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**Title:** Chinese and Japanese: The Changing Values of "Flexible Capital"

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**Keywords:** neoliberalism

**Abstract:** Our project hinged on the ability of the undergraduate advanced Chinese and Japanese students at the UIUC to describe, during short interviews, the value of their respective languages in economic terms. We found that the undergraduate students involved in learning third-year Chinese and Japanese were very well aware of the changing economic reasons for learning their languages. Our hypothesis that Japanese students were more motivated by popular Japanese media while the Chinese students were more motivated by economic reasons was borne out by our findings, though to say that our hypothesis was perfect would be a gross generalization not cognizant of the outlying data and the limitations of our project.

**Response Paper #1:** Duggan, Lisa. 2003. *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston, Beacon Press. Chapters 1,2. Pp. 1-42.

Giroux, Henry. 2005. The Terror of Neoliberalism: Rethinking the Significance of Cultural Politics. *College Literature* 32 (1) Winter: 1-19.

Phoenix, Ann. 2004. Neoliberalism and Masculinity: Racialisation and the Contradictions of Schooling and for 11-14 Year Olds. *Youth and Society* 36 (2):227-246. First 9 pages only.

Neoliberalism, the confluence of aggressive free-market capitalist principles and politics originating in the 1960s has gone on to dominate global political perspectives since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and through the 1990s. Based on works by Friedrich von Hayek and students such as Milton Friedman, it contains concepts like "spontaneous order" in society, arising from free-market conditions, and espouses the limitation of government to ensuring and enforcing the free market.

In Lisa Duggan's, "The Twilight of Equality?" the definition of neoliberalism is expanded beyond mere economic constraints and is explained as "cultural and identity politics." Delving into the origin of liberalism, neoliberalism's precursor, Duggan explains that liberalism, and thereby neoliberalism, "organizes material and political life in terms of race, gender, and sexuality as well as economic class and nationality,

or ethnicity and religion,” adding later that Liberalist terminology can be divided into the master categories of “the state, the economy, civil society, and the family.” These terms serve to divide public and private life and obscure and justify various impingements on personal rights, such as gendered marriage and the racial politics. Duggan further argues that neoliberalism seeks “greater wealth and more democracy,” at the cost of economic equality and ideological freedom in a variety of realms, and contributing to the rise of a new Western imperialism, headed by the United States of America and enforced by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on less privileged nations. Duggan’s “The Incredible Shrinking Public” documented the use of culture wars and identity politics in furthering the neoliberal agenda. Identity politics seem to be the politics of race, gender, and sexuality, economic class, and nationality, or ethnicity and religion, while culture wars seem to be the use of normative cultural judgments based on identity politics to reduce the footprint of social institutions.

Meanwhile, Giroux’s “Terror of Neoliberalism” takes the definitions given in Duggan’s *Twilight of Equality* and then details the faults of neoliberalism as well as a vague outline of a successful response to neoliberalism. Specifically, he mentions the corporatization of America, legalized corporate tax evasion, upwardly distributed wealth, ideologically unforgiving politics devoid of rational discourse, and the militarization of society, as well as rising unemployment, the widest rich-poor gap of contemporary times, civic disengagement and the overall undermining of the democratic system, though he doesn’t stop there. Possibly more relevant to our class is the effect of neoliberal policies abroad, propagated by the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, and the International Monetary Fund, and the devastating effects of neoliberalism on youths. Abroad, emerging worlds are reduced to relying on the patronage of “wealthy nations led by the United States,” while on the home front, the youth are subjected to futures with high risks and costs with little hope for a return on their investments. Giroux wraps up his paper by saying, essentially, that the enemy (neoliberalism) must be named and understood before it can be combated, that there are forces in action already moving to counter neoliberalism, and that these movements and organizations must band together across national lines to make another world possible.

Finally, in Ann Phoenix’s European study of the navigation of boys’ masculinity versus their study habits in neoliberal knowledge societies, it was found that the neoliberalist concept of individual responsibility for transformation in order to survive in the market placed boys directly at odds with their masculine identity. This is due to the fact that studying and schoolwork is seen as a feminine activity, despite

knowing full well that schoolwork is vital for success in the future.

These authors are well versed in portraying neoliberalism in a negative light, and they have convincing and fleshed out arguments regarding the detrimental effects of neoliberalism on society. Duggan provides an excellent introduction to the origin and history of neoliberalism and the broad changes it has wrought to the socio-intellectual landscape, while Ann Phoenix highlights the specific effects neoliberalism has had on today's youth. Giroux argues for the rallying of a movement against neoliberalism. Overall, these papers strongly complement each other in a convincing fashion, each building off the other, performing examinations of neoliberalism on both a macro and micro scale. While Giroux's argument is the most vehement in implicitly calling for action against neoliberalism and outlining a few methods, it does not reduce the impact of the points he makes. He derives authority from Duggan and many other sources to support his position – he seems informed and rational rather than a rabid fanatic. Phoenix and Duggan call less aggressively for the dethroning of neoliberalism, but are no less convinced of the dangers of such a cutthroat capitalist environment.

However, judgment from such a small sample of essays makes it difficult to determine the actual scholarly consensus on neoliberalism, given that before this class I'd never before encountered the term. In order to better understand the issue contradicting views should be appraised, seeing as the only definitions of neoliberalism put forth are already couched in negative terms by these three authors. Otherwise, they could be merely shadowboxing with a construction of their own making, which seems unlikely in the face of their arguments, especially Duggan's thorough definition of neoliberalism. Giroux seems too happy to blame neoliberalism with the ills of society, or the rise of the "military-prison-education-industrial complex." Giroux's weakest argument is in his link between class, color, and gender and the prison-industrial complex, which is justified merely by a rhetorical question.

Personally, it would take more extensive reading on liberalism and neoliberalism to ascertain both a neutral definition of neoliberalism and an idea of the scope of the ideology in order to better understand the arguments put forth by these three authors. To be fair, neoliberalism also has benefits that might warrant the modification, rather than outright revolution. Entrepreneurship is not always inadequate to meet the needs of the people, especially in the case of information technology – a world without Google would be a world without effective online search, which makes the internet that much more expansive. The X-Prizes led to the creation of a commercial space travel business, exposed to competitive

selective pressures that were absent in the government-funded NASA, which hadn't put a vehicle on the moon in decades. Furthermore, the world is experiencing the rise of two motions in response to neoliberal pressures, the Free/Open Source Software movement and crowdsourcing, or Wikinomics, which distribute production costs and do away with a sale price. What, in a neoliberal setting, could be better than free? Yet at the same time, these movements have been compared to socialism. To quote a history teacher of mine, it is Jeffersonian ends through Hamiltonian means.

All in all, I am now very curious about neoliberalism as it progresses today, its effects and its ramifications, in a global arena than merely in America as most of the articles implied. I would also like to know more about the effects on youth and the higher education process, and whether or not neoliberalism is an accurate frame through which to view the world.

**Response Paper #2:** *Boo, Katherine. 2004. The New Yorker. The Best Job in Town: The Americanization of Chennai.*

<http://courses.washington.edu/globfut/req%20readings/BooBestJob.pdf>

*Brooks, David. 2001. Atlantic Monthly. The Organization Kid*  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200104/brooks>

This week's narratives brought several neoliberal narratives into focus: Joe and Harish of Office Tiger, and the rise of today's "millennials," and the Organization Kids. In Chennai, India, Joe, a western business mogul, fosters a culture around the selection of top talent in the local area, the best and brightest of which is Harish. But with so much social capital invested in Office Tiger, what happens when Office Tiger invests its fiscal capital somewhere else? Meanwhile in America, children are as busy now as they will be in their future roles as CEOs, thanks to their baby boomer parents.

In Katherine Boo's "Best Job in Town," we follow the story of Harish Kumar, who, after an unsuccessful first stint with school, self-educates himself in IT and gains the attention of, and a job with, Joe, Princeton graduate and co-founder of Office Tiger. Office Tiger itself is founded by Joe and Randy, two Princeton graduates who saw an opportunity in "judgment dependent services" staffed not in America, but in India; essentially, they lowered service supply costs through outsourcing. As a result, Harish is happily employed, and Office Tiger

employees are not only willing to work for ten to twenty percent of what their American analogues would charge, but they are even honored enough by their employment to brand their wedding invitations with the company name. Only the best and the brightest are hired at Office Tiger, creating an intense level of competition. Harish himself admitted that he would not have hired a low-scoring applicant like himself. Meanwhile, his work days often stretch from 5:30AM to past midnight, but his daily life isn't the only thing a career at Office Tiger is changing. As highly positioned and salaried as he is, he is a good prospect for any wife his parents chose for him – that is, if he allowed it. It is a Tamil tradition to arrange the marriages of one's children, but Harish would rather spend the time working rather than raising a family. And even after all this investment in Office Tiger, with the Indian rupee appreciating at record rates against the dollar, Joe and Randy may have to make the decision to cut costs and relocate to the Philippines or Sri Lanka, which may leave their sixteen-hundred-odd Chennai employers with nothing.

Meanwhile, David Brooks penned an article in 2001 called “The Organization Kid,” about the newest generation of college-aged overachievers, the sons and daughters of the baby boomers. Having lived a highly regimented life since their childhood beginnings, they have continued to live the only way they know how by filling their schedule with activities – homework, studying, exercising, charity work, sports – to the point where it is often necessary to schedule appointments just to see their close friends. As a result, there's less time for the characteristically 1960s era college activities such as revolutionary ideas, protesting, and relationships. Many of the students, to paraphrase from a 1960's handbook on admissions, enter college in a “prudential” frame of mind, as the means to an end as opposed to an end in and of itself. Complacency and compliance has increased. Instead of trying to change the system, the meritocracy, they are attempting to ascend it. Overall, he concludes, between spending much of their time enhancing skills, being relatively content, or submitting to authority, the children of today are just different. He then explores the possible origins of the Organization Kid, from infancy all the way through adolescence, highlighting trends in rearing and education along the way. Brooks couples the behaviors of the teens he's seen with a reduced generational consciousness – college students today did not spend their time trying to break free from the definitions or constraints of the last. Countercultures and mainstream have merged, creating an environment in which has no overarching culture to defy, where hippies are CEOs of multinational corporations and teachers listen to punk and ska.

These articles tell the same story. While they may be about different subjects in vastly differing areas, the grand narrative, that of

neoliberal competition and its consequences, is still the same. Harish is the best and the brightest in Chennai, as are many of the kids in Brooks's article, but the true story is about the pyramid, the meritocracy, that both create. To quote Masahiro Sakurai, creator of hit game Super Smash Brothers and its sequel, Super Smash Brothers: Melee, "if you make an environment where everyone is trying to climb their way to the top of a single tall mountain, it's clear that the people having fun would be limited to a small number of individuals." What he is speaking of is the exclusivity at the top of the gaming mountain. Though little known outside of Korea, gaming is now a profession. However, professional gamers must practice multiple hours a day to hone their skills, and though a player might be considered skilled in a local sense, that same player would be absolutely destroyed on the professional scene. Pro gamers game upwards of 5 hours a day, like gymnasts training for the Olympics. This is the same thing that the community in Chennai is fostering, as well as the American culture of meritocracy, and that is the same environment in both cases.

However, to what extent are these forces changing their subjects, and what is lost in the process? Harish and his colleagues lose their culture little by little, while kids in America lose their ability to defy the processes that have created them, limiting them to the box that their parents have nurtured them in all their lives. The end goal in both cases is a kind of happiness married to the indicator of financial success. It's a narrow perspective, but, properly focused, neoliberal subjects are quite "productive" – another term that has been defined by liberalism. Many will find that their happiness falls by the wayside, that time is the scarcest of resources, and that individuality, that defining characteristic of Western society, is at its apex. What that means is that the successful will be less willing to compromise their neoliberal lives for the burden of a relationship, as has been seen in Brooks's article, and furthermore that family life and kids are an even less acceptable compromise. It's well known that in developed nations the more affluent a household is, the less likely it is to have multiple kids. Parents aren't likely to have much time for their kids, and on the other hand the modern day rearing of a child, with its busy schedule and making sure everything is just perfect for growth and development is a career in and of itself. In China, where the one-child policy has been enforced for multiple generations, Chinese people are forgetting the words for "aunt," "uncle," and "cousin," words that have fallen out of common usage. What ramifications do these have on day-to-day life? What kind of new generation are trends like this creating?

It would be interesting to see those neoliberal subjects who break free of the constraints of the neoliberalist viewpoint, to crack the cosmic

egg, and then to see if neoliberalism has the ability to co-opt these individuals. Specifically, to break free of the view that financial success is the definitive measure of success, to reject the notion that economic power is the definition of superiority, and to be happy or content nonetheless. Such individuals would have to rewrite the definition of success to something far more ephemeral, which makes combating the ennui of existence that much more difficult. Acquisition and spectacle seem, by far, the main methods of doing so today, but spectacle alone seems rather shallow and Orwellian. There does seem to be a trend towards the Eastern ideas of enlightenment, Dao, contentment, meditation, peace, and harmony for well being, but it has been co-opted by neoliberalism – Yoga equipment experienced record sales figures recently, for example. But this may be nothing more than a trend. So where does that leave a paradigm-breaking individual?

I guess we'll find out in a generation or so.

**Response Paper #3:** Austin, Joe. 2005. [Youth, Neoliberalism, Ethics: Some Questions](#). rhizomes.10 spring 2005. paragraphs 1-16 (online)

Ong, Aihwa. 2006. Higher Learning in Global Space. In *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty*. Durham: Duke University Press. Pp 139-156.

Anagnost, Ann. Forthcoming. Imagining Global Futures in China: The Child as a Sign of Value. In Jennifer Cole and Deborah Dunham, eds. *Figuring the Future: Children, Youth, and Globalization*. School for American Research Press.

*A\*Star (Singapore Agency for Science, Technology, and Research) Yearbook 2006/07* (to be handed out in class).

Neoliberalism is highly concerned with the development of the young and the individual as a knowledge subject. On the one hand, as developed in Joe Austin's article, youth are simultaneously the risk society takes in neoliberalizing and the spokespeople for avid consumerism. On the other hand, as Anagnost puts forward, youth in China are disproportionately valued and are also signs of value. Meanwhile, Ong argues that the corporatization and globalization of learning institutes, specifically American universities, deemphasizes moral learning and nationalistic boundaries by creating globe-trotting cosmopolitan extra-national citizens, but also uniquely positions American universities to shape the moralities of its cosmopolitan

graduates, domestic or foreign-born.

Austin's article, "Youth, Neoliberalism, Ethics: Some Questions," addresses the effects of neoliberal governmentality on youth studies, an effect that has been largely ignored in that field, and raises some questions based on selected readings, including "Ronald Strickland's edited volume *Growing Up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young* (2002), Mark Cieslik and Gary Pollock's edited volume *Young People in Risk Society: The Restructuring of Youth Identities and Transitions in Late Modernity* (2002), and Alain Badiou's *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (1993; trans., 2001)." More specifically, he argues that youth as a relatively consequence and carefree period is being wiped out as a result of neoliberal advances on the core fabric of society, where no period of time is seen as having a free lunch. In his analysis of the collected works under the title "Growing Up Postmodern," he argues that the prison-industrial complex has replaced school as the socializing mechanism for youth instead of school due to the erosion of the welfare state, and, by connection, the public school system. Justification for this complex has arisen as a result of the 1990's predictions of a new wave of "superpredators." Yet, he also posits that youth are seen as the ideal consumers, the necessary money accelerators for the capitalist engine. Youth are at once marginalized as agents of free will and actively participate with the risk society in order to develop their own agency. In the second part of his essay, Austin directly connects neoliberalism governmentality with youth through relevant readings, noting in particular youth's lost security as the welfare state is privatized and asking what is being produced as these protections are stripped away. In the final portion of his essay, he uses Badiou's *Essay on the Understanding of Evil* to understand the ethical ramifications of the neoliberalization of youth, and poses new questions from there.

Meanwhile, Anagnost's article on the Child as value begins with a story about the youth of China on an expedition in Mongolia, exposing Chinese parents' fears about the very nature of their children and their children's education. The transformation of China from a Communist state to one in which, "Making money is glorious," has changed the stakes for Chinese families. There are greater rewards and more difficulties in a neoliberalized state. While encouraging a one-child household, the Chinese government has also made sure to encourage those families to maintain a very "high quality" child in order to both reduce population and maintain competitive edge in a global market. Towards this goal, maternal and educational labor inputs have increased in order to develop "high quality" children. Economic changes in China have made abundantly clear the differences between the haves and the



have-nots, migrant workers giving the educated urban elites a measure from which they can derive their own superior value, specifically in comparison to each others' children. This generation of parents lost many educational opportunities during the Cultural Revolution, save for their ability to "eat bitterness" and endure, which they are determined to make up for in their children. At the same time, they fear that this hardness, the street-smart, practical quality is something that their children lack, and something which they attempt to make up for by sending their children on camping trips in, say, Mongolia. As a result, their anxieties about their children are constantly being compared on a transnational level, which Anagnost phrases as being "located in a transnational network of gazes of competitive childhoods." Yet, while a child can be cultivated, an oppositional fear is "*mianbudui shehui*," or a child's inability to "face society" between family and school obligations, a fear which illustrates the human limitations of their children. However, as a result of neoliberalism, childhood itself is commoditized, as endless products or services arise to feed and satisfy the fears of parents, whose financial inputs into the value of their children reflect the commodity that is the child. As a result, childhood itself is in a crisis as parents eliminate play time in favor of skill-enhancing activities.

Ong argues in "Higher Learning in Global Space" that the social technology of education that has long been a staple of a certain type, the white male, is being diffused across a wide variety of immigrants, global elites, and exchange students, which engenders a rethinking of the roles of the university institution. Ong says that the university's original roles were as places of cultural as well as analytical thinking, inculcating nationalistic and moral goals, heavily tied to the supposed ethnic superiority of the white male, as well as the maths and sciences. As a result of the globalization and corporatization of the universities, the cultural and nationalistic aspects fall to the wayside in order to better accommodate students from all over the world, especially in growth markets such as China. Graduates of such institutions may have the analytical qualities that allow them to succeed in a global market, but their allegiances have less and less to do with particular areas of the world. However, these globetrotters are not motivated to improve the state of Democracy in America or elsewhere, content to be extranational citizens of the world. As America's borders become less penetrable after 9/11, Ong argues that it is time to rethink education in a global reference in regards to culture and the arts, as well as the quantitative and analytical studies.

In the A\*Star packet we were given, three elements are stressed - development of potential, economic incentives, and romance. It is made to look easy to join the A\*Star program, when in reality only the cream of

the crop is accepted. Once in A\*Star, the ability to develop one's potential is broken down into a few categories: in terms of adding to human potential, with appeals to aiding humanity; in terms of economic rewards, with many references to alumni entrepreneurs and the commercialization of knowledge products; and in terms of sports, with an emphasis on discipline and development, while enjoying work, or at least buckling down. Economic incentives underly every page of the packet, specifically Singapore's success and, more importantly, survival. This is based on continued leadership in knowledge workers and the service industry, which is closely tied to Singapore's success as a nation with few natural resources. Furthermore, they also appeal to the individualistic economic incentives, as noted before, and even directly facilitate a form of personal economic incentive, the growth of a fund matching the tuition cost for the individual's use after graduation. Finally, the entire packet is romanticized in terms of personal relationships as couples of highly matched and highly productive knowledge workers, and as the most fitting means towards the goal of personal success while contributing to humanity.

These readings all contribute to a sense of despair for a carefree childhood, and a suspicion of the future as a place where children are larvally vetted in order to produce the optimized human being, with the highest *suzhi* possible, only to emerge later, sticky with the fluids of a encapsulated pupahood, to serve the hive that is the capitalist neoliberal economic engine. With all the manic emphasis on the development, where does the repressed needs of a human populace go? Certainly, they don't just disappear. Is the necessary antithesis of neoliberalism the rise of the counterculture and development of the arts at just as fierce a pace? Nam Hyun Joon, a liquid dancer from Korea, is said to have practiced 8 hours a day - surely at the expense of his neoliberal education. And yet, he is an example of a youth ideal for young Asians everywhere. Korea, in particular, is known to have an extensive bboy culture, and those who take it seriously have no time for the neoliberal emphasis on knowledge production. A further example of the spectacle production vs. knowledge production is the mangaka of the manga series "Naruto," Masashi Kishimoto, who was ranked 38th out of 39th in his graduating class in Japan. Yet his works are read on a global scale by youths around the world.

So what are the youths that don't quite make the cut doing? They are not the elite, but they still have that human potential that is so often spoken of on a time-limited scale.

**Response Paper #4:** Rofel, Lisa. 1999. *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Pp. 41-95, 166-187,

217-256.

This week focused in on the state-managed person in China, specifically through Lisa Rofel's narrating of her experiences in China in her book "Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism." In recounting her experiences in Hangzhou, she portrays her revelations about the multiple roles of the Chinese people, and how they navigate identities and display agency in a post-socialist China. Underlying all of this is Rofel's divorce from what she calls a "field of Eurocentric hegemonies." She includes three key categories of workers in her study of China: those who came of age previous to the Cultural Revolution cohort, those who came of age during the Cultural Revolution, and those who came of age after the Cultural Revolution. Specifically, she speaks to Chen Shifu, Xiao Bao, and Xiao Ma as examples of their respective eras.

Chen Shifu is upheld in the Zhenfu factory as being the ideal worker, with a long history of involvement with the silk industry, who the party officials would have Rofel believed triumphed through the backward times before the industry was nationalized. What Rofel finds beyond the official party line is an individual who has found self-empowerment through the new gender roles espoused by the Communist government, specifically in the silk industry. Prior to the centralization of industry in China, the silk trade was a highly masculine craft, with male weavers guarding their secrets closer against competing families of male-dominant silk weavers. Comparing this to the common modern aphorism, "Men plow, women weave," referring to the fact that it weaving is mostly a women's occupation in the modern times, and often presented as a natural fact and an artifact of feudal China, it becomes evident how vastly the gender landscape has changed. In the time before the "women's liberation" of the silk industry, there was a distinction between women going "out" to work and "in" to work, with no relation to the European hegemonic ideas of public and private, but rather what was contained in the household and what was not in the household. For instance, a woman staying inside to weave silk was perfectly within her rights to do so. However, if she were to exit the domain of the household in order to weave, she would be shunned, having committed an act just like prostitution. There was great shame in leaving the boundaries of the household, if one were a woman, akin to becoming "damaged goods," that was related to an inculcated dependency on a patriarch in traditional China. As one of these female workers who had gone "outside," Chen Shifu took the tenets of the liberation to heart, not only re-imaging her personal history as one of a strongly independent, ideal female worker suppressed by the masculine forces, but also reclaiming her dignity and refuting the shame of the previous era by becoming the ideal Communist worker. What's more,

Chen Shifu not only liberates herself from her gender, but has co-opted parts of the masculine identity in casting off her status as a shameful female deviant. With her firm gait and strong speech, other workers define her as being "willing to talk," a euphemism normally meaning willing to speak without fear of state retribution, but also implying masculinity in women, who are supposed to be timid and shy. As Austin Powers said, "She's a man, baby!"

Meanwhile, Xiao Bao, in many ways a product of the Cultural Revolution and a member of a later generation than Chen Shifu's, is the counterpart to Chen Shifu's model worker. Due to her formative years during the Cultural Revolution, in which the "olds" were challenged, and resistance against authority was a key component in displaying an understanding of true Communist values. An active member of the Revolution, she was particularly skilled at writing catchy slogans. However, her resistance to authority in the space of the factory works at cross-purposes to the rest of her coworkers. Specifically in a position of authority as the assistant shift leader, her resistance to authority is embodied in her refusal to fulfill her own authoritative roles. Her despairing defiance is grounded in the cognitive dissonance of her existence, caught between believing the ideals of the Cultural Revolution and her own position, a limbo perhaps best represented by the table at which she is supposed to work, which she never leaves, at once a symbol of authority and a stronghold for Dilbert-esque thumb-twiddling, fraternizing, and low-key disdain for authority. Unlike Chen Shifu, she does not stride confidently into a room. She sits at her desk and entertains and is entertained by socializing with the workers of the factory. Interestingly, she at once criticizes the peasant women she works with, disparaging their quality, yet refuses to leave her position, envying men their ability to turn their back on the factory without consequences. Her envy of the peasant women and factory men of their ability to leave stems from disdain for the women and envy of the men's courage. She seems to regret not having gotten a university education, and is close-mindedly resigned to her position amongst the peasant women, at once convinced of her own higher quality and yet believing that doors to anything higher had been shut along with the gates to university. It is also interesting that, as a woman, she is bound by yet another custom of adhering to gender boundaries, another authority she is resigned to following, but not willing to supplant, and yet another personal limbo.

Another worker, Xiao Ma, is at one point seen yelling at Xiao Bao's workers for breaking too many silk threads. Xiao Ma is a member of the newest cohort of women workers, one whose primary objective is to define themselves in a post-Mao era, rather than to defy authority. As

such, she does her job well and does it without questioning authority, having internalized the challenge of feminine identity rather than the challenges of politics. Xiao Ma is the shift leader for the factory, initially seen as bustling about and indifferent to matters of love or marriage. Yet, after a break from her anthropological fieldwork, Rofel returns to the factory to find an exuberantly married, pregnant Xiao Ma on maternity leave, and dead set on staying away from the factory for as long as possible. Rofel goes on to show how the allegory of postsocialism in endorsing the post-Mao modern woman places Xiao Ma at odds with her state function as a worker. She also says that, ironically, "the discourses of gender identities are produced and deployed by the state," in hopes of overcoming Western stereotypes. In overcoming the Western stereotypes of Chinese culture by promoting the universality of "modern" gender identities, the state manages to shoot itself in the foot by failing to convince these same women to remain working. As is most commonly seen as natural in the West today is the idea of the female as naturally enamored with conjugal love, marriage, and motherhood. However, older cohorts have no shame in admitting that they give their children to relatives to raise and barely see them, a refutation of the so-called nature of a mother, and find discussions of their husbands extraneous. Instead, they focus on becoming married as a path to adulthood, to the ability to "speak with social authority." And, whereas the concern with Xiao Ma's cohort for having a child stems from the supposedly instinctive maternal urges that a natural woman is supposed to feel, the older cohort is more concerned with the practicality of having a child to fulfill filial responsibilities in the parents' old age.

Through all of this, Rofel explores the wide cultural gap between her Eurocentric understanding of gender and labor identities and that of a vastly different culture, with an equally vast difference in historical background and even modernity, and eventually realizes the distance in her conceptions of the identity mean challenging the homogenization of women or women workers in China. On page 186, she states that, "such complex relationships should warn us against easy generalizations about 'workers,' 'women,' or 'women workers,' - and perforce 'modernity' - as coherent, homogeneous categories." Rofel presents a compelling argument, dissecting both the notions of identity and femininity in China, and then turning on the preconceived notions of femininity and identity that she brings into her fieldwork, coming from a western culture herself. Her discovery is dramatized and characterized by her initial clash with Yu Shifu on the positions of men and women. She also refutes Western generalization about the Chinese emphasis of the group over the individual. In Lou Shengzhi she finds an individual who has successfully defied practically all the gender roles of any of the time periods she lived in, and, what's more, flourished, by navigating her identities as a woman,

as a wife, and as a capitalist. Her childhood, raised by her parents as the son of the family, challenges the overwhelming portrayal of the Chinese as strict neo-Confucianists. Her marriage, on her terms and not her husband's, not only challenges gender roles, but the facelessness of the Chinese people, as her husband went far out of his way for Lou Shengzhi out of love. Her success as a capitalist and, further, her success under the new China, despite being in a polygamous relationship, challenges the state-sponsored message of monogamy, and further the Western dogma of monogamy. Her working in her husband's factories at once illustrates the differences between the concept of inside/outside that was the pre-Cultural Revolution cohort's view and the concept of private and public spaces espoused by Eurocentric hegemonies, while her fantastic success and drive in either environment shows the futility of making generalizations about the roles of women in China.

However, examples like Lou Shengzhi are also the weaknesses in Rofel's argument. As she uses examples of certain women of a certain plant of a certain region within the vast confines of China to highlight broader understandings of the Chinese people, the certainty of the breadth of her revelations decreases. While interesting, the few cases of the extraordinary cannot necessarily be used to prove the ordinary. Furthermore, as conjectures subjective purely to herself, her arguments may be lofty constructions that exist only in her head. All in all, though, she does an excellent job of convincing me of her primary points, and opening my eyes to the hegemonic views that affect my notions of China. I am particularly taken by the example of Lou Shengzhi and Xiao Bao, both defiant and atypical, but for vastly different reasons. As we move on in our studies, I hope to find out more about the humanity behind the concepts I have of East Asian nations.

**Response JAPAN**  
**Paper #5:**

Uno, Kathleen. 1993. The Death of "Good Wife, Wise Mother." *Post War Japan as History*. Andrew Gordon, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press. 293-324.

Gordon, Andrew. 1998. Managing Society for Business. *The Wages of Affluence: Labor and Management in Postwar Japan*. Harvard University Press. 174-194.

**KOREA**

Cho, Hee-yeon. 2000. The Structure of the South Korean Developmental Regime and Its Transformation -- Statist Mobilization and

Authoritarian Integration in the Anticommunist Regimentation. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 1(3): (selection) 410-413.

Nelson, Laura C. 2006. South Korean Consumer Nationalism: Women, Children, Credit, and Other Perils. In Sheldon Garon and Patricia L. Maclachlan, eds. *The Ambivalent Consumer: Questioning Consumption in East Asia and the West*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. Pp. 188-208.

State management in Japan and Korea, such as Korean consumerism and Japanese corporate culture, take the stage in this week's reading. The focuses of our readings differ between the two nations: Korean state management is focused around anti-communism and appropriate consumer spending, whereas Japanese state management centers around gender roles and corporate culture.

In Cho Hee-Yeon's segment, he argues that the Korean developmental regime, the "disciplinization of social and political behaviour in order to be accommodated to the dominant rule" of industrial and export development, was preceded and engendered by the anticommunist regimentation of society. By anticommunist regimentation, he means the response to the immediate threat of North Korean military and societal advances on South Korea. Furthermore, he relates the situation in Korea to the Cold War, which was internalized through the Korean civil war and the following perpetual truce and imprisonment and persecution of those involved in the working class movement or the opposition party by the American Occupation Forces and the South Korean government. The result of the developmental regime was the weakening of the landlord class so as not to impede the developmental regime. Subsequent South Korean social discipline was founded on development of industry, exports, and appropriate consumer spending in order to maintain a reserve of consumer capital in the case of national requirements.

Whereas Cho Hee-Yeon's article focused on the macro-level backdrop of South Korea, Laura Nelson focused specifically on the different purchasing pressures on consumers throughout the anticommunist and developmental regimes. With the military coup by Park Chung-Hee, an emphasis was placed on the restriction of consumer spending in order to revitalize the economy, a frugality based on Japanese thought at the time. Park Chung-Hee himself was a volunteer for the Japanese during occupation, and also took ideas from a brief stint with Communism. His regime reduced foreign competition in the domestic market and maintained low wages in an attempt to keep South Korea globally competitive as an export nation. As a result, the middle and poor classes

both felt the same hardships and the same urge to conserve spending, focusing instead on the next generation. However, as the following generation approached adulthood, South Korea began to produce consumer electronics, automobiles, and other luxuries in large quantities, some of which were sold on the domestic market. Combined with a real estate market that polarized the economic situations of the poor and middle class families, this laid the groundwork for the consumer culture that would engulf Korea. Much was made of frugality, and targets of high-spending included women and youth as the perpetrators of irresponsible consumer spending. Men's spending, however, was not highlighted due to the near-holy esteem in which homosocial spending on drinking, sex, and politics. Government abetted criticism came to a halt, however, after the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis forced the South Korean government to rely on its citizens for an influx of cash through *appropriate* spending. However, citizens still felt uneasy about consumerism, so to boost purchases, the government cut interest rates and offered incentives to use credit cards, such as income tax incentives for those who spent more than 10% of their income through credit cards. As a result, in 2002 there were about four credit cards per working person in South Korea, many used to pay off older credit cards in an unending cycle. Women and youth came under renewed criticism over credit card purchases. However, post 1997 criticism is different in that it is less effective at criticizing consumer spending, seeing as consumer spending is now a mainstay for the South Korean economy.

In Japan, the original form and subsequent transmutations of *ryosai kenbo*, or "good wife wise mother" were powerful discourses in the roles of women in society. Championed by high-profile men in the aftermath of the Sino-Japanese war, *ryosai kenbo* defined women's social contributions as that of wifedom and motherhood – wives managed the household, while mothers focused on educating their children. The limitations included denial of voting rights, ability to found political bodies, and speaking rights in pre-Democratic Japan. Like Korea, households and therefore wives were exhorted to practice frugality, and were not generally accepted as employees until the end of World War II, in which the Japanese government was restructured. Furthermore, women were exploited in factories, given lower than living wages, and educated for home-making in company positions. Despite muted feminist movements, feminism became considered un-patriotic in the face of the nationalistic upsurge following the Manchurian incident. To make headway, female activists made appeals to motherhood in order to raise awareness and increase authority. In the post-war society, despite restructuring, Japanese society assumed it was the job of women to be mothers and wives first and foremost. However, motherhood gained ascendancy for, Uno argues, three reasons: the rise of the independent



wife, the ease of household chores and thereby increased motherly attention on offspring, and the decrease of women in family business. Ryosai kenbo perpetuated in labor and in education; home-making classes were required for women until 1989. Major women's organizations in post-war Japan sought equity in the framework of wife or motherhood. However, feminist movements in the 1970s rejected ryosai kenbo as a pretense for equity, and instead emphasized women's choice in not becoming housewives, and further the "feminization of work" rather than the "masculinization of women," opening avenues beyond the home and increasing home autonomy, besides. Women's movement also opened up avenues for men, as was the case in one Tokyo suburb, where men were granted equal childcare leave as women.

Gordon's article on corporate culture shows the vast degree to which corporations managed the average citizen, and what discourse occurred between the populace, the government, and the corporations. Business leaders pushed the Ministry of education to produce two tiers of workers: the top three percent, who would be university educated and groomed for management positions, and the rest, who would begin work out of high school and needed to master a consistently high level of basic skills to be used in the workplace. As a result, university enrollment doubled in 15 years as parents and children sought higher credentials. However, the basic corporate goal had been met in exam based competition and group-oriented values, which allowed employers to easily filter out employees and at the same time ensured teamwork and submission. Exam-based competition continued in the workplace, where continual self-improvement was needed to gain promotions. Meanwhile, wives were expected to keep the household running while their husbands worked, which was reinforced even after the introduction of the EEOL by company policy which fulfilled the requirements to the line, but no more, and pressured women to assume female careers, many of which had no upward mobility. Meanwhile, corporate response to Communist and Socialist groups such as Minsei and Ro-on dominating the new Japanese emphasis on recreation was to give corporate leisure time an agenda. At the peak of Minsei's membership, corporate Japan decided to combat it through pushing membership to conservative rags like Sankei, creating anti-left recreational agents, and using leisure activities to reinforce capitalist ideals and squeeze out ideological circles. The rise of stereos and LPs, as well as karaoke bars, as well as business-world subsidies of performances, meant the end of Ro-on, and the slow death of ideological circles' involvement in leisure time. The judicial system and its judges instated a culture of corporate loyalty, with severe consequences associated with firing, perhaps as a result of their own poor situation. Meanwhile, this weakened the unions, as there was little

real reason to join, as job safety had been inculcated into society and corporate structure. Despite worker and union activity, as well as Communist hopes, corporate Japan quickly squelched any larger movements through national campaigns, criticizing unionism as undemocratic minority egoism, which seems to have been accepted by the majority of Japan. As a result of this nationalism, unions worked with corporate Japan to reduce costs and eliminate jobs. A few restraints on corporate Japan were environmental and women's movements. While the shinjinrui, or youth aliens, were identified as possible cause for change, they proved to do little in changing the status quo. Corporate Japan, however, identified for itself a new obstacle to capitalism in Japan – the government. A final wildcard in the equation were international pressures brought to bear on Japan.

Our readings this week bring to light a great deal of external pressures on citizens in Japan and Korea, which interweave quite nicely, even bringing together Japan and Korea at some points, as competition between Japan and Korea forced, to some extent, the cost-cutting tactics employed by Japan in the 1980s. Furthermore, the readings on the effects of ryosai kenbo in Japan are well-backed by Gordon's piece on corporate Japan, well enough that, besides a great depth of information in Uno's piece, ryosai kenbo was well enough represented to stand on its own. Though expressive on a macro scale, the state-managed person of Japan and Korea hasn't been as well represented to me as has the state-managed Chinese woman, and my knowledge of the people of Japan and Korea lacks the humanistic side. Wives in Japan are seen to largely fulfill their role, with exceptions to that only scarcely sketched out, while consumers in Korea are seen primarily as reserves of wealth, as opposed to humans as were shown in Rofel's pieces last week. I would like to find out less about the Japanese mindset so much as one Japanese mind and heart, less about Korean anticommunism and more about Korean unification.

**Response** Hoffman, Lisa. 2006. Autonomous choices and patriotic professionalism:  
**Paper #6:** On governmentality in late-socialist China. [Economy and Society](#) , 35: 4: 550-570.

Amy Hanser. 2002. The Chinese Enterprising Self: Young Educated Urbanites and the Search for Work. Hirsch, Jerrold Link et al. *China Popular*. Lanhan, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. Pp. 189-206.

Pazderic Nickolas. Manuscript. Smile Chaoyang. In Ann Anagnost, Andrea Arai, Brian Hammer, and Ren Hai, eds. *Global Futures in East Asia*.

Education and employment, two subjects which, as an undergraduate student, are never far from my mind, are also the top priorities for students in China and Taiwan, the primary countries in our readings this week. How do students in China cope with the vast sweeping changes due to the liberalization of the market? What are the criteria of students and new graduates as they hunt for jobs, and what pitfalls do they encounter? What pressures are Taiwanese students placed under in the face of globalization? Amy Hanser, Lisa Hoffman, and Nickola Pazderic attempt to answer these questions in this week's readings.

In "The Chinese Enterprising Self," Hanser examines how Chinese students and employers cope with the newly liberalized economy through interviews with ten young men and twelve young women aged nineteen to twenty-nine, all with high school degrees or better, making them somewhat privileged in China. Hanser argues that neoliberalization has changed the game for both prospective employees and the industry itself. Framing her understanding of her interviewees is Nikolas Rose's concept of the "enterprising self," which is an idea of self autonomy and material fulfillment through self-discipline in neoliberal societies. In order to compare the change in the workforce, Hanser then briefly describes a pre-reform China, in which competition was primarily political – participation in the workforce was considered aiding the revolution, and competition for such jobs was based on political activism. Competition, she says, changed the criteria people looked for in a job – in post-reform China, jobs became important for Chinese to define themselves and as routes of self-fulfillment. In order to find the best jobs, the students and graduates she interviewed tended to emphasize flexibility and self-development when job-hunting. Again comparing pre- and post-reform China, Hanser says that the iron rice bowl gradually became obsolete, not only by the government, but also by falling out of favor with the general populace, who, for the reasons above, could no longer condone a stable, static job with little personal fulfillment. However, with the changes came disappointments, as few jobs are able to live up to the expectations of the new Chinese. Some are unable to find jobs at all, and those who find jobs can't find good ones. Furthermore, gender perceptions limit, in many ways, participation in the workforce by women.

Hoffman covers in more depth the issues Hanser brings up. She states that not only was the labor market changed with the introduction of the reformations, the job market was actually created. That means both job-seekers and employers have to try harder in order to find the optimal meeting of supply and demand. However, Hanser makes the distinction that choice and freedom aren't merely the restoration of agency, but a new governing tool. Like the US, neoliberal management is ascendant,

but unlike the US, it is infused with a sense of patriotism. This is deliberate – whereas the neoliberal state in the United States and Britain are operating in a long tradition of liberalism, China is very quickly becoming “de-statized,” which means that the state is retreating in tactical ways using taxes and incentives to promote social responsibility and autonomy simultaneously. Noting, in the tradition of and even quoting Hanser, that Chinese youths wished to match their majors, gain experience, and develop their skills, Hoffman further states that the new hopes of the Chinese denote a change from emphasis on the job within the government to individual position and development. However, far from seeking to escape China, the youths tended to see their autonomy as coming with responsibilities to the state, and the urge to contribute to China’s future. This inculcated by the education system, who guide students towards making socially responsible career choices. Using the example of a young student who successfully lobbied for a closed government position for average pay, Hoffman illustrates a sense of responsibility towards the state. In several follow-up examples, she shows the paradox of the young Chinese professional – while sipping Starbucks in foreign nations, they criticize the affluence that attempts to “keep China down.”

Taking a different route, Pazderic’s “Smile Chaoyang” highlights the effects of neoliberalism in Taiwan, whose political isolation, poor natural resources, and looming conflict with China mean dire straits in the near future. She is particularly horrified by the resulting use of cultural critique in shaping culture, and the use of the state to create “smiling standard bearers of globalization.” Beginning in the 1990s with the reduction of state-owned industries, the changes in the Taiwanese society gradually phased out programs that weren’t related to the neoliberal demands for “autonomy, self-discipline, and technological sophistication...of the work force.” She postulates that neoliberalism operates within and transforms two conflicting value systems, which she identifies as State Neo-Confucianism and Enlightenment. The second part of her thesis involves the promotion of happiness to create docile, unquestioning workers. Discussing State Neo-Confucianism further, she uses a 1970s quiz on citizenship training in which the only correct answer to the question of the responsibility of the young is to build society. Allegiance to the state is reinforced, though Pazderic remains quizzical as to the statehood of a country that is no longer recognized by the United Nations. She calls this allegiance State Neo-Confucianism, and it is linked to the process of testing by the civil service examination. Group structures, stereotypically emphasized in discourse about the East, any of which deemed inappropriate were suppressed between 1945 and the 1990s. Group activities such as boy scout-like organizations have been made subservient to the state. The Enlightenment, meanwhile, is the process

by which the educational system in Taiwan is reworked, at once allowing more freedom as the state retreats, and initiating competition and infighting as older State Neo-Confucianist professors resent the younger, Western-trained and aggressive researchers and professors. Graduate students, meanwhile, are caught between the two, and produce a feedback loop by playing the two sides against each other. The democratic consumerism then, is the freedom of these students to choose, though Pazderic derides the both the consumer choices they make and the demands they make on the educational system. She moves on to explain the rise of neoliberalism and Taiwan's dependency on global competitiveness. Though a manufacturing hub at one point, it invested the capital into higher education as the manufacturing industry fled to China and South-East Asia. Even education becomes a matter of global competition, as places of higher learning strive to both compete on a global level and to satisfy their customers – the students. As a result, the university proscribes to several international indexes of educational rankings in international science indexes (ISI), some divisions of which are the Science Index (SI), the Social Science Index (SSCI), the Arts and Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI), and the Engineering Index (Ei). Meanwhile, an emphasis on BQ, or beauty, brains, and behavior quotient, illustrates the Taiwanese reliance on happiness and personality education to make the population submissive.

Pazderic comes off as having some sort of agenda, and a negative view of students and professors of the Chaoyang university, and of the entire Taiwanese educational system, or even the whole of Taiwan. She appeals to the stereotypical group-oriented view of the Chinese and criticizes State Neo-Confucian views, such as the urge to rebuild the state, as well as Taiwan-centric views for little reason other than that Taiwan is not recognized by the UN. If her assumption is that Taiwan is not a viable as a nation, with a national identity, then she should state her belief at the outset. Furthermore, she becomes a little overcritical on certain details, such as the boy scout-like organizations created for the purpose of serving the state – that was their original purpose, neoliberalism or not. I don't see how she intended to emphasize state subservience through state-formed organizations in the new neoliberal Taiwan when the previous version of the China Youths National Salvation Corps was intended to prepare boys for mandatory military service. So the goal now is happiness – both means serve the state ends, anyway.

Hoffman appears to be the most thorough and clearly articulated of the three authors, though her scope is the narrowest. She gives a more thorough look at a few of the issues Hanser, who looks at the broad changes, summarizes. Hanser, though lacking some connections

between basic facts and speculations, such as the link between neoliberalism and the Chinese urge towards fulfillment through work, presents an interesting view of the neoliberalization of the job market, from both an employer and an employee's view. Hoffman then points out that, previous to the reform era, there was no job market to speak of.

With all this negative talk about neoliberalization, one has to wonder if it's bad. Yes, it presents everything as a commodity, and yes, there are cultural downsides. But I think that every negative aspect of neoliberalism is just an example of a trend within the framework that can be reversed without necessarily negating neoliberalism itself. Public institutions are adversely affected – if neoliberal subjects were to vote with their money, wouldn't it necessarily reverse the situation? And if not, then what is the true role of government and how could it best serve the people?

**Response Paper #7:** A write-in from the please-don't-grade-this corner of my mind:

Week 15 - Technical Meditations  
AND  
An Undergraduate Response

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Tom T. Ahonen & Jim O'Reilly. Introduction and Digital Youth. In *Digital Korea: Convergence of Broadband Internet, 3G Cell Phones, Multiplayer Gaming, Digital TV, Virtual Reality, Electronic Cash, Telematics, Robotics, E-Government and the Intelligent Home* (Future Text, 2007). Pp. 1-35.

Chan, Dean. 2006. Negotiating Intra-Asian Games Networks: On Cultural Proximity, East Asian Games Design, and Chinese Farmers. *Fibreculture: Internet Theory/Criticism/Research*. 8:1-12

And Ge Jin's Gold Farmer Presentation...

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**Digital Korea**

-Koreans are scarily connected, but this future is what I wrote my award-winning scholarship essay on.

-This essay neglects Facebook. Wonder what kind of connection Facebook and Cyworld have?

-Generation C? I thought we were millennials. Unless the author is talking about Korean youths in particular. Whatever. We're definitely the pioneering generation of social networking.

-These txtrs r crzy. txt gr4mm3r in ess4ys? W4nn4 l1v3 in |\\u Zeal4nd

n0w.

-Whoa, phone replacement rates are crazy. I've had mine for years. I guess it's really true that this generation can navigate new UI's like crazy mongooses, though.

-Citi in m4 p0ck3t, cool

-Whoa...networking...rise of social networking is positively correlated with physical fiber networks...?

-I wonder if SMS really is an excuse to be rude...who determines these things anyway? What's rude? Long, winding, circumlocutions are rude sometimes. More subtleties, perhaps, but more laborious. It's a youth culture...I guess we're just not polite with each other. Actually, a majority of anonymous internet users are also not polite, as per John Gabriel's Greater Internet F\*\*\*wad Theory (<http://penny-arcade.com/comic/2004/3/19/>). Rudeness just seems to be funny, most of the time. Guess that's just another generational divide.

-Cool article. I knew there was a telecom advantage, but to know the specifics is humbling.

### **Negotiating Intra-Asian Games Networks**

-Yeah, yeah, MMO's are big in Korea

-Yes, they also rock the house in SC, and probably will in SCII as well (Star Craft)

-Ultima Online was the prototypical MMO, and that and SC are pretty American (don't believe Lord British)

-CJK East Asian MMO? Lemme at it!

-Goldfarming and Chinese goldfarmers ("Chinese farming" sounds pretty stupid) - this just means that MMOs need to reduce grinding...so does RL, for that matter

-Well, that was boring. Let's read the article on Freestyle DDR instead.

-Wow, I didn't know the breakdance revival came from Asia...specifically from DDR!

-Hahaha, high correlation to Asian American populations...

-<http://10kcommotion.com>

-<http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-416431628064546280>

### **Ge Jin's Chinese Gold Farmers Presentation**

-Daaaang, that looks like my cousin's basement.

-...wait...Brandon?

-Not even kidding. The screens and the crowded set-up looks like my cousin's basement. Also, my cousins pwr/vl'd in DAoC (Dark Age of Camelot) and sold accounts for money.

-PS, did you know there's an economist working on analyzing EVE online?

-Poor hygiene and working conditions is just another word for MMO addiction in general.

-I wish I could be paid to play videogames. Video game alpha-testers,

anyone?

-This is the low end of the pro-gamer ladder...the high paid gamers are in Counter-Strike, StarCraft, and others that I don't care about enough to know about. Here are some Pro-gamer winnings from tournaments: <http://clanbase.ggl.com/news.php?nid=204859>. They include Meng "Rocketboy" Yang, a Chinese guy who beat American gaming legend Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel. And incidentally made over \$100,000 in doing so.

-Cool. Gaming culture.

**Preliminary Question:** International students from Asia are known to choose engineering as a major to such a degree that at one point the University of Toronto's Engineering department was known as the "Hong Kong Express" (Ong), and is, even today, dominated by mainland Chinese students. But why? What qualities make a North American engineering education worth the expense, and to what extent is it a neoliberal "skill enhancing activity" (Brooks) or vocational pursuit (Ong)?

Are these future international engineers motivated by money, passion, or something else entirely? To what extent are they neoliberal subjects?

To facilitate answering these questions, I propose in-depth interviews of a small sample of such international engineers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign regarding their chosen subject field, their interest in their work and field of science, and their ambitions and plans for the future, as well as hypothetical questions regarding the possibilities that an engineering degree from a prestigious American university grants them.

**Interview/Ob serv. #1:** **Codename: Alita**

My first interview was with an undergraduate female non-heritage advanced Chinese language learner (CHIN 306). Arriving somewhat late to the interview, as has been observed to be a tendency of this author regarding deadlines, I was afraid my tardiness would color the interview, but thankfully it did not. As I approached the subject, I noticed she was sitting next to an Asian male who looked like an undergraduate as well. They were sitting close together and seemed to be chatting with each other in English in a relaxed manner. This man would later be revealed as the subject's Chinese boyfriend.

After meeting, the man took a respectful distance as we began our interview. As we had met before, the subject and I were relatively comfortable speaking, though at first she seemed somewhat distracted by the cell phone I used as a recording device, a Ming A1200 that had never been released in the US. I hoped she would not aim her face at it the entire interview, as I trusted the microphone was of sufficient quality



to record our voices in an authentic conversation. I am glad to note that as the interview went on, the device became unobtrusive and she faced me rather than the phone.

This subject initially placed out of a language requirement for graduation from the UIUC by taking the Spanish proficiency test. However, she made many Mandarin-speaking Chinese friends in her freshman year, noting that her best friend spoke Mandarin and that she would be teased from time to time for not being able to speak Mandarin. Deciding she'd learn the language to prove them wrong, she registered for a Chinese class "for fun." As the classes were entirely booked, she wrote a letter with false sentiments regarding her intention to use Chinese professionally in the future, and managed to obtain a seat in the beginning Chinese class. Ironically, these false sentiments would become reality as her enjoyment and appreciation of the Chinese language grew.

In fact, her involvement with the language and culture led to her switching majors after a trip abroad to China, from a physical science to East Asian Languages and Culture. She will be spending time abroad in China again, attempting to gain fluency in the language and network while attending the same university her boyfriend, a visiting scholar, once attended. Interestingly, she said that she would not have considered living in China before she began going out with her boyfriend, even if she had a professional career interest in China.

As for her professional interests in China, she intends to "go back" and teach English, perhaps get an internship, and then perhaps attend graduate school. She also hinted at the possibility of starting a business in China. She seems to have high faith in job-security with EALC, hinting that the situation for China was improving. Her faith in her ability to adapt socially, however, was not as strong, citing her "not-so great" Chinese, and her American-ness. She also said that she might miss American culture.

In regards to the language classes here at the UIUC, she viewed the beginning classes as "fun" and "silly," while she found the advanced classes to be of more interest as her ability to formulate advanced ideas and speak fluently grew. She noted that beginning Chinese required learning traditional Chinese characters, whereas her teacher during her study-abroad trip China told her to "relearn everything in simplified." She had a slightly confused reaction to the explanation that traditional characters should be learned for cultural value and for some usage, taking that explanation, it seemed, with a grain of salt.

She also expressed a preference for her Chinese teacher rather than for

her teachers in America. And grammar lessons.

This subject was interesting for a variety of reasons, the highlight of which was that her involvement with Chinese did not originate in a career-oriented mindset, but was socially driven. Furthermore, her career goals emerged out of her involvement with Chinese, and her entire life plan changed after her study abroad trip. However, if I could turn back time, impossible as it may seem, I would not arrive late, first of all, and target my questions better towards her views on Chinese itself rather than how she would use it or how she came to it. I would also ask more about her boyfriend and how they met, seeing as he is Chinese. I would also ask about popular media in her life in an attempt to connect with our readings on Iwabuchi.

**Group Research Question:**

**Version #3**

In David Brook's "The Organization Kid," Ann Anagnost's "Child as Value," and the A\*Star Yearbook, evidence has pointed towards a heightened sense of global competition in neoliberalizing nations, which in turn focuses attention on particular skills development for children and students. Language is appreciated as one skill that is an asset for international business; Japanese has been a longstanding favorite however, due largely in part to China's meteoric economic ascent, Chinese has emerged as a contending option for students. We are interested in whether - and to what extent - non-heritage Chinese and Japanese Language learners at the University of Illinois see their language acquisition as an advantage in the global labor marketplace. Further, we are interested in exploring the extent of involvement with East Asia that they expect to have in their future lives and careers. We are also interested in what factors outside the potential market value of a given language motivated them to begin their studies (i.e. familial influence, personal interest etc.) as well as whether or not their personal lives are culturally affected through the language learning process.

We want to find out if advanced Japanese and Chinese language learners see themselves in a global playing field or in only a US playing field, referring back to Brooks, Boo, and Ong. Are they using their language as "flexible capital" as Ong called it? Will this language just be capital for them in the US? Are they aware of the "changing world" (pacific age)? Are they also aware or unaware of the changing power distribution?

**EUI Links:**

**Interview/Ob serv. #2:**

**Codename: Akira**

My second subject was an International Studies major with a minor in

business, and a male non-heritage advanced Chinese language learner. I met him at the Illini Union, where I was, unfortunately, already extremely tired from the day's events, which may have contributed to the lack of depth in my interview.

My subject seemed very well aware of China's growing politico-economic role. When asked about why he chose to learn Chinese, he made references to the economic power of China and its "challenge" to the United States.

As a senior in High School, this subject studied both Japanese and Chinese, the primary languages under consideration in this project, and chose Chinese, believing it would be more useful and easier than learning Japanese. Many of the subject's friends on the UIUC campus speak Chinese, as well as a few who speak Japanese. His ideal post-graduation career is to work abroad in China for about 2 years. While he could "possibly" see himself living in China, he also did not see himself staying in any one place for long periods of time, though he did concede that he would ideally have someplace to call home. Similarly, he did not want to work for a company for a long period of time, hoping to one day start his own small business or franchise.

He said he would probably learn another region's language if that area were to gain prominence.

This subject was fascinating because he seemed to fit the expected mold so well - he casually considers crossing national borders, as a truly cosmopolitan neoliberal subject would, intending to use language skills as flexible capital, and has an entrepreneurial spirit. However, a few hesitations gave away perhaps more depth than is at first apparent. For instance, when I reflect on the interview, he never said, specifically, that the reason he decided to take Chinese was because of economic reasons. Instead, he merely stated the reasons why taking Chinese was a good economic decision. Furthermore, in later questions, though perhaps just a slip, he said that taking Chinese was a "random choice." He immediately followed it up by rescinding the statement, but combined with the above observation may have meant that factors other than economic ones were more instrumental than seemed at first glance. It would be interesting to delve into the social dynamics of non-heritage language learners, as both of my subjects hinted at social influences on their choice of language.

### **Codename: Kazuma**

My third interview was a Chinese language TA, whom I interviewed on a

terse improvisational basis due to time constraints and lack of notice ahead of time. Thankfully, he was patient and kind enough to answer my questions.

Interestingly, he noted that there was a variety of majors represented in his class, which, though small, could be argued to be significant because of its small size. He specifically mentioned East Asian Languages and Culture, engineering, and business majors. When asked about his students' intentions to go abroad, he said that about half of his students were planning to go to a Chinese-speaking nation in the near future for research and studies or business. Many of his students indicated a greater involvement with China, either by pursuing a Master's degree or a business opportunity, which would entail living in China.

Frustratingly, when asked, twice, whether there were a great deal of advanced Chinese language students, he explained first that his class size was just right, and the second time explained the difference between heritage and non-heritage Chinese language learners, as well as the institutional methods for testing proficiency.

**Group Summary:** Although we completed 12 interviews due to the changing nature of our project a few of our initial interviews have limited use with regard to our final inquiry. We sought to discover the motivations behind non-heritage undergraduates studying the Chinese and Japanese languages at advanced levels. We hypothesized that Chinese is currently displacing Japanese as the East Asian business language of choice for students involved in a career path affected by transnational neoliberalism, while Japanese students are increasingly learning Japanese for personal reasons or out of a desire to work in the entertainment industry.

In accordance with our hypothesis we found that those students studying Chinese tended to be very goal-oriented and had a very clear idea of using Chinese as an advantage and commodity in their future careers, much like David Brooke's "skill enhancement" in the "Organization Kid." Those studying Japanese who expressed an interest in entering the entertainment industry developed their career goals over the course of their studies rather than entering the language learning process with them in mind. Additionally, not all of the Japanese students planned on using the language professionally. Those studying Chinese were very conscious of the "flexible capital" (Ong) they gained by learning Chinese, while, overall, Japanese students had a tendency to be less interested in business-oriented careers requiring Japanese fluency.

Interestingly both Chinese and Japanese students seeking to use their language skills professionally intend to work either in America or for an American company in Asia on a temporary basis as opposed to making

a long-term commitment to working in East Asia. However, while they predominantly plan to work in America, they see themselves as global players on an internationally competitive level. In the case of the Chinese students, this may reflect an awareness of the possibility that China will supercede America economically while giving a nod to the present reality of America as the current world superpower, or simply a faith in the continued success of America.

Perhaps related to their differing motives for studying their respective languages, the Chinese students had a tendency overall to be less invested in Chinese culture whereas the Japanese students showed greater dedication to Japanese culture. We saw this through both their reactions to studying abroad and lifestyle here at the university. For instance, one Chinese student who proclaimed that he "lived by" the Chinese culture could not name a single example of Chinese culture, save for a trend among women for having pale skin. This, unfortunately, is not even specific to China, but can be seen in various East Asian cultures today. In contrast, two of the Japanese students interviewed talked enthusiastically about the myriad of ways Japanese popular culture has infiltrated their everyday lives, including an enjoyment of both traditional food and candy, reading manga, and deliberately seeking further enrichment in cultural activities.

**Paper:** As Japan's rapid modernization in the first half of the 20th century shocked the world into acknowledging the value of learning Japanese, so too is China's recent economic growth throwing Mandarin Chinese, or putonghua, the common language, into the limelight. As a Time Magazine issue put it, the 21st century is China's century. But what became of Japan's century, and the value placed on Japanese as a language? And is the learning of Chinese among advanced undergraduate language learners displacing Japanese as the East Asian business language of choice? What motivations drive advanced students of either language? Where do they see themselves in the future? My colleagues, Kasey Alms, Patrick Carmody, Rachel Lenz, and myself set out to find what answers we could within the bounds of the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign.

Our analyses of the data we collected were informed by weekly readings including broad overviews of neoliberalism by Lisa Duggan and Henry Giroux. Of particular interest were the observations that while neoliberalism might result in the highest economic efficiency, certain sacrifices, such as the polarization of the upper and lower economic classes as well as human rights issues and even Democracy itself, must be made in order to better satisfy the production/consumption machine that is the economy. This was borne out in David Brook's "Organization Kid," in which he notes that today's child is shuttled between activity to activity in order to better prepare them for a competitive future. He calls this child the Organization Kid, living a regimented life with no free time to explore or play, or to be a kid. Instead, every waking moment is an investment into their value, as they are signed up for one skill-enhancing activity after another.

Meanwhile, in a little Indian village called Chennai, an industry springs up around cheap, high quality labor produced by the natives, instilled with an American culture of competitiveness that, in many aspects, edges out the native culture. These laborers are able to co-opt the American-style corporate culture and excel at learning various technical and communication skills that lead to greater profitability, though sometimes at the cost of putting them at odds with their parents and their culture at large. Cross-referencing Ong's Higher Learning in Global Space, this is a display of subjects' abilities to learn and commoditize the learning of skills in Information Technology, communication, English, and

even culture itself. There is an increasing presence of international students in America – the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, in the heart of America, has the highest international enrollment of any university in the nation, emphasizing Ong’s hypothesis for the ruptured nation-state as the framework for global education strategies.

With an increasingly connected world, transnational flows of culture become more obvious in the wake of the “Korean Wave” and the “Pokemonization” of the world. In Anagnost’s “Child as Value,” we saw the ambivalence of American teachers to the lives of Chinese children; on one hand decrying the “overregimented” lives of the kids while at the same time harboring a growing insecurity about the education of American children. All of these factors contribute to increased contact zones in the US and abroad for neoliberal logics to spread, such as the dedication of time during the valuable childhood and studenthood periods of development towards “skill enhancing activities,” where skills are themselves seen as flexible capital. Thus, the process of laboring for valuable goods begins at an early age.

That said, our hypothesis was that Chinese is currently displacing Japanese as the East Asian business language of choice for students involved in a career path affected by transnational neoliberalism, while Japanese students are increasingly learning Japanese for personal reasons or out of a desire to work in the entertainment industry. On the whole, our subjects' responses and our

hypothesis resonated with a surprising strength.

We purposefully limited our ethnographic surveys to advanced non-heritage Chinese and Japanese students in order to reduce white noise from heritage learners who sought simply to reclaim their heritage, and to select those students who had shown great dedication to the language. Unfortunately, the scope of our project was also limited by the resources available, meaning it was constrained to a single semester with four student researchers and a limited geography. Equally crippling as the rest combined was the lack of any operational budget. Therefore, while certain data points in this project are intriguing, the conclusions and analyses we reach can only be considered a preliminary survey, as the data are too limited to draw broad conclusions from.

Overall, the four Chinese students we interviewed were overwhelmingly skewed towards the business sector, as each displayed an interest in the use of advanced Chinese language skills to start a business or otherwise professionally employ their adopted language. Three of our subjects were remarkably cognizant of and even spoke specifically of the economic rise of China, implying the proportional rise in the value of Chinese as they did. The fourth, meanwhile, did not cite economic reasons as her primary interest in the language, though, in an interesting twist of fate, she used the very same reasoning to bargain her way into the introductory Chinese class, which was closed to enrollment at the time, and realized the benefits after her involvement in the language grew. She, too, later mentioned that she might be interested in starting a business in China. It is



interesting to note that the subjects most invested in the economics of learning Chinese were male.

In an almost shocking fit with our hypothesis was the case of "Akira," one of the male subjects, who responded that he would "probably" be willing to learn a different nation's language were that nation to gain prominence, and had studied both Japanese and Chinese in High School, eventually choosing Chinese. This illustrates the subject's investment in the "flexible capital" of the language itself. The male subjects displayed a cultural distance from the culture of China, evinced by a lack of willingness to live there permanently, or to be employed by Chinese companies as opposed to American companies, or showed a lack of faith in the ability of China to deal with ambiguous "problems they just sweep under a rug" that apparently threaten the trustworthiness of China. Even the female subject, who was dating a Chinese Ph.D student at the time, showed a wariness towards living in China, with her, "not-so-great" Chinese and her American-ness, though her reasons seemed more social than the male subjects' reasons. Overall, it seemed like American hegemony still had some grasp on the imaginations of the students, with the Chinese language being a relatively secure path to prosperity.

Meanwhile, the Japanese students were a mixed bag in terms of motivation.

While the Chinese students, for the most part, knew the economics of learning Chinese, the Japanese students mostly entered the learning process with popular media, such as manga or anime, in mind. Later, they would come to realize the career advantages it conferred upon them and seek to join the very industry that

spawned their interest, which serves to strengthen my conviction in our hypothesis. Yet, another student began the learning process to fulfill an inner passion that had little bearing on the rest of the world. Culturally, the Japanese students tended to have much more vested interest in products of Japanese culture, such as manga or anime; according to Ms. Lenz, the colleague who interviewed the Japanese students, they "live, eat, and breathe the culture." Indeed, the prominence of anime and manga in the interviews with the Japanese students speaks very strongly of this statement.

However, while their introductions to the language through popular culture and their continued investment in the culture remain constant, there were certain aspects of the Japanese students' dialogues that fell out of line with our hypothesis. For example, the student who pursued Japanese from an inner passion also seemed willing to bet that Japanese would remain an economically significant language. Despite having considered learning Chinese, he chose Japanese instead partly because of the "opportunities" and belief in its continued prominence. He also displays a certain economic logic in choosing to enroll in business Japanese in his next semester, as well as indicating that he would not work for a Japanese company unless the financial benefits were high enough. He also indicated an interest in starting a business. A second interview by Mr. Carmody revealed another business-oriented individual who was introduced to the language by a fluent elder sibling in the form of anime and manga, and believed in the future economic stability of Japan, citing popular culture and

globalizing companies.

Similarly to the Chinese students, none of the Japanese students fully cleaved, spatially, economically, or culturally, to the homeland of their adopted language, preferring an American job to a job abroad, though some were willing to concede that it might be an option. The Chinese students, while displaying a more cohesive agreement with the hypothesis, also showed signs of deviance. For example, the motivations of "Alita," the student with the Chinese boyfriend, were purely socially motivated at the outset, as many of her friends spoke Mandarin Chinese, and she was at one point the butt of many jokes for not being able to understand. Her decision to speak Chinese was simply to prove them wrong - that she could speak Chinese. It was ironic, therefore, that her rehearsed reasons for bargaining her way into the class eventually became true. Akira, too, had a large number of Chinese-speaking friends that may have influenced his decision. I am led to believe that this may have been the case through a subtlety of his speech that I did not catch at first - when I asked him why he sought to learn Chinese, he immediately jumped to the economic benefits without drawing a direct causation as to why he had chosen Chinese. While it may have simply been a habit of speaking, it may also have been a convenient explanation for learning a language that many of his friends spoke as well. However, I will not delve too much into double-guessing the subject; instead, I can only note the incident and hope to be more specific in the future.

In conclusion, while there were broad overarching vectors that matched

our hypothesis, regarding the Chinese students' motivations and the impetus for learning Japanese, certain details remain outside the scope of our hypothesis, but open to further exploration.

**Reflect:** The entirety of the project was nothing too epic or profound, merely an exploration into students' ideas about Chinese and Japanese, which, I think, was a perfect size for a project with these constraints. Anything on a grander scale would have failed to reach conclusions of any sort, given the various limitations on our resources, and even the conclusions that we did reach riddled holes in our initial hypothesis, despite their seeming overall fit.

To recapitulate the constraints on the project, purposeful and not, they were:

- Time limit (one semester)
- Languages (Chinese and Japanese)
- Human resources (four student researchers, three of which are undergraduates)
- Interviewed only advanced non-heritage Chinese and Japanese language students
- Small sample size
- Subjects came from only a few class sections
- \$0.00 operational budget, AKA no budget whatsoever

So, to draw broad conclusions from the data we received would be, in this researcher's opinion, too foolhardy, especially concerning the variables we did not or were not able to control and therefore unable to investigate within the limitations stated above. These include, but are not limited to:

- Socially driven motivation for learning
- Major/minor requirements (EALC)

- Instrumentalization of language for purposes other than economic reasons
- Degree of personal interest or history of involvement with the language

Personally, a few difficulties came from being unable to meet deadlines and meet with my subjects on time. This resulted in an aborted meeting with a Korean TA who happened to be a TA for one of my classes, which could have been disastrous for my GPA. Thankfully, she is not a vindictive person. Another time, I arrived late for a meeting, though thankfully the interview did not seem to have been affected by my tardiness. However, it is key to realize that it could easily have offended the subject.

The methodology of my data collection was casual exploratory conversation, recorded on a cellphone. This seemed to be sufficiently effective, though it should be noted that the cellphone used was very sophisticated. There were a few gaffes in getting the IRB slips signed - I wasn't aware at first that there was one copy for myself and one for the interview subject. I also received probably an inordinate amount of amusement by changing my subjects' names to post-apocalyptic anime characters' names, for their security, of course.

Meanwhile, working in a fully online environment worked to my advantage, as it is quite natural for me to sit at a computer for hours at a time and do nothing. At least this way, I was productive. Finally, I fully submit every part of this work to archive, which is convenient in that I no longer have to archive everything myself - I can simply refer back to the IDEALS project online. I suppose I'll put this on my resume as a publication, but having just now referred to a resume which will

refer to this document, I fear I will have created a literary infinitely recursive self-referential wormhole. If this is the cause for problems in the future, I deny culpability for the irrevocable loss of any and all literary works or thoughts to this phenomenon.

**Recommendations:**

Due to the results of our project, I would recommend that Japanese as a business language remain a strong presence on campus and in the curricula, as many students still maintain belief in the utility of Japanese on the international marketplace, despite China's economic rise. Furthermore, I would suggest that Chinese curricula reinforce the culture of China as well as teaching technical aptitude at the language - the two should be inseparable. If they are separated, I believe the result would possibly be jarring on an individual scale as the Chinese students seeking to utilize the language seek to interact with Chinese citizens. Furthermore, the ambiguity of China's problems that were found in multiple interviews should be addressed, though I do not know when or where an instructor would address these issues in a language class. What seems important is to stress the Chinese view of things as well as the American view, hoping to reduce the tensions between the two cultures. One might say that while these students, more often than not, saw the economic stresses between the two nations as a battle, the truth is that both nations must learn to coexist with each other in the long run. Therefore the trope of "battle" or "rivalry" should be mitigated.