

Culture as Leisure and Culture as Capital

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My goal in this essay is to track the new career of the old buzzword culture (*wenhua*) in post-1992 China. Deng Xiaoping's 1992 Southern Excursion Talks marked a turning point, as portentous as the 1989 crackdown, on the calendar of China's market reform and cultural transformation. What do economists and humanist elites mean when they talk about this historical "transition" (*zhuangui*) in China, in celebratory or condemning rhetoric, and each in their own disciplinary perspective? Can such a transition be characterized as China's "progressive" movement from socialist state-planned economy to capitalist market economy, or in terms of a cultural transformation, from elitist to popular?

Neither of those clichéd formulas is of much explanatory value. Old dichotomous paradigms, steeped in cold war ideology (i.e., socialism versus capitalism) and imbued with culturalist aesthetics (i.e., high versus low culture), are inadequate conceptual tools for our task of capturing the "transitional" or transformational logic at play in contemporary Chinese society. In fact, binaries are dissolving. There are only trends that come and go, accompanied by endless examples and counterexamples. Economists have provided innumerable clan-centered models of township economy that may appear more feudalistic than socialist or capitalist; the pop culture industry is said to have been taken over by the so-called *dawanr* (literally, magic wrists.), new cultural intermediaries who, situated between intellectuals and "the people", upset the simple distinction between the high and the low. Yet dichotomous thinking seems to have trapped all (cultural)tourists who, after a sightseeing trip to Tiananmen Square, are prone to turn themselves into instant china experts. Even a dialectician like Terry Eagleton is no exception. In his eagerness to define "contradictions in [Chinese] postmodernism," the Marxist critic surrenders himself unwittingly to the dubious strategy of "Mao Zedong" at the square against the yellow-arch logo of McDonald's in the neighboring street.¹ The allegory of communist authoritarianism versus laissez-faire capitalism would have worked but for the simple fact that a counterexample—the third term, so to speak—exists right across the street from McDonald's and pokes holes in Eagleton's neat binarism. I am referring to Red Sorghum, a traditional-style soup-noodle restaurant, which opened in 1995 in a confrontational spirit against U.S. culinary imperialism. The ensuing press hype about the Chinese palate à la Red Sorghum illustrated that neither socialism nor capitalism may have the last laugh when the dust settles in the land of contradictions, to whose inventory we may add the third term *nationalism*. Yet the noodles sold at the eatery owed their popularity less to popular taste than to the trademark of red sorghum sanctified by the culture of international film festivals.² As a glaring example of *chukou zhuan neixiao* (an export re-imported right back), red sorghum already contains within itself the other that nationalism sought eagerly to exorcise.

All those conflicting sighs deliver two lessons: First, to capture the flow of the historical transition of 1990s china, one can do no better than catalog, in lieu of dichotomizing, those divergent trends. Second, there is a legible narrative that coheres proliferating signs, symbols,

and new laws that greet Chinese consumer-citizens on a daily basis; namely, political, cultural, and economic capital in post-1992 China now emerge as interchangeable terms of value. I say value precisely because the conflation and collaboration of those three regimes are built on the epochal logic of investment. Capital builds new alliances, innovative forms of complicity are being formed. Interests crisscross and the most unlikely partnership is being made. The capacity of going, on to wealth and power and perhaps to the spectacle of a reform that may leave little room for ridicule.

To get into the nitty-gritty of the triple alliance in question, I need to go back to the beginning of this essay where I foregrounded the issue of culture as the vantage point for our examination of the changing China of today. We are definitely in the presence of a buzzword. *Wenhua* is the talk of the town. More curiously, it emerges as the top agenda item for public policy makers, city planners, and both the central and local states. Although the elitist connotation of culture resonates in the humanists' debates (1994-1995) on the moral idealism of high culture, yet the word *culture* today strikes a very different chord in the consumer public and in the busy minds of policy makers. I propose to examine three interlocked trajectories through which the motion of a society in transition can be captured: first, the popularization of the discursive construction of leisure culture (*xiuxian wehua*) since 1994; second, the burgeoning policies of cultural economy (*wenhua jingji*) that promote the collapse and convertibility of cultural capital into economic capital. As the postsocialist state is the key player in initiating and consolidating both trends, does it mean that the Chinese state has not shed much of its totalitarian character? I argue the opposite by naming the third trajectory of China's epochal transformation as the metamorphosis of the post-1989 state apparatus from a coercive to a systemic regulatory body of governance. All three trajectories demonstrate how culture is reconstructed in the 1990s as the site where capital- both political and economic capital- can be accumulated. That is to say, not only has the postsocialist state not fallen out of the picture, but it has rejuvenated its capacity, via the market, to affect the agenda of popular culture, especially at the discursive level. The state's rediscovery of culture as a site where new ruling technologies can be deployed and converted simultaneously into economic capital constitutes one of its most innovative strategies of statecraft since the founding of the People's Republic. This proves that all crises have only perfected the state machine instead of smashing it – parodying Marx and remembering 4 June 1989.

Culture As Leisure: Consumer-Citizenship in the Making

The rise of the discourse of “leisure” has much to do with the changing discursive power of Chinese elites vis-a-vis the state in the 1990s. The 1980s witnessed the quick succession of Western paradigms, and who but the cultural elites themselves owned the right to translate and interpret them? A decade later, as high culture was cornered by an authoritarian regime, on one hand, and by the market, on the other, the breakdown of such discursive monopoly was accompanied by the diminishing allure of traveling theories to academic intellectuals.

Since 1996 there has been a greater and more self-conscious resistance on the part of Beijing cultural elites (who were, after all, the primary transmitters of Western theories) against traveling theoretical agendas. The application of postmodernist and postcolonialist theories was no longer a ticket to the limelight. On the contrary, its practitioners now risk courting the stigma of

careerists and Occidentalists guilty on four counts: fetishization of theory, othering the “west” misrepresenting Western learning, and sinocentric return. A growing consensus has been gaining momentum from critics of diverse theoretical positions: it is necessary to debunk Chinese “postisms” and, at the same time, to revive the discussion of modernity.³ Most of the indigenous critiques of Chinese postmodernism and Chinese postcolonialism have zeroed in on the paradoxical practice of critiquing Eurocentrism from the periphery while constructing the periphery (i.e., China) as another center.⁴ This is a noteworthy breakthrough in the old intellectual dilemma: the forward leaping/catching up mentality (universalism) going hand in hand with the obsession with cultural nationalism (particularism).

The post-isms are not the only imports that were thrown into oblivion. Issues such as the public sphere/civil society, transported to China in the early 1990s by overseas scholars, were also tossed aside. The elites retreated on this intellectual front probably because they were deeply mired in a legitimation crisis. They knew very well that they could no longer speak in the public name or pose as the public saviors. But more important, the arrival of the age of consumerism disrupted the consensus of elitism rooted in the humanities. Members of a now stratified intelligentsia, who bickered among themselves about how to revive “the spirit of the belles lettres” (*renwen jingshen*) could no longer speak in cohesion, much less in unison, about what is best for the people and what they themselves should do to best serve the public.⁵

This left a tremendous gap, on the discursive platform at least, for other actors (and saviors) to strut in. An unpredictable scenario met the eye. While the elites had lost their momentum and interest in resuming the discussion of the public sphere, it was the postsocialist state that took it over and utilized it selectively to its own ends. Since 1994, central state organs have been busy reinventing the construct of the public by highlighting one of its semantic properties, the claim that the public is a space open and accessible to all. Open and accessible to what? To consumer goods and to an officially endorsed leisure culture. To be more specific, instead of celebrating Chinese leisure culture fever as another symptom of the challenge that transnationalism posed to an autocratic regime, I want to highlight the fact that weekend culture in China is first and foremost an official discourse born from a well-calculated state policy.

But first, what enabled the Chinese socialist state to emerge as a historical agent that could reposition itself as a democratic apparatus operating for the good of the phantom public? This is a question that involves a lengthy discussion of the changing roles of the (Chinese) state in the era of transnationalism. I will address this issue in the last section of this essay, but I will focus now on the details of the campaign to “democratize” society’s access to cultural goods, sponsored by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Historically, the party-state was best known for its ability to mobilize the participatory consciousness of the people. In the mid-1990s, however, the state’s reinvention of the notion of participation was divested of its links to political ideology (of neither proletarian revolution nor democratic polity). As China recovered from the trauma of 1989, the collective project in which the Chinese public was invited to participate was not a political utopia of any sort (socialist or liberalist), but the making of an egalitarian consumer public theoretically unmarred by vertical hierarchies, in short, participation in the democratic consumption of leisure culture.

Envisioning a new kind of participatory citizenship was high on the policy makers' agenda in Beijing in 1996. Earlier that year the city's governing apparatuses initiated a series of projects operating under the hidden agenda of locating the interface between the public and the popular. One over-riding theme of the city's projects was to appropriate, and eventually to dissolve, the image of private and privileged consumers engaged in conspicuous consumption into that of community-conscious and civic-minded consumer-peers.

To the average citizen, the state has indeed succeeded in recasting itself into a modern authority with seemingly decreasing authoritarian character—a point to which I shall return later. Especially in the past several years, the state has emerged once again as the safeguard of a secure (*anquan*) and stable (*anding*) society, a safe consumer haven where crimes and petty sins of improper and conspicuous consumption are to be obliterated. Beijing city government's 1996 Hard Strike Campaign (*yanda*), which targeted criminal elements—a shifting *mangliu* (blind inflow) population that drifted into the capital from rural areas—won immediate applause from all walks of society. In quick succession the state published one legal statute after another, enthroning itself as the modern lawmaker in the blink of an eye. Among the most publicized regulations announced in the past two years were Customers' Civil Statute, Tourists' Civil Statute, and the Law of Consumer Rights' Protection, a series of legal documents that stretched the clichéd semantics of socialist civilization to accommodate the modern culture of consumerism.

What interests me the most is the state's collaboration with the print media and the market in producing a new discourse of leisure culture in urban China. The category of leisure culture popped up not long after Beijing, joined by other major cities and townships, instituted a forty-four-hour weekly work system in February 1994. The capital has no doubt led the trend of discoursing about leisure. By 1995, presses such as *Beijing Youth Daily* had started publishing weekly special editions of leisure culture—for example, Fashion Bulletin (*shishang daokan*), Auto Age (*qiche shidai*), and Computer Age (*diannaos shidai*)—educating the masses about how to consume cultural and commodity goods and, above all, how to consume leisure itself. By 1 May 1995, when a forty-hour workweek system was implemented nationwide, what to do on the double leisure day (*shuangxiu ri*)—what we understand in the West as the weekend—became the hottest topic in newspaper columns and street and office conversations. A leisure culture fever swept over all major cities as urbanites quickly learned consumerism's paralogic: the invisible link between free time, consumption, and exhaustion.

Of course, a leisure culture campaign was not a mere discursive event built in a vacuum. The state understood only too well that consumption is first and foremost a material practice. The consumerist modernity of work-and-spend culture is more than the sum total of blitzes of TV commercials—a vision—or of governmental propaganda materials—an ideology. Spending boils down to the size of wallets and pocketbooks. Rising to the occasion, the state has undertaken the building of the material base of a consumer society as steadily as it inculcates the ideology of mass consumption. Efforts were made to close the gaps between haves and have-nots through the institution of laws that guarantee the even accumulation and distribution of social wealth. Major policies were implemented to level consumption capacities, to increase the incentives of industries to invest, and to whet the appetite of the public to spend.

An eventful policy that affected commoners and entrepreneurs alike was the lowering of interest rates twice in 1996 and more than four times in 1998. Economists may celebrate the coming of age of China's macroeconomic management that is now regulatable through interest rate policy rather than through central credit planning.⁶ For commoners, the drop of the interest rate theoretically propelled them to save less and to consume and invest more, at least in 1996 and 1997. Monetary policies aside, one of the most significant fiscal reforms that took place was a new income tax law put into effect in January 1994. An excise tax is levied on luxury items such as cosmetics, tobacco, alcohol, automobiles, and motorcycles.⁷ Regulation of conspicuous consumption continued into 1995 as a favorite theme of governmental reforms that affected daily lives down to the most minute details. In the latter half of the year, the states campaign of clamping down on entertainment expenditure with public funds (*gongkuan xiaofei*) forced dining businesses to fling their doors open to the common folks. Menus were changed. The catchphrase for all restaurateurs and hotel managers is we serve all customers whether their wallet is small, medium, or large. Median (*zhongdang*) and ground-level (*didang*) consumption is in. The trend spills into disco bars and other forms of high entertainment culture. Even city planning committees responded to the increasing stratification of popular consumption by embracing a multiple centers theory of urban development, the coexistence of big and medium-sized department stores (complete with food courts) with old-style grocery shops that support a thriving street economy.

Needless to say, national shopping sprees for the “four big pieces of appliances” (*san dajian*) have given way to consumer fever for more trivial commodities. The discourse of pluralism as a market phenomenon is in circulation. More significantly, we are witnessing the subtle movement of the market from an organic economy (which satisfies physical needs) to a social economy based on emulation (in pursuit of fashion) and to a leisure-driven cultural economy. Of course, shopping for daily necessities still largely defines the general pattern of consumption in China. However, popular shopping guides such as *Vogue* [*Shishang*] and *Brandname Shopping Guides* [*Jingping gouwu*] have led buyers to valuables and conjured up the specter of conspicuous consumption, now an increasingly affordable malaise that plagues both white-collar workers and the comparatively well-to-do (*xiaokang*).⁸ Regardless of the buying power of individuals, they participate in consumerist culture, and their lives are affected by it.

This discussion, which demonstrates the primacy of state policies in building the material base of mass consumption, now returns us to the main theme of this section, namely, the consumption of leisure and culture. Indeed, while organic economy is taken for granted and social economy is still reserved for the privileged few, it is cultural economy that emerges as the center of gravity of everyday life and is, therefore, the bulls-eye for public policy making.

Nor should we consider (leisure) cultural economy a matter of concern exclusively for metropolitans. According to the statistics published by the National Bureau of Tourism in 1997—now thematized officially as the year of tourism (*lvyou nian*)—one of every two Chinese citizens has traveled within the country, and of those, 60 percent are peasants! Of course, the number tells us very little about the exact nature of such mobility, whether it was vacational or vocational. The statistics, however, do reveal that the newfound leisure frees up time, energy, and most important, the flow of cash. By 1997 the national theming of tourism served to illustrate that the

state had gone a step further to capitalize on leisure. The conflation between free time (the poor's capital) and money is now complete as the former is turned into another form of capital to be transformed into a major source of profit and tax revenues.

Having said this much about the importance of the discursive category of leisure to social classes of various income levels, I would like to focus on a specific campaign that Beijing city government launched to propagate the consumption of leisure culture. Like all campaigns, this one provides an opportunity to examine the intersection of social control and the making of new cultural spaces. But I hesitate to close the discussion of leisure culture prematurely by citing the campaign as another example of how urban space renders itself an easy target for manipulation and management.⁹ Despite its resemblance to many other fortress cities characterized by decreasing privatized spaces, Beijing, probably because of its historicity and rich cultural memories, is populated with spots that cannot be closely monitored nor will-fully homogenized by state-sponsored urban projects. In short, the multiple voices of the city always guarantee choices that outreach the normative version and vision of the leisure culture campaign. The notion (and reality) of the arrival of leisure has released imaginary autonomous spaces that provide spontaneous and playful urban experiences. I say imaginary because the spaces cultivated by *yangge* street dancers (and Falun gong practitioners as well) are spaces of which the party-state is constitutive. That those spaces are conceived of as the "people's" spaces hardly means that they exist outside or necessarily in opposition to the power that is. The challenge that postsocialist China poses to the conceptualization of state-society relations cannot be adequately answered by resorting to the dichotomous paradigm of power and resistance. This is a subject for lengthy treatment elsewhere.

Now a close look at one specific leisure culture campaign in Beijing: In February 1996, the Department of Propaganda of the City Commission published the latest version of the "Civilization Contract with Residents." To implement this contract, the department, together with twelve subcommittees, launched a nine-month campaign of the double leisure day action package. Several major leisure activities were promoted: visiting museums, going to the movies, participating in sports, sightseeing, learning English, taking driving lessons, and learning how to use computers.¹⁰ This was the first time that the party-state attempted to appropriate leisure culture officially into its ideological agenda and to give a facelift to the party's age-old discourse of socialist spiritual civilization. The theme underlying this operation was unambiguously put as "learning how to become a modern and civilized Beijingers." The resident's capacity for being a modern, cultured, and public citizen is now measured by his or her recognition of the changing concept of time into that of pastime. Furthermore, not only is the concept of time disciplined into that of pastime, but the concept of civil resident itself incorporates the new meaning of the civil consumer.

A streak of Fordism seems obvious in the Chinese macroeconomic policies that drove such public campaigns. By linking leisure with outdoor activities and specific commodities (i.e., automobiles, computers and sports gear and clothing) and, more important, with a two-day weekend, the state envisioned that increased consumer demand would soak up inventory and accelerate mass production.¹¹ This same logic underlay the surprising announcement of a one-week holiday made by the Beijing city government on 1 May 2000.

The link between Labor Day, leisure, and consumption cannot be more clearly pronounced at this juncture of an oversupplied economy seeking fast relief. This perspective confirms the regulatory intentions of the state in naming leisure as a privileged site where profitable social activities take place. So perhaps Chinese cultural jeremiads missed the real target when they attacked consumerism. The hedonistic potential of mass consumption may be an evil, but it is a lesser one compared with the *disciplinary* potential of a consumption-based notion of leisure.

Leisure conceived in this sense leads to more purposeful work and, paradoxically, to a lifestyle that can spare no time for unproductive labor. So it seems that the state, staying fast on the Fordist track, entertains a few hidden agendas. By naming and administering leisure consumption as such, it disciplines production simultaneously. This agenda, however, should not hasten us to conclude that the post-1989 Chinese state has not changed much of its totalitarian character since Mao's time. For all those new policies and the subsequent social transformations in China point to one question: If such a carefully monitored socioeconomic reality, overridden with the public's desire for holiday spending and increased productivity, bespeaks control and the abuse of state power—all those qualities that define an authoritarian regime—then what shall we say about our own society marked by the same “domination of the market over the language of liberty”?¹²

This is, however, neither the time nor the place to broach the controversial subject of state power versus freedom. Yet certain observations can be drawn from this brief discussion of the Fordist characteristics of Chinese socioeconomic policies. First, perhaps the average citizen in China indulges in the excess of consumption in much the same fashion as postwar Americans and Europeans haunted by memories of wartime scarcity. After all, the new epochal marker, post-Deng, has not yet been kicked firmly enough into the national psyche to obliterate the collective remembrance of the era known as post-Mao, with its posttraumatic syndromes of lack. Second, this obsession with mass consumption predicts that it will be some time before Chinese consumers or even their critics (i.e., elite humanist intellectuals) raise the question familiar in the post-affluent West: Why is leisure linked to the market rather than to the utopia of free time? Or, why does the system “find no purpose for [free time] other than seeking all possible means of turning it into money?”¹³

Ironically, while no significant critical discourses have surfaced in China to examine the paradox of leisure, the state did articulate, to a certain extent, its ambivalence toward consumption-based leisure culture. In fact, the Beijing campaign of Double Leisure Day Action was originally motivated by the policy makers' intention to rejuvenate the issue of “spiritual civilization” (*jingshen wenming*) on the eve of the inauguration of the Fourth World Conference on Women and its Non-Governmental Organization Forum in Beijing and Huai'rou in the fall of 1995. What was at stake was the image of Beijing. How would the capital and its residents be perceived by world presses and by the globes TV watchers who still remembered the 4 June massacre? Although delayed for almost six months, when the new “Civilization Contract with Beijing Residents” (the oldest version dated back to 1984) and its twin project, the “Civilization Code for Beijing Residents,” finally greeted the public in February 1996, one could still detect the anxiety of a city undergoing a makeover to convince a critical world of its urbanity and civility. High on the agenda of both the contract and the code was the cultivation of the so-called capital consciousness and civilized residentship.¹⁴

The Department of Propaganda of the City Commission did not mince

words. Clearly, the qualities of citizenship in the capital are "intimately intertwined with the degree of [their cultivation of] urban civilization." Moreover, there is no better way for policy makers to measure and improve such qualities than to prescribe the leisure activities of citizens. Double Leisure Day is thus named as the site where the modern construction of the spiritual civilization of the capital has to take place.¹⁵

Paradoxically, while linking free time with consumption, the city's Double Leisure Day Action Campaign critiques "mindless consumption" and vows to redress the profit-driven trends of culture industry. To underline the good intentions of lawmakers by no means exonerates them from the charge of being thought police. There is much to criticize about the dubious strategy to which modern city planners resort with or without socialist conscience: to control and construct urban experience by redefining residentship or citizenship as an activity of consumption. But can we totally withhold credit from a postsocialist state whose historical compulsion to rule by force seems now to have given way to its interest in democratizing the access of the consumer public to cultural goods? This is a complex question. The intertwined nature of the issue of the interest of the public and the self-interest of a regime that would do anything to avoid another legitimation crisis precludes a definite answer.

I will revisit this difficult question at the end of the essay. Right now it suffices to say that the post-1989 Chinese state has evolved into a paradoxical body of political representation whose values cannot be easily summed up by ideologically motivated studies. Although it is too early to assess the results of Beijing's Double Leisure Day Action Campaign, the package did contribute to a sudden outburst of leisure activities that demonstrated the residents' revived interest in haute culture (ballets, museums, and symphony orchestras are in, and lecture series on traditional culture sponsored by research institutes, libraries, and bookstores have flourished) and, not surprisingly, a renewed fascination, among the older generation especially, with folk cultural practices.¹⁶

What are those practices that may constitute a break, even an imaginary one, from the unlimited emulative and manipulative consumer culture and from the state-defined consumer discipline? This is a question that I raised earlier when I addressed the issue of urban space and social control. Beijing, as I pointed out, is replete with spots where the encounter between historicity and urbanity generates alternative forms of leisure communities that cannot be easily contained in officially designated public leisure spaces such as auditoriums and gyms, museums, music halls, libraries, and scenic spots of interest to tourists. It is the hypothetical existence of such spontaneously formed communal spots or strips that give real substance to the discussion of false needs of contemporary consumer culture.

What is this non-market-oriented social space, and where is it? Where do we find examples that illustrate how free time in a managed urban space is not subsumed by money? Is there such a thing as a spontaneous entertainment culture rooted in a city-capital now caught in a whirlwind of urban development? The folk cultural practice I wish to discuss is the resurgent *yangge* dance, now named one of the most distinctive streetscapes in Beijing. *Yangge* is a form of traditional

harvest song-dance practiced by peasants in the old days. Communism instilled a new celebratory spirit and revolutionary content into the folk form as it marched through rural China to its cataclysmic victory. Today, the term *yangge* is involuntarily associated with the memory of an era when farmers held up the Red Sky. It is indeed a conflicting landscape to witness, a proletarian art form resuscitated into a metropolitan spectacle. This is not an occasion for cynicism or didacticism, however. Neither the evocation of socialist utopia nor its symbolic critique of bourgeois consumerism has much to do with the increasing popularity of the dance today. The state, as Vivienne Shue argues, is by no means totally absent from the mushrooming activities of contemporary China¹⁷ community associations. In the case of a “voluntary” leisure form such as *yangge*, it remains to be seen to what extent neighborhood committees were involved in initiating and organizing its formation. However, swaying waists, beating drums, swinging fans and handkerchiefs, and blasting old harvest songs from boom boxes are seen by their practitioners as a spontaneous form of recreation. There is a certain generational logic at work here. “The dancers are mostly retired men and women who gather on the streets after nightfall. While their children crowd into discotheques and karaoke bars, the old timers (whose age averages fifty-seven) put on heavy makeup, embroidered shoes, and red and green costumes and dance out of their doors gleefully to one of the thousand *yangge* teams that have formed in the capital.¹⁸ Interestingly, the dancers have no binding obligations to frequent the same team. When interviewed, most of the performers (and its curious audiences) insisted on the spontaneous nature of their gatherings and attributed the street shows to their fun-seeking (*zhaole*) impulse.

Not all *yangge* dances were greeted with equal enthusiasm, which provided public security officials justification for intervention and regulation. One person’s self-expression may be another’s aberration. Many intellectuals and youths spoke contemptuously of the “low” dance culture, and residents living near the performance sites continually called for intervention of the city government to alleviate the “noise pollution.” The debate about the contemporary *yangge* revival will undoubtedly continue to resonate in urban discourses into the new century. It is not easy for Beijingers to conclude whether the dance is symbolic of individualist or collective spirit or of communal or anarchist ideology, a form of self-recreation (*ziyu*) or a selfish pleasure-seeking principle — in short, the jewel or the shame of the capital. For now, it seems unlikely that this emergent leisure cultural space can be controlled easily with routine vigilance by the city police. Proliferating at street corners and under overpasses, the *yangge* teams seek open spaces that cannot be insulated and isolated and, as a result, are difficult for effective surveillance and regulation. As a spontaneous street culture, the *yangge* dance seems to provide a viable alternative to what is prescribed in the Double Leisure Day Action Campaign. Such an alternative seems possible not because it is reputedly self-generated or because it is a historical genre uncontaminated by the profanities accompanying the transnational capital. The *yangge* culture succeeded in locating itself off the map of city planners because of its own spatial logic: the performers take to the streets where the boundary between the private and the public is fluid.

The street, “the medium in which the totality of modern material and spiritual forces could meet land] clash,” performs daily life as an interactive and intimate matter of lived experience.¹⁹ The *yangge* phenomenon contains all the ingredients of an urban street festival; spectators become part of the spectacle, and strangers are bonded by familiar fellowship. Best of all, it is free. My only hope is that by the time a worn-out Chinese consumer public starts its own theoretical quest

for a notion of leisure that is free from market rule, *the yangge* form will still be alive. That, of course, depends on how fast the horizontal urban space gets nibbled up by skyscrapers. For now, at least, Beijing enjoys a cultural asset that neither Shanghai nor Guangzhou—the two rival cities with which the capital competes consciously—can brag of, that is, a vibrant leisure culture community existing beyond the immediate reach of the market and the state.

Culture as Capital

The stented commitment to the discursive construction of leisure culture created a leisure market that capitalizes on the collapse of free time into money. But leisure is by no means the only fetish of the day. The buzz-word culture has accompanied the leisure trend and shared the spotlight during the heyday of leisure culture campaigns. As 1996 drew to an end, those who observed the urban propaganda machine carefully noticed that a new verbal ritual is in the making— —the culture chic is in. Indeed, as the state kicked into high gear its experimentation with the ruling technologies of the realms of symbolic production, the word *wenhua* regained its currency. No longer packaged as a Marxist category, as a superstructure that reflects or disguises the economic activities of society, culture now parts with ideology and is turned into capital itself, that is, into an economic activity in itself, and perhaps the most important economic activity of all.

The notion of the convertibility of culture and capital may not seem unusual in Western societies where the economic value of culture has long been taken as a given. But culture in the Chinese context—-with the brief disruption of Mao's era—has always privileged and pointed toward elite culture. In fact, the logic of cultural capital was inconceivable as late as the 1980s, when Chinese cultural production was still largely dominated by anti-market-thinking cultural and literary elites. The historical continuity of Chinese elitist tradition made the collapse of culture into capital such a radical phenomenon. What we are witnessing is arguably the shift from productive to reproductive technologies, a phenomenon that Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard would fain ascribe to the symptomatic arrival of postmodernity.

The centrality of culture and the prominence of symbolic consumption emerge undeniably as the most eye-catching features that define urban life in China today. Almost every urban business industry is now susceptible to a promotion package highlighting the concept of culture. Home decorating businesses started a discourse on cultural furnishing (*wenhua zhuanghuang*); an international automobile exhibition inaugurated in Beijing in the fall of 1995 was tagged Auto Culture Festival; and the National Bureau of Tourism not only named 1997 the year of tourism (as I pointed out earlier), but its chief advocated upgrading the tourist culture industry by incorporating vacationing and tie-in merchandising into a cultural tourism (*wenhua guanguang*). All this could be just another discursive turn, masterminded by the complicitous triple players, the state, the market, and the presses. Indeed, what can better characterize the cultural transformation of post-1992 urban China than the collapse of the distinction between the realm of culture and the realm of economic activity? So shall we drag ourselves into the debate about Chinese postmodernity?

The answer is no. The growing conspicuousness of the consumption of culture, and the availability of cultural goods, is largely an urban phenomenon in a vast land of unevenly

developed regions. Just as it is problematic for academic elites to celebrate the coming of postmodernity in China because they spotted a few literary examples of “postmodernism,” it is inconceivable that one can generalize about China based on one’s visual encounter with city cultures in Shenzhen, Shanghai, or Beijing. The postmodern vision of a hyperreal image-world that broke from the productive forces (and necessities) of modernity and Fordism is, as many critics have already pointed out, a “highly European construct,” a scenario that presumes the end of labor and production that falls short of characterizing the hybrid social reality of the non-West.²⁰

To determine if symbolic technologies have indeed supplanted productive forces in China requires an in-depth study of multiple localities. If the recent statistics about the increasing income gap between peasants and urbanites have any insight to offer, however, it is none other than a rebuff of the fallacy of homogenizing China from the standpoint of an urban locale. Having said this, I will resist the temptation to make a prediction about how fast rural China will catch up with urban China in the articulation of its cultural needs or whether it will emulate the latter in producing an image culture. Suffice it to say, postmodernity as a theoretical model has limited explanatory values at the present moment in China. The discussion of the convertibility of cultural into financial capital—a primarily urban phenomenon—does not need to be entangled in the conceptual maze of Chinese postmodernity.

The thesis of “culture as capital,” whether it serves as the epochal marker of postmodernity, spells out a logic that seems self-explanatory: the drive of market economy for profit inevitably produces the very condition for the bloom of a mass culture industry. Indeed, a culture industry of pop music already existed as early as the 1980s, and the early 1990s witnessed the rise of many commercial entrepreneurs among the literati themselves. Elite writer Jia Pingwa illustrates how fast savvy high-brows could adapt to commercialism. Never mind that the novelist was denounced by his intellectual peers for marketing his novel *Feidu* (An abandoned city)—contemporary pornography— —and turning it into a best-seller overnight. Paradoxically, Jia’s allegedly premeditated symbiotic relationship to the culture industry would have been a less serious affront to critics if he had packaged *Feidu* as popular fiction rather than as pure literature (*chun wenxue*). Sour grapes or an asceticism gone berserk? In any event, in the early 1990s, that elitism could sell was considered a conspiracy of the highest degree.

Ironically, the Jia Pingwa phenomenon—the making of commercial cultural entrepreneurship— —soon became a norm. The notion that profitable culture is not culture had fewer believers as the decade moved on. Sporadic examples illustrate just the opposite: high culture and lowbred commercial culture can do (good) business together.

- The Zhengzhou branch of Joint Publications Bookstore (Sanlian shudian) moved into the second floor of a first-star restaurant in town, Yuexiu Tavern. The merger brought booming business to both the restaurant and the bookstore. In the lavishly decorated salon adjacent to the bookstore, Beida professor Chen Guying gave his lecture series, “The New Directions of Daoism.” Writers such as Wang Zengqi and Xiao Qian also signed up for other lecture series. Among the learned and famous who

patronized the major literati attraction was eighty-four-year-old sociologist Fei Xiaotong.²¹

- Beijing National Opera House established the Dannon Peking Opera Troupe to honor its donor, the Dannon Company.
- The orchestra of the Central Ballet Company in Beijing changed its name to Shenzhen Konggang Orchestra in 1993. The alteration was made to acknowledge a Shenzhen sponsor who donated 200,000 RMB annually to the orchestra.
- The City Central Symphony Orchestra in Beijing held its first pop musical concert in 1993. In place of tuxedos, its male performers appeared onstage in T-shirts; the public greeted this makeover with enthusiastic support.²²

Those “events” took place during the early 1990s. Long before the state stole the scene, intellectuals and performers of high culture had already grasped the truism and practiced it: cultural capital and economic capital were mutually transformative. But in the early 1990s, the culture that was at stake was an elitist one. Serve or perish. The complicitous move was replete with guilt and crisis consciousness. Those who owned the economic capital called the shots. This was hardly the case in the mid-1990s when the notion of culture as capital went back in circulation.

In a matter of a few years, the cultural realm has recovered some lost ground. By 1995 serious art and literature — —symphony orchestras, ballet, ethnic music, and literary journals—had returned to the market with success. Perhaps what accentuated the cash value of culture with such dramatic speed was the so-called Guangdong Phenomenon in 1994. The affluent province that marches at the forefront of the market economy reinvented itself as a cultural vanguard. Programs and festivals of high culture were launched one after another throughout the year under the auspices of the Guangdong Provincial Institute of Cultural Development Strategies.²³ “Utilizing culture to promote business” (*yiwèn cùxiào*) soon became a catchphrase that inspired policy makers in other cities.²⁴ A trend was set. Culture and capital tied the knot officially. By the time state officials started harping on the importance of building up a “cultural economy,” they meant something entirely different from saving (high) culture from extinction, as in the early 1990s. On the contrary, culture (both high and pop) has reemerged as a site where profits are guaranteed and to be shared. The symbolic capital of culture points directly to the accumulation of wealth that the state is eager to exploit. Such a social landscape was indeed unimaginable in the early 1990s.

New means of depositing cultural revenues into the coffers were explored. The State Department made a recent attempt to milk the lucrative cultural industry in the name of “improving policies regarding “cultural economy.”” Starting in 1997 a 3 percent levy, euphemistically called a “construction fee for the building of cultural enterprises” was imposed not only on major entertainment venues but also on departments overseeing advertising in radio and TV stations, newspapers, journals, and magazines. Donations made to opera houses, symphony orchestras, ballet troupes, and ethnic performance art are now eligible for tax exemption.²⁵

Concomitant with the increase in the cash value of culture is the public's growing awareness of the worth of signs (both written and visual)—logos, trademarks, design patents, and brand names (the so-called invisible assets)—and no less important, the image-capital of a city.²⁶ While it has become a common practice for corporations to get the face value of their logos or brand names officially appraised (the logo of the Dannon Company is said to be worth 300 million RMB), it is not easy to put an entire city on the scale.²⁷ But that is exactly what the city commissioners (both within the CCP and the government) of Beijing have attempted to do since late 1996. How to reinvent the national capital into a world-class center of cultural consumption preoccupied policy makers of all levels in Beijing. In the remainder of this section, I will discuss how the Beijing city administration rode the culture waves and concocted an urban development strategy that epitomized this drift of cultural capital toward economic capital.

First, it is important to recognize that by the end of 1996, Beijing had grown more self-conscious of its competition with major metropolitan centers for the title of the hub of Chinese cultural industry. It might not be an exaggeration to say that the recent hype about Beijing's capital impact (*shoudu xiaoying*) was the result of an intensifying image race orchestrated and monitored closely by the Department of the Strategies of Cultural Development in Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Beijing. As Shanghai and Guangzhou shifted their emphasis of urban planning from industrial to cultural economy, Beijing followed suit. In March 1996 the fourth plenary session of the Eighth Assembly of Beijing's Municipal Political Consultative Committee convened to devise “new strategies for the economic development of the capital. The thematic motion dominating that session and the subsequent brainstorming sessions was encapsulated into the slogan “founding the capital through culture” (*wenhua lidu*). A motion for developing the “tertiary sector” in place of heavy industry was made. More significantly, the members of the Municipal Political Consultative Committee emphasized the necessity of capitalizing on the historical and cultural heritage of Beijing, a (hidden) asset that a financial capital like Shanghai and a depthless commercial city like Guangzhou could never challenge, let alone match.²⁸ The March meeting set the tone for the subsequent programs implemented by various city organs to modernize Beijing. Big investment projects were envisioned. The Department of Propaganda announced its plan to invest five billion RMB in the next decade to construct large-scale cultural establishments, including national museums and libraries, bookstore complexes, and television “satellite cities. The Department of Culture in the municipal government has also been busy drafting plans to recover lost cultural venues such as run-down theaters (i.e., Chang'an Cinema and Xidan Theater) and bookstores (Xinhua Bookstore).²⁹ Amid all the propaganda blitzes about the renaissance of a vintage Beijing, the first Foundation of Culture Development of the capital was brought into being in December 1996. More specific urban designs aimed at advancing the development of tourism in Beijing are also in the pipeline. The Xuanwu District Committee announced its plan to build “a special cultural zone” made up of five key spots of cultural tourism, namely, the Da Zhalan District (commercial culture), the Heavenly Bridge District (folk culture), the Garden of Grand View (Honglou meng culture),³⁰ the Liuli District (antiques culture), and the Niu Street District (Muslim culture).³¹

Lest all those fevers over the cultural mappings (and the constructions) of the city mislead one into thinking that the Beijingers are obsessed with how to best serve the mind, I should reiterate that culture serves only a means to an end, not an end in itself. That is, culture is an alternative

source of wealth whose value is reconvertible into cash. Nobody can articulate this point in the emergent state discourse of the so-called cultural economy better than economists and sociologists: “In the realm of modern productivity, one must say that the content of the culture of a country or a district constrains and dictates its industrial structuring, economic configuration, and the direction of its development and the speed of its growth”³² In short, culture gives impetus to, and serves as an index of, economic boom.

The mere recognition of the exchange value of culture calls for a better prediction of how it circulates within society, hence, for a more stringent regulation of cultural industry. Regulation and investment in this context are two sides of the same coin. The employment of the notion of cultural capital points to the increasingly sophisticated ruling technologies of central and local state apparatuses. While maintaining the law and order of cultural production is part and parcel of the large scheme of any political regime, postsocialist China gains the edge over Western democratic regimes in that it can depend on the goodwill of the mass media to propagate state policies with total commitment. The control of Chinese public and popular opinions proves to be a relatively effortless chore for the party-state, as it still has the media largely at its command despite its decreasing authority in other spheres of activity.

So what does the imminent transformation of Beijing's city culture teach us about urban China in the 1990s? In the process of its becoming more entrepreneurial and image conscious, is Beijing following the examples of other metropolises caught in their transition toward a faceless postmodernity at all costs? The fierce debates of Beijingers over the preservation of vestiges of history (e.g., the Yuanming Garden, the Qianmen City Gate, and those meandering *hutongs*) may challenge such a universalist formula of a “non-place space” of the postmodern city.³³ Or are those debates simply indicative of a postmodern retro-fever?

Eventually the success of Beijing's thematic (re)turn to culture will hinge on how attached its residents are to those historical memories that old Beijingers are so proud of. Right now it seems that the city is deeply sunken in an identity crisis. Discourses showcasing its cultural heritage exist side by side with feature reports that reinvent the capital in the image of Guangzhou (“Beijing is a coastal city”) and Shanghai (“Beijing is the locale where world-famous U.S. and European transnational corporations converge”).³⁴

The capital's image-making conflict reflects in many ways the dilemma of post-1992 China in miniature. How can Beijing be Chinese, modern, and global all at once and yet retain a strong sense of place? The residents, because of their acute awareness of their city's centered location, wrestle with that question more strenuously than their compatriots who live in other parts of the country. The complexity of the transformation of the city's cultures tells conflicting stories that rebuff any attempt by elite critics to sum up the post-1989 epochal experience as antiauthoritative, anticultural, and antihistorical.³⁵ The reductiveness of such an implicitly binary critical move is evident as contemporary Chinese experiences of political authority, culture, and history tell us tales riddled with ambiguities. Culture (even high culture) and history are returning to the spotlight; authorities have undergone a makeover and reemerged as benefactors, and their interventions are not always unwelcome.

The postsocialist society is changing. But instead of examining the specific nature of those changes and trying to understand culture as lived experiences and postsocialist civil polity as a body of many faces, Chinese elites (and their Western counterparts) often lock themselves in the reductive theory of political and commercial totalitarianism and vent to no avail. My previous discussions of the two prominent trajectories in post-1992 China — —leisure culture fever and the increasing visibility of cultural capital — —foreground a different set of questions for contemporary China studies: What does culture mean today? What forces are propelling culture to a stature of greater importance?

The two previous sections of this essay attempt to answer the first question by rescuing the notion of culture from the symbolic hierarchies long established by the elites. Such an approach takes us away from a focused and interpretative engagement in specific cultural products or objects of consumption toward the examination of the processes where culture (whether it is culture as leisure or culture as capital) is socially constructed.

The second question — —the motivating force, or the agenda setter, of China's public culture— brings us back to the subject of the postsocialist state, and the mandate and efficacy of its rule, an issue I deferred addressing in the first part of this essay.

A New Hegemonic Moment: The Modern State

There are two perspectives on the Chinese state that need no further elaboration: its ideological pandering to the interests of capital and its poor human rights record. While I have no interest in defending a state whose name is historically associated with violence and coercion, I have little faith in classical Marxist and liberal theories on a statism that emphasizes force as the foundation of state form. There is nothing fundamentally wrong in reiterating this time-worn thesis of the state as institutionalized violence. It is the conclusion — that the state machine should be smashed — that is the problem. The determinist view that the state is built on force (a concept dominant in political theories from Machiavelli through Thomas Hobbes to Max Weber, and from Marx and Lenin to Louis Althusser) often precludes us from evaluating the effectiveness and extent of state interventions in the process of capital valorization. By emphasizing its absolute collusion with capital and its oppressive nature as a policing apparatus, most critics (both in China and in the West) eschew the transformative possibilities of the Chinese state in the era of transnationalism, namely, its intention to manage the process of globalization.

In the case of China, such a view can only lock us into a contradictory position. On one hand, we celebrate the weakening of the postsocialist regime by capitalism, and yet we affirm the hypertrophy of its coercive apparatus, on the other. In fact, in the day-to-day reality, both observations are problematic. The post-1989 state is neither hollowing out nor able to intervene in culture and economy as an autonomous body of governance. What the first two sections of this essay delivered is the discourse of state intervention. Whether or not such a discourse is successfully implemented, and to what degree it is executed at the provincial and subprovincial levels, are issues that only time and interdisciplinary teams of scholars can address. For the time being, let us not assume that power rules absolutely. That the state apparatus exists does not mean that it can effectively intervene.

What we need from a contemporary study of statism is thus the dual recognition that neither the state nor capital is external to the other. Such an analysis of the intricate relations between the state and the contradictions of capitalist accumulation will enable us to take a closer look at the sometimes complicitous coexistence, and sometimes conflicting relationship, of the state and the market, public and popular culture, and state-owned and private enterprises in China. A set of criteria needs to be developed that would allow us to examine “how far the manipulative possibilities of the state apparatus extend, where they stop, where they produce new contradictions, where they contain in capitalist form elements of a true socialization of production” and, I might add, of a true socialization of consumption as well. Most important, such a perspective will prevent us from conflating the post-1989 Chinese state with the one that sent the Peoples Liberation Army into Tiananmen Square in 1989.³⁶ One can say that, in principle, postsocialist China has moved from a coercive to a systemic regulatory form of governance. The suppression of the Falungong in 1999 presented an anomaly. But it is interesting to note that domestic public opinions hinged on debates over the means, not the reasons, for the banning of the sect. It may be too early to tell if the Falungong incident signals the reversion of the state to mind-control tactics. But it is safe to posit that the question of how to maintain the formal equilibrium of the semblance of a systemic regulatory polity has preoccupied the postsocialist state since the 1990s.

Such a preoccupation is seen in all spheres of the states activities, especially in its sustained effort of legitimizing its rule through an emphasis on legality. Thus, lawmaking as a political technology is as important to a regime in search of legitimacy as its more mundane ^appeal to [individual] interest.”³⁷ It is not a coincidence that legalizing economy (jingji lifa), the incorporation of the economic in the juridical, became one of the focal points of state reform in the mid-1990s. The vision of a society ruled by law (fazhi shehui) has sunk deeply into the public psyche. Most of the state laws published since 1994 were made to establish a groundwork of proper consumption and even distribution and 44to safeguard the competitiveness of national capital on the capitalist world market,”one of the four primary functions that Elmar Altvater assigns to state management.³⁸ Banking Law, Statistics Law, Creditors5 Law, Law of Negotiable Instruments, Auction Law, Law Punishing Financial Criminals, and the Law Governing Lawyers are just a few of the new regimens. Such a macroeconomic stewardship may not be a contemporary manifestation of the tyrannical impulse of the state. On the contrary, as William Greider suggests in his controversial *One World, Ready Or Not*, it is a long-overdue scenario—the state sitting at the wheel to temper the excesses of the market and “save capitalism from itself.”³⁹

Those laws and other stipulations in the making point to a restructuring attempt of the postsocialist state to turn itself into a machine capable of mediating the contradictions resulting from capital accumulation. One can, of course, cast a dubious look at the state s efforts to construct new legal subjects and new financial subjects out of its reformist lawmaking machinery. Such efforts are reminiscent of the controlling capacity of the state and its compulsion to weed out anomalies. The successive lowering of the interest rate (twice) in 1996 was a policy meant to eliminate nonconsumed and noninvested income. A financial subject thus firmly grounded in consumption (and competition) is a disquieting prospect for those who cherish the utopian vision of humankind's liberation from necessities. And the legal subject making, of which Beijings Hard Strike Campaign serves as a paramount example, blocks us

further from investigating the root cause of the flow of criminal elements into the city, that is, the uneven distribution of resources between rural and urban areas. Finally, the real danger of the Hard Strike Campaign resides in the state's success in disciplining the social body by turning its anticriminal action into a visual showcase accessible to the public. The fall 1996 grand exhibition of Hard Strike Campaign cases, a documentary eye-ful, at the city's Military Museum created many disturbing aftereffects. Among them was the ideological indoctrination that could make all free citizens cringe: "The People's police is our new idol."⁴⁰

The popularity of both political technologies, the disciplining of the citizen's legal and financial consciousness, spells out the real danger of the state that now markets itself as a benevolent regulator. But on the other hand, in today's world where greed is the creed, and where multinationals have neither the social conscience nor the legal leverage and fiscal authority to regulate the conflict between wage labor and capital, what options do constituents have but to give the benefit of the doubt to an apparatus they supposedly voted in (and could vote out) to represent them?⁴¹ China, of course, presents a challenge to this kind of innocent faith in legislature. Local and national electoral reform is still a vision far short of being realized, despite increasingly heartening reports about the upcoming democratization in that area. Yet against all odds that the Chinese state may backpedal, it is an undeniable fact that it has taken upon itself the task of producing an appropriate framework for the process of internationalization (in all cultural and economic spheres) to proceed. We have seen how it has introduced new legal and fiscal reforms and is developing a new international intellectual property regime.⁴²

It is difficult enough to envision the rehabilitation of a regime deeply mired in the history of its totalitarian past. But what is even more inconceivable is the state's attempt to expand the sphere of its intervention through not only legal but ideological means. The revival in postsocialist China of ideology as a tool for mobilizing mass consumerism would raise many eyebrows. To put it in a nutshell, the party-state is searching for consumerist campaign slogans from Mao's Little Red Book. I should warn those rooted in the them (socialism)—versus—us (capitalism) ideologies that what we are witnessing may signal neither a second coming nor the demise of socialism. So what can we make of this ironic vista? That the regulatory capacity of the state sometimes depends on its success in reactivating the people's memory of a socialist ideology that went bankrupt in postrevolutionary China?

I am speaking of the incredible party slogan "serve the people" (*wen renmin fuwu*) that the sixth plenary session of the Fourteenth Party Congress attached to the national agenda in late 1996. The slogan, of course, reinforced the CCP's legitimacy. More important, what is at stake for the state is not merely a commercialism steered off course (the problem of the so-called social efficacy of market economy), but also the founding spirit of socialism, a collectivism that privileges the public's interests over the individuals. Not coincidentally, prior to the resurfacing of the slogan, a social contract system (*shechui chengnuo zhi*) blossomed all over the nation, a concrete mechanism that guaranteed a renewed collectivist spirit by binding all public sectors to serve the "masses" better with professionalism à la capitalism.

The services in question cover areas that range from the stately to the trivial, from city water, gas, and electric companies, airlines, and railroad stations to taxi drivers' decorum and elevator operating times. From Yan-tai City (Shandong province), where the contract system first

sprouted, to Harbin, Xi'an, and Shenzhen, together with some thirty other towns and cities, the local states and central party organs have been busy establishing a legitimizing base, in contractual terms, for the restructuring of the relations of public sectors to private consumers. People's rights have to be ensured and protected, as all the official documents have kept trumpeting. Yet the irony that enables the slogan and the contract to make sense and nonsense at the same time was left unsaid. That is, both the contractual spirit and the socialist slogan have worked—to the embarrassment of the ideologically pure—not because of the residual public faith in socialism but due to the semantic transformation of the word *people* into *consumer-citizens* in post-1992 China. What makes possible the contemporary revival of “serving the people” is the equation, contradictory or not, between socialism and democratic consumerism.

This returns us to a point I raised earlier, that is, the state's reinvention of the notion of the public sphere by defining it in terms of the public's equal access to goods and services—a “consumerist democracy” on the rise. What enables the Chinese postsocialist state to reposition itself as a democratic apparatus operating for the good of the public?

To address this question, we need to recognize, first, that the simple dichotomy between the hegemonic first world and the subjugated third world has fallen short of telling the story of unequal distribution. At the threshold of the twenty-first century, this abstract global scheme often prevents us from addressing the more urgent issue of unequal distribution at home, within the first world and the so-called third world, respectively. It is no longer adequate for us to think merely in terms of a division between a controlling and centralizing first world and a deprived and marginalized third world. The differentiations, I want to emphasize, do not simply reside between the two fixed poles of the transnational versus the national, but also in the vertical gaps and hierarchies within each society. As the division between the first and third worlds is breaking down in those terms, local hierarchies between haves and have-nots are increasing at a phenomenal pace. One may ask what form of political body is in place to effect changes in redistributive policies.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, transnational capital not only did not weaken the Chinese postsocialist state, but its intensifying presence since 1989 has rescued a regime that barely emerged from the crisis of confidence after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. It was transnationalism that opened a space for the state to intervene and, through its mechanisms of checks and balances, to arbitrate the contradictions of capital accumulation.

The process of the transnationals' sped-up infiltration in post-1989 China, therefore, led to the relegitimation of the state as an equalizer. Postsocialism and transnational capitalism can be strange bedfellows after all.

This is not to deny, however, that capital did trigger some deep structural changes in Chinese statism. Nowhere is this change more pronounced than in the controversial new dynamic that now exists between Beijing and the provincial states. What do we make of the power of a state whose authoritarian aura was now tempered by the negotiatory relationship between the central and the local? Many analysts have written about the significance of the state's earlier fiscal policy of “devolving powers and yielding benefits” (*fangquan rangli*) and how it initiated an increasingly competitive partnership that gave local states more control over financial and

material resources.⁴³ The subsequent 1994 tax-sharing reform (*fenshui zhi*) raised more questions about the redistribution of central-provincial fiscal power relations.⁴⁴ But despite those controversies, the stated capacity to rule and the potency of its fiscal authority remain intact. Its interest in nurturing a new partnership with the local states should not be confused with the involuntary loosening of its central planning mechanisms. Just as “the centre has more options than being everything or nothing,” it is structurally flexible enough to guarantee its continual metamorphosis and command position.⁴⁵ This may not be good news to those who cling to the cold war ideology and would be happy to see China disintegrate. But such thinking has been increasingly challenged by well-researched studies that emphasize the negotiatory over the combative relationship of the center and regions.

In many ways, because and regardless of the gradual transference of its power to subnational or pan-regional bodies, the “state seems to have risen from the ashes at the regional and local level.”⁴⁶ Controlled decentralization may be part of the scheme to consolidate power. No matter how we evaluate the post-1992 Chinese regime, there is no denial that a state apparatus closed in upon itself is passé. What we are witnessing is the birth of a new political rationality invested in making a new hierarchical structure open to complicitous and multiple partnerships. A more level-headed assessment of the efficacy of the central state apparatus brings us to this conclusion: in the absence of an international horizontal structure of governance, the national state remains the most significant site that reckons and negotiates struggles among global, triadic, supernational, national, regional, and local forces.⁴⁷

Finally, merits and vices of Chinese statism aside, we have to return to the question of the standing of the postsocialist state at home in mainland China. Regardless of its international image, we need to ask if the party-state has lost its mandate to rule. Is it perceived as an oppressive polity by the majority of its own citizens (insurgent Tibetans and Muslims in Xinjiang aside)? Perhaps Antonio Gramsci's theory of the hegemonic moment can teach us a few lessons about the dialectic relationship between coercion and consent. What we confronted in post-Deng China in the late 1990s was a rare moment of hegemony in which diverse interests of subordinate groups cohered to form a base of popular consent on which the state builds and practices its authority and leadership.⁴⁸ The convergence of neoconservative thinking since the mid-1990s in cultural, economic, and political spheres makes tangible the formation of such a moment of collective will.

Neoconservatism is a topic that begs a full-length treatment on its own. But a quick summary is in order so that we may grasp the general picture of how interests of diverse intellectual groups coordinate in post-1992 China to constitute a dominant discursive bloc that legitimizes the regime.⁴⁹ As political scientists call for the recentralization of state power,⁵⁰ economists prioritize market stability, on one hand, and endorse the state's policy of privileging moderate measures of (economic) reform over radical changes (of participatory politics), on the other.⁵¹ Corresponding to this moderate turn of economic and political philosophy is the culturalists, renewed attack on May Fourth radicalism and their consecration of Chinese learning as the cornerstone for an East Asian development model.⁵² Underlying those different strands of neoconservative thinking is a resurgent nativism that foregrounds the Chinese experience as a unique experiment that is neither capitalist nor socialist. This is, in a word, an ideology that the state has been propagating all along. Remember Deng Xiaoping's famous slogan, “socialism with

Chinese characteristics”? Only now has it come full circle, completed with the intellectuals' blessing and their overwhelming vote of confidence in the party's vanguard position in leading this experiment.

On the popular front, scholars' surveys of and statistics on political trust yield similar findings: the postsocialist regime is popular at home. This verdict may puzzle many and displease China observers who write for the major presses in this country.⁵³ But those who fail to comprehend that “mastery results from winning a substantial degree of popular consent” will continue to make misleading speculations about a Proteusian regime and a populace who perceived themselves less as puppets than as collaborators.⁵⁴ What message, then, does the increasingly positive, popular perception of Chinese statism deliver? It is none other than the regimes transformative capacity of turning itself into a credible administrative apparatus that is moving from coercive to systemic regulatory instrumentality. As my previous discussions of leisure and cultural capital illustrate, the postsocialist state has learned how to condense a constellation of different social, cultural, legal, and economic practices and discourses into a complex formation of alliances.

Finally, one may ask, what do all these discursive activities add up to regarding our understanding of the material reality of China? What does it mean that the postsocialist state is acting on the theoretical possibilities of redistributing social wealth? Is the time ripe for the state to acculturate the well-to-do to an international cosmopolitanism and make its bid for global citizenship? In other words, do those state-coordinated efforts reflect not just the image making but the reality of an affluent society? Or did the legal constructions and campaigns of leisure as culture and culture as capital come into existence as mere discursive happenings that attempt to contradict and counter (rather than mirror) the material reality? That is to say, could it be possible that the accentuation of the state's regulatory rhetoric merely reveals that things are out of control? Could the proliferation of new laws (and best-sellers such as *China Can Say No*) indicate exactly the reverse, that is, the complete domination of transnational capital and the market, which, precisely because it knows no rules and obeys no regulations, has motivated the resurgence of Chinese nationalism? And finally, one cannot resist asking the routine question regarding statism: Are those institutions of governance brought to serve the interests of the state and its ruling elite or those of the people?

Those questions are the kind of recurring mental traps that I wish to circumvent, for they are symptomatic of the binary mode of thinking that is losing efficacy in a world where parties of conflicting interests negotiate in the boardroom rather than duel on the battlefield. Domination is not total; resistance is never complete. Perhaps it is time for us to revalorize the conceptual category of complicity so that we can get out of the sterile binary of good versus evil and, in the end, deliver ourselves from the conceptual deadlock of power versus subjugation versus resistance. This exercise shows that leisure and pleasure are not easily disentangled from policies and state sponsorship. And culture is just another term that has gone eclectic. Can we examine the quotidian without elitist purism and methodological conformity?

Notes

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1 Terry Eagleton, “The Contradictions of Postmodernism,” *New Literary History* ²⁸ (winter 1997): 1-5.

2 I wish to acknowledge Yue Gang for his commentaries on this essay when it was presented at “Mapping the ‘Popular’ in Post-Socialist China,” the first Luce workshop held in May 1998.

3 Wang Yuechuan, “Zouchu houxiandai sichao” [Walking out of postmodern thought], in “Houxiandai zhuyi yu dangdai Zhongguo wenhua bitan” [Notes on postmodernism and contemporary Chinese culture], *Wenhua yanjiu* [Cultural studies] 2 (February 1996): 40-42; Li Tuo, Dai Jinhua, et al., “Mantan wenhua yanjiu zhong de xiandaixing wenti,” [Notes on the question of modernity in cultural studies], *Zhongshan* [Bell mountain] 5 (1996): 173; Tao Dongfeng and Xu Youyu, qtd. in Zhang Ming, “Wenhua jiazhi: Jinri shchui jiangou zhi jichu: Guanyu houxiandai sichao de yici duihua [II]” Cultural value: The foundation of society today: A dialogue on postmodern thought], *Guangming ribao* [Guangming news daily], 13 April 1995; Wang Hui, “Jiushi niandai Zhongguo dalu de wenhua yanjiu yuwenhua piping” [Cultural studies and cultural criticism of 1990s China], *Wenhua yanjiu* 2 (February 1996): 23.

4. Zhao Yiheng, “Post-Isms and Chinese New Conservatism” *New Literary History* 28, no. 1 (winter 1997): 31—44; Zhang Longxi, “Duoyuan shchui zhong de wenhua piping” [Cultural criticism in multicultural societies], *Ershiyi shiji* [Twenty-first century] 33 (February 1996): 18-25. Also see Wang Hui, “Jiushi niandai,” 27.

5. For details on the debates over re7uvenjingsheny see the special issue, “Literature and the Spirit of the Belles Lettres,” in *Wenyi lilun* [Literary theories] 7 (July 1995). For the summary of this debate see Zhang Fu, “Yijiu jiu wu: Wenhua shichang yu wenhua piping zhijian” [1995: Views on cultural market and cultural criticism], *Dongfang* [The orient] I (January 1996): 7-11.

6. I would like to thank Li Wei, my colleague at Fuqua business school, for responding to my inquiries regarding Chinese macroeconomic policies.

7. Lee Fook Hung, “Value Added Tax, Consumption Tax, and Business Tax,” *Bulletin for International Fiscal Documentation* 49, no. I (January 1995): 24.

8. For a definition of xiaokang see Sun Xuewen, “Xiaokang wenhua de neihan he jiben tezheng” [the content and characteristics of the culture of the comparatively well-to-do], *Jiangnan luntan* (January 1994): 39-40. The annual income of a *xiaokang family* is approximately 30,000 to 50,000 yuan (US\$4,000-7,000).

9. Susan Christopherson, “The Fortress City: Privatized Spaces, Consumer Citizenship, I” in *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, ed. Ash Amin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 409-427.

10. "Shuangxiuri xingdong jihua quanmian tuichu" [An all-out implementation of double leisure day action package], *Beijing qingnian bao* [Beijing youth daily], 5 February 1996.

11. Henry Ford, "Why I Favor Five Days' Work with Six Days' Pay," an interview by Samuel Crowther, *World's Work*, October 1926, 613-616.

12. Gary Cross, *Time and Money: The Making of Consumer Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993).

13. Andre Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason* (London: Verso, 1989).

14. The materials I cite were published in Beijing Youth Daily between February 1996 and March 1997. A series of editorials were written about the "Civilization Code for the Capital's Residents" ["Shoudu shimin wenming gongyue"], which was due in September 1995 (for the occasion of the World Conference on Women). The delay of its publication was attributed to the lengthy discussion about its revision that involved elaborate collaboration between diverse units of Beijing residents.

15. "Chuangzao maixiang xinshiji de xiandai dushi wenming [Creating a modern urban civilization that faces the new century] *Beijing qingnian bao*, 1 February 1996.

16. There were many reports on the trend of high cultural consumption in Beijing between 1995 and 1996. I want to cite two examples here. See "Shuangxiu ri da xingdong: Tisheng nide shenghuo zhiliang" [The big double leisure day action: Raising the quality of your life] *Beijing qingnian bao*, 16 May 1996, 7, and "Wenming xiuxun cheng shishang [The leisure Consumption of civilization is becoming a fad], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 28 November 1996.

17. Vivienne Shue, "State Sprawl: The Regulatory State and Social Life in a Small Chinese City," in *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China: The potential for autonomy and community in Post-Mao China*, ed. Deborah Davis, Richard Kraus, Barry Naughton, and Elizabeth Perry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 95.

18. Reports about the *yangge* revival proliferated in the latter half of 1995 in Beijing Newspapers. See "Huozai zijide xinqingli" [Living with one's own (happy) mood], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 3 November 1995; "Yangge niuchule shenmo?" [What did the waist-twisting yangge deliver to us?] *Beijing qingnian bao*, 27 August 1995; "Yihe yiqiao yidao tianqian" [one river, one] bridge, and one trench], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 3 November 1995; and "Shenmo douneng zhili, zenmo jiu zhi li buliao yangge?" [Everything can be regulated, how come nothing can be done about yangge?] *Beijing qingnian bao*, 3 November 1995.

19. M. Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

20. John Storey, *An Introductory Guide to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 96.

21. “Sanlian shudian heyi banru jiujiu?” [Why did Joint Publications Bookstore move into a tavern?], *Xinmin wanbao* (Xinmin evening news), 11 September 1994.
22. Liu Hongtao, “Shiheng de wenhua xianxiang: Jiusan wenliua baogao” [Imbalanced cultural trends: A report on the culture of 1993], *Wenhua yanjiu*] (1984): 47, 19.
23. Yang Taoyium and Zhou Daping, “Jiusinian Zhongguo wenhua zoushi” [Chinese cultural trends of 1994], *ciowang* [Observation] 6/7 (June-July 1995): 17-20.
24. Ju Mingzheng and Guo Shuquan, “Dalu wenhua shichang fazhnn qushi, duanxiang sanzhang?”, [The trends of the development of mainland cultural market, three chapters), *Xiandai qiye daokan* [Bulletin of modern business enterprises] 10 (October 1994): 40-42.
25. Jinyibu wanshan wenhua jingji zhengce [Making another step toward improving policies of cultural economy), *Gongren ribao* [Workers’ daily], 14 November 1996.
26. The term *wuxing zichan* (invisible capital/assets) emerged toward the second half of 1996 as a crucial point of discussion for policy makers and entrepreneurs who emphasized the importance of making national policies and governing bodies oversee the operation of transnational joint ventures in China. The first conference on the “Theories and Practice of Chinese Invisible Capital” was held in Tianjin in November 1996.
27. *Zhongguo minpai yeyou jia* [Chinese brand names also have a value], *Beijing qingnian bao* 21 April 1996.
28. “Keji xingye wenhua xinghang: Yige shoucki jingji fazhan xinzhlanue de tichu” [Science and technology lead to an industrial boom, culture solidifies the nation: A new proposal for the capitals economic development strategies], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 28 March 1996.
29. “Beijing, wenhua sheshi jianshe zai qibu” [Beijing, its cultural constructions are just taking *Beijing qingnian bao*, 15 November 1996.
30. *Honglou meng* [Dream of the red chamber] is an eighteenth-century novel in which the protagonist lives in a beautiful garden with his love-struck cousins and maids. Because of the popularity of the novel, Shanghai and Beijing have constructed the fictional garden, which has become a favorite tourist attraction in both cities.
31. “Xuanwu dachu jingwei wenhua pai” [Xuanwu district showed off its cultural trump card], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 21 November 1996.
32. Chen Wenke, “Jingji wenhua, wenhua jingji guifanhua: Shichang jingji tiaojianxia wenhua yu jingji de jiehe wenti [The moralization of the culture of economy, and the regularization of cultural economy: The problems of combining culture with economy in the condition of market economy], *Wenhua yanjiu* 2 (February 1997): 8.
33. Mike Featherstone, “City Cultures and Post-Modern Lifestyles,” in Amin, *Post-Fordism*, 392.

34. Especially in the latter half of the 1990s, reports about and comparisons of the economic development strategies of the three cities could be spotted regularly in newspapers. Those stories are typically intertwined with reports about the urban planning and cultural development of the three cities. See, for example, “Beijing yeshi yanhai chengshi” [Beijing is also a coastal city], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 7 June 1995; “Zhiming kuaguo gongsi daliang yongru: Beijing qianwan meiyuan hezi xiangmu zhengduo” [Famous transnational corporations are pouring in: U.S.-China billion-dollar joint-investment projects in Beijing are on the rise], *Beijing qingnian bao*, 6 July 1995.

35. Chen Xiaoming, “Yiwai de hemou: Jingying yu dazhong de chongdie yingxiang: Dangdai dalu de wcnhua liubian” [An accident of complicity: The overlapping image of the elites and the people: Cultural transformations of contemporary mainland (China)], *jintian*[Today] 3 (1995): 65.

36. Wolfgang Muller and Neususs Muller, “‘The Welfare-State Illusion’ and the Contradiction between Wage Labor and Capital,” in *State and Capital: A Marxist Debate*, ed. John Holloway and Sol Picciotto (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979), 34.

37. David S. G. Goodman, “Democracy, Interest, and Virtue: The Search for Legitimacy in the Peoples Republic of China,” in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, ed. S. R. Schram (London and Hong Kong: School of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of London and the Chinese University Press, 1987): 296.

38. Elmar Altvater, “Some Problems of State Interventionism: The ‘Particularization’ of the State in Bourgeois Society,” in Holloway and Picciotto, *State and Capital*, 42.

39. Matthew Miller, “A Rising Tide Sinks All boats,” *New York Times Book Review*, 19 January 1997, 12. This is a review of William Greiders *One World, Ready Or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997).

40. Shen Xiangping, “Jingcheng ‘yanda’ jishizhan liuobao” [Fever over the documentary exhibit of Beijing’s “hard strike” campaign], *Beijingqingnian bao*, 16 November 1996.

41. According to a report in *China’s Economic Daily*, the Chinese Labor Department recently announced its efforts to regulate wage labor in state-owned enterprises such as real estate, export companies, and tourist, finance, and insurance industries. The policy is now being tested in Shenzhen, Chengdu, Beijing, and seven provinces, including Guangdong and Jilin.

42. China’s interest in making and enforcing policies for intellectual property rights was a response to the U.S.-China disputes over the Chinese bootlegging industry that produces laser discs and videotape copies of American books, movies, and TV shows. In a 1995 show-down, Washington slapped tariffs on a billion dollars worth of Chinese imports. Chinese government action against pirating has intensified since the trade war.

43. Zhao Suisheng, “From Coercion to Negotiation: The Changing Central-Local Economic

Relationship in Mainland China,” *Issues and Studies* 28 (October 1992): 1-22.

44. Jao Ho Chung, “Beijing Confronting the Provinces: The 1994 Tax-Sharing Reform and Its Implications for Central-Provincial Relations in China,” *China Information* 9, nos. 2 and 3 (winter 1994—1995): 1—23.

45. David S. G. Goodman, The Politics of Regionalism: Economic Development, Conflict, and Negotiation,” in *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade, and Regionalism*, ed. David S. G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (London: Routledge, 1994), 12. Goodman’s more recent work on the issue of center-periphery further complicates the binary paradigm. He problematizes the validity of the center-periphery perspective as a valid explanatory model for understanding rapid changes in the Chinese polity in the 1990s. He argues not only that “centre-periphcric relations are necessarily mediated by intervening variables” but that not every gain in power “by any part of the periphery” is necessarily made “at the expense of the centre.” See his “Re-defining the Chinese Polity,” English and Chinese versions, respectively, in *China Perspectives and Ershiyi shiji pinglun* (forthcoming).

46. P. Van Hoogstraten, *De ontwikkeling van het regional beleid in Nederland 1949-1977* (Nijmegen: Stichting Politiek en Ruimte, 1983), 17, qtd. in Bob Jessop, “Post-Fordism and the State,” in Amin, *Post-Fordism*, 272.

47. Ibid., 274.

48. Stuart Hall,” The Problem of ideology: Marxism without Guarantees,” in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), 25-46.

49. For a detailed introduction to neoconservatism in 1990s China see Zhang Jing, “Xinbaoshou zhuyi xueshu quxiang” [The academic orientation of neoconscrvtisin], *Ershiyi shiji pinglun* 2 (1997): 18-27. Also see Gan Yang, “P'an minzhu de ziyou zhuyi haishi minzhude ziyou zhlyi?” [Antidemocratic liberalism or democratic liberalism?], *Ershiyi shiji* 39 (February 1997): 4-17.

50. The seminal essay of economic neoconservatism was written by Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang, *Zhonggao guojia nengli baogao* [Report on the state capacity of China] (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1993). Also see Wang anti Hu’s “Zhongguo zhengfu jiqu nengli de xinjiang ji qi houguo ” [The decrease and consequences of the extractive capacity of the Chinese state], *Ershiyi shiji* 21 (February 1994): 5_14.

51. Lin Yifu, Cai Fang, and Li Zhou, *Zhongguo de qiji: Fazhan zhanlueyu jingji gaige* [A Chinese miracle: Development strategies and economic reform] (Shanghai: Sanlian shudian, 1995).

52. Zhu Xueqin, “Wusi sichao yu bashi niandai jiushi niandai” [The May Fourth thought and the 1980s and the 1990s], *Xiandaiyu chuanguotong*][Modernity and tradition]6 (1995). Also see Deng Shaoji, “ Wo guan guoxue re” [IHow I look at the fever over Chinese learning], *Wenhua*

53. T.J.Shi, "Cultural Values and Political Trust: A Comparison of the People's Republic of China and Taiwan," *Comparative Politics* (forthcoming).

54. Stuart Hall, "Gramsci's Relevance for the Study of Race and Ethnicity," in *Stuart Hall*, 424.