimie felt it was inappropriate to hold public demonstrations demanding gay rights. China, he explained, changed him, not the other way around. Sally argued forcefully for acceptance of bisexuality. Sam felt strongly that his desire to become more Chinese made it impossible for him to represent one side of an East-West divide. Thus those from the West by no means presented a homogeneous version of gay identity.

Nonetheless, both the activism of these foreigners and the prestige and cultural hegemony already accorded to the United States in China make the interest in some form of identification compelling. But Western gay identity did not enter China simply as an unimpeded flow. Whether or not we want to argue about the extent to which these individuals might embody discursive formations, the fact remains that gay men in China view them as at once idiosyncratic and representative of Western culture. Where the dividing line between these categories is drawn depends, again, on the matter of cultural citizenship. Jaimie's drag queen behavior was regarded as idiosyncratic, since it transgressed respectable performances of gayness in China. But his desire to further people's sense of normality about being gay was completely accepted.

Several activists from Hong Kong who come for short visits and longer stays work in the same circles. Chinese-language books and magazines from Hong Kong have circulated in Beijing for some time. Those in China who write about sexuality and gender, such as Cui Zi'en, also have their books published in Hong Kong. Identification with gay men from Hong Kong, as I argued above, slips between sameness and difference. The bifurcated gay identity of Hong Kong leads mainland Chinese gay men, in line with public discourse, to view Hong Kong simultaneously as a very foreign place and as connected to China—but as never simply having a self-identical relationship with China. One day a young gay man who calls himself Edward spoke to me passionately of his need to get out of China to lead a freer gay life. He recounted for me a recent gay tourist trip he had taken—to Thailand and Hong Kong. For him, this exotic imagined geography represented alluring sexual freedom.

Gay men from other places who participate in this transnational scene are not elevated to exemplars of distinctive sexual systems, even if at times they portray themselves that way. Owing to the histories of colonialism as well as current world hegemonies, these places have had scant ties to China and have not sparked the imaginations of people in China who hope for a transnational gay future. Allen, a thirty-four-year-old from the Philippines, presented himself as someone with a preference for straight men and for taking care of them, even if they were married. He explained that in the Philippines those who call themselves gay tend to find partners in married men, although these men always break their hearts. But most Chinese gay men who knew Allen did not think he represented a distinct cultural system, certainly not one that should be considered a model. On the contrary, they felt he had an individual problem. Allen had gotten involved with a Chinese male lover, whom he agonized over but felt committed to. He wanted to take care of him. Ah Zhuang cautioned Allen repeatedly that getting involved with straight men was the wrong thing to do; he should get involved only with other gay men. But Allen told me this type of orientation—gay men getting involved with other gay men—was new in the Philippines and that while the idea of it made him more proud to be gay, it was not easy for him to change his erotic desires.

"Global gayness," with its assumptions about the similitude of identity, the homogeneity of values, and a sliding scale of identity development, fails to capture the intricate complexity—what Donald Donham (1997) has called "the conjugated transitions"—of gay life in Beijing. The insistence on identities that do not break down and on categories that are self-contained ignores the discursive processes of exclusion and
differentiation. While the visions of many Chinese gay men in China about what it means to be gay are certainly connected to the knowledge that gay people exist all over the world, these men do not simply imagine a global community of horizontal comradeship. If the models of what it means to be gay emanate from outside China, they nonetheless construct a transcultural space by opening up a process of working them out in China. This process involves unexpected outcomes as people who bring different imaginations to their transcultural encounters contend with the way in which they will connect to one another. These transcultural encounters illuminate the construction of a “desiring China” through which gayness resonates with both Chinese-ness and a cosmopolitan life. They highlight how economic policies introduced into China in the 1990s did not automatically produce a linear alignment of subjectivities.

By looking beyond discourses of identity, we can consider how these categories are necessarily incomplete, how they cannot mark their own limits and thus, paradoxically, create a measure of indeterminacy. This indeterminacy haunts claims of neoliberal coherences. Moving from the global to the transcultural means moving from identity to identifications, which means toward a politics of contingent alliances rather than toward simple essences or self-identical recognition. There are more fruitful ways to understand gay identifications that decenter the universalisms of the global gay identity; namely, transcultural gay identities are crafted in ongoing processes of historical and cultural contingency. Such processes remind us that the idea that neoliberalism fully encompasses all aspects of social and economic life, that it exists as a neat package, is a fantasy that needs a lot of work to make it seem plausible, exciting, or worth pursuit. We might want to heed the words of Emmanuel Levinas (1956/1952) who urged us, in reference to other formations of identity and difference, to replace our attempts to reduce alterity to sameness with engagement in a nonsubsumptive relation to alterity, forgoing the mediation of a universal category of identity. This way of imagining the emergence of gay identities in China might serve us better than the invocation of an always already global gay world.

Cosmopolitanism” is central to the constitution of “desiring China.” It serves as one of the key nodes through which sexual, material, and affective desires bind citizen-subjects to state and transnational neoliberal policies. In the previous chapter, I argued that gay men learn how to be gay by wedding cosmopolitanism with cultural citizenship. This chapter turns to the cosmopolitanism that young heterosexual women embody. This cosmopolitanism consists in two aspects in tension with one another: a self-conscious transcendence of locality, posited as a universal transcendence, accomplished through the formation of a consumer identity; and a domestication of cosmopolitanism by way of renegotiating China’s place in the world.

Cosmopolitanism has been constructed in relation to what the government calls “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” is how the Chinese government comes to grips with tethering economic reform to neoliberal capitalism. It is the official portrait of these transformations as a coherent whole. Although the content of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is quite distinct from Maoist socialism, its manner of attempting to fasten together economic policies, moral evaluations of social life, and the emergence of new kinds of persons closely resembles the earlier socialist articulations of power, knowledge, and subjectivity.

Within China, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” normalizes new forms of inequality, new ways to value human
differentiation. While the visions of many Chinese gay men in China about what it means to be gay are certainly connected to the knowledge that gay people exist all over the world, these men do not simply imagine a global community of horizontal comradeship. If the models of what it means to be gay emanate from outside China, they nonetheless construct a transcultural space by opening up a process of working them out in China. This process involves unexpected outcomes as people who bring different imaginations to their transcultural encounters contend with the way in which they will connect to one another. These transcultural encounters illuminate the construction of a “desiring China” through which gayness resonates with both Chineseness and a cosmopolitan life. They highlight how economic policies introduced into China in the 1990s did not automatically produce a linear alignment of subjectivities.

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From Sacrifice to Desire

Cosmopolitanism with Chinese Characteristics

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Within China, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” normalizes new forms of inequality, new ways to value human
activity, and new ways of “worlding” China, of placing China in a reimagined world. The cosmopolitanism it produces is intimately tied to the emergence of a bourgeoisie. The dizzying economic growth of the late 1990s produced contradictory affective energies. A belief that anything was possible mingled with anxiety about the meanings of such rapid transformations, even as the material environment reflecting the rapid transition transformed the senses as it folded past and future into one another. Cosmopolitanism, then, is a site for the production of knowledge about what it means to be human in this reconfigured world, knowledge that is being embraced, digested, reworked, contested, and resisted in China. These struggles over knowledge of the world and the ability to embody this knowledge are what I refer to, playfully, as “cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics.”

Young heterosexual women provide a site distinctive from gay men for grappling with the tension between transcending the local and renegotiating China’s place in the world. For young women embody the tension between transcendent desire and protective Chineseess. They are normalized as the mediators of cosmopolitan desire, in contrast to gay men, whose cultural negotiations continuously struggle with marginalization. Young women are pulled into negotiating the meaning of Chineseess because they are posed as the ultimate—and proper—consumers. Although cosmopolitanism is often presented as an entirely new historical conjuncture, in fact “cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics” is similar to worldings of China that occurred throughout the twentieth century, including the Maoist world of international socialism. When people in China domesticate cosmopolitanism they also pull from this heritage. At the same time, the way they domesticate cosmopolitanism is through a series of structural dichotomies and structured forgettings that reinvent the past.

These new mappings and subjectivities seem to share the major characteristics highlighted in recent discussions of cosmopolitanism (Breckenridge et al. 2002, Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2003, Nussbaum 2002, Cheah and Robbins 1998). While the range of these scholars’ political vantage points on cosmopolitanism varies widely, with few exceptions they all share a tendency to take a substantive and formal approach to the question of what constitutes cosmopolitanism. “Citizen of the world” would perhaps be the most basic definition on which they might all agree, but even as some of these scholars qualify and pluralize which worlds, they are nonetheless convinced that a substantive content for cosmopolitanism can be found. Moreover, this content provides them with the possibility of being for or against cosmopolitanism. The most prolific of the recent scholars hold out progressive hope in cosmopolitanism, especially as they see it poised against the nationalisms and patriotisms that have brought so much devastation since the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. While I am sympathetic with critiques of nationalism—and never more so than now—my approach to cosmopolitanism is, by contrast, a genealogical one that traces the political struggles to be counted as human in the context of neoliberal capitalism. Cosmopolitanism is constituted differentially, and thus through exclusions that return to haunt its politics. It shares the contradictions of neoliberal capitalism, both opening up and shutting down conceptual horizons. While posing as a universal category, it fundamentally depends on its concrete manifestations. Hence, the ever proliferating lists of cosmopolitanisms: vernacular, rooted, plural, religious, and so on. A genealogy of cosmopolitanism, by contrast, necessarily reveals its spatial and temporal articulations. Thus, I digress for a moment to discuss the spatial and temporal modes of that which has come to be called globalization, for I see them as providing the staging, as it were, for contemporary enactments of cosmopolitanism and, by extension, neoliberalism.

Many scholars have been swept up in the fervor of pronouncements about globalization and have drawn the conclusion that changes in China are just another instance of a deterritorialized globalization that is out there already fully formed. I would like to step back from those heady pronouncements and take another look at this thing that everyone is calling “globalization.”

Questions about the cultural constitution of place and locality have long been at the heart of cultural anthropology. They bear repeating because troubling assumptions about place continue to dominate recent scholarly discussions within and beyond anthropology about contemporary transformations. These discussions often assume a radical disintegration of temporal and spatial distances and a reconfiguration of localities and local subjects. These debates, reflected as well in writings on cosmopolitanism, often circle around questions of homogenization and hybridity. Formulations of this type rely on binary metaphors between the local and the global that are increasingly obfuscatory.
In their place, we might reconsider questions of locality and, by extension, cosmopolitanism, by refusing to assume we already know the content of the local and the global. Instead, what is called for is close examination of globalization as heterogeneous cultural and political process, and similarly of locality as created by the politics of placemaking. By locality, I mean not a narrow site but rather a location from which one views and experiences a world that one participates in crafting imaginatively. In contemporary theory, local versus cosmopolitan framworks refer us to the scale and spread of social phenomena. Rather than disparaging locality as only a site for grasping the effects of neoliberal capitalism and thus as something cosmopolitanism takes us beyond, we might examine the making and remaking of geographical and historical places as that which produces cosmopolitanism and attend to the forms of agency of those who make these places. Anna Tsing (2005), for example, draws our attention to shifting, competing claims about scale (i.e., local, regional, national, global) while Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2005) describes multiple interpretations of movement. She argues that we should not take movement for granted but should ask after its meaningful construction. Cosmopolitanism today is not newly marked by “movement,” only the latest version of a particular kind of movement.

Only from specific social and geographical locations can the remaking of place be apprehended and the significance of transformations in locality and thus of cosmopolitanism be effectively analyzed. The very same term, for example, “Chineseness,” can denote the local in one context and the cosmopolitan in another. To carry out such a genealogy will require grappling with a paradox: to view what we might call cosmopolitanization as an overarching, universal force versus attending to the politics of representation in that portrayal. Cosmopolitanization sometimes appears as a sui generis social actor that makes things happen in other places. Just saying “other places” already points to the paradox. For as soon as the implication arises that cosmopolitanism is a deterriorized force, or an unfixed force, or an overpowering force, or even a totalizing force—the place of no place—the next move should be to interrupt that image by (1) locating the specificities of placemaking and identities and politics formed through attachments to place, and (2) decentering these representations of the “cosmopolitan” and the “local” by reversing their assumed hierarchies, telling histories of unexpected locations, and capturing the ironic and compelling commentary of those people assumed to be the most “local” — treating them, in short, as representations. The paradox, then, between cosmopolitanization as force versus as representation is that it seems impossible not to hold onto both sides of the “versus.” Each is wrong, or perhaps incomplete, in some fundamental way, but it is a wrongness we cannot give up at the moment. That which is invoked as “cosmopolitanism” clearly is far from being a force acting over the rest of social life. Yet we seem pulled into treating it, at times, as if it were. On the other hand, we know that placemaking—as the seeming obverse of cosmopolitanism—is a representational practice only in the strongest sense—that narratives have real potency in the world and the imaginations they suggest get institutionalized and acted on. Theorizations concerning the intersection of the local and the cosmopolitan have neglected attention to the ways social actors distinguish and mark phenomena as local and/or cosmopolitan through, for example, representations of gender, nation, race, class, and sexuality—representations which themselves have origins and dimensions (see Brown 2005). These approaches to the construction of placemaking inform my analysis of “cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics.”

CONSUMPTION AS COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITY

I begin with a story one woman told me, Ding Yingquan. Ding Yingquan was twenty-six years old when I met her in the summer of 1999. She is a journalist for the Xinhua News Agency, China’s equivalent of the Associated Press. Her job is to put out news about China for the English-language foreign press. Given the pressures of her job, Ding Yingquan had been difficult to pin down for an interview. As I have often experienced in China, she called me just a few moments before she felt she had the time to chat. That happened to be very early on a Sunday morning. I quickly dressed and met her at a place she had chosen—an American fast-food restaurant, A&W. I first explained to her that I was interested in the lives of young women in China today, especially those young women doing work that had not existed or was rare for women under socialism. I described my earlier research tracing the distinctiveness of different generations of women under socialism. I said that in recent years I had had long conversations with women who were her mother’s generation about their concerns for their daughters, but that I wanted to...
speak with the daughters themselves. I then proceeded to my usual first question: “Do you see any differences between your mother's generation and your own?” Ding Yingquan offered me a wonderful allegory in response, striking not only for its content but its narrative genre, which is classical Chinese morality tales based on historical fables.

“I’d like to tell you an ancient story that illustrates this. May I?” she began. “There was a prominent statesman (daochen). He decided that he wanted to go into business and became a wealthy man. He had two sons. One son grew up with him while he was still an official and did not have a lot of money. The other was born after the statesman became wealthy. One day, the leader of a foreign country captured his good friend and sentenced him to death. The statesman was going to send his youngest son with a bundle of money to give to one of the officials there so that he would let his friend go. The oldest son objected, ‘Why do you send him and not me? I am the oldest and I should go.’ So the father gave his oldest son the money and sent him off. The oldest son got there and gave the money to one of the country’s officials. But then he heard that the king had granted a special pardon to everyone and was going to let them out of jail. So the son quickly went and retrieved the money. But then the king changed his mind and so the statesman’s friend was beheaded. He came back and the father said, ‘I knew you were going to fail in this matter. You grew up poor and for you, this money is very precious. My youngest grew up after this household was already wealthy, and he wouldn’t think twice about letting go of that amount of money.’”

This fable and its telling capture succinctly the kinds of transnational encounters that lie at the heart of cosmopolitanism in China. The moral of the tale is that wealth and, by association, consumption make a better cosmopolitan person. In telling the fable, Ding Yingquan traces a transition from a socialist world in which prestige rested on political power to a postsocialist world in which prestige rests on the wealth one accumulates in the market through jobs and commodities. The father knew the younger son would succeed in the delicate political matter of saving his friend because the son did not think wealth was precious. This son, by implication, was accustomed to consuming large quantities of wealth without giving any thought to waste or sacrifice, let alone issues like poverty. Another implicit moral of the tale is that the son, as a carefree consumer, embodies the perfect cosmopolitan subject, for he would have been able to handle international politics much better than his older brother, who obviously grew up under circumstances similar to those portrayed for the socialist period: extreme want, extreme privation, extreme hardship. This point is driven home by the unprecedented move on the father's part to skip over the elder son in favor of the younger one. In Chinese kinship relations, this move is tantamount to shaming the eldest son, and perhaps even disinheriting him. Intriguingly, the tale is told in a cross-gendered manner, for I had asked about mother-daughter differences and Ding Yingquan offered me a tale about fathers and sons. Implicitly, Ding Yingquan captures here a dilemma for women: in post-Mao China, it is imperative to make radical distinctions between femininity and masculinity and yet the cosmopolitan self one should embody is both implicitly nongendered and easier for men to achieve.

Ding Yingquan herself went on to explicate this classical-sounding fable for me: “For my mother, they look first at the price of everything and decide whether it’s too expensive. I buy things according to my interests and my tastes. My mother often criticizes me and says that I am wasteful.” Under socialism, urban women and men were required to work at a job designated by the state, though gendered divisions of labor often skewed women toward lower-paying, less-skilled jobs; women were given rights to marry whom they wanted, rather than someone their parents chose for them; and with communal landholding, the preference for sons was not as absolute as before the revolution. For both women and men, the major preoccupation was the state’s class status labeling system. Just after the revolution the state assigned everyone a class label. Although not the original intention of the new socialist government, these labels became inherited. They determined individuals' access to education and prestigious jobs, and formed the basis of assessing political consciousness, a difficult thing to measure. The post-Mao transformations instigated by the state have abolished class labels, abolished state distribution of jobs and commodities, and witnessed a popular denunciation of Maoist feminism, which, as I argued in the first two chapters, is said to have emasculated men, masculinized women, and mistakenly equated the genders.

The younger women I spoke with, like Ding Yingquan, retrospectively imagine this period to have been nothing but a life of sacrifice and constraints for their mothers. Strikingly, these daughters are often unclear about the details of their parents’ lives during the Cultural Revolu-
tion. The daughters’ narratives of sacrifice come out of the literature known as “scar literature” and films such as *Sacrificed Youth* that captured the imagination of the immediate post-Mao years and lent a great deal of weight to the legitimacy of economic reform (see chapter 1). Indeed, the post-Mao government gave broad support to these narratives that saturated the popular landscape. This corpus of literature and film always portrayed the protagonist as a passive victim of larger forces. Perhaps not surprisingly, almost never do we find in scar literature a description of someone who actively participated in the Cultural Revolution. In this genre of literature and film, those who came of age in the Cultural Revolution are portrayed as a ruined generation, who sacrificed their lives for meaningless power games. This genre accomplished a sentimental move from one destiny to another. It generated an affective investment in what might come next.  

The daughters, then, imagine themselves as having within their grasp the possibility of becoming free of all constraints. But consumption, one of their measures of freedom, is not just about pleasure. It is a post-socialist technology of the self by which Chinese young women and, by metonymic association, the Chinese nation, enable themselves to transcend the specificities of place and identity and become part of the “world.” Of course, in many respects, this worlding is specifically about an ideology of the American middle class and the domination of American consumer goods in the networks of globalization. Consumption is about embodiment, embodying a new self. At the heart of this embodiment is desire. A properly cosmopolitan self is supposed to be desirous and this desire is supposed to be open and unconstrained. What struck me most in my fieldwork was the absolute insistence on the part of everyone I spoke with that they were a desiring subject, that desire was for sex, consumption of various sorts, or a desire to be a subject who just has multiple desires. As with all cultural productions of desire, these desires, too, are historically and culturally specific and have specific modes of normalization and transgression at the heart of them.

As I lay out in more detail in chapter 5, “Legisitating Desire,” the desiring subject in China is evaluated according to two axes: one is whether the desire expressed can reduce the dangerous passions of politics to the seemingly benign interests of either possessive individualism or acquisitive consumption. This process, perhaps we could call it rationalization of the subject, enables the assignment of very specific value to discrete desires. It also subsumes desires under interests, defined in the narrow terms of possession or acquisition. An embrace of variegated desires in postsocialist China has been accompanied by a rejection of what have become portrayed as the dangerous political passions of socialism. This view of socialist passions as dangerous has further slid into an evaluation of all political passions as dangerous. By contrast, desires interpreted as nonpolitical are viewed as benign interests. While this opposition targets socialist passions of the past, it also can address itself to the more recent political passions reflected in the democracy movement of 1979, the June 4th movement of 1989, and the ambiguous political passions of the Falun Gong movement. For that reason, the state is itself both implicated and interested in fostering this opposition.

The benign interests have the added attraction of making China appear cosmopolitan. In revisionist histories, China is portrayed as isolated and closed during the socialist period, thus accomplishing the historical forgetting of a world that no longer exists—the world of international socialism. This historical forgetting produces the felt need for China to become cosmopolitan. But there is also a felt need to find that which is distinctively Chinese. Thus, the second axis for measuring the desiring subject in China is according to whether that subject can simultaneously be a universal, cosmopolitan person but one with Chinese characteristics. How to be both cosmopolitan and Chinese at the same time? This axis of cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics articulates with class-inflected definitions of desire and abilities to display them.

Young women repeatedly described to me the need to cultivate a self that lacked constraints in order to express itself properly. Tao Ming, a woman then in her early thirties, who works for the *Workers Daily*, explained, as we sat in another American fast-food restaurant, Roaster’s: “My mother is very frugal (jiejian, jiesun). That whole generation was. Very diligent (jinlao). They didn’t treat themselves very well. They would sacrifice for others before doing something for themselves. Our generation is more selfish.” By selfish, she meant literally centering on a self that is allowed to desire.

Luo Min is a woman also then in her thirties who holds a prestigious position at the Shanghai Stock Exchange. Luo Min thought women should be free, sexually as well as intellectually. She, too, placed a great deal of emphasis on the “self” (ziwo). She spoke about the importance of “self-realization,” “self-development,” “self-actualization,” how the
“self” needs “freedom” and reflexivity. She spoke about how the self’s need for self-realization is in conflict with commitments to marriage and also to children. She said that the mother-child relationship is unequal, because the mother loves, selflessly, but the child only acts out of duty and not love. She used her own relationship with her parents as an example, how she did many things for them out of xiao (filial piety) but did not love them as a dutiful daughter should. She would not stay by their side when it came time for her to decide where to live.

There were several aspects to these women’s everyday practices that were supposed to lead to the embodiment of this desirous, consuming self who could live without restraints and thus remake the body and the social self: food, sex, fashion, and language. While in China, it did not strike me at first as an ethnographic insight that the vast majority of the young professional women I spoke with wanted to meet me in American or American-style fast-food restaurants: A&W, McDonald’s, and others. 6 Only afterward did I think about the significance of our meeting places as I began to realize that the creation of a consumer identity domesticates cosmopolitanism even as the goal of such a creation is to transcend place. These spaces do not simply reify consciousness. We must move beyond Lukács (1972) to understand how these fast-food restaurants are the new Paris Arcades, the new dreamworlds of cosmopolitan consumption (see Benjamin 1999 [1972], Buck-Morss 1989). They embody the paradoxes of neoliberalism: they appear as an overarching, universal force that folds people into its dreams of a world beyond that evokes America but only viscerally. At the same time there is ready commentary in China on the politics of representation in that portrayal. This commentary only reinforces the material, sensuous folds of the environment. Paradoxically, the absence of a shared content with others in this space constitutes the promise of its universal cosmopolitanism. This fast-food environment is a world in miniature. These spaces mark a break with other identities. They are not in the least bit recognizable as something Chinese. They do not attempt to signify their presence either in architecture or the kind of food they serve. Their interior design signifies cleanliness, impersonality, and a world that can be carried anywhere. They foster the idea that you are what you eat. But the food is actually not the attraction. It’s the mise-en-scène that beckons, an enclosed space of temporality where one can distance oneself from what appears antiquated, including the recent past, and where one can embrace a utopia in which political morality and its attendant dangers become superfluous. While these fast-food restaurants signify middle-class consumption in China, in part because of the cost of the food, they beckon toward the everyman figure, the flaneur. Like the flaneur, Chinese citizens seek refuge here in the crowd. But unlike the flaneur, who witnesses a scene that opens out as if onto a landscape or panorama, this mise-en-scène is protectively enclosed, a place not to see or be seen but to display one’s ability to maneuver in such a space. It is a cross between an airport waiting room and a street fair. The dialectical image of the fast-food restaurant contains within its mesmerizing cosmopolitan consumption the signs of hope that the pleasures and self-modifications it promises will truly liberate China from its place in history. Thus, these sites carry one set of the sacred bundle of characteristics that make people believe they can be cosmopolitan.

Other bodily practices that try to capture the paradoxical desire to transcend locality and domesticate cosmopolitanism include sex and fashion. In the 1980s, virtually no one ever discussed sex with me. Married women told me they did not want to discuss that sort of thing with me until after I was married. In the 1990s, by contrast, the whole point for young, urban women was to be savvy about sex. Discussions of sex were everywhere in China: sexology had burst onto the scene alongside increasing attention among psychologists to novel genres of sexual abnormalities. Sex crimes became a more refined category; people searched for their sexual identities, and, as I discussed in the previous chapter, certain people began to embrace a gay identity. 7

To be sure, sex is often about sheer pleasure. But it is also a national discourse about normality, about which kinds of citizens will represent China to the world. Many of the women I spoke with explained to me that sex is the measure of humanity, that site where we can see what is natural or unnatural for all human beings and then measure China’s progress toward that humanity. Again, this discourse is not new in China; it began most vociferously in urban areas in the earlier part of the twentieth century. 8 I leave to the following chapter a discussion of the ambivalence surrounding homo-erotic desire.

Luo Min bemoaned the fact that she learned about sex so late in life and had been, in her view, too conservative in the past. “Women do not get the education they need. My classmates from Guizhou, they are all ignorant. In college, one of my classmates thought you could get preg-
nant from just holding hands! So you see the problem! . . . Really, the teachers themselves were not well educated in this regard, so they couldn’t really teach us students anything. I had a classmate, she got pregnant and had to have an abortion. She was benighted (yuren). Her education back at home was like the Puritans. My parents were very strict, they wouldn’t let us have anything to do with boys. That wasn’t good because then we never learned how to interact with boys. We were completely ignorant. My parents never considered the issue of how there is a certain repression around sex, that it’s not good to repress sex. Women then don’t understand anything. Boys, at a certain age, have to express themselves sexually. At the university, I wanted to study psychology. Many women are afraid of being exposed because they are not married. They are afraid people will think they are eccentric.”

It is important to avoid the conclusion that in China a simple dichotomy exists between a repressive past and a liberated present. It would be dangerously facile to accept that the Chinese people were actually more repressed in the past while people today are more open.

If we have learned nothing else from Foucault, as well as countless other theorists of sexuality, it is to realize that discourses of sex contain their specific forms of power. A lot of work, worry, and effort must be put into figuring out how to express the proper sexual self. The opposition between repression and liberation functions to make cosmopolitanism both make sense, by domesticating it within China’s recent history, and appear desirable.

I continued the discussion with Luo Min by asking her how she finally learned about sex. She offered me a striking answer: “In Beijing, the girls studying foreign languages are more open-minded. They know a lot more; they have a reputation for being casual with the boys. So I learned from my classmates who were studying foreign languages. I was studying Chinese literature, which is a much more conservative discipline. One of the girls studying foreign languages encouraged me to read about sex, to read Freud.”

This response is most striking for its equation between the consumption of knowledge about sex, rather than its mere enactment, and the cosmopolitan. Luo Min naturalizes the idea that those who learn foreign languages are more open about sex. Finally, Luo Min made liberal use of stock-market metaphors to explain relationships. She spoke about “investing” in the emotions and personal relationships and the “profit” one derives from it. She compared “investment” in relationships versus in one’s career and how the latter brings a bigger “harvest” or “results.” She spoke of how people’s lives are “mobile” and “unstable.” You never know what might happen in the relationship, it could go up or down.

Fashion, too, literally signifies cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics. Most of these young professional urban women wore clothing with noticeable company labels on them. Ding Yingquan, for example, was wearing a shirt with “Boleno” written on it when I first met her. Boleno is a Chinese company, using an English logo. And while the Armani and Comme de Garçon choices displayed in upscale boutiques lie beyond most Chinese people’s incomes, plenty of street markets exist that are stuffed with clothing made fashionable, in part, by sporting English-language labels. The fashion and its English writing are signifiers of the transcendent global consumer. Women wrap transparency around their bodies when they don this clothing. It paradoxically marks and unmarks them.

**STRUCTURED FORGETTINGS**

Consumption, then, is one of the key means by which urban young women, as well as other urban residents, bring cosmopolitanism into the heart of the self. By embracing consumerism as an identity, they can make claims about transcendence of place, about moving into a seemingly universal, unmarked globe, at the same time they domesticate cosmopolitanism in China. This consumer identity in China, as I stated earlier, revolves around a key tension between transcendence and domestication. This tension, in turn, is put into play by a series of structural dichotomies and structural forgettings that reinvent the past of socialism and, by so doing, allow these women to culturally construct a locality which they can leave. These structural dichotomies between past and present are central to what it means to be cosmopolitan in China today. The three main structural dichotomies and their attendant forgettings that I heard most often were between (1) consumerism and the search for wealth versus politics; (2) consumerism and the search for happiness versus kinship; and (3) consumerism and the search for freedom versus communalism.

Every single one of the young women I spoke with began our conversations with a striking, and unsolicited, statement that, at first, I thought
had nothing to do with the questions I asked. Usually I began our conversations asking them to compare themselves with their mothers’ generation. They all began their answers with this declaration: “I am completely uninterested in politics.” Then they proceeded with what I thought was the answer to my question. As I repeatedly heard that declaration, I began to ponder its significance. This moment was an ethnographic epiphany. I realized that this declaration was not a simple means of warning me off of dangerous topics. Everyone volubly, vociferously, and satirically condemned the government’s treatment of Falun Gong, for example. Rather, this assertion stressed that the passions of the self were not in the least bit directed toward the state. I eventually realized that these young women were declaring that they were completely unencumbered by the government. Recall the historical fable with which I opened this essay. The son who grew up while the father was a statesman, in a political household, knew nothing about how to handle the world, whereas the son who grew up in a household dedicated to the pursuit of wealth, after the father had left service in the imperium to become a businessman, was unencumbered by the constraints of a political self. Indeed, the main criticism of life in China that these women offered was that the self is still too burdened, that it needs greater freedom in order to pursue its meaningfulness.

When I asked Ding Yingquan a very open-ended question about the main problems in China today, she responded immediately: “First, I think they need to give people more latitude, more freedom of choice. Both in work and in marriage. My brother, he has changed his job a lot, at least ten times. He is now a legal consultant for a company. But still there is not enough latitude. If you go to college, the government pays for your education. Then after you graduate, you have to work in a government workplace, otherwise you have to pay them back for your education. And you have to sign a contract for five to eight years.” Recall Tao Ming’s statement that her mother’s generation “would sacrifice for others before doing something for themselves. This generation [meaning her own] is more selfish.” Both Ding Yingquan and Tao Ming have created an opposition between a self who desires to be flexible, to consume things, to treat jobs as if they were items for consumption and also as a means to wealth, versus a past they reimagine as one filled with constraint, sacrifice, and deprivation.

This lack of openness resulting from political interventions by the government, it seems, has also shaped people’s very consciousness. Ding Yingquan expressed a common sentiment when she said: “Another problem is that people’s thinking is not sufficiently open (kaifang). Take the people who are unemployed. Actually, they could look for other jobs that might even be better jobs, but they are used to relying on the government and they would rather do that and live on that little bit of money than look for another job.” In expressing this view, Ding Yingquan marked herself as simultaneously cosmopolitan and middle class, distinguishing herself from the urban workers who have been laid off and, obliquely, the peasant migrants who form the new urban underclass.

This opposition between a past where politics equals constraint versus a future in which consumption and the pursuit of wealth means freedom is, as I said, a structural dichotomy that depends on structured forgettings. It forgets that politics once inspired many in China with a passion that gave meaning to their whole lives as well as the most menial or trivial tasks in which they might be engaged. It forgets that in their youth, many of their parents thought of politics not as constraint but as the ultimate moment in taking control of their lives and giving them more freedom, as least for a brief time. Finally, it forgets that many young women who came of age under Maoism felt empowered by the transgression of gender boundaries enabled by calls for women to participate fully in socialist construction (Wang 2001). The term “liberation” was not a cynical cover for an oppressive revolution but had its actual liberatory meaning, for some though not all.

If this generation of young women poses consumer freedom and the pursuit of wealth over and against politics, they also structure an opposition between consumerism and the search for happiness versus kinship. When Tao Ming said that her generation is more selfish—she used the term zisi, meaning literally “self privacy” or “unto the self”—I was not sure whether selfishness, a focus on the self, was a good thing or a bad thing for her. I asked her. Her answer implicitly acknowledged that both were true: “Yes, but there have been good changes, too. My friend and all her sisters don’t want to have any children. Their mother says they are selfish.” Tao Ming, in other words, thought the decision not to have children was a positive sign that women, too, can have a free self of desire as opposed to a kinship-oriented self that seemingly characterizes her mother’s generation.

In story after story these women told me about their lives, their desire
to be global produced a split gender subjectivity: the single, free woman versus the respectable, married woman. Women spoke of the impossibility of inhabiting this split subjectivity. In grappling with the tension between the two, they engender globalization and, by extension, neoliberalism. Luo Min, for example, explained this dilemma when she described the troubles her friends have in their marriages. “Nowadays,” she stated, “women want to go back into the home. They want to find a rich husband and rely on him. Nowadays, people have a broader education, they are ‘diverse’ (duoyuanhua). With my parents, they have the traditional Chinese thinking about family, that you should form a family. But if both the woman and the man are too capable then it won’t work. I have a friend. She wanted to find a husband she could lean on. So she found a husband who was a big official. But she’s a very capable woman. So eventually they got divorced.”

Like many other young women, Luo Min participates in a broader discourse about Chinese culture and its “traditions” that has come to the fore in post-Mao China. As I argued in the previous chapter, in post-socialist China, “culture” has replaced “politics” as the site where Chinese subjectivity is meaningfully defined, sought, and conferred or denied. “Culture” of course is a highly politicized category, but it signals something other than the politics of the Maoist period. The category of culture, rather than politics, confers affinity, signals novel modes of inclusion and exclusion, and contests over hierarchical difference. A paradoxical process takes place in the construction of this category. On the one hand, it is naturalized, as if the category had no history. This naturalization allows people to treat the socialist period as an aberration in a seemingly five-thousand-year-old “tradition” of Chinese culture. On the other hand, people continuously and sometimes vociferously debate which kinds of behaviors should be deemed appropriately Chinese.

Young women placed their mother’s generation in the category of “traditional culture.” Their goal, as they constructed it, was to transcend this tradition in order to become desirable, globalized subjects. Listen carefully to the explanation that Tao Ming gave me in discussing why she isn’t married: “Women I have seen who are married and have a child don’t lead a very good life. I think it’s important to develop oneself and one’s abilities. The women I know who are married have given up that possibility. They are very capable but they have abandoned (fangqi) their abilities. I have been very influenced by psychology, and I believe in the theory of personality (renge liulun). I believe that people should first develop themselves. They must have ability and then second, a healthy personality. I believe people should keep developing themselves. With my classmates who’ve married, I really can’t talk with them anymore, we don’t have much in common to talk about. They really envy my life.”

But women worry, nonetheless, about how to be a sexually open woman and maintain respectability. They feel they should experience romantic love, and they construct an opposition in which they believe that their mothers married in order to have sons, carrying on the cultural practice of patrilineal succession, and that the husband was secondary in her affections. They, on the contrary, should have modern, affectionate marriages. Ding Yingquan stated unequivocally: “I think people should be able to live together before they are married. This could resolve a lot of problems, both physical and psychological. You get to know each other before marriage and you get to know what each other needs.” But when I asked her if she were planning to do so, she averred that her parents did not approve and that her boyfriend did not have the courage to do so.

Young women’s views of their parents’ “traditional Chineseness” has been confirmed in the explosive national debate in urban areas about “the third one” (disanzhe). The third one refers to extramarital affairs. Older cadres in the Women’s Federation made this issue one of their primary targets. They contemplated support for new legislation being discussed that would make it a crime to have an affair outside a marriage. The kind of affair imagined as deserving of punishment is that of a married man with a younger, unmarried woman. The new law poses as a protection for married women; the object of potential punishment is the young, unmarried woman, “the third one.”

Young women’s imagined opposition between their open desires for sex, love, and happiness, which makes them properly cosmopolitan, and their mothers’ experiences when they presumably married only out of kinship obligations once again reflects a structured forgetting. After all, their parents, and even their grandparents, grew up with ideologies of companionate marriage that were written into the first constitution of the People’s Republic of China. The kind of revolution they fought for based itself on an ideology of gender equality that posed class identification over and against kinship identity. During the Cultural Revolution, moreover, their parents participated in movements in which many of them denounced their parents for having the wrong politics. Far from
being mere subjects of a traditional Chinese culture, their parents also thought they were fighting the four "old" of feudalism in China.

The final structural opposition, with its structured forgettings, that I encountered was consumerism and the search for freedom versus communalism. These young urban women refuse the space and time of nation building and imagine themselves as transcending city, country, class, and, ultimately, China. For the young women I met, as well as for others in China, excitement about the possibilities of a cosmopolitan future includes a search for the freedom to move through space and time that their parents, they imagine, did not have. They imagine that the socialist state fixed people in place in order to regulate and stabilize social relations. Of course, there were attempts to fix people in place, such as the household registration system that drew a strict line between the countryside and the city. People in the cities were organized into work units, often though not always including housing organized by work unit. This arrangement was meant to stabilize full employment and social welfare benefits. David Harvey (2000) has argued that utopias are usually spatialized, that spatial form controls temporality, and that an imagined geography controls the possibility of social change and history. Unlike the utopias Harvey addresses which, he claims, repress the dialectic of social process, the stabilized spatial arrangement under Maoism produced the opposite. Part of the structured forgetting entailed in the imaginations of these young women is the history of the social struggles under Maoism that addressed the issue of space and place: should certain young people remain in the city or be sent to the countryside? Should urban residents remain in their work units or transfer out to other work units? It also forgets the experience of chuanlian: during the Cultural Revolution urban youth enthusiastically traveled everywhere to experience revolution as Mao urged them to do and to learn from the peasants and each other.

Many today have emphasized the apparatus of control and surveillance also involved in the Cultural Revolution, forgetting the other kinds of movement. Not a few of the young women I spoke with had migrated to Beijing from small towns across China. For them, one of the key ways to embody the global self is to travel across space—not, as they frame it, for the purposes of desperately seeking work or trying to move up in social status but for the purposes of pleasure. The emergent bourgeoisie in China has enabled a thriving business in tourism. Cultural tourism consists in travel both within and across national borders. Domestic travel for pleasure, in contrast to travel for political goals, is supposed to indicate the truly free self, reflected not in the travel location but in the sensibility embodied in the act of traveling. These women regaled me with stories about travels to the south or the southwest of China, and also travels within the tourist circuit most accessible to Chinese people—Southeast Asia, specifically Thailand, Malaysia, and Hong Kong.

These young women have also acquired a distinctive approach to time that marks them as having bourgeois cosmopolitan aspirations resonant within the dominant imaginary of global capitalism. This temporal sensibility is no longer premised on modernist notions of linear progress. While these young women assume their lives will improve continuously and China will become more developed, they do not measure the movement of their lives across time in these terms. Just the opposite. Several of them expressed the view that they could only live from moment to moment because they had no sense of certainty about historical progress. Time under socialism had a contradictory effect: on the one hand, it was marked by a political-philosophical commitment to the idea and practice of dialectical revolution as a way to move beyond the continuities of exploitation. But the very campaigns that marked Maoist socialism, what Gail Hershatter calls "campaign time" (2002), had the effect of disrupting temporal progress, leading to a temporal effect of discontinuity. These disjunctions of campaign time taught Chinese citizens that the future is uncertain and unknowable. Linked to an imaginary of "flexibility" emanating from American versions of global capitalism, such an experiential effect of disjunction has produced a generation whose bourgeois cosmopolitan aspirations are post-progressive. They no longer view time as that empty homogeneity that Benjamin so eloquently described as underwriting modern bourgeois notions of progress. Instead, they experience a temporal sensibility of radically discontinuous movement.

WORLDING CHINA

How is China's position reconfigured in this newly imagined world? The contradiction of transcending China to become a cosmopolitan self and domesticating cosmopolitanism within China rests, as I have been argu-
ing, in the bodies of young women. Gay men, by contrast, cannot fully domesticate cosmopolitanism because of the ambivalence with which non-gay citizens view the extent to which gay men themselves can be domesticated. Young women literally embody Chineseness, both productively and as objects of desire. They thus provide the site for figuring out how to domesticate cosmopolitanism. But Chinese women, as consumers and subjects of desire, also represent the potential to transcend Chineseness. I turn to three different moments that highlight this contradiction in the bodies of young women. These moments are prescient; they are veritable histories of the present. They speak back to contemporary barbarisms and provide a warning to those who might envision cosmopolitanism as a universalism uncontaminated by alterity.

The first moment is a 1993 Chinese television movie, Sunset at Long Chao Li. The film tells the story of a young Chinese man who returns from studying architecture in America. He brings with him his new Caucasian American wife and her son from a previous marriage. The movie focuses on his attempts to negotiate between remaining a filial son to his father, an architect renowned in the past, and becoming accomplished in ways that the West (embodied by his wife's father, who owns a construction company) will recognize and acknowledge. Kathleen Erwin, an American anthropologist who happened to star in the movie and argued with the producers along the way about the story, concludes that Sunset constitutes an effort by elite men to contest images of China in the international arena. The film's producers highlighted an alternative representation that emphasizes China's global dominance, one that Erwin concludes “depends in part on reimagining the nation as masculine and (sexually) desirable” (1999, 238). This reimagining entails representing white women rather than Chinese women as the object of Chinese male desire. Erwin argues that such a representation “eclipses Chinese women . . . as symbols of the Chinese family/nation, as agents in the pursuit . . . of a transnational Chinese modernity, and as legitimate subjects in the constitution of their own sexuality and desire” (238).

The masculine cosmopolitanism Irwin emphasizes and that seems to prevail in China today provides a countervailing allegory to the ones that served as warning tales in women's engendering of cosmopolitanism. These warning tales provide the second moment. In the midst of my discussion with Tao Ming, for example, I asked her if she had spent time with foreigners. She replied very firmly, “No, I haven't had any contact with foreigners. Chinese children are really tragic (beicain). Because poverty chills ambition [she used an ancient scholarly phrase: renqiong-zhiduan]. I have another friend who found a laowai husband [laowai is a derogatory term for "foreigner"]. These are friends who study foreign languages. They are tragic (bei'ai); maybe because they are poor they want to marry laowai. I think they are like prostitutes. At Liberation, they had some very high-class prostitutes, who were well educated. They are like them . . . I have another friend who met a French man at a nuclear power factory where she was working. She was very unhappy; now she's gone to the United States — with her Chinese husband.”

I asked if she would be willing to have a foreign boyfriend. She answered: “No. Maybe it's cultural prejudice. I think foreigners have a curiosity about Chinese women, but I think they look down on Chinese people. I have a lot of relatives in other countries. They don't look for foreign boyfriends. They have experienced prejudice there. They have a background experience. Middle-class foreigners [in foreign countries] look down on Chinese as working class [here she reverts to using Cultural Revolution terms for class, such as chengfen, which have virtually disappeared from people's vocabularies]. They see Chinese as foreigners, not as French. Chinese lovers of foreigners, when they go back with them to foreigners' apartments, are not allowed inside the gate. They will take you as a lover but they won't marry you.”

These two moments reflect a dual strategy in worshipping China. One is to erase the woman in order to make the nation cosmopolitan. The second strategy is recoup the woman as a defensive maneuver, thus recouping civilization. From the perspective of these tales, it becomes clear that the reason China needs to become such a prominent figure in the globalized world is to continue to offer civilization over and against barbarism. I end with another ethnographic moment, an allegory about cosmopolitanism that Ding Yingquan offered. Her comments, made in 1999, are prescient. I had asked her which kinds of foreign influences were having the most effect in China. I carefully did not specify Western or Japanese or other meanings of “foreign.” She replied: “It's everywhere, all these American fast-food stores. But this American culture is superficial; it is laji wenhua.” “Excuse me?” I asked. For thought I had heard the term “rubbish culture.” Ding Yingquan spoke the phrase in English, “Rubbish culture. Like the movies — the ones that are pirated — they are all rubbish culture.”
ME: So you think foreign influence is bad?
DYM: No, because without the superficial contact, you can’t have any deeper conversation. I have read many books about the United States and learned about the United States. But I wouldn’t be able to do that without having the superficial contact first.
ME: What is your impression of American culture?
DYM: It’s declining (shuailuo).
ME: What makes you say that?
DYM: From the language. I read books, and *Time* and *Newsweek*. They all use jargon. They use all the same jargon. The language is declining. Language is not just a tool; it is reflective of a culture. I see the language in decline and I take this to mean American culture is declining.

I wish I could leave Ding Yingquan with the last word. But I must insist here that the vision of cosmopolitanism she shares with other young urban women is itself haunted by the specter of which it excludes: the rural migrant workers who populate their urban worlds but whom they appear not to see. These migrant workers come from the interior, poorer provinces to the large coastal cities to be domestic servants and do other menial labor (Gaetano and Jacka 2004, Huang 1999, Song 1999, West and Zhao 2000, Yan 2003a, b). Migrant men do most of the construction work, of which there is a great deal as Chinese cities rebuild new dream worlds into the landscape. Migrant women and men are often blamed by urban residents for urban crime and social instability; migrant women are portrayed as conducting extramarital affairs that destabilize urban marriages (Zhang 2001, Sun 2004).

The women migrant workers I came to know also have visions of cosmopolitanism, but their affective energies bespeak a desire to become cosmopolitan by transcending the divisions within China. Ma Xiaoduo is an activist member of the Rural Women’s Association in Beijing. Like these urban, middle-class women, she, too, tells a colorful tale of her travels around China that transcend her rootedness in the countryside. While her travels were caused by her need to find work, she highlights less the hardships than the adventures. She, too, signals the remaking of herself through consumption. Her first act when she arrived in the Shenzhen special economic zone bordering Hong Kong was to tear off her country clothing and buy a new set of clothes. She wants to live in the city because she refuses to do agricultural labor. Her cosmopolitanism includes an ability to avoid domestic service, especially the care of children, that most migrant women end up doing when they first migrate. But, she says, “The city is not ours.” Migrant workers from the countryside live illegally in the cities and, reminiscent of undocumented workers in the United States, are periodically swept out whenever there is a need to make the urban environment look pristine (see Zhang 2001). Ma Xiaoduo narrates her cosmopolitanism through a tale of overcoming her prior view of what it means to be a migrant worker in relation to urban-born residents. Her cosmopolitanism lies in the way she grasps the incommensurability of her life in relation to theirs: “I can’t enter their circles and I don’t care what happens to them . . . with their going abroad, getting into Beijing University, or their unemployment problems.” For Ma Xiaoduo, to be cosmopolitan with Chinese characteristics means to begin from this point of incommensurability within China. Her story, and those of other migrant women in China, leaves a trace of alterity, of the unassimilable remainder, which renders the cosmopolitanism of urban women ghostly to itself, even as their cosmopolitanism in turn haunts American universalist cosmopolitanism.

In the face of complex changes in capitalist dynamics around the world, academics in different disciplines have turned to narratives of cosmopolitanism, which they often accompany with images of a newly global capitalism. Such images and narratives are used in both celebratory accounts that stress the triumph of the marketplace and capitalist democracy and in critical analyses that highlight the apparent eradication of platforms or possibilities for concerted opposition. Yet both celebratory and critical emphases on cosmopolitanism and neoliberal capitalism manifest assumptions that, too frequently, are accepted as unquestioned truths. The broadest of these assumptions is the idea that neoliberal capitalism and cosmopolitanism exist together as a coherent package, that the one determines the other. In this essay, I have offered an alternative route. Rather than assume coherence, I have traced the makings of that coherence in the historical encounters of a postsocialist generation. “Cosmopolitanism” does not have a stable meaning, nor is it merely the opposite of “the local.” To understand how “desiring China” comes into existence, we need to follow the instabilities of categorizing peoples and views as either cosmopolitan or local. To pursue the politics of claims made in the name of cosmopolitanism means accounting for
how those claims are acted upon by subjects differentially able to make their imaginations stick. We might fruitfully recast much current theorizing if we thought of “cosmopolitan” and “local” not as transparent subjectivities-cum-spatial arrangements but as analytic categories given meaning through specific representational practices. Locating activity, rather than “local” activity, might help us to position the “cosmopolitan” in determinate cultural practices rather than treating it as a deterritorialized phenomenon or wholly a penetration from the West. Precisely these kinds of specificities offer insight into the heterogeneous and uneven practices that create what, only after we have traced their motivated interconnections, we might call neoliberalism.

In March of 1999, a Mr. Xu brought a legal complaint of defamation against one Fang Gang, a journalist of social reportage, and his publisher, the Jilin People’s Press, who had published Fang Gang’s book Homosexuality in China (1995). Mr. Xu claimed that Fang Gang had brought him irreparable harm, of an emotional and professional sort, by writing about him in his book. Fang Gang had written a passage describing the first-ever Valentine’s Day gathering of gay men in Beijing, at a café whose bar manager Fang Gang described as a “homosexual.” The exact passage reads:

Valentine’s Day, a term that Chinese people have gradually become familiar with, that day in 1993, when many young men buy roses for their girlfriends … in Beijing’s Xidan district, in a small bar, an event of very special significance was taking place. This was the fifth event of the “Men’s World”’s cultural salon. The manager of this bar is a thirty-something homosexual, a volunteer on the hotline. The afternoon of Valentine’s Day, the bar turned away customers and tightly closed its windows and doors. From 2:00–5:00, it became the world of male homosexuals. The two experts Qiu Renzong and Chen Bingzhong came, Wan Yanhai and other organizers of course were not absent, five newspapers, China Daily, Beijing Youth, People’s Daily, the China News Agency, and the German Daily Mirror
played out in the infamous television series *River Elegy*, contended that China had lost its opportunity to reach a status as a world power on a par with the West when the Chinese imperium turned away from seafaring and bent its gaze inward to build power on land rather than outward overseas (as had Western colonialists) (Su and Wang 1991). In the 1990s, this cultural fever transformed into cultural nationalism.

7. This province is to the south of Henan province, where the women’s museum is located.

8. When I saw it the museum was still a work in progress. It did not have explanatory texts, for example, of the exhibits.

9. Taussig (1993), Bhabha (1994), Tsing (1995) and others have revitalized the concepts of mimesis and alterity, turning them back against their Enlightenment origins. Earlier ideas of mimesis as a synonym of realism, as an endeavor to craft an exact replica of the social world, have been reconceptualized by these authors in a poststructuralist manner to signal actions and representations of similitude that, in attempting to copy the original, end up subverting it, or making the copy more “original” than the original, or exposing the provisional and strategic constructions of subjects and objects and the orders of power involved in those constructions. Mimesis, in their theories, depends on a relation between a knower and its object, or a relation of alterity, of making a thing or person into an “other.” Taussig draws from the Frankfurt School, Bhabha from psychoanalytic theory, and Tsing from postcolonial, minority discourse and feminist theories. All of them emphasize the importance of colonialism in the dynamics of mimesis and alterity. They all use concepts of mimesis and alterity, then, to conceptualize dynamics of domination and its possible subversions.

10. One finds alterity, by contrast, in museums constructed by colonizers to display the native peoples they have conquered, or in history museums that produce replicas of the quaint “traditions” of “our forefathers” that reassure us about our modernity. The women’s museum, with the exception of minority women, does not display a set of contrasts against which the subject gazing upon the exhibit can be reassured about the normative nature of their subjectivity.

11. When I first wrote this essay, I had in mind lesbian and gay cultural productions in the United States. Since the early 1990s, as will become evident in the next chapter, lesbians and gay men in China have put on cultural productions that are in dialogue with a transnational gay network but do not merely replicate U.S. identities.

3. **Qualities of Desire**

1. This essay speaks mainly about gay men. At the time I began this project, in the summer of 1997, the few lesbians I knew in China asked me not to write about them. Since then, I have interviewed a number of lesbians but feel it is best for the purposes of this essay to direct my argument to the majority of those with whom I have spoken about these questions.

2. They almost always use the English word “gay.” The Chinese word for “homosexuality” is *tongxingliang* and carries connotations of medical abnormality. As I describe in the essay, the term “comrade” has also become popular.


4. Italics indicate that these terms were said in English.

5. Lydia Liu (1995) coins the term “translingual practice” to highlight how the politics of crossing categories and concepts over language boundaries can lead to fraught confrontations charged with contentious claims to power. My use of “transcultural practices” stems from Liu’s conceptualization, though I am tempted to keep her felicitous phrase for use in an analysis of sexuality. I explain cultural citizenship below.

6. David Halperin’s (1998) exquisite rendering of the historical and cultural specificity in Foucault’s study of sexuality—which moves us beyond the act-versus-identities dichotomy—is a model of what I have in mind.

7. Altman has written a more elaborate version of this argument in his monograph, *Global Sex* (2001).

8. See also Strongman (2002) for a related critique.


10. For recent examples of the work I allude to, see Boellstorff (2005), Cohen (1995), Manalansan (2003), Morris (1997), and Povinelli (2002).

11. Kath Weston (1995) has argued this point beautifully in her essay on gay urban/rural imaginaries in the United States.

12. I use Smart Hall’s (1985) concept of articulation, by which he means that connections are not given but appear only under particular conditions and must be constantly renewed. An articulation of different practices means not that they become identical but that they function together.

13. See Gopinath (2005) and Manalansan (2005) for leading the way in this critique in relation to queer politics and culture.

14. I suspect that homosexuality is exempt in part because its major faultline of difference lies not between itself and heterosexuality but between itself and homosociality. Unlike the homosociality that Sedgwick (1985, 1990) so perceptively excavated, homosociality in China is public, intimate, and the norm. Many men I have spoken with, both gay and unmarked as gay, feel that sex among men may be seen as a natural outgrowth of friendship among men, at least until they marry. Love between men is seen as normal.

15. Wan Yanhai is his real name, which I use because he became internationally famous after he was jailed by the government in 2000 for exposing the prob-
lem of AIDS among poor rural farmers. He then went into exile in the United States. Since that time, he has been allowed to return to China, and he works on public health issues with the support of NGO funding.

16. Indeed, one could argue that human rights discourse is similar to gay identity in that both circulate globally and both are translated with ambivalence.

17. Cui Ziten is his real name, which I use because he has an international reputation and regularly attends film festivals and academic conferences. Other than Cui Ziten and Wan Yanhai, the names in this essay are pseudonyms.

18. As Fuss explains, "Identification is a process that keeps identity at a distance, that prevents identity from ever approximating the status of an ontological given, even as it makes possible the formation of an illusion of identity as immediate, secure, and totalizable" (1995, 2).

19. Manalansan (2003) portrays the specificities of this Filipino identification, which is termed bakla, both in the Philippines and in the Filipino diaspora. Manalansan argues that bakla is socially constructed as that of the male body with a female heart. This identity has less to do with cross-dressing or effeminacy than with being able to express emotions and desires conventionally associated with women. Few of those who identify as bakla want to have sex with other bakla; instead they look for straight men.

20. "The temptation," he wrote, "of total negation, measuring the infinity of this attempt and its impossibility-this is the presence of the face. To be in relation with the other... is to be unable to kill. It is also the situation of discourse" (1996 [1951], 9).

4. From Sacrifice to Desire

1. For an elaboration of the concept of worlding, see Zhan (2001).

2. For a general overview on social transformations in post-Mao consumption practices, see Davis (2000). See also Evans (2000, 2001) and Gillette (2000a, 2000b) for specific discussions of gender and consumption.


4. I have learned a great deal about how to question ideologies of globalization from my colleagues at the University of California, Santa Cruz, including Anna Tsing (2004), Jacqueline Nassy Brown (2005), and Hugh Raffles (2003), who, in recent years, have provided much creative rethinking about the cultural construction of place, space, and scale. What I say here is inspired by their work.

5. Thanks to Lydia Liu for this insight.

6. Yan Yunxiang (1997) has offered an astute ethnography of McDonald's in Beijing. He argues that McDonald's has been "localized" in its symbolic meaning and cultural use by Beijing residents. This localization includes the transformation of McDonald's in China into a place of high status, where young professionals like to spend time to acquire and also display their knowledge of foreign cuisine and culture, and its use as a place for family rituals. McDonald's "style" rather than the food is the main attraction. Yan points out that McDonald's portrayal of itself as using scientific methods of food preparation also makes it a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity.


8. Yan (2003) finds in his ethnography of contemporary northern rural life that premarital sex, love, and intimacy have become the focus of courtship among rural youth. He argues that these changing expectations have been shaped by periods of migrant labor in urban areas as well as the spread of popular mass media, such as television. See also Evans (1997), who sees a continuity from earlier periods in public representations of women who engage in undomesticated sexual behavior as victims or depraved.


10. The four "olds" referred to old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas.

11. See Pan (2003) for an important discussion of tourism and labor migration as the two main forms of movement in post-Mao China.

12. But see Zhang (2004) for an ethnography that complicates this picture. Zhang examines migrant entrepreneurial families from Zhejiang province living in Beijing. They, in turn, have hired poorer migrants to work for them.

13. Ma Xiaodao's sense of distance from her rural past is the other side of this tale of overcoming. Yan (2003) puts these views in context in his ethnography of rural life, which describes how migrant labor experiences have wrought an emergence in the countryside of an ethos of subject development, in which personal desires loom large.

5. Legisrating Desire

All translations in this chapter are by the author.

1. See Lubman (1999) for a discussion of this point, especially chapter 9. Lubman argues that the practice of not having precedent is based on the historical flexibility of the legal system in China as well as its intimate relationship with enforcing state authority. However, recently, the highest court, the Supreme People's Court, has cautiously been trying to establish precedent by publishing carefully chosen decisions in their gazette.

2. Yanagisako (2002) argues that Hirschman's history additionally reveals how the category of "interest" became vague enough that no one felt the need to ex-