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Nascent Articulations of Feeling: Affective Care Labor in Emerging Postsocialist and Late Capitalist China-U.S. Circuits

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Cai, Kathryn

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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Kathryn Cai

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Nascent Articulations of Feeling: Affective Care Labor in Emerging Postsocialist and Late

Capitalist China-U.S. Circuits

by

Kathryn Cai

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Rachel C. Lee, Chair

This dissertation traces flattened affects in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Asian

American and Chinese literature, original ethnographic fieldwork, and film that imagine circuits of

migration and capital between China and the U.S. following China's entry into the global economy.

This project builds on interest in Third World and Afro-Asian legacies in Asian American Studies

and on considerations of the transpacific as a transnational field shaped by but also exceeding

nation-based formations. I do so to propose a postsocialist framework that considers emergent

possibilities for transnational affiliations and forms of agency following economic reform in China,

when it was once a communist world revolutionary touchstone. This postsocialist framework seeks

to make visible forms of agency that take shape through non-revolutionary affects, such as

ambivalence and detachment, that do not seek to clearly overthrow a situation. Instead, they enable

living on within dominant nation-based projects tied to capital without full affective commitment to

them.

Specifically, the narratives this project examines center sites of gendered affective care labor within and outside the family as arenas through which to apprehend and learn to navigate these still-changing and emergent postsocialist conditions. Rather than affects commonly demanded of caretaking relations, such as complete emotional regard, availability, and investment, these narratives elaborate on valences of flatness as a way of traversing and living on within China-U.S. circuits through caring for the self and others. Flatness enables the figures of these narratives to do so without fully acquiescing to either Chinese imperatives to cultivate the self and family for the nation's economic prosperity or U.S. imaginations of Asians as economic resource and threat. My first chapter examines Ha Jin's *The Crazed* (2002) and Yiyun Li's *Kinder Than Solitude* (2014) to consider how flattened affects are differentially available in different gendered subject positions in the wake of China's accelerated economic growth and increasing ties between China and the U.S. from 1989 onward. Chapter Two elaborates on original ethnographic fieldwork in Beijing, China (2017) to consider how my primarily female interview subjects who have lived through the Maoist era and China's reform formulate flatness as healthful and desirable mode of caring for themselves and others to navigate and live with the unassimilable aspects of these vast changes. Chapter Three considers Chinese investigative journalist Chai Jing's air pollution documentary *Under the Dome* (2015) and Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) to elucidate how gendered affective care is a racialized technology that extends into a speculative, technologized future. The project ends with a coda on Boots Riley's feature film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) to further mine how transnational forms of gendered care work underwrite contemporary imaginations of the evolving global economy and possibilities for contesting its structures.

The dissertation of Kathryn Cai is approved.

Allison Carruth

C. Jason Throop

Rachel C. Lee, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

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VITA

Kathryn Cai received her B.S. in Biological Sciences and B.A. in English from the University of Maryland, College Park in 2011 and expects to receive her Ph.D. in English from the University of California, Los Angeles in 2019. Her research focuses on broadening the spectrum of affects associated with care labor in transpacific circuits of migration and capital through attending to bodily states and body-environment interactions in Asian American cultural productions. She has published articles on Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* in *Literature and Medicine* and Lorine Niedecker's *New Goose* poems in a special issue on "Fugitive Environmentalisms" in the *Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*. She will be a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the Interdisciplinary Humanities at Wake Forest University beginning in fall 2019.

Introduction

Care Work and Affect in Transpacific Postsocialist Circuits

This dissertation traces affective stances that enable orientations to large-scale conditions that are continuing to shift in the present. In particular, I examine in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Chinese and Asian American narratives that that grapple with China's entry into the global economy, which officially began in 1978 and accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s. As is widely discussed in the Western popular media and academic scholarship alike, China's economic growth on a massive scale has rendered it a significant global economic and geopolitical player, with far-reaching but shifting and unknown consequences.[1] China, however, has long been a globally significant site and actor. Maoist China once served as a historic touchstone for global Marxist and Third World movements and exemplified the possibility of a revolution that would overturn not just a capitalist but a racist and imperialist world order.[2] As scholars in Asian American studies increasingly consider the potentialities that Third World solidarities have for the racial and class politics of the present,[3] this project investigates how contemporary imaginations of China-U.S. circuits insist on the need to grapple with the emerging conditions of China's economic reform. Far from a process with a clear end point and parameters, the drastic changes to local and global conditions are continuing to unfold in the present. The imaginative literature, original ethnography, and film I examine accordingly turn to murkier affects to sense and navigate these still-emerging and uncertain conditions. Rather than imaginations of revolution, these diverse narratives posit flattened

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[1] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

[2] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

[3] Colleen Lye, "US ethnic studies and Third Worldism, 40 years later," in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* vol. 11, issue 2 (2010): 188-93; *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*, ed. Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Crystal Parikh, *Writing Human Rights: The Political Imaginaries of Writers of Color* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017); Vanita Reddy, "Affect, Aesthetics, and Afro-Asian Studies," in *Journal of Asian American Studies* vol. 20, no. 2 (2017): 289-294.

affective orientations commonly associated with passivity in Western contexts—such as ambivalence and detachment—as means through which individuals can continue to contingently sense and adapt to their continuously changing environments. While focusing on ambivalence and detachment in China-U.S. circuits, I intend for my connections between forms of economically precarious and ascendant gendered caretaking work to form the basis for further consideration of a diverse range of affective registers that can attend the attempt to negotiate still-emerging conditions in a broader constellation of interconnected transpacific postsocialist situations, which I further develop elsewhere.

Asian/American Racialization in the Twenty-first Century: Gendered Care Between Nations

While China's economic ascendancy has dominated news headlines, the forms of precarious labor still performed in China continue to form a central part of its economic growth. The seeming incompatibility of considering precarious and increasingly economically privileged subjects in China parallels this dilemma in Asian America. While discourses of the model minority have been extensively critiqued in Asian American and other ethnic studies fields for its complicity in upholding white supremacist frameworks in the U.S. and its failure to account for the numerous Asian American subjects who differentially struggle with poverty and marginalization, preoccupation with the Asian American model minority also continues to dominate popular U.S. discourses, such as those surrounding affirmative action. My project argues that caretaking and the material conditions of who cares, how to care, and to what ends can serve as a framework that brings together these economically precarious and ascendant livelihoods across China-U.S. circuits.

Caring for the self as a biopolitical mode of governmentality has been a central concept for conceptualizing neoliberalism across diverse global contexts. With the withdrawal of state welfare

associated with neoliberal policies across diverse global contexts, the capacity to care for the self and private, intimate others has become an imperative associated with moral good, which theorists of biopolitics have critiqued as the basis for remaking the self in the image of model consumer-citizens.[4] Meanwhile, affective and caretaking labor shape global migration patterns and become central to conceptualizing emerging economic conditions and global circuits of migration and capital in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Scholars of global neoliberalism assert that forms of affective labor that draw on the emotive and relational capacities of workers has become a paradigmatic form of labor in late capitalism across national boundaries.[5] These forms of care work coincide with the rise of neoliberalism globally and in the U.S.[6] While 1978 to 1980 marked a turning point in the spread of neoliberal policies in China, Britain, and the U.S., the U.S.'s promotion of neoliberal economic policies around the world through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization also accelerated following the end of the Cold War in 1989.[7]

As David Harvey writes, these trends proved to have global significance in "remak[ing] the world around us in a totally different image,"[8] and they have significantly shaped U.S. economic and geopolitical policies in Asia.[9] In these decades and extending into the present, market rationality has come to shape all aspects of everyday life and culture,[10] a pervasiveness that scholars argue is central to neoliberalism as a particular political formation even as it is presented as an apolitical "way of

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[4] Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Malden: Polity Press, 2008).

[5] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2000); Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

[6] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[7] Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," in *Theory and Event* vol. 7, no. 1 (2003); Harvey, 94, 111.

[8] Harvey, 1.

[9] Harvey, 85; Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 97.

[10] Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy."

being reasonable and of promoting universally desirable forms of economic expansion and democratic government globally."[11] The moral valences of care of the self that scholars of neoliberalism, drawing on and beginning with Foucault,[12] identify most readily in relation to health but that extend to all aspects of everyday life thus serve to develop self-enterprising and self-sufficient subjects whose approaches to everyday life are indeterminately shaped by state-sponsored neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism and consumerism.[13] Harvey argues that in order for neoliberalism to become dominant as a way of thought, it must appeal to our "institutions and instincts, to our values and desires,"[14] central to which is a concept of individual freedom.[15]

This concept of freedom as autonomy intersects with the valorization of independence that many scholars identify in relation to social welfare reform and the denigration of feminized labor across a wide range of contexts,[16] including caretaking in relation to health and disability,[17] domestic labor,[18] factory labor, and gendered caregiving for children within the family in both the U.S. and China. Neoliberal values for an autonomous self exacerbate the elision and denigration of private forms of caretaking labor, which is often performed by women and, in particular, women of color.[19]

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[11] Lisa Duggan, "The New Heteronormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002): 177.

[12] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

[13] Wendy Larner, "Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmetality," in *Studies in Political Economy* vol. 63, no .1 (2000): 5-25; Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," in *Rethinking Marxism* vol. 14, no .3 (2002): 49-64; Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*.

[14] Harvey, 5.

[15] Ibid., 5-7.

[16] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," in *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 19, no .2. (1994): 309-336; Ann Shola Orloff, "Explaining US welfare reform: power, gender, race, and the US policy legacy," in *Critical Social Policy* vol. 22, no .1 (2002): 96-118.

[17] Kelly Fritsch, "Gradations of Debility and Capacity: Biocapitalism and the Neoliberalization of Disability Relations," in *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* vol. 4, no .2 (2015): 12-48; Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenship," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 439-63.

[18] *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, ed. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

[19] Boris and Salazar Parreñas, Introduction, in *Intimate Labors*, 1-12.

As a result of U.S. welfare reform, "[c]aregiving has been shifted to an even more marginal status within the U.S. policy regime, as claims based on the status of family caregiver have been eliminated" and reception of public benefits rests on the ultimate goal of returning to employment.[20] Ann Shola Orloff observes that "[c]aregiving, while socially necessary, is culturally and institutionally denigrated,"[21] and opponents of public assistance programs for families "ignore the significance of unpaid, caring labor (especially but not only when performed by women of color), vilify welfare programs and construe any sort of dependency, or even interdependence, as pathological."[22]

While some scholars hesitate to characterize China as neoliberal because of the continuing primacy of the state,[23] others elaborate on the neoliberal characteristics that are increasingly shaping not only China's economy but all aspects of everyday life.[24] Socialist structures and provisions for life-long care that were ostensibly built into the urban *danwei*, or work unit, and rural collective farming systems have been dismantled, and social services such as healthcare have become increasingly privatized.[25] Known as "smashing the iron rice bowl" that was once in place to provide for an individual's livelihood from birth to death,[26] these market-driven changes have resulted in shifting forms of inequality and precarity, while the legitimacy of the party-state rests on its narrative of producing economic prosperity that will, in the words of Deng Xiaoping, "let a portion of the population get rich first" so that all may eventually benefit.[27] The imagination of the good life that

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[20] Ann Shola Orloff, "Explaining US welfare reform," 99-100.
[21] Ibid., 102.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2009).
[24] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*; Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Hui Wang, "The Year 1989 and the Roots of Neoliberalism in China," transl. Rebecca E. Karl, in *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 12, no. 1 (2004): 7-70.
[25] David Bray, *Social Space and Governance in Urban China: The Danwei System from Origins to Reform* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Wenfang Tang and William L. Parish, *Chinese Urban Life Under Reform: The Changing Social Contract* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society.*
[26] Bray, 160.
[27] Haomin Gong, *Uneven Modernity: Literature, Film, and Intellectual Discourse in Postsocialist China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012): 15.

can be achieved through capitalist development is thus central to the Chinese state-sponsored narrative of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."[28]

Nation-based discourses of global capitalist competition within increasingly neoliberal life conditions thus underwrite gendered forms of caring for the self and others in and beyond the privileged heterosexual family unit. Caring for the self and others to produce model citizens who are exemplary entrepreneurial subjects able to navigate global flows is a form of care that is both upheld and contested in nation-based discourses between China and the U.S. In these circuits, the Asian American model minority increasingly converges with Chinese model children and families, centered around their shared concern to affectively reproduce offspring who are adept at negotiating global economic networks. Susan Koshy elaborates on the Asian American model minority family as a neoliberal form held up as a model not only for other minorities but also increasingly for white Americans.[29] Koshy's explication of the American public fascination with Amy Chua's Tiger Mother figure centers on the exacting model minority mother and family's role in reproducing entrepreneurially adept children able to flexibly negotiate and the vicissitudes of neoliberal capital.[30] This iteration of the model minority increasingly converges with the model Chinese family, which faces immense pressure to raise children able to compete with their peers to secure prestigious placements in universities abroad.[31]

Precarious subjects across China and the U.S. are similarly enjoined to engage in caretaking labor, whether in support of privileged family through domestic work or as a form of caring for the self that cultivates themselves in the image of these model entrepreneurial subjects. In relation to

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[28] Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong, Introduction, in *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*, ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015): 1-20.

[29] Susan Koshy, "Neoliberal Family Matters," in *American Literary History* vol. 25, no. 2 (2013): 344-380.

[30] Ibid., 344.

[31] Vanessa Fong, *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Vivienne J. Zhang, "Family-History Narrative Approach: Higher Education Choices and Decision-Making in China's Then and Now," *SAGE Research Methods Cases* (2014).

globalized flows of capital in China, young women from rural backgrounds work in the service industry serving both urban Chinese customers and, in major metropolises, international travelers and businesspeople and must carefully tailor and adapt their bodily habits, mannerisms, and appearances to suit their customers' and clients' tastes, particularly in relation to the international clients whose satisfaction and respect for China further China's status as an elite space of global commerce.[32] Migrant rural women who work as domestics in the homes of urban residents face similar pressures and assessments about their bodily comportment.[33] The imperative to care for the self inflects even industrial labor. The spaces of globalized industrial labor producing goods for foreign markets are also highly gendered; in their assessment of a "dormitory labor" regime in which workers are provided provisional housing on factor campuses, Pun Ngai and Chris Smith note that workers are predominantly young, female, and make up a mobile labor force from the countryside.[34] Ngai and Smith argue that this system constitutes a "factory-centered socialization of the daily reproduction of labour" as a "new production space re-institutionalized between transnational capital and the local state in China for re-fusing the sphere of production and reproduction of labour into one regime."[35] These young women workers in China are also engaged in cultivating themselves through habits and comportment that align with market values, which scholars have variously considered as a form of neoliberal caring for the self as well as a form of self-determination that nevertheless converges with capitalistic and national imperatives.[36]

In a U.S. context, Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas note that caretaking labor is usually "assumed to be the unpaid responsibility of women, and, consequently, is usually considered

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[32] Eileen M. Otis, *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[33] Wanning Sun, "*Suzhi* on the Move: Body, Place, and Power," in *positions: east asia critique* vol. 17, no .3 (2009): 617-42.

[34] Pun Ngai and Chris Smith, "Putting transnational labour process in its place: the dormitory labour regime in post-socialist China," *Work, Employment and Society* vol. 21, issue 1 (2007): 33.

[35] Ibid., 42.

[36] Leslie T. Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2008).

to be a non-market activity or an activity of low economic value that should be done by lower classes or racial outsiders."[37] Boris and Salazar Parreñas assert that though under- and devalued, this paid and unpaid labor "sustains the day-to-day work that individuals and societies require to survive—and flourish."[38] This assessment similarly applies to forms of labor characterized by "material, affective, psychological, and embodied" intimacy with other bodies in the U.S.,[39] which are themselves embedded within the global economy, as well as feminized work in the factory and service contexts that are integral parts of China's globalized economy. These forms of intimate care converge with historically gendered forms of labor that have structured migration flows to the U.S. As demands for both factory and care work in a globalized economy have increased in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, increasing numbers of Asian and other women of color have migrated to the U.S. to fill these demands.[40] As Lisa Lowe articulates, "Asian immigrant women have constituted an important low-paid work force within the U.S., 'occupationally ghettoized' in menial, domestic, and reproductive labor, textile and garment industries, hotel and restaurant work, and a current mix of mass production, subcontracting, and family-type firms."[41] These forms of manufacturing and industrial labor are linked with feminized forms of caretaking work in what Lowe frames a "gendered international division of labor that makes use of Third World and racialized immigrant women as a more 'flexible,' 'casual,' and 'docile' work force."[42]

Feminized labor has thus played a key role in the ways in which Asian Americans have been racialized in the U.S. and nuances the association between the figure of the Asiatic and the

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[37] Boris and Salazar Parreñas, 3.
[38] Ibid., 1.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Lisa Lowe, "Work, immigration, gender: New subjects of cultural politics," in *Social Justice* vol. 25, issue 3 (1998): 31-49.
[41] Ibid., 37.
[42] Ibid., 36.

economic.[43] Asian Americanist scholars have examined the Asiatic figure's long association with the economic from the nineteenth century onward. From the coolie,[44] to imaginations of yellow peril and the model minority,[45] to cyborg factory workers,[46] scholars argue that the Asian figure's association with the economic has been marked by ambivalence.[47] As Colleen Lye has articulated, these dominant U.S. racial imaginaries are predicated on Asians' "putatively unusual capacity for economic modernity,"[48] which Lye argues connect the seemingly disparate figures of the coolie as denigrated worker and the economically and socially ascendant model minority in the twentieth century. These constructions of the Asiatic are also highly gendered. In the nineteenth century, Chinese men worked in traditionally feminine, and thus denigrated, positions such as "cook, waiter, tailor, and laundryman."[49] While Asian women of Chinese and Japanese descent were barred from immigration to prevent the formation of marriages and families on U.S. soil in periods during the early- to mid-twentieth century,[50] their eventual inclusion into U.S. immigrant populations also shifted gendered dimensions of race. Women's roles in reproducing the family became central to Asian American families' economic ascendancy,[51] as well as an ongoing site of contestation in Asian American racial politics. Patterns of interracial marriage between Asian women and white men, for instance, became a form of cultural and racial assimilation that has been critiqued from masculinist

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[43] Yen Le Espiritu, "Race, Gender, Class in the Lives of Asian American," in *Race, Gender, and Class* vol. 4, no. 3 (1997): 12-19.

[44] Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[45] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[46] David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, "Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction," in *Techno-Orientalism*, 1-19.

[47] Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 129; Lye, 10-11.

[48] Lye, 5.

[49] David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001): 92.

[50] Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Distant Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

[51] Keiko Yamanaka and Kent McClelland, "Earning the model-minority image: Diverse strategies of economic adaptation by Asian-American women," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 17, issue 1 (1994): 79-114.

cultural nationalist Asian American standpoints as contributing to the emsasculation of Asian men.[52] Gendered experiences of patriarchy and misogyny within Asian American communities and struggles over the sexualized representations of both Asian men and women have constituted key sites for contesting the simultaneously gendered and raced constructions of Asian Americans from the Asian American Movement in the 1960s onward.[53]

In the contemporary moment, the ways in which Asian subjects are construed as either economic resource or threat are shaped by forms of caring for the self and others across privileged and precarious contexts. This convergence presents a contemporary transformation of the economic threat that has historically conflated Asians and Asian Americans in the Asiatic figure writ large. As a highly visible site of nation-based economic competition and stratification, China-U.S. circuits present an intriguing opportunity to interrogate linkages between these seemingly disparate forms. From the explicitly economic figures of Chinese businessmen who increasingly worked abroad from the 1990s onward,[54] Chinese students across American university campuses have become increasingly visible transnational subjects and potent sites for American fears of China's ascendancy,[55] even as they present a lucrative market that institutions cannot afford to turn away.[56] These same students and families are centrally important resources to Chinese national ambitions

[52] Espiritu, "Race, Gender, Class," 14; Sean-Shong Hwang, Rogelio Saenz, and Benigno E. Aguirre, "Structural and Assimilationist Explanations of Asian American Intermarriage," in *Journal of Marriage and Family* vol. 59, no. 3 (1997): 758-772; Jennifer C. Lee and Samuel Kye, "Racialized Assimilation of Asian Americans," in *Annual Review of Sociology* vol. 42 (2016): 253-73.

[53] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Gender," in *Keywords for Asian American Studies*, ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, Linda Trinh Võ and K. Scott Wong. New York: New York University Press, 2015.

[54] Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Ong specifies that these figures were indeed predominantly men.

[55] Douglas Belkin and Miriam Jordan, "Heavy Recruitment of Chinese Students Sows Discord on U.S. Campuses," *Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), March 17, 2016; "How International Students are Changing U.S. Colleges," *Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY).

[56] Terry Crawford, "Why Chinese Students Aren't a Threat," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Washington, DC), April 30, 2018; Open Doors Report on International Students, Institute of International Education (2017) https://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Insights/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students; Karin Fischer, "Chinese Students Lead Foreign Surge at U.S. Colleges," *New York Times* (New York, NY), November 30, 2014; Laura McKenna, "The Globalization of America's Colleges," *The Atlantic* (Boston, MA), November 18, 2015.

for consolidating economic power and,[57] in their status as highly visible successful transnational subjects, nuance Koshy's explication of the model minority family that has become a model as well as ambivalently competitive threat for white Americans. Insofar as the burdens and anxieties of model/minority reproduction continue to fall disproportionately onto mothers,[58] affective structures of familial care that are gendered and heteronormative form one aspect of the contemporary Asiatic figure's association with the economic. Through contestations over their construction as national and economic resource, these privileged familial forms are linked with the forms of precarious labor as economic resource in both Chinese and U.S. contexts that also center on gendered affective labor. Nation-based contestation and emerging significations of Asian racialization thus takes shape through gendered arenas of care across privileged and precarious sites.

This dissertation asks: can situations of care and its associated affects simultaneously produce desirable subjects that conform to dominant narratives of nation and capital while also being sites for contesting these narratives from within their inhabitation? The novels, original ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Beijing, and films I examine center gendered forms of caring for the self and others within their imaginations of the emerging conditions of China-U.S. circuits. In these narratives, caretaking relations become the sites through which individuals apprehend and learn to navigate the emerging conditions stemming from China's economic reform, which extend into uncertain presents and futures. Mirroring contemporary trends, the performance of care work on and for the self and others across privileged and vulnerable subject positions become the means through which individuals are able to navigate the emerging transnational conditions of the present in diverse ways. These narratives thus explore how feeling and sentiment can be deployed towards different ends. They call attention to feeling's imbrication in reproducing broader nation- and

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[57] Vanessa Fong, *Paradise Redefined*; Teresa Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015).
[58] Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty*.

capital-based structures through affective investments in versions of the good life. By doing so, they

simultaneously explore how affect's open-ended and indeterminate nature can point to and critique

these instrumental ends and suggest possibilities, however compromised and limited, for being and

relating otherwise.

The figures in the fictional and non-fictional narratives I explore perform this work to

migrate and traverse transnational contexts, cultivate their health and affective states to contribute to

imaginations of the nation, create spaces to register their ambivalence over these national projects,

and imagine ways of caring otherwise that do not seamlessly reproduce the imperatives of nation

and capital. Their imaginations of care thus deviate from straightforward evocations of affects

traditionally associated with sentimentalized ideals of subservient gendered caretaking, such as those

of nurturing, warmth, emotional availability, and overriding concern for another. Instead, these

individuals perform care work and inhabit caretaking relations through flattened stances that allow

for the flexible navigation of still-changing conditions in migratory and economic circuits emerging

from China's economic rise. Alongside scholarship that complicates the desire for and availability of

straightforwardly caring affects in care work,[59] the stances my project explores simultaneously enable

oblique contestations by refusing full affective commitment to reproducing valorized imaginations

of national progress and racialized constructions of national and economic embodied resource

extraction. By exploring these less valorized affects, I do not suggest that relations and feelings of

genuine love and regard for others cannot exist, or that these ways of relating are not world-

changing in their own right. I seek simply to extend attention to a broader spectrum of affective

orientations that are not always visible within caretaking relations even as they might co-exist with

love and regard. In doing so, I hope that attending to the co-existing and sometimes irreconcilable

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[59] Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Queering the Chain of Care Paradigm," in *Scholar and Feminist Online* issue 6, no. 3 (2008).

complexities and contradictions of care can illuminate their centrality to dominant structures as well as the ways of living on these affects enable.

Postsocialist Affects

Rather than revolutionary critiques launched from the outside, the disruptions these flattened affects register emerge obliquely from within the inhabitation of subject positions that simultaneously also contribute to dominant discourses of nation and capital. This project asks how narratives in the wake of China's entry into the global economy postulate non-revolutionary forms of agency that deviate from the strong emotions and imaginations of overthrow associated with both socialist China and with Western models of liberation. As theorists of neoliberalism widely assert, market rationality has entered into all aspects of everyday life, providing no clear outside from which to launch a revolutionary critique. Rather than constructions of agency as the capacity to clearly overthrow a situation, I draw on theorizations of affect that attend to its emergent, indeterminate nature and lack of resolution.[60] Theorists of affect such as Kathleen Stewart, Jane Bennett, and Sara Ahmed consider affect as the body's capacities to both affect and be affected by other bodies in its worldly surroundings.[61] While these scholars point to affect's imbrication in the social and economic conditions of the world, they also suggest that affect presents the potential to navigate these conditions in ways that do not clearly align with straightforward acquiescence or contestation. Lauren Berlant, for instance, articulates a "coasting sentience,"[62] while Kathleen Stewart describes affect as a "commonplace, labor-intensive process of sensing modes of living as

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[60] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010)

[61] Ibid.

[62] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 43.

they come into being."[63] While Asian Americanist scholar erin Khuê Ninh asserts that in relation to compulsory feelings of filiality and indebtedness in Asian American families, attention to affect "enable[s] the study of feeling as part of a biopolitics of control—a biopower even more fine than the subject-level attentions of Foucauldian discipline,"[64] this project argues that affect can simultaneously cut multiple ways and lead in multiple directions that are sometimes contradictory without closing down these multiple possibilities. As such, they are both the means through which bodies are made to conform to dominant imperatives of the nation and capital while at the same time presenting possible disturbances and contestations that emerge simultaneously and that cannot be smoothly reconciled to instrumental ends. Building on the work of Asian Americanist scholars who consider how Asian bodies are disciplined into certain types of American subjects,[65] my project's explicit attention to affect as emergent and open-ended attends to the felt and affecting forces, senses, and disturbances that cannot always be clearly named and that do not clearly distinguish between contestation and acquiescence to dominant imperatives. Rather than clear boundaries between subjugation and agency as contestation, I seek to elaborate on and articulate indeterminate spaces for ways of being that are aimed at inhabiting these dominant structures but do so without whole-hearted investment or acquiescence.

The Chinese case is here instructive. As shifts in forms of governance and market growth have enabled individuals to exert a greater degree of self-determination in their everyday lives, scholars of contemporary China have grappled with definitions of individual agency in the context of increasingly neoliberal policies and continued one-party rule. Lisa Rofel observes that in the

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[63] Kathleen Stewart, "Afterword: Worlding Refrains," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 340.

[64] erin Khuê Ninh, "Affect/Family/Filiality," in *The Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014): 47.

[65] David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); erin Khuê Ninh, *Ingratitude: The Debt-Bound Daughter in Asian American Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Koshy, "Neoliberal Family Matters" (2013); Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings*.

reform years following 1978 and accelerating after the Tiananmen protests of 1989, "one of the major visions of the state about itself since the Cultural Revolution is its claim to noninterference in that space that has come into existence as 'the personal,'"[66] which some scholars argue perpetuates an indirect, neoliberal form of governmentality "from afar."[67] Theorizations of therapeutic treatment as means to maintain productive workers able to labor for profit as a form of "therapeutic governance,"[68] or injunctions in addiction treatment programs to remake the self in the model of acquisitive individualism,[69] consider forms of biopolitical governmentality that contribute directly to state goals for market growth and national progress. These pursuits, which I consider affective, are both projects that contribute to dominant national imperatives and at the same time forms of self-determination that cannot be easily reconciled with these imperatives and perhaps do not need to be.

Thus far, these forms of cultivating the self, feeling invested in state-promoted visions of the "good life," and registering contradictions between these visions and other lived realities in China have not explicitly been characterized as affective. I argue that a framework of affect, however, can nuance the relationship between nation-based projects tied to capital and individual navigations of them. The ways in which both privileged families and female domestic and factory workers are invested in cultivating particular bodily comportment and habits, for instance, suggests affective negotiations rooted in caring for the self. These processes of self-cultivation and self-transformation rely not only on appearances but a complete sense of someone's "quality," known as *suzhi*, which can be "high" or "low," with those deemed of low *suzhi* usually from poorer, rural backgrounds.[70] Scholars note the rise of *suzhi* discourse during the reform period following 1978, during which it

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[66] Rofel, *Desiring China*, 63.

[67] Zhang and Ong, Introduction, in *Privatizing China*.

[68] Li Zhang, "The Rise of Therapeutic Governing in Postsocialist China," in *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* vol. 36, issue 1 (2017): 6-18; Jie Yang, "'Fake Happiness': Counseling, Potentiality, and Psycho-Politics in China," in *Ethos* vol. 41, no .3 (2013): 292-312.

[69] Sandra Teresa Hyde, "'Spending My Own Money, Harming My Own Body': Addiction Care in a Chinese Therapeutic Community," in *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* vol. 36, no .1 (2017): 61-76.

[70] Andrew Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach," in *The China Quarterly* (2006): 295-313.

first took on meanings of population quality in relation to the one child policy,[71] which was meant to decrease population number in favor of greater resources invested in one "quality" child.[72] Conceptions of *suzhi* are thus linked to economic reform and have broadly come to "encompass the minute social distinctions defining a 'person of quality' in practices of consumption and the incitement of middle-class desire for social mobility."[73] In striving to remake themselves as refined consumer citizen-subjects, those of low *suzhi* are thus also contributing to the quality of the nation by furthering its prosperity and cultural status.[74] Women working in factory settings, for example, often seek to remake themselves in the image of cosmopolitan subjects through consumption,[75] rendering the line between standards imposed from the outside and individual desires difficult to distinguish.

Though thus far not discussed in relation to affect, *suzhi* speaks to an embodied sense of another that, while central to hegemonic discourses of the state and capital, also cannot be easily quantified and articulated.[76] Insofar as senses of *suzhi* shape the ways in which individuals respond to one another, it can also be considered an indeterminate part of embodied affective responsiveness. *Suzhi*'s clear centrality to hegemonic discourses also elaborates on affect's imbrication in power structures and intersections with theorizations of governmentality,[77] even as individuals might assess it as a site of potential self-determination for both the self and the family. As Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin Winkler suggest, the increasing importance of *suzhi* in population policy in the 1980s marked a shift away from previously more coercive state intervention, which eventually converges with

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winkler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008).
[73] Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," in *Public Culture* vol. 16, no .2 (2004): 190.
[74] Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment Networks," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 18, issue 4 (2003): 494.
[75] Chang, *Factory Girls*.
[76] Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach," 295-6.
[77] Anagnost, "Corporeal Politics"; Greenhalgh and Winkler; Yan Hairong.

assessments of neoliberal governmentality invested in capitalistic growth. In a history marked by intensive intervention and state programs that entailed large-scale upheaval and harm, this shift thus presents more ambiguous and difficult-to-assess consequences for concepts of individual agency, self-determination, and wellbeing. As scholars of China are currently considering, China's economic reform presents new possibilities for individual happiness and the pursuit of individual desires,[78] even as it also includes the evacuation of certain forms of state care and emerging forms of inequality and precarity. Attention to affects can thus make room for multiple contradictory possibilities in navigations of the present that emerge from dominant imperatives and also exceed them. In their capacity to move in multiple directions at once without closing down meaning, they also hold the potential to enable critiques against multiple nation-based hegemonic discourses. Alongside their critiques of Chinese national imperatives, the Asian American narratives I examine also contest U.S. racializations of Asians as both economic resource and threat, whether in the form of exemplary model minorities or denigrated and devalued forms of precarious caretaking and industrial labor. In doing so, they also refuse U.S. liberal multicultural narratives of immigrant assimilation and uplift.

This project therefore draws on transnational frames of the transpacific that simultaneously critique multiple national hegemonies and decenter the primacy of the nation as a category of analysis. Scholars in Asian American studies are increasingly considering the spaces and the analytic of the transpacific to interrogate historic and emerging conflicts and convergences in national and capitalistic interests and possibilities for their contestation.[79] Alongside the forms of national

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[78] Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing: Pleasure, Sovereignty, and Self-Cultivation in China's Capital," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 20., issue 3 (2005): 303-27; Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012); Arthur Kleinman, "Quests for Meaning," in *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011): 267; Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society*.

[79] Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counter-poetics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Richard Jean So, *Transpacific Community: America, China, and the Rise and Fall of a Cultural Network* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

competition, nation-based hegemonies, and resource extraction centered in the transpacific, such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership, recent theorizations consider the transpacific a space of speculative possibility for formulating different futures and ways of living on in the present.[80] In *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field*, Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins write that transpacific studies as a "set of theories and methods […] can help activate those alternative and dissident intellectual currents produced from Enlightenment thought and resistance movements of anticolonial nationalism and minority empowerment."[81] They argue that these frameworks can bring together considerations of power dynamics and flows in American studies, Asian American studies, and studies of Asia to decenter any one of these geographical frames. Drawing on this foundation, Christine Mok and Aimee Bahng foreground the transpacific as a "contact zone" and take up Yunte Huang's call to "imagine and engage with the 'transpacific as critical space' [as …] a crucial prompt for Asian American studies in its post-national turn."[82] Mok and Bahng do so by "invok[ing] minority survival" and the ways in which "the transpacific expands upon and exceeds previous formulations."[83] They call attention to the "precarity of a wide range of life forms—of migrant workers, animals, and ecosystems" that form the foundation for economic imaginaries of the transpacific as resource while also exceeding these hegemonic structures.[84] For Mok and Bahng, attention to the speculative can bring together coexisting but disjunctive frameworks and realities— those of economic speculation, histories of colonialism and resource extraction, indigenous concepts of futurity, and the precarious and ascendant livelihoods that take shape and intersect in the transpacific.[85]

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[80] Christine Mok and Aimee Bahng, "Transpacific Overtures: An Introduction," in *Journal of Asian American Studies* vol. 20, no. 1 (2017): 1-9.

[81] Viet Thanh Nguyen and Janet Hoskins, "Introduction: Transpacific Studies: Critical Perspectives on an Emerging Field," in *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014): 23.

[82] Huang in Mok and Bahng, 4.

[83] Mok and Bahng, 4.

[84] Ibid., 5.

[85] Ibid., 5-6.

This attention to speculative possibilities for imagining transpacific circuits in fact resonates with historic circulations of possibilities for different worlds in Third World and global Maoist imaginaries. Scholars in Asian American and Afro-Asian studies are increasingly considering the political possibilities that might stem from global interracial affiliations that took shape in the 1950s and 1960s in the wake of China's Communist revolution and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement at the 1955 Bandung Conference.[86] These transnational affiliations formed part of a vision of a colored Third World that was not aligned with U.S. or Soviet Union Cold War ambitions for global hegemony.[87] Insofar as these visions proposed diverse theorizations of the racist, capitalist, and imperialist structures of the world and sought to imagine possibilities for different futures, they also participated in speculative projects that are extending into the present as scholars, artists, and activists in the twenty-first century take them up.

This project proposes the framework of global postsocialism as an intersecting and overlapping framework for considering transpacific circulations of possible presents and futures. While Western scholars widely consider China after Mao to be postsocialist,[88] this frame has yet to be applied to contexts outside China even as both Western popular media and academic critics point to China's growing global influence.[89] Scholar of contemporary Chinese literature Jason McGrath, however, argues that China's postsocialist shift holds consequences for the world at large, insofar as communist China once suggested a viable alternative to global capitalism that no longer exists. McGrath argues that

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[86] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

[87] *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives*, ed. Christopher J. Lee (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

[88] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*; Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Arthur Kleinman, Yunxiang Yan, Jing Jun, et al., *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Rofel, *Desiring China*; *Privatizing China*, ed. Zhang and Ong.

[89] Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Verso, 2007).

postsocialism is not just a condition that characterizes nearly all of the formerly communist 'second world' but is rather a global, universally shared condition. The international communist movement represented the only really serious threat and alternative to the spread of capitalism—as synonymous with modernity—around the world. The failure of the global communist movement and the apparently overwhelming triumph of capitalism are therefore conditions affecting the entire planet.[90]

Just as the transpacific does not merely designate a spatial arrangement, the postsocialist in this project is therefore not simply a historical marker to indicate China after Mao. This dissertation places Chinese postsocialism within this broader transnational context of transpacific circulations in conceptualizations of the present, possibilities for being otherwise, and the lived, material conditions in which these theorizations are rooted. I take postsocialism as a designation of a shift in conceptualizations of the present and future and their possible negotiations that are shaped by the vast changes wrought by China's entry into the global economy.[91] These postsocialist ramifications, which are still contingently unfolding in the present coeval with still-changing conditions, extend beyond China's borders to transpacific circuits.

My project takes China-U.S. circuits of migration and capital as a focalizing starting point for constructing a postsocialist framework to conceptualize these far-reaching ramifications that is able to speak simultaneously to multiple hegemonic discourses of nation and capital. As such, it also draws on a conception of the Sinophone as a framework foregrounds the tensions and particularities of varying definitions and constructions of Chineseness that are rooted in local places of cultural production, rather than a stable and unitary discourse of "authentic" Chinese culture rooted in the

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[90] McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, 14.
[91] While postsocialism is also commonly discussed in the context of the former Soviet Union, they are primarily contextualized through the designation of the "second world" and do not consider intersections between these European settings and other contexts. In engaging with China's role in the Third World and Non-Aligned Movement, my consideration diverges from this second-world definition of postsocialism (see Jennifer Suchland, "Is Postsocialism Transnational?" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 36, no. 4 (2011): 837-862 and Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery, "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* vol. 51, issue 1 (2009): 6-34)).

mainland.[92] Shu-mei Shih elaborates that the Sinophone "makes possible taking multiple subject positions against multiple power agents, which reflects the increased complexity of contemporary experience of immigration as well as the scattering and multiplication of hegemonies."[93] Accordingly, my project attends to the ways in which narratives situated in the circuits between China and the U.S. can simultaneously critique the dominant discourses and imperatives of both nations. Focalized through a Sinophone and transpacific consideration of global postsocialism, the narratives I examine leverage critiques, propose worldviews, and imagine forms of agency that reveal and contest the raced and nationalist logics tied to the economic emerging in transpacific postsocialist circuits. Writing on China-U.S. circuits, Lily Wong articulates a transpacific framework that enables attention to the "mobility and mobilization of the figure" to "read Chineseness as an affective product instead of solely an ethnic or cultural signifier."[94] Wong argues that Chineseness constitutes a "morphing affective structure: it embodies social sentiments that resemble categories of difference and social relations" and is thus "deterritorialized from fixed, and often exclusionary, authenticity discourses."[95] This Sinophone and transpacific understanding of Chineseness is contested and continually in flux. As such, it usefully illuminates my project's attention to the nationalist and raced constructions of shifting subject positions associated with both privileged and precarious forms of caring for the self and others.

The imaginations of flatness in the narratives I examine thus illuminate possibilities for transpacific Third World affiliations in the present. Within contingently unfolding conditions that extend from a failed communist past uncertainly into the future, imaginations of world revolution

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[92] Chien-hsin Tsai, "Issues and Controversies," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, 18; Shu-mei Shih, "Introduction: What is Sinophone Studies?," in *Sinophone Studies*, 7.

[93] Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 84.

[94] Lily Wong, *Transpacific Attachments: Sex Work, Media Networks, and Transpacific Histories of Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 6.

[95] Ibid.

are no longer straightforwardly available. Rather than revolution, the affective orientations that

emerge from gendered care work extend the potential for affiliations that might emerge in less

visible, immediately accessible ways through the shared denigration of feminized labor and the lived

experiences of their material conditions across diverse contexts. These connections have already

been made in relation to labor conditions in twentieth-century labor movements and feminist

political critique. Lowe points to work by Third World Feminists such as "Audre Lorde, Cherríe

Moraga, and the collective Asian Women of California" as examples of the

> necessary alliances between racialized and Third World women within, across, and outside
> the border of the U.S. [that] grow out of the contemporary conditions of global capitalism
> under which immigrant women working in the garment industries of Los Angeles are
> virtually part of the same labor force as those employed in Asia or Latin America.[96]

This project builds on these transnational connections to considers circulations of affect for

conceptualizing potential transnational connections rooted in the contemporary lived conditions of

denigrated feminized labor. Scholars working with feminist and queer approaches to Afro-Asian and

Bandung histories continue to assert the elision of non-masculine, non-heteronormative connections

even within work that examines politically radical thought.[97] Rather than a straightforward

recuperation of historical evidence, which may or may not be present in the archive, Vanita Reddy

and Anantha Sudhakar turn to affect and intimacy, which "not only names state management of

racial difference and affiliation, but also provides new ways to read cultural forms in relation to the

archive."[98] For them, "[i]ntimacy, in this sense, gives expression to tacit, minor, or ephemeral

affective relations that remain difficult to locate within state or official archives and that may surface

more readily within the domains of the aesthetic and the representational."[99] This project builds on

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[96] Lowe, "Work, immigration, gender," 39.
[97] Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, "Introduction: Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations," in *The Scholar and Feminist Online* issue 14, no. 3 (2018).
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

this attention to affect and intimacy to consider the possibilities and tensions of affective affiliations that emerge obliquely from within the inhabitation of hegemonic structures. Postsocialist affects, which have heretofore been explored only in nation-bound capacities in limited Asian contexts,[100] can thus also present avenues for interrogating transnational linkages in laboring and living conditions and available modes for navigating them. In doing so, they also offer conceptions of agency that are non-Western-centric. To contest these logics, the narratives I examine suggest affective orientations that emerge from within the inhabitation of gendered affective labor forms. Rather than straightforward investments in agency as revolution and the capacity to overthrow a situation, they formulate flattened affects as forms of agency that emerge from lived experiences of upheaval and that do not recapitulate Western-centric logics of direct action and rights-based discourses.

Experiments in Genre

The ongoingness of life conditions that continue to unfold contingently in unknown ways is therefore central to the affective orientations this project explores. Through postulating affects that are open-ended and without resolution, they are engaged in asking, considering, and experimenting with possibilities to continue orienting to present situations that are still unfolding contingently and indeterminately into the future. These experimental postulations are thus also experiments with genre that imagine narratives as coeval with the continued unfolding of world historical events and conditions. Rather than a failure to attain resolution or clarity, flatness is in fact central to their conceptualizations of and orientations to a present still unfolding without resolution.

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[100] Christina Schwenkel, "Post/Socialist Affect: Ruination and Reconstruction of the Nation in Urban Vietnam," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 28, no .2 (2013): 252-77; Jean-Baptiste Pettier, "The Affective Scope: Entering China's Urban Moral and Economic World Through Its Emotional Disturbances," in *Anthropology of Consciousness* vol. 27, no .1 (2016): 75-96.

My project brings together diverse literary and lived narratives to examine their relationships

to the unfolding events of "the real." Rather than take fiction and ethnography as analogous, I

suggest that the affects that emerge through diverse narratives of imaginative literature, ethnography,

and film are coeval attempts to conceptualize and navigate still emerging world conditions. I thus

take these affects as suggestive of their stances and orientations to the worlds in which they are

situated. Taking up engagements with orientations to the world as a mode of genre-making in

literary studies,[101] I consider how affects that are, as Sianne Ngai elaborates, not themselves formal

elements of a text but are "'loosely fastened' to signifying practices" do not "simply turn up the

volume on what is already there, but point[] to the presence of something 'separate'."[102] In the

narratives I examine, flattened affects such as ambivalence and detachment enable individuals to

sense in ongoing ways their contingently shifting contexts and continue to flexibly navigate these

conditions. At the same time, they make possible oblique contestations to dominant discourses of

race and nation from within the inhabitation of these structures. Their experiments with genre and

narration are thus also orientations that constitute worlds. Affects in these narrations are ways to

both sense and "dwell[]" in the world,[103] to make a place for oneself that "matters" in particular ways

in an open-ended and emergent process of "attunement."[104]

My first chapter examines Ha Jin's *The Crazed* (2004) and Yiyun Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*

(2014) to trace the emergence of flatness and detachment as means through which the figures of

these novels navigate conditions inflected by capital accelerating within and outside of 1989 China

and extending into the present. While these novels engage with the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests

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[101] Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
[102] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 74; Ngai draws on Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi to postulate the capacity of affect to "resonate" and point to something other than what is explicitly present in the text.
[103] Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric attunements," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* vol. 29 (2011): 449.
[104] Jarrett Zigon, "Attunement and Fidelity: Two Ontological Conditions for Morally Being-in-the-World," in *Ethos* vol. 42, issue 1 (2014): 24-25.

and massacre, they do not valorize revolution. As these texts suggest, straightforward celebrations of

Tiananmen's revolutionary potential uphold Western notions of the universalized desire for liberal

democracy as a mechanism for spreading U.S.-led economic policies as well as Chinese nationalist

narratives of a revolutionary socialist past. Instead of revolutionary overthrow within dichotomized

structures of Chinese oppression and U.S. freedom, these novels imagine flattened, muted affects

that present modes of sensing, negotiating, and contesting ongoing transformations in connected

conditions shaped by capital across China and the U.S. As my juxtaposition of these novels shows,

flatness is also highly gendered in relation to the flexibility that is differentially available to differently

gendered bodies within networks of global capital. While the young male protagonist of Jin's *The

Crazed* becomes a neutral cipher within these networks, this neutrality is not available to the women

of Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*, whose flexibility as transnational neoliberal subjects rests on their

performance of affective caretaking labor. This labor, however, simultaneously allows them to

contest imperatives to reproduce Chinese national imaginations of progress through the normative

heterosexual family and U.S. imaginaries of racialized resource extraction and immigrant uplift.

Though they perform care work, their flattened, uncaring affects refuse the trajectories of economic

ascendancy associated with assimilation and the nurturing and emotional availability commonly

demanded of care workers.

My second chapter elaborates on the original ethnographic research I conducted in Beijing,

China in 2017 with practitioners of *yangsheng*, a popular genre of health practices that includes a wide

range of activities, such as *tai ji*, artistic pursuits, and socializing.[105] My interviewees were in their 50s

or older, came of age during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, and experienced the

vast changes from China's Maoist past through its economic reform period from 1978 on. This

chapter elaborates on how these interviewees constructed detachment and ambivalence as healthful

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[105] Farquhar and Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing" and *Ten Thousand Things*.

orientations to the vast scale of changes and ongoing uncertainties in China's trajectory. The flatness and detachment they constructed as healthful allowed for multiple, sometimes contradictory orientations to these changes without closing down these possibilities. My interviewees amalgamated discourses of the body in Traditional Chinese Medicine and the biosciences to convey an affectively felt sense of bodies that are actively engaged in constructing a desirable present and future as modes of caring for both themselves and others.

Chapter Three examines Chinese investigative journalist Chai Jing's air pollution documentary *Under the Dome* and Chang-rae Lee's speculative dystopic novel *On Such a Full Sea* to expand concepts of "biocapital" as embodied resource extraction that includes gendered, affective labor. Scientific and technological advancement have long been sites of China-U.S. competition and measures of modernity. Chai elaborates on China's smog and air pollution problem, which she directly traces to China's use of coal in its pursuit of accelerated industrial development in the decades following the beginning of economic reform in 1978, central to which was a desire to "catch up to the West."[106] Meanwhile, Lee sketches a future post-national dystopic world that has already succumbed to the environmental disaster wrought by industrial development, in which nations have been abolished in favor of ruling corporate entities and laborers of Chinese descent constitute workers in a protected colony that produce goods for a stratified elite. Within these present and future worlds of technological innovation that harness instrumentalized and experimental bodies, these narratives reveal the unquestioned affective reproduction of the normative family as a paradigmatic logic that underlies and ultimately obviates the need to biotechnically render docile laborers. They also, however, formulate the maternal body's affective responsiveness as the basis for imagining possibilities for caring and relating otherwise. They suggest that alongside affective labor

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[106] Mei Zhan, *Other-worldly: Making Chinese Medicine Through Transnational Frames* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 43; Greenhalgh, *Just One Child*, 98.

as a form of embodied resource extraction, bodies continue to possess affective potentials to be and relate otherwise that do not seamlessly reproduce the same hegemonic structures. From within these structures, Chai and Lee imagine the cultivation of heightened capacities to sense the conditions of one's environment and the bodies within it, which begin to enable responsiveness and care for those beyond whom they are designated to care as kin.

Finally, this project's coda traces these forms of flatness to the contemporary legacies of transpacific global socialist imaginaries through Boots Riley's 2018 feature film *Sorry to Bother You*. Riley's film is set in a near-future, neoliberal, dystopian U.S. The film's class- and race-based critique extends a black radical tradition that emerged in conjunction with Third World and Global Maoist imaginaries of a "colored" world revolution, in which China served as a touchstone, to engage the globalized economic structures of the contemporary moment. While the film explicitly centers on black male telemarketing and industrial labor, these forms of labor are already predominantly being performed by Asian and other women of color elsewhere to the U.S., which the film does not overtly acknowledge. The film's speculative dystopian imagination is thus routed through Asia without naming these historic and contemporary Asian contexts. I thus take the film as an opportunity to consider the implications of attending to connections in transnational gendered labor for considering the political and racial solidarities imagined through Third Worldism and Global Maoism in relation to shifts and possibilities that are differently emerging in the wake of global communism's foreclosure. Rather than bodies that are clearly aligned and laboring for or against revolution, the diffuse, affective, and flattened modes emerging in the postsocialist present contingently and provisionally sense and formulate possibilities for being and relating otherwise, all the while remaining embedded in capital's circuits.

Chapter 1

Ciphers and Subjectivities in China-U.S. Circuits: Navigating 1989 to the Present in Ha Jin's

The Crazed and Yiyun Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*

In the Western popular imagination, the 1989 Tiananmen protests and massacre in Beijing,

China strikingly symbolize a repressive totalitarian regime and a universalized liberal humanist

subject who yearns for the progress of Western democracy.[107] These considerations, however, belie

an uninterrogated and orientalizing opposition between Western freedom and Chinese autocracy

that cannot offer nuanced considerations of the wide-reaching and still emergent outcomes of

China's entry into the global economy, which has been widely discussed by academic scholars and

popular U.S. news media alike. Considering the historical specificity of Tiananmen and China's

reform trajectory, scholars of neoliberalism as a global but geographically differentiated phenomena

widely recognize Tiananmen as a manifestation of the social inequalities produced through the

process of China's economic reform, which officially began in 1978. The Tiananmen protests of

1989 are thus an inflection point that connects accelerating neoliberal policies within China and

elsewhere in the world. The still-unfolding and wide-ranging consequences of China's entry into the

global economy calls for frameworks of analysis that consider the circuits between China and the

West, rather than remain limited within individual national paradigms that maintain an orientalizing

nation-based dichotomy.

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[107] Ien Ang, "To Be or Not to Be Chinese: Diaspora, Culture and Postmodern Ethnicity," in *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* vol. 21, issue 1 (1993): 1-17; Rey Chow, "Violence in the Other Country: China as Crisis, Spectacle, and Woman," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-24; Jeffrey Wasserstrom, "Current Chinese Protests and the Prism of Tiananmen," in *Press/Politics* vol. 8, no. 1 (2003), 81-6; David Vukovich, *China and Orientalism: Western Knowledge Production and the PRC* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 26.

Ha Jin's *The Crazed* (2009) and Yiyun Li's *Kinder Than Solitude* (2014) consider these circuits

and the modes available to individuals for navigating the unpredictable and vast changes within

them. As such, they offer a transpacific Asian/American paradigm that moves beyond consideration

of Asian immigrants within the U.S. to consider interconnected global conditions and circuits that,

due to China's rising global power, do not assume the U.S. to be the desired endpoint of either

national progress or individual betterment through immigrant uplift. Instead, both novels treat the

intertwined imperatives of capital and the nation in both Chinese and U.S. contexts with

ambivalence, as a form of condemnation that simultaneously also acknowledges and remains

invested in understanding the conditions of the present. While these novels have garnered popular

critical attention in the U.S. for their portrayals of life under Chinese state regulations and the

intertwined personal and national consequences of the 1989 Tiananmen protests, Asian American

literary studies has thus far not engaged substantively with either work. Though they are both

written from the U.S. in English, this lack of engagement suggests that their ongoing attention to

China locates them elsewhere to the U.S., at most in the Chinese diaspora, a formulation that, as

Shu-mei Shih argues, continues to be defined by the country of origin.[108] In light of the changing

demographics in Asian America following U.S. immigration reform in 1965 and steadily-increasing

migration from mainland China following the re-opening of Chinese borders in 1978,[109] as well as

the circuits of capital continuing to evolve between China and the U.S., Asian American literature

must now contend with imaginations of subjectivity under intersecting conditions of Chinese

postsocialism and neoliberal policies across China and the U.S. Indeed, the transnational

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[108] Shu-mei Shih, "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production," in *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader*, ed. Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 38.
[109] Min Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 37.

foundations of the field and its investments in critiquing forms of U.S. exceptionalism can uniquely interrogate these conditions and the transforming racialized dimensions of China-U.S. competition.

Jin's *The Crazed* opens in the months leading to Tiananmen in 1989 and follows a literature graduate student, Jian, who must care for his professor, who has been hospitalized with a stroke. Throughout the novel, Jian comes to apprehend the hyper-malleability of surface appearances that extends from the Maoist past but becomes linked with vastly different demands connected with capital during the reform era. When Jian is carried along to the Tiananmen Square protests and must leave China for the West, he himself comes to fully inhabit this hyper-malleability in a migratory path that coincides with circuits of capital accelerating between China and the West. Li's *Kinder Than Solitude* follows three childhood friends in the aftermath of Tiananmen as they navigate the mysterious poisoning of their young friend and neighbor, who was a university student who participated in the protests. The novel, however, offers no clear resolution to the mystery, instead focusing on the detachment and ambivalence that each friend formulates to continue living under intertwined personal and large-scale conditions of uncertainty and potential complicity, first in China and later as adults in the U.S. Read together, these novels chart a historical and geographical trajectory that elaborates on the forms of agency that emerge through flattened, muted affects first formulated in China and carried to the U.S.: from the months leading up to the June 1989 protests and their immediate aftermath in China, where Jin's *The Crazed* ends, into the contemporary moment in both China and the U.S. in Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*. In doing so, they explore emerging postsocialist subjectivities at the scale of everyday life that reflect contingently-emerging, embodied modes for apprehending and learning to navigate the post-reform and neoliberal present(s) across China and the U.S.

My argument that these novels are focused on the contingency of the present begins with Tiananmen as a direct product of the process of economic reform in China. Rather than a

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spontaneous instance of universalized desire for Western democracy, scholars articulate how the events of Tiananmen were fundamentally embedded in the social and economic transformations that attended the spread of neoliberalism in different parts of the world. The student and worker protests that led to Tiananmen took place following the beginning of China's economic reform in 1978 and the increasing rise of neoliberal policies in China in the following decades, which converged with the rise of neoliberalism in the U.S. and Britain in the 1980s and 1990s,[110] particularly following the end of the Cold War in 1989.[111] Within this context, Hui Wang traces the Tiananmen demonstrations to the process of China's economic reform itself and the contradictions and inequalities that this process produced. Wang argues that the transition to private ownership from predominantly state-controlled enterprises involved the control of resources by a privileged minority and led to widespread social inequalities, which provided the primary motivating context for social unrest,[112] a consideration that other scholars of neoliberalism in China such as Lisa Rofel, David Harvey, and Aihwa Ong echo.[113] While the extent to which China can be characterized as neoliberal remains under debate,[114] these scholars point to Tiananmen's suppression as a key step in reinstating the central government's control over economic development and accelerating neoliberal policies, which Wang characterizes as the "legislative procedures to render legal" broad

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[110] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[111] Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory and Event* vol. 7, issue 1 (2003); Harvey, 94, 111.

[112] Wang Hui, "The Year 1989 and the Roots of Neoliberalism in China," trans. Rebecca E. Karl, *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), 14-15.

[113] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*; Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[114] Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2009).

deregulation.[115] In the decades following Tiananmen, these policies have propelled China's

unprecedented economic growth.[116]

In this historical arc of evolving neoliberal conditions within China and connecting China to

the rest of the world, I suggest that Jin's *The Crazed* and Li's *Kinder Than Solitude* consider Tiananmen

and its aftermath as exemplary, rather than exceptional, events. Rather than valorize wholesale

revolution, I argue that Jin's and Li's novels are concerned with the everyday modes through which

individuals apprehend and adapt to the highly contingent and uncertain changes that attend China's

economic reform process into a present. Tiananmen and its aftermath make visible the uncertainties,

vast changes in everyday life conditions, and demands for adjustment and adaptation to new state-

sanctioned standards for good citizenship from the Maoist years that have already been unfolding in

everyday life since the beginning of China's economic reform in 1978. In these novels' imagination,

this history is inherently transnational; their protagonists begin in China and move to the U.S., and

sometimes back again, as circuits of capital and migration intensify between China and the U.S.

throughout the reform process.

Just as Jin and Li do not straightforwardly celebrate Western-style liberal democracy within

China as an antidote to Chinese authoritarianism, they also do not chart trajectories to immigrant

uplift in the U.S. Rather than upward trajectories of revolution or assimilation in the U.S., these

works are marked by flattened affects that are similarly applicable across diverse conditions in China

and the U.S. Flattened affects such as neutrality and detachment offer ways of continuing on within

the large-scale contingency that marks China's entry into the global economy, which unfolds in

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[115] Wang, 20; David Harvey and Aihwa Ong variously theorize the intersections between neoliberal economic policies and continuing centralized state control. Harvey articulates this intersection as a "construction of a particular kind of market economy that increasingly incorporates neoliberal elements in interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control" (Harvey 120), while Ong theorizes neoliberal policies as strategic technologies of the state that enable it to maintain authoritarian control (see also Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)).

[116] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

unknown and unpredictable ways for ordinary individuals. These forms of flatness are modes that enable constant adaptation to unpredictable changes without positing an overarching rubric or end goal. At the same time, in these novels, they offer a means of refusing full affective commitment either to Chinese national celebrations of market capitalism or U.S. liberal discourses. The transferability of sensing and adaptive modes developed in post-reform China to the U.S. suggests shared logics in interconnected conditions shaped by neoliberal policies and China's entry into the global economy, which scholar Jason McGrath argues holds consequences for the entire world,[117] even as they are differentially connected to the imperatives of each nation. In asserting the horizontality of China-U.S. conditions, Jin and Li simultaneously critique Chinese state policies and dismantle discourses of U.S. exceptionalism. They reject the false promises of immigrant assimilation, which demand that immigrants and other minoritarian subjects make themselves anew to become more fully American as a horizon that can never be reached. This rejection of hegemonic imaginations in both nations does not lead them to propose antidotes, solutions, or alternative word systems. The flattened affects they imagine, which do not point to coherent plans or endgames, formally signal their focus on the emergent nature of the present. These novels are preoccupied with contingent orientations that unfold coterminous and contemporaneous with unpredictable changes in national policy and world history as modes of apprehending and negotiating these large-scale conditions. While they recognize the undeniable shaping influence of world historical events in everyday life, this view of history is therefore also not determinative.

In Jin's and Li's novels, flattened affects are not formulated independently as the intellectual work of autonomous individuals. Instead, they take shape in social situations centered around caring for oneself and others, which has become a central concern in forms of neoliberal governmentality that mandate individualized, privatized forms of care as a moral imperative alongside the evacuation

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[117] McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, 17.

of state care across China and the U.S.[118] As such, these forms of sensing suggest the embodied

forms of affectivity that scholars of affect assert disrupt the Euroamerican Enlightenment ideal of

the autonomous, fully intellectually-coherent individual of action.[119] They also speak to

considerations of neoliberal governmentality in scholarship on China that continues to grapple with

the extent to which individual actions are fully determined by state structures,[120] albeit in different

forms from the Maoist past, particularly as it pertains to healthcare.[121] The provisional sensing and

adjusting of embodied affects suggest a different approach to considering what counts as agency,

one that is not rooted in Western humanist concepts that posit agency as the capacity to actively

overthrow a situation. These provisional, non-humanist affects and agencies disrupt pathologizing

dichotomies between passive and active and depart from a straightforward valorization of

Tiananmen as proof of a Western model of revolutionary desire.

Alternative to both Enlightenment concepts of agency and the still predominantly Western-

centric scholarship on affect, the sociality of how this sensing takes shape in Jin's and Li's novels

point to a route particular to Chinese history by which this affectivity takes shape. Jin and Li call

attention to care work as a site of tensions between social collectivities and emerging forms of

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[118] Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979*, trans. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Foucault, *The Care of the Self: Volume 3 of the History of Sexuality*, transl. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988); Sandra Morgen and Jeff Maskovsky, "The Anthropology of Welfare 'Reform': Perspectives on U.S. Urban Poverty in the Welfare Era," in *Annual Review of Anthropology* vol. 32 (2003): 321; Ann Shola Orloff, "Explaining US welfare reform: power, gender, race, and the U.S. policy legacy," in *Critical Social Policy* vol. 22, issue 1 (2002): 99-100; Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-first Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar,* ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[119] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[120] Zhang and Ong, Introduction, in *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*.

[121] Amy Borovoy and Li Zhang, "Between Biopolitical Governance and Care: Rethinking Health, Selfhood, and Social Welfare in East Asia," in *Medical Anthropology* vol. 36, issue 1 (2017): 3; Yang Jie. "'Fake Happiness': Counseling, Potentiality, and Psycho-Politics in China," in *Ethos* 41.3 (2013): 292-312; Li Zhang, "The Rise of Therapeutic Governing in Postsocialist China," in *Medical Anthropology* vol. 36, issue 1 (2017): 1-13.

individualization brought about by market reforms within China. Scholars of China point to the rise

of the individual as a social subject distinct from the Mao-era collective subjectivity mandated by the

communist state as well as older forms of social identity marked by relations with kin as privileged

social others.[122] In Jin's and Li's novels, these social situations are marked by tension and

contestation to become the staging grounds for formulating the flatness that enables ongoing

adaptation, both to the unpredictable conditions of economic reform within China and to the

networks of capital taking shape between China and the West. In contrast to caretaking's

conventional associations with docility, nurturing, and affective comfort, Jin's and Li's novels

elaborate on discomfiting flattened orientations of detachment, neutrality, and the absence of regard

for another that can nevertheless emerge within the structures of caretaking relations. In these

novels, these forms of flatness are initially formulated in Chinese reform- and Tiananmen-era

contexts but are adapted and similarly useful in linked conditions in the West. These flattened affects

thus invoke the intertwined imperatives of nation and capital across China and the U.S. while also

suggesting how forms of caretaking can become arenas of contestation through which the seamless

reproduction of these structures can be contested.

Contrary to concepts of revolutionary overthrow, this contestation takes shape obliquely

from within the inhabitation of these relations. Scholars of neoliberalism argue that one of its

defining hallmarks is the extent to which it shapes all aspects of culture and daily life.[123] Accordingly,

the contestations that these novels imagine emerge from within the inhabitation of subject positions

that also participate in the reproduction of these discourses and structures between China and the

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[122] Arthur Kleinman, Yunxiang Yan, Jing Jun, et al., *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society.*

[123] Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy"; Harvey, 94, 111; Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith, "Four Phases of Neoliberalism and Literature: An Introduction," in *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, ed. Mitchum Huehls and Anna Greenwald Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 1-20.

U.S., precisely because there is no outside from which to launch a revolutionary critique and overthrow. As my juxtaposition of these novels shows, flatness is also highly gendered in relation to the flexibility that is differentially available to differently gendered bodies within networks of global capital: while the young male protagonist of Jin's *The Crazed* becomes a neutral cipher within these networks, this neutrality is not available to the women of Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*. Instead, Li's female protagonists' conscription into reproducing national discourses and structures of capital from within the normative heterosexual family, as well as their refusal of these families and their turn to flexibility as transnational neoliberal subjects, rest on their performance of affective caretaking labor. Insofar as caretaking remains a crucial and highly gendered resource for the state within the heterosexual family unit in both the Chinese context and in imperatives to reproduce the Asian American model minority, these novels' imagination of oblique contestation also refuses emerging forms of gendered racialization in China-U.S. circuits of labor, migration, and capital.[124]

In the course of this exploration, these texts challenge orientalizing dichotomies between the U.S. and China and conceptions of literature as "Third World" allegories of political conditions.[125] Rather than trajectories of uplift and revolution, their attention to modes of inhabiting and contesting from within China-U.S. circuits enables a form of transnational critique that, in Shih's words, "makes possible taking multiple subject positions against multiple power agents, which reflects the increased complexity of contemporary experience of immigration as well as the scattering and multiplication of hegemonies."[126] Jin and Li simultaneously challenge conceptions of clear-cut subjugation or resistance to the Chinese state, U.S. immigrant narratives premised on uplift,

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[124] In the context of neoliberalism, alongside Asian/American racialization, the U.S.-based "black solo mother" has historically been constructed as the quintessential welfare dependent whose caretaking labor within the home is not institutionally recognized as work (Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 323). This connection between raced and gendered forms of denigrated care labor across the U.S. and China.

[125] Frederic Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," in *Social Text* vol. 15 (1986): 65-88.

[126] Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 84.

and the U.S. as the site of political freedom in opposition to a totalitarian Chinese state. In the process, they suggest that postsocialist subjectivities in China can speak to immigrant subjectivities in the U.S., and hence to contemporary U.S. imaginaries of inclusivity and liberal democracy that are shifting under global neoliberalism.

Embodied apprehensions

Jin's *The Crazed* opens in 1989 in the months leading up to Tiananmen. The protagonist, Jian, is a graduate student in literature at a university in a provincial Chinese city who is tasked with caring for his professor, who has been hospitalized from a stroke. Jian's care, however, is devoid of empathy, nurturing, or even filial devotion and respect. Instead, it is characterized by grudging obligation, disgust, and rejection towards Professor Yang's unexplained outbursts and incoherent rants against the state about the impossibility of living an intellectual life in China, which are not clearly connected with his physical ailment. In the novel, rather than care as either a full instantiation of social obligations and identity or its rejection as an assertion of liberal individual personhood, Jian's exposure to Professor Yang's rants constitutes a self-centered but socially-oriented learning process through which Jian comes to apprehend and adjust to the market logics of China's economic reform. Beginning with Professor Yang and extending to the others whom Jian encounters in his daily life, Jian gradually perceives an emerging logic centered on the malleability of outward appearances and the impossibility of discerning any authentic interiority. This logic in fact extends from the Maoist past into the post-Mao present, but it is transformed through China's increasing participation in networks of global capital. Jian's learning process, however, does not reflect a classic bildungsroman in which he comes to grasp and fully inhabit the dominant standards of his society. Though Jian comes to understand this market logic, this understanding results in his simultaneous alienation from and necessary, cynical, and full embodiment of it in circuits connecting China and the U.S. At the novel's close, Jian becomes a flattened, flexible cipher as he leaves China

for the West, presaging the speculative financialization that also requires flattened flexibility in the circuits of capital and labor across China and the U.S.

The Crazed connects the emerging manipulations of the body during economic reform to historic ways in which the body has been made to speak to state-sponsored programs in China's history. The hyper-visibility of Professor Yang's stroke and his rants against intellectual life in China mark him as a figure who recapitulates historic ways in which the body has been made to testify to social suffering in twentieth-century China. During his hospitalized rants, Professor Yang repeatedly exhorts Jian to abandon the useless and irrelevant life of an intellectual, and Jian becomes increasingly disillusioned with the prospect of intellectual life in China. Kong argues that Professor Yang's stroke allegorizes both "the country's mental breakdown" as well as "late-1980s China as a grotesque body rotting inside and out,"[127] and Jin's "representation of the intellectual […] advance[es] a macrohistorical critique of the impossibility of intellectual life in twentieth-century China."[128] Rather than allegory, I would suggest that Professor Yang's critique emerges from within a recognition of the increasing importance of malleable bodily forms in market reform China, which diverge from the humanistic intellectual critique that in the reform period following 1978 comes to uphold the dominant narratives of the reform state and its distinction from the state that wrought the Cultural Revolution's chaos and upheaval.[129] The histories of embodied testimony vis-à-vis the state that Professor Yang's rants call up and his simultaneous refusal to assimilate his expressions to dominant narratives from within the same subject positions whose critiques are leveraged to uphold these discourses suggest how critique can emerge from within positions fully embedded within hegemonic structures. These critiques from within are further transformed in relation to the state's

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[127] Belinda Kong, *Tiananmen Fictions Outside the Square: The Chinese Literary Diaspora and the Politics of Global Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 94.

[128] Ibid., 102.

[129] Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China*, 9.

market reforms, whose increasing influence in all aspects of everyday life is accelerating in the late 1980s China.[130] As scholars of market reform and neoliberalism in China note, neoliberalism is marked by its influence in cultural and social spheres, rendering a position outside this system from which to launch a revolutionary critique impossible.[131] Jian gradually perceives this impossibility and the disillusioning but necessary compromises and precarities that attend the subject positions of the reform era through the bodily changes connected to capital that her perceives and that, ultimately, he himself comes to embody.

Although Professor Yang is an intellectual who Jian remembers teaching seminars and delivering lectures on poetry before his stroke, after he is hospitalized, Professor Yang begins to rant against imagined enemies, sing revolutionary songs that "Red Guards [used to] chant,"[132] and declare his love and loyalty to Chairman Mao.[133] Professor Yang's belated recapitulation of these Maoist slogan both recalls and transforms the ways in which the body was made to testify in relation to the party-state. While these rants can be read as explicit references to the discrediting and humiliation of intellectuals, who were designated class enemies, during the Cultural Revolution, they also situate him within longer traditions of expressing social suffering from both before and during China's socialist past. The influential writer and intellectual Lu Xun's New Culture movement of the 1910s shifted social conceptions of individual pain as meaningless to an expression with social value.[134] In the socialist period, the practice of "speaking bitterness" during the revolutionary years of the 1940s and 1950s encouraged peasants to speak out against land owners and oppressors, venting their

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[130] Nancy Chen, *Breathing Spaces: Qigong, Psychiatry, and Healing in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 37.

[131] Ong and Zhang, Introduction, in *Privatizing China*; Huehls and Smith, "Four Phases of Neoliberalism and Literature."

[132] Ha Jin, *The Crazed* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 21.

[133] Ibid., 23.

[134] Vera Schwarcz, "The Pane of Sorrow: Public Uses of Personal Grief in Modern China," in *Social Suffering,* ed. Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 126.

suffering and often culminating in violence.[135] This ritualized practice promoted and staged by the

Communist party-state often involved highly emotionally charged public gatherings and

denouncements, in which peasants would name their grievances and confront the landowners and

intellectuals who were deemed their class enemies.[136] These practices of embodied testimony were

strategically leveraged by the state to construct a socialist collectivity for which a new communist

nation could act. In the late 1980s, Professor Yang's Maoist declarations take on the quality of farce,

and his students, doctors, and nurses greet his behavior with a mixture of disgust, pity, and amused

dismissal. Jian declares that the Red Guards who in the past had sung the same songs Professor

Yang now sings had "contributed their little share to the revolution" with their demonstrations, but

"that had been two decades before, and now the song was no more than an embarrassing joke."[137]

Similarly, when Professor Yang shouts "'Long live Chairman Mao! Long live the Communist

Party!'" to express his happiness, Jian declares that "[t]hat was an old way of expressing one's joy,

but now the shibboleth sounded farcical."[138] Jian sees Professor's Yang's Maoist performances as

baffling and pathetic anachronisms that were denied to him during the Cultural Revolution, when

Professor Yang was labeled a "reactionary intellectual" who "must have been forbidden to join the

revolutionary masses."[139] The farcical nature of Professor Yang's performances resonates with Anne

Anagnost's assertion that, with the "routinization [of 'speaking bitterness'] within postrevolutionary

political culture, it ultimately lost its power to articulate with subjective experience in its failure to

reflect sufficiently the 'true social present.'"[140]

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[135] Ann Anagnost, *National Past-Times: Narrative, Representation, and Power in Modern China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 35.

[136] Ibid., 19.

[137] Jin, 21.

[138] Ibid., 92.

[139] Ibid., 22-3.

[140] Anagnost, 33.

As a manifestation of a broader malleability in appearances, however, Professor Yang's anachronistic Maoist slogans also evacuates the political possibilities of humanistic critique rooted in the expression of authentic interior experience and suffering. Emphasizing the deliberate attention to presentation, Jian characterizes Professor Yang's Maoist declarations as a "shibboleth,"[141] a term that sheds light on their capacity to both guard against the danger of being designated a class enemy and provide a socially sanctioned mode of expressing emotion. In designating these expressions of feeling a performative "shibboleth," Jian calls attention to their state-mandated status while also recognizing the emotion they might nevertheless articulate. The novel thus emphasizes the inability to distinguish between emotional authenticity and the myriad other motivations and coercions that might be contained within the same expression, an ambiguity that extends from the socialist past into the novel's contemporary moment. Anagnost argues that an awareness of carefully calibrating outward appearances as a mode of navigating social and political conditions persists alongside the shift in the relationship between the embodied expression of "speaking bitterness" and what is perceived to be lived reality in the post-revolution years: the "manipulation of identity, which became necessary as a survival tactic in the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution […] led to a certain self-consciousness of this as an artful process" into the post-1978 reform era. Indeed, the "explosion of self-fashioned identities unleashed, in no small part, by the economic reforms of the 1980s" can be traced to the importance of appearances during the Cultural Revolution.[142] Professor Yang's Maoist expressions, while out of place in one sense, thus also importantly highlight a continuous inability to determine the subjective content of an appearance that is presented to the world, which renders unavailable any determination of authenticity in both the socialist past and the novel's reform era present.

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[141] Jin, 92.

[142] Anagnost, 47.

In the novel's contemporary moment, Professor Yang's laments on the impossibility of intellectual life in China are also expressions of Cultural Revolution suffering that map onto the "speaking bitterness" in which intellectuals themselves engaged following the beginning of reform. Rofel argues that "[f]or the greater part of the 1980s, the voices of intellectuals predominanted as they claimed to speak for the nation as a result of their bitter lives in the previous era."[143] Rofel's analysis suggests that the "speaking bitterness" of intellectuals is embedded within the dynamics of the post-Cultural Revolution reform state and its economic policies. Not only did "the state generally provided the ideological space for those voices as it recuperated them into projects of economic reform," even the space of resistance converged with reform. In the novel, however, Professor Yang's rants simultaneously fit within and disrupt this enlistment of intellectuals' suffering into the state's reform project. Though his expressions testify to suffering, he refuses to then coherently construct his experience as a sacrifice for and endorsement of the reform state. Though Professor Yang had once convinced Jian to choose the path of the intellectual who is "rich in [his] heart,"[144] when he is hospitalized, he repeatedly exhorts Jian to abandon the life of an intellectual, whom he characterizes as "dumb laborers kept by the state" and mere "clerk[s]" who are "screw[s] in the machine of the revolution."[145] Viewed in relation to invocations of liberal humanism imbricated within the state's reform project, Professor Yang's seemingly incoherent rants begin to make sense. Expressions such as his non-sequitur references to animalistic tales, which Jian is unable to clearly trace to any cultural referent, become imbricated in his refusal to obediently align with the humanism of the reform project. Indeed, the lack of any clear connection to his physical stroke suggests the possibility that his seeming insanity also marks a strategic use of the contingency of physical illness to cobble together a refusal of humanistic coherence and the traces of critique.

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[143] Rofel, 50.

[144] Jin, 67.

[145] Ibid., 153.

This critique that emerges through a body whose expressions are enlisted to reproduce the discourses and policies of the nation is both potent and easily dismissed and neutralized precisely because of its incoherences and oblique refusals. Professor Yang's critiques evoke Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman's study of depressive symptoms that were consistently diagnosed as neurasthenia, a diagnosis characterized primarily by physical symptoms, in mainland China in the mid- to late 1980s. Kleinman and Kleinman write that many of the patients in their study who expressed physiological complaints to their physicians engaged in a sanctioned expression of anger and dissatisfaction with the political system and the pain of the Cultural Revolution through a process they call somatization. Somatization refers to the "expression of personal and social distress in an idiom of bodily complaints and medical help seeking,"[146] and these patients' symptoms were correspondingly predominantly diagnosed by physicians as neurasthenia, a physiological disorder, rather than the psychological one of depression. Kleinman and Kleinman attribute this diagnosis and the link between physiological symptoms expressed by patients and broader conditions to a complex interplay between dominant sociocultural norms, acceptable political limits of expression, and the ways that individuals themselves conceptualize these norms through their articulations of affect and experience. Kleinman and Kleinman's discussion of somatization highlights imbricated intersections of sociocultural and political imperatives and assertions of individual experiences and anger within biologically embodied symptoms. Without simplistically attributing Professor Yang's rants to either straightforward critique or meaningless insanity, these assessments of somatization and the state-sanctioned discourses of reform suggest possibilities for refusal within behaviors that are simultaneously easily biologized and dismissed.

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[146] Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, "Somatization: The Interconnections in Chinese Society among Culture, Depressive Experiences, and the Meanings of Pain," in *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*, ed. Arthur Kleinman and Byron J. Good (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), 430.

Reading Professor Yang's rants for their instability and incoherence points to the novel's

broader attention to the impossibility of discerning subjective experience and locating resistance

from within acts and appearances, an impossibility that is itself thoroughly entangled with

postsocialist subjectivities shaped by the market. With regard to this capitalistic development, the

novel briefly mentions a third option that seemingly presented a way out of this impasse: in 1987,

before the events around Tiananmen that are narrated in the present of the novel, a "Hong Kong

trade company" had attempted to recruit Jian for his English and Chinese language skills.[147] Though

Jian did not pursue this path because of Professor Yang's influence and initially chose to pursue an

intellectual career that he still believed would be authentically meaningful, Jian's eventual

disillusionment leads him to turn away from the path of the intellectual but towards a dead-end:

Jian's safe, state-sanctioned option is to be a provincial official who is literally a government clerk, an

option that is eventually denied to him anyway because he is not a Communist Party member. The

novel's brief allusion to capitalistic opportunity momentarily suggests a way out of this impasse and

speaks to an emerging subject position within postsocialism: state-sanctioned self-determination

through the market, suggesting that capital permeates the world of the novel and its exploration of a

postsocialist subjectivity that is increasingly based on the ability to manipulate surface and

appearance.

Jian's sense of how to navigate the present thus forms in conversation with both Professor

Yang's entreaties and the other bodies with whom he comes into contact. Jian is engaged to

Professor Yang's daughter, Mei Mei, who wants Jian to relocate to Beijing, where career prospects

and life conditions are more prosperous than in the provincial city where he currently lives. After

Mei Mei ends their relationship he later sees her at a dance with a man who lives in Beijing, Jian

details Mei Mei's dress and make-up. He notes that "her face was delicately powdered, her lips

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[147] Jin, 65.

rouged crimson, and her eyebrows, penciled in the arching Russian style, stretched from the root of her nose to her temples."[148] Jian's analysis of Mei Mei's appearance reflects incoherent cultural references to the communist past and an increasingly capitalist consumer culture in the present. Though Mei Mei wears make-up and looks "glamorous like an actress," she also incongruously wears her hair in two small braids, a common hairstyle for young girls in Maoist China, which "kept her less exotic." Jian concludes that her face appears "rather rigid, smiling at no one in particular,"[149] a mask that is not fixed to any stable sense of interior motivation. In another moment in which Jian perceives the impossibility of reading interiority, Jian goes to a provincial village and sees villagers who are paid a pittance to be extras in a film scene about peasants welcoming a Han dynasty hero.[150] Jian is "shocked at the emotion they had worked up" when he sees their real tears and hears their laments,[151] a shock that stems in part from his inability to distinguish between their acting and real emotion; after the scene is over, Jian sees a young girl spill the well water that she had carried for miles and begin crying, which, because of the tears in both scenes, Jian mistakes as part of the filming.[152] Jian's confusion and disorientation in both circumstances suggests the still-emergent nature of actions inflected by capital, in which Jian registers his inability to discern interior motivations and emotions and can only fixate on appearances. Crucially, it is the visceral presence and forms of these other bodies that allow Jian to register a broader instability of surface appearances that he first begins to affectively register as discomfort, incongruity, and confusion.

Cipher and subjectivity in non-revolutionary circuits

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[148] Ibid., 291.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid., 248.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., 249.

In the context of the novel's broader foreclosures of interiority in connection with capital, Tiananmen in the novel becomes not a moment of exception but embedded within the emerging logic of the present; indeed, the majority of the novel is devoted not to Tiananmen but to the mundane events of Jian's everyday life and the various forms of subjectivity that are presented to him in the course of them, reflecting scholarship that considers the social unrest surrounding Tiananmen as a product of the inequalities produced through reform and the increasingly neoliberal policies instated following its suppression. Tiananmen finally makes undeniably visible the instability and impossibility of reading interiority. Without fully registering it himself, Jian embodies the evacuation of internal authenticity when he participates in the student protests. On a momentary whim fueled by anger rather than investment in activism or democracy, Jian attempts to reach the Square. As he decides to go with a fellow student to Beijing to join the demonstrations, Jian acknowledges that he has no "grand purpose or dream of democracy and freedom." Determined both to show Mei Mei that he is not a coward and to "prove that [he] was a man capable of action and choice," Jian becomes "crazed" and "driven by desperation, anger, madness, and stupidity" into going to Beijing.[153] The tumult of his personal emotions carries him into playing the part of a protester, though he does not share the movement's political convictions. As Jian nears the Square, he admires the uniform and bearing of an army officer who approaches a student who is attempting to dialogue with the troops. Jian is "impressed by the officer's handsome looks: broad eyes, thick brows, a straight nose, white, strong teeth, and a full chin," and he details the "black necktie beneath his jacket, which had four pockets" and the "purple belt [that] tightened his waist."[154] To Jian, the officer "looked like material for a general,"[155] suggesting authority and gravitas. This barely perceptible suggestion hovers only within the space between this sentence and the next, however,

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[153] Ibid., 295.
[154] Ibid., 303.
[155] Ibid.

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when the officer, "[w]ithout a word … pulled out his pistol and shot the student in the head."[156] The

moment the officer shoots and the stunned silence from the crowd that follows shatter any enduring

notion that appearances can be read safely as indications of stable meaning. Jian's perception of the

officer as "material for a general" suggests a lingering belief that some underlying "material" can

determine a particular status, which in turn has a particular role and signification in the social

context of the crowd. Jian reads the soldier's bearing and appearance as a stable and authoritative

sign and so is utterly unprepared for the shot fired, which completely explodes this stable

conception of apprehending appearances.

Jian's full apprehension of the body's always latent potential to be manipulated and misread

is registered in the "amalgam of loneliness and grief [that] overwhelmed [him]."[157] Within the

broader evacuation of authentic interiority in the novel, Tiananmen's violence is thus exemplary but

not exceptional. As such, it resonates with Berlant's assertion that "the drama of adjustment to a

pervasive atmosphere of unexpected precarity makes certain situations exemplary laboratories for

sensing contemporary life in new idioms."[158] Jian experiences the explosion of his lingering belief in

the reliability of appearances as stable signs in his complete lack of mental preparation for the

gunshot; though he earlier begins to recognize the potential for the body to be manipulated, he only

fully apprehends the stakes of appearance as a free-floating entity in this violent moment. The full

impact of this shattered belief literalizes itself in the "[b]its of brain [that] were splattered like

crushed tofu on the asphalt" and the "[s]team … rising from [the student's] smashed skull."[159] The

scattering of the crowd as gunfire is initiated by the officer's opening shot thus also signals a broader

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156 Ibid.
157 Jin, 304.
158 Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 54.
159 Jin, 303.

social unmooring that Tiananmen makes violently visible but that, as the other bodies of the novel suggest, is in fact already taking place.

Jian's own characterization of his participation in the protests, even as he does not espouse its political ideals, as "crazed" speaks to the extent to which he is himself already unthinkingly caught up in enacting the malleable identities that are coming to characterize social behavior. Although, after the fact, Jian seemingly associates his own "counterrevolutionary" actions with a set of liberal values, his syntax reveals the instability of this construction of interiority and resistance. Jian asserts that by "act[ing] like a counterrevolutionary," he hoped, "like a free man capable of choice, to dislodge [him]self from the revolutionary machine" and "def[y] a prescribed fate."[160] The simile in Jian's formulation of acting "*like* a counterrevolutionary" and "*like* a free man,"[161] however, crucially reveals Jian's construction of personal liberation as one of appearances and behavior rather than any sense of authentic interiority. Similarly, Jian declares that "[i]t's personal interests that motivate the individual and therefore generate the dynamics of history" in reference to the Chinese communist revolution. According to Jian, the revolutionaries were motivated to join the movement by their desires to "escape an arranged marriage or avoid debts or just have enough food and clothes."[162] Jian thus also undermines the stability of a national narrative of political passion and self-sacrifice that is driven by a deep-seated belief in communist ideology. Rather than oppose communist affiliation and Tiananmen political dissent, the novel thoroughly undermines a pure ideological identification from both these models of revolutionary politics. Instead, Jian's perception of infinitely malleable embodied subjectivities and his own embodiment of this logic through and beyond Tiananmen become the paradigmatic postsocialist subjectivity that also encompasses and redefines these political identifications.

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[160] Ibid., 321.
[161] Ibid.; italics added.
[162] Ibid., 320.

Jian's disillusionment, however, also inadvertently suggests the possibility for agencies that

emerge from within contingent and compromised positions rather than as pure ideals that stand

outside everyday life. The novel's emphasis on form and refusal to delimit subjective content

resonates with criticism that attempts to move away from liberal humanist notions of authenticity

and resistance. Rather than models of revolutionary politics premised on authentic interiority, the

novel thus focuses our attention on the forms of agency that are available when interiority and the

progress narrative of liberation are thoroughly undermined: contingent individual modes for

continuing to live on, however that becomes possible and manageable, that continuously emerge and

evolve through the dynamics of the emerging present. My choice of phrasing is thus meant to

neutrally reflect, rather than pathologize as deluded or ineffectual, a neutrality that is itself an

orientation to the world that is useful at a particular historical juncture. Tracing these embodied

forms of contestation historically in China, Anagnost asserts that the self-awareness of appearance as

a survival tactic following the Cultural Revolution "enabled the creative elaboration of identities that

poach on the existing relations of power."[163] Anagnost's assessment of this "artful process"

resonates with Michel de Certeau's theorization of individual tactics as mobile, everyday practices

that "must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of

the proprietary powers."[164] While these considerations of everyday tactics continue to articulate

terms of resistance that can clearly be discerned from subjugation, however, albeit ones that emerge

from within the acts themselves, Saba Mahmood asks whether it is even possible to "identify a

universal category of acts—such as those of resistance—outside the ethical and political conditions

within which acts acquire their particular meaning."[165] Instead, Mahmood asserts that it is crucial to

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[163] Anagnost, 47.

[164] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life: Volume 1*, transl. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 37.

[165] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

"detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics" in order to "grasp these modes

of action indebted to other reasons and histories," as well as forms of ethics and politics that "do

not map onto the logic of repression and resistance."[166] Extending this attention to the

indeterminacies of agency that emerge from their particular situations, Anne Anlin Cheng notes the

liberal impulse to "presume and privilege an ideal of a subject who is integrated, authentic, or

whole." This subjectivity, Chang asserts, "gets invoked too often precisely at those very moments

when its condition for being is most at risk, often "at the expense of recognizing or even allowing

those inevitable moments when the exceptionalism of subjectivity fails."[167] Rather than wholesale

dismissal of political potential, these formulations of complicit and alternative agencies suggest

possibilities for considering individual agencies that emerge from within the inhabitation of

compromised subject positions in everyday life.

The final moments of the novel fully dismantle this distinction between resistance and

subjugation and connects the emerging market-shaped logics of post-Mao China with the networks

of global capital to which China is increasingly connected. The novel closes with Jian, who is now

wanted as a dissident, taking on a new appearance as he waits for the train to embark on a journey to

North America via Guangzhou and Hong Kong, a path that parallels these circuits of global capital:

> With a black-headed match I burned my student ID, then rose to my feet and went to the
> [barber] shop to get a crew cut. Without my long hair my face would appear narrower, and from
> now on I would use a different name.[168]

In these final lines of the novel, Jian fully embraces the possibilities of infinitely malleable surfaces,

not as revolutionary personal liberation but as a full embodiment of the governing logic of surfaces,

which he narrates as the process of becoming a cipher. Ironically, his transformation is

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[166] Ibid., 14.

[167] Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 121.

[168] Jin, 323.

simultaneously that which reveals the cognitive dissonance of the postsocialist condition within China and the value of flexibility that connects China and the West. The novel's emphasis on surface suggests that the neoliberal conditions of the present engendered and encouraged by the state demand the ability for ever more malleable forms of self-manipulation, even as declared loyalty to the party-state must incongruously remain absolute. To the extent that flexibility is also a valorized trait under neoliberalism, this malleability also renders Jian all the more capable of flexibly adapting to capitalist demands that increasingly link the West and China. Jian's transformation into a cipher is therefore simultaneously a full inhabitation and critique of a governing logic that takes particular shape in China in relation to the state but that also extends beyond it. This mode of critique from within cannot be captured adequately by the terms of liberation or subjugation. In *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai illustrates how embodying a racial stereotype too well can also undermine it through the sheer exaggeratedness of its embodiment.[169] Jian's transformation into a cipher is discomfitingly matter-of-fact, however, suggesting that his critique lies not in exaggeration but merely in carrying forward the logic that the party-state disseminates to an end that ironically erases any meaningful distinction between dissident and loyal citizen. In revealing the incongruity between the demand for malleability and for unchanging loyalty, Jian's status as a fully subjugated cipher and his inhabitation of a subjectivity capable of political critique become indistinguishable, co-existing uncomfortably within the same moment. Jian embodies a liminal state within an emerging global condition that speaks in two directions, to China and the West, and thus dismantles straightforward opposition between the two.

The novel's evacuation of liberal politics through the logic of capital suggests that even a dissident narrative and flight from China cannot promise freedom. Though Kong asserts that Tiananmen "finally and successfully catapults the hitherto self-absorbed hero into a journey to

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[169] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 67.

enlightenment—overseas,"[170] the novel has thoroughly undermined the liberal humanist conceptions

of individual resistance that would underpin this narrative of a flight to freedom. Jian's flight

parallels circuits of capital between China and the U.S. that are accelerating in 1989. Following Deng

Xiaoping's famed "Southern Tour" of cities in southern China to promote market reform policies,

in 1980, the government designated Shenzhen, which, like Guangzhou, is also located in Guangdong

Province near Hong Kong, its first Special Economic Zone as "a free trade zone for multinational

factories."[171] These zones designated for "joint ventures between foreign companies and the Chinese

government," and they had expanded the whole east coast by the late 1980s and to the entire

country by the 1990s. Following these decades, "the prohibition on foreign-private economic

cooperation in China was lifted," and "[b]y 2000, the government stipulated required quotas of

foreign investment that *all* areas had to fill."[172] Rather than liberation, Jian's flight thus situates him

within the same routes and logics of capital that are simultaneously permeating China alongside and

intersecting with the party-state's continued, though changing, authority. Jian trades an impasse with

the state for an impasse with capital; he is caught in the circuits of capital whether in China or

outside it. Jian's flatness is thus highly effective within the flattened circuits of speculative finance

that are accelerating in this historical moment into the present.[173]

These flattened speculative circuits also encompass liberal discourses of resistance and rights

between China and the U.S. Chow asserts that the U.S.'s invocation of human rights from

Tiananmen onward cannot "be understood purely on humanitarian grounds but rather must also be

seen as an inherent part—entirely brutal yet also entirely logical—of transnational corporatism":

> [b]y releasing its political prisoners—who can be seen as a kind of national product—in a
> regulated manner, the Chinese authorities accomplish the pragmatic goal of forcing Western

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[170] Kong, 103-4.
[171] Rofel, 11; Harvey, 119.
[172] Rofel 11; italics in original.
[173] See Aimee Bahng's analysis of the discourses of speculative finance in *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

nations to soften their rhetoric against China and thus of receiving more trading privileges and opportunities over time.[174]

Chow argues that the invocation of human rights and the Chinese government's varied responses, including refutation, denial, and at times, promises of consideration and change in exchange for international recognition, negotiating power, and business relations in fact constitute "an ongoing series of biopolitical transactions in global late capitalism," in which it is productive to consider the extent to which China and the West in fact become "collaborative partners" in the geopolitical and economic networks emerging through China's entry into global capital.[175] Jian's evacuation of the liberal humanist discourse of protest thus also indicts the intersecting and globally circulating investments in protest and capital that Chow critiques. Jian's transformation into a cipher disrupts distinctions based on straightforward delineations of freedom between life outside and within economic reform China. As the novel illustrates the impossibilities of wholesale political critique and revolution premised on individual liberation within and beyond China, it leaves us with a focus on the embodied forms through which individuals negotiate their everyday lives in the present, including how Jian will navigate similar conditions of daily life under the neoliberalism in the West in which he will find himself.[176]

Gendered politics of refusal: detachment in reform-era China as a staging ground for China-U.S. circuits

Like *The Crazed*, Li's *Kinder Than Solitude* elaborates on and specifies an emerging form of embodied agency that emerges from within the inhabitation of subject positions that are enlisted to

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[174] Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 21.
[175] Ibid., 20.
[176] Indeed, Harvey notes that Chinese reforms coincided with "the turn to neoliberal solutions in Britain and the United States" (Harvey, *A Short History of Neoliberalism*, 120) and that the "emergence of China as a global economic power after 1980 was in part an unintended consequence of the neoliberal turn in the advanced capitalist world" (121).

reproduce dominant power structures in the networks between China and the U.S. While Jian in *The Crazed* becomes a neutral cipher all the more flexibly adapted to traversing networks of global capital, however, *Kinder Than Solitude* suggests how gender circumscribes both women who remain in China and those who seek to make themselves similarly adept at navigating these circuits. Li's novel begins where Jin's leaves off, poised at the edge of a global circuit of capital and at the end of the 1980s as China is about to enter a new decade of accelerated economic growth. While *The Crazed* suggests an overarching market-driven logic, *Kinder Than Solitude* makes clear that gendered contestations are central to both hegemonic national discourses and programs tied to capital and the critiques of them that might emerge.

Just as with Jian's neutral cipher, these critiques emerge from within the inhabitation of subject positions that simultaneously contribute to these structures. In post-Mao China, gendered caretaking labor is enlisted to reproduce dominant discourses of the state and capital. The rise of traditional, normative femininity was central to the reform state's claim to legitimacy.[177] Extending into the present, families, in which caring labor remains predominantly performed by mothers,[178] face pressure to produce model children who are can attend prestigious universities abroad and become successful entrepreneurial subjects able to navigate global networks of capital.[179] The central women of Li's novel, however, eschew these gendered positions in China and immigrate as adults to the U.S., where they similarly refuse positions protected by the linked institutions of marriage and citizenship and the assimilation that comes with them. Instead, they choose to remain in affective laboring and caretaking positions predominantly performed by women of color in the U.S. In these

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[177] Rofel, *Desiring China*, 59; Harriet Evans, *The Subject of Gender: Daughters and Mothers in Urban China* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 104.

[178] Teresa Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty: Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015), 162.

[179] Fong, *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011)*,* 2-3.

multiple refusals, they recognize and decline to participate in the family structure's central role in reproducing dominant discourses and structures of nation and capital, even as, in laboring outside the family, they remain embedded in gendered forms that also sustain these structures. Rather than flexible, neutral ciphers, their flexibility in global circuits of capital thus stems from their willingness to perform affective care labor, whether through state-sanctioned modes within the legal, heterosexual family or outside of it. No matter their subject positions, they are therefore not exempt from the imbrications of gender, affective labor, and these dominant discourses. Their subject positions show how Jian's neutrality is also inflected by masculinist constructs of the reform state and projections of domesticity and femininity onto the bodies of women charged with reproducing this state. However, in Li's novel, these female figures' refusal of protected positions and the diverse affects beyond docility with which they perform their caretaking acts generates critique from within the inhabitation of these precarious positions.

Li's novel formulates a gendered politics of refusal that is fully embedded within circuits of economic reform and rising neoliberalism between China and the U.S. The gendered apprehensions of emerging logics of the present and orientations formulated to navigate them in the aftermath of Tiananmen in China are then carried to the contemporary U.S., where they similarly challenge racialized gendered imaginations of immigrant assimilation in the context of a neoliberal U.S. The novel interweaves the contemporary perspectives and memories of three childhood friends from Beijing who are haunted by the poisoning of their young neighbor, a student protestor named Shaoai, in the months following Tiananmen, and its chapters are told from the alternating perspectives of these three friends as adults they live their daily lives in the aftermath of Shaoai's recent death. In the chapters on their childhoods, Shaoai remains ardently committed to political revolution in China and to feminist revolution to overthrow the oppressive family structures and obligations against which she rails. Shaoai, however, misunderstands the emerging imbrications of

gender, capital, and nation that foreclose clear politics of overthrow, on which her insistence fails to generate the outcomes she desires. Instead, the circumstances of this failure and her subsequent poisoning become the staging ground for the other figures of the novel to apprehend the emerging conditions of the novel's market reform present and attendant modes of navigating these conditions. Two of the female friends, Ruyu and Moran, will then carry forward these oblique refusals and forms of agency from reform era China into their lives as immigrants in the contemporary U.S.

Though Shaoai's dedication to revolution does not succeed in the context of Tiananmen, she carries the ethos of protest into her everyday life in Tianamen's immediate aftermath. Following her participation in the protests, Shaoai has been indefinitely suspended from university and is awaiting news of whether she will be expelled or allowed to continue her studies. At home, she rails against her family's and peers' perceived failure to consider "those people shot dead in Tiananmen Square" and their intertwined devotion to filial and intimate forms of caring.[180] Citing her parents' failure to engage with the protests, she rejects their interdiction for discussing politics in public places and its rationale of protecting others' safety, which her father explains was necessary during the Chinese civil war prior to the communist victory.[181] Meanwhile, she also aggressively challenges her parents' notions of filial responsibility, which she identifies as structurally embedded within and inseparable from China's political conditions. She rejects her mother's belief in filial duty and care for Shaoai's bedridden grandfather,[182] accuses those in her father and grandfather's generations of having "made this country impossible for [Shaoai's] generation,"[183] and constructs her parents' worry for her as the self-serving desire to "have a daughter safe-at-hand to see that [they're] well taken care of when [they] grow old."[184]

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[180] Yiyun Li, *Kinder Than Solitude* (New York: Random House, 2014), 115.
[181] Ibid., 146.
[182] Ibid., 147.
[183] Ibid., 146.
[184] Ibid., 147.

Shaoai's anger thus expresses the personal as political that was central to Western third-wave feminist thought. Indeed, the novel mentions that she is reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.[185] In the context of economic reform China, these engagements with gender and Western feminist influences are also complexly intertwined with the goals and discourses of the Chinese reform state. The 1980s and 1990s saw the return of naturalized femininity as part of the reform state's repudiation of the Cultural Revolution. Dominant reform-era discourses rejected Mao-era "ungendering," in which gender equality, women's work outside the home, and a communist aesthetic that condemned the "bourgeois" trappings of femininity were central to the party-state's discourse of modernity and liberation.[186] In the reform years, this "ungendering" was constructed as unnatural,[187] and "beauty, romance, leisure, and material comfort" became the hallmarks of femininity.[188] Following 1978, the rise of femininity was accompanied by the increasing importance of the "private" and the "personal," which the state constructed as a realm in which its "claim to noninterference" was central to distinguishing the reform state from the reach of the Cultural Revolution into all aspects of life.[189] Women's roles and identities within this newly re-emergent personal space became the grounds upon which a new reform era national identity could be constructed in distinction from the communist past.[190] Gender identity and women's labor, however, have been consistently manipulated in the service of state projects across these periods. This dichotomous construction of gender elides the ways in which women disproportionately labored within the home even during the Mao years and the communist victory in 1949,[191] when the interests

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[185] Li, 108.
[186] Rofel, 66.
[187] Ibid., 58.
[188] Evans, 103.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid.
[191] The communist discourse of gender equality (*nan nu ping deng*) sought to abolish the separation of the "inner," domestic, private (*nei*) and "outer" (*wai*) spheres (Evans 101-2). By the communist victory in 1949, women and men were declared equal, and women were expected to work outside the home in the service of the state; indeed, Evans notes that "*nei* became a term pejoratively and often moralistically used to exclude the domain of the domestic and

of the private, "inner" family sphere were deemed antithetical to true revolutionary zeal and loyalty to the party-state.[192]

Shaoai thus lives during a period in which gender's relation to the reform state is under contestation. Shaoai implicates the complicities between gendered familial dynamics by making the pointed but vague accusation that her parents' generation has made life in China "impossible" for her own. She cannot, however, articulate a more precise critique of these intertwined conditions or propose an alternative way of being; she is left raging but without recourse. The limitations of the critique she is able to articulate speak to the nation- and gender-based boundaries that dominated political discourse. Though national constructions of Chinese modernity in the 1990s initially painted Western culture as "polluting,"[193] male intellectuals also turned to the West as a space of humanistic discourses that could help them assert their past suffering and the legitimacy of their claim to dictate China's post-Mao future.[194] These discourse valorized concepts of individual agency and "implicitly borrowed from the pervasive representations of an aggressive, if uncertain, masculinity that dominated public culture."[195] They also upheld the inequality of the reform process and, in doing so, also "inadvertently established some of the ideological framework for China's neoliberal policies."[196] Certain women turned to these discourses and "narratively fashioned themselves as ungendered (that is, male) intellectuals sacrificing for China's modernity through their labor" to contest femininity's new association with the nation,[197] suggesting a path of direct repudiation that Shaoai's aggression mirrors. In connecting broader political and gendered

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private from the range of affirmative subject positions revolutionary women should aspire to" (103). Rather than "women guilty of the 'selfish individualism' of bourgeois ideology," Evans argues that the "*nei/wai* boundary was part of an ideological project to reorient individual loyalties and aspirations away from the family and toward the party-state, in the form of the workplace and the collective" (103).

[192] Rofel, 63.
[193] Rofel, 81.
[194] Ibid., 73.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid.
[197] Ibid., 58.

conditions in the family, however, Shaoai also begins to suggest a more complex critique than can be

articulated through these available subject positions. She seeks to simultaneously condemn the

sociopolitical conditions of reform and the turn to domesticity that accompanies it, rather than

upholding state agendas and, ultimately, masculinist discourses that render women the objects

through which the nation is imagined.

Shaoai's critique, however, is circumscribed and rendered inarticulable by the multiple

nation-based discourses that constrain it. Alongside masculinist discourses of the Chinese state, the

suggestion of Shaoai's influence by Western feminism also evokes the transnational politics between

China and the West. In the aftermath of Tiananmen, Chow argues that Western feminist calls for a

purely indigenous feminism joined Western investment at large in the concept of a pure Chinese

tradition to police boundaries between China and the West.[198] From Western perspectives, the

violation of a pure Chinese feminist politics was similarly constructed in terms of pollution and

contamination. Chow elaborates that although "[h]istory books tell us that modernization in Asia

means 'Westernization,'" "if Chinese texts and writers exhibit 'symptoms' (as they well should) of

having been affected/infected, they are by and large viewed with concern, suspicion, and

disapproval" from Western perspectives.[199] These boundaries render the Chinese woman's position

impossible because they fail to recognize lived relations to dominant discourses of modernity that

are shaped by orientations to the West:

> [f]or Chinese women who go through the most mundane parts of their lives with the
> knowledge that it is precisely this notion of an 'originary' Chinese tradition to which they
> cannot cling, the advocacy of a 'Chinese feminism' in the nativist sense is exclusionary in
> nature; what it excludes are their lived relations to Westernization and the role played by
> these relations, however contradictory, in their subject-positions.[200]

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[198] Rey Chow, "Violence in the Other Country"; see also Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
[199] Chow, 97.
[200] Ibid.

Investment in indigeneity that excludes consideration of Western influence is thus another aspect of nation-based boundaries and discourses that excludes the "pollution" of lived experience. These investments in pure politics converge with the Western humanist, rights-based discourses of political and feminist revolution; whereas Western feminism in this period continued to fight for rights, certain Chinese feminists recognized that women in China since the communist victory in 1949 "have long had these rights" but that they "have not led to liberation."[201] Like dominant discourses of the Chinese state, these Western feminist imaginaries similarly reinforce boundaries to demand a political engagement that aligns with their values.

Shaoai thus remains constrained by the separate discourses that are available to her and that approach the rise of naturalized femininity through a path of direct repudiation. Within these globally upheld national discourses, Shaoai's partly wordless anger suggests that it is her own position that is "impossible": she is unable to imagine and embody a subjectivity that stands outside these structures and available discourses of critique. In response to this impossibility, Shaoai continues to maintain her commitment to forms of direct resistance that map onto discourses of clear repudiation and rights. This stubborn and unwavering commitment to her own conception of the right solidifies in Shaoai as aggression and a will to mastery, which ironically recapitulate the same coercive logics of the discourses that constrain her own critique. She directs her rage through forms of intimate aggression, verbally and relationally at her parents and physically towards Ruyu, an orphan girl living with her family who shares Shaoai's bed. Ruyu is starkly different from Shaoai in her seeming placidity, indifference, and detachment from the people and events around her, which enrages Shaoai. Shaoai repeatedly and contemptuously exhorts Ruyu to defend herself against strangers and castigates her for seeming not to care what happens around her. Unbeknownst to Shaoai, however, Ruyu also displays quiet care and companionship for Shaoai's bedridden and

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[201] Rofel, 82.

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nonverbal grandfather, though this form of domestic care does not align with Shaoai's imagination of political action outside the family. Finally, Shaoai takes a path of direct attack to coercively engender a situation of gendered and social awakening for Ruyu.

Shaoai attempts to forcibly embody an "external agency" that would force Ruyu to take up Shaoai's own version of gendered critique through direct intervention in the form of assault.[202] One night, Ruyu feels "a hand moving ever so clandestinely underneath her pajamas, her lips pried open by a wet and warm tongue; a foreign body on her own, the weight not heavy but enough to pin her down as one could be pinned down by a nightmare."[203] The particular object of Shaoai's attack is Ruyu's detachment: immediately afterwards, Shaoai declares to Ruyu that "[y]ou are the most unbending girl I've ever met […] Why do you think you have the right to be like that?"[204]She asserts that "[s]omeday, you'll be grateful to me": since no one else has taught Ruyu to "think or to question" or "even to have human feelings," "someone else must."[205] Shaoai's attack, as an extension of her commitment to a highly visible and active politics of intervention and overthrow, makes starkly visible the violence and coercion that can also attend revolutionary projects. Indeed, her actions and motivations map onto not only the revolutionary politics of Tiananmen and Western feminism to which she is committed but also the revolutionary politics of the communist state, whose large-scale interventions into people's lives sought to produce a radically new communist society and citizen-subjects whose overriding allegiance was directed towards the party-state.

Shaoai, however, fundamentally misunderstands intervention's highly contingent nature, which cannot directly produce the forms of subjectivity that she desires. In the context of reform, Shaoai's actions ironically turn Ruyu permanently towards the detachment against which Shaoai

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[202] Evans, 119.
[203] Li, 176-7.
[204] Ibid., 178.
[205] Ibid.

rages rather than to the revolutionary subjectivity she desires to create in her own image. Ruyu perceives the desire to control and shape that Shaoai expresses as a violent and narcissistic impulse towards total mastery that contains an "unrestrained desire, unrestrainable, consummating itself and in doing so making its object abandon existing as herself" with an identity that is nothing but reflective of Shaoai's own will.[206] Shaoai's attack and Ruyu's reaction make clear the violence that lies in the narcissistic will to self-reproduction that can underlie revolutionary political projects; like the nation-based discourses that constrain her, Shaoai attempts to force Ruyu to become a political actor in her own image.

Ironically, in the moment of the attack, Ruyu in fact desires intervention and action from both herself and others; she thinks to herself that "one would afterward forever question why one had not awakened in time, why one had not protested,"[207] while "[n]o one came to stop the hands and the tongue, nor did she believe that anyone could stop the insanity behind those unclean organs that clung to her."[208] In the absence of intervention and protection, Ruyu recognizes and rejects the vulnerability that accompanies the desire for help. She realizes that

> [i]n one's hoping for help, one becomes small; smaller yet when no help comes. Only then does one understand that this moment is always there, waiting, preying, in disguise, or even in arrogant openness. How could she have misread life with such foolishness?[209]

Ruyu interprets Shaoai's attack as emblematic of a broader logic and pervasive social condition at work: the ever-present, immanent possibility of abandonment. This perception coincides with the increasing evacuation of state care and the turn to the self that scholars of neoliberalism identify as accelerating in late 1980s and 1990s China, particularly in the aftermath of Tiananmen.[210] Through Shaoai's attack, Ruyu thus comes to perceive an emerging logic of the present that Shaoai fails to

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[206] Ibid., 177.
[207] Li, 177.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Zhang and Ong, Introduction, in *Socialism from Afar*, 8.

apprehend, and the concomitant detachment and totalized sense of autonomy that solidifies in Ruyu

becomes a way of living on under these conditions.

Polluted, contaminated, and, in the novel's case, poisoned gendered subjectivities that

confound clear categories of overthrow thus emerge as central to the novel's imagination of the

reform period and extend into the present. However, their linkages to forms of revolutionary

politics and the emerging neoliberal conditions of the novel's present are not presented as clear

allegories, and indeed, the novel resists straightforward attributions of significance, either personal

or political. In response to Shaoai's intrusion, Ruyu feels herself to be "neither a girl nor a woman

[…] but a being as blind as the force driving her predator. As poisonous."[211] Shaoai's attack is an act

that generates its own poisonous aftermath; she is eventually literally poisoned, and we do not learn

who the perpetrator is until the final pages of the novel, in which Ruyu reveals that she left a

poisoned drink on her own desk that Shaoai then consumed of her own volition, leaving her "near

blind and with the intelligence of a three-year-old."[212] Rather than an act of revenge that can be

clearly traced to the event of her attack, Ruyu's explication of her actions centers on her desire to be

left alone:

> All I wanted to do was to mind my own business. If there was a poisonous drink I mixed up
> and left on my desk, it was my own business … Shaoai's problem, like many people's, was
> not knowing how *not* to mind other people's business.[213]

In contrast to this direct intrusion, Ruyu locates her actions in a liminal space between the clear

choice and act of poisoning Shaoai and the choice not to. Her indirect act contains a more diffuse

causality and intentionality: she "didn't mean to kill [Shaoai] … Though I should say, I didn't mean

to *not* kill her." Elaborating on this ambivalence further, she reflects, "[b]ut is either statement true?

No, I would say no. I didn't even know if I wanted her to take the poisonous drink or not. She had

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[211] Li, 179.
[212] Ibid., 137.
[213] Ibid., 307.

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drunk it before I made up my mind."[214] In contrast to the politics of overthrow and the forms of direct intervention and harm that Shaoai perpetrates, Ruyu takes an alternative path of total ambivalence and diffused causality that nevertheless enacts harmful consequences but that needs and provides no reasons for these actions. In this diffuseness, the novel evacuates the question of why Ruyu does what she does and thus a straightforward allegorical reading; her complete indifference is the means and the ends, marking a clear departure from personal and political actions that correspond clearly with deep-seated desires and quests for freedom and self-determination. Instead, Ruyu's indifference manifests an overarching approach to the world in which care for the self takes precedence above all else.

In doing so, the novel forces us to weigh the harms that come of direct intervention against those that come from the evacuation of care. These modes map onto the large-scale politics of the Maoist state and revolutionary projects more broadly and of the shift to neoliberal forms of governance and the rise of market forces in everyday life, respectively. Ruyu, for instance, recapitulates neoliberal discourses of personal choice by framing Shaoai's poisoning as a consequence of Shaoai's own choice to drink from a cup that did not clearly belong to her. These large-scale conditions, however, do not linearly produce set subjectivities. Instead, individual modes emerge contingently in conjunction with these conditions. The novel acknowledges both Shaoai's rage and Ruyu's totalized sense of autonomy as attempts to formulate ways of navigating the uncertain circumstances extending from reform era China into the present. While Shaoai's attempt misfires, Ruyu's lack of care for others also offers a way of living on in the world. The novel does not valorize this autonomy; it posits Ruyu as a limit case and one iteration of the multiple affective valences that detachment can carry as a mode of navigating life conditions linked to accelerating

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[214] Ibid., 306.

global neoliberalism in the present. These non-revolutionary, non-humanistic modes are also ways of negotiating the conditions of the world through which a politics of the present must emerge.

Everyday elusions: detachment and ambivalence in U.S. immigrant subjectivities

As adults who immigrate to the contemporary U.S., Ruyu and Moran carry forward this rejection of coherent meaning as a means to refuse the gendered imperatives of national politics in China and the U.S. In the U.S., these modes of ambivalence and detachment allow Ruyu and Moran to contest nation-based logics of U.S. exceptionalism and the false promises of immigrant assimilation and uplift that are the traditional purview of Asian American studies and politics. Li's novel, however, connects emerging contemporary Chinese imaginaries of the nation tied to transnational capital with these U.S.-based discourses. In doing so, Ruyu and Moran's detachment simultaneously contests both.

Though Ruyu and Moran leave China, their geographical remove does not necessarily exempt them from the increasingly transnational nature of these national imaginaries. Chinese families able to produce highly successful children who can receive educations and work abroad are increasingly central to imaginations of China's global economic prowess,[215] while individuals who move abroad but return to work in China remain important for their capacities to labor for national economic growth.[216] Indeed, gendered forms of labor in transnational contexts are sites of national economic and geopolitical contestation between China and U.S. Asian American scholars have elaborated on the Asiatic body's ambivalent association with the economic in dominant U.S.

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[215] Fong, 2-3; Andrew B. Kipnis, *Governing Educational Desire: Culture, Politics, and Schooling in China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 147.
[216] Fong, 6.

imaginations, both as potential individual resources and markets and as economic threats.[217] This

Asiatic economic imagination is shifting in relation to China's growing economic significance.

Though images of Chinese factory workers, who are mostly women, linger, they are also

supplemented by ambivalence over the highly successful transnational students and families that

Chinese discourses promote and valorize. As the imagination of the Asian American model minority

shifts to present a model of families able to produce highly successful children who can navigate the

uncertainties of neoliberal capital and to offer a model to both other minorities and white Americans

alike,[218] this model minority also increasingly converges with model Chinese families. To the extent

that caretaking labor in domestic contexts remains highly gendered, these convergences suggest that

gendered labor within and surrounding the family are sites that can reproduce hegemonic discourses

of China-U.S. contestation. Alternatively, however, they also present sites of potential contestation

that, though not exempt from these dominant structures, suggest diverse alternative modes for

relating to them from within their inhabitation.

As such, they also link subjectivities that emerge from navigating China's economic reform

conditions with immigrant subjectivities in the U.S. Much scholarship in Asian American studies has

considered the changing demographics of Asian America following U.S. immigration reform in

1965,[219] while the demographics of Chinese immigration have also shifted following the beginning of

China's economic reform in 1978.[220] With regard to the post-1978 Chinese diaspora, Min Zhou

argues that the exponential rise in and increased diversity of migrants from China to the U.S. has

come about through a convergence of reformed U.S. immigration policy and China's market reform

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[217] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 10-11; Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015), 129.

[218] Susan Koshy, "Neoliberal Family Matters," in *American Literary History* vol. 25, no .2 (2013): 344.

[219] Min Hyoung Song, *The Children of 1965: On Writing, and Not Writing, as an Asian American* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

[220] Zhou, *Contemporary Chinese America*, 38.

and globalization,[221] which has enabled a segment of this immigrant population to become highly educated and incorporate directly into professional occupations.[222] While economic success marks the most visible of these immigrants and transnational Chinese subjects in dominant U.S. discourses, the women of Li's novel reject the imperative to wealth accumulation that Asian American scholars argue mark model minority discourses of assimilation and transform wide-ranging associations of Asiatic bodies with the economic.[223] At the same time, Ruyu and Moran also refuse coherent assignations of meaning and historicity that would read their daily lives as allegories and reflections of the large-scale Chinese histories they have experienced.[224] The modes of refusal they enact from within circuits of transnational labor and migration between China and the U.S. are markedly devoid of strong affects, aggressive repudiation, or clear political allegiances and motivations. Instead, these modes perform desired forms of stasis marked by detachment, flattened affects, and a focus on the present that is interested only in continuing to live on from day to day and moment to moment without striving for a better future.

To pursue this flatness, Ruyu and Moran refuse the upward mobility and assimilation proffered through sustained commitment to the linked institutions of marriage, citizenship, and prestigious white-collar labor in relation to both China and the U.S. Instead, they choose to remain in gendered caretaking roles that are not institutionally protected in relation to the family and that usually fall to women of color in the U.S.[225] While the young male would-be intellectual of *The Crazed* becomes a neutral cipher within networks of global capital, Li's novel shows how this neutrality is not available to women, whose gendered identities and bodies continuously provide the

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[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid., 49.

[223] Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings*, 129.

[224] Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," 65-88.

[225] Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Introduction, in *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, ed. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 96.

grounds through which dominant discourses of the nation and capital and the material conditions that sustain these discourses are negotiated and reproduced in both China and the U.S. In actively choosing to remain in un-institutionalized and usually more precarious roles, Ruyu and Moran decline to reproduce and advance the interests of dominant national discourses and agendas that are variously tied to these institutions. Though these subject positions remain imbricated in these dominant programs by sustaining the same family and profit-generating structures that reproduce capital for the nation, Ruyu and Moran's ambivalence and detachment also suggest that diverse affective valences and orientations can transform the inhabitation of subject positions otherwise straightforwardly denigrated as non-agentive and can enact some refusal from within these positions. These muted and flattened affects tied to caretaking labor simultaneously help Ruyu and Moran effectively navigate and labor within circuits of transnational neoliberal capital while also refusing to straightforwardly recapitulate and reproduce hegemonic nation-based politics.

In the present, the total ambivalence and indifference that Ruyu embraces in her childhood in Beijing translates into a mode of living within potentially exploitative circumstances that transforms them into manifestations of her own power and agency. Ruyu presents a limit case of flattened uncaring affects that can be present even in relations and labor predicated on taking care of others. In the novel's present, Ruyu is employed by a well-off white woman, Celia, and her family in an ambiguous domestic role that that is characterized primarily by the affective labor Ruyu performs in the form of companionship for Celia. In the past, however, Ruyu has similarly occupied positions usually tied to affective, relational labor to allow her to immigrate to and make a livelihood in the U.S.: the novel reveals that Ruyu married while still in university in China in order to obtain a green card to the U.S., obtained a divorce and married again, and before her current employer, worked for a wealthy man in again an unspecified capacity while having a romantic relationship with him. Ruyu's indifference, however, renders these potentially exploitative circumstances ones in which she

in fact holds the upper hand, a dynamic that the novel suggests through Ruyu's one-sided

relationship with Celia, who is disproportionately invested in Ruyu. After first meeting Ruyu, Celia

resolved to hire her, inexplicably drove hours out of her way, and presented a series of favorable

conditions to entice Ruyu to work for her. In Celia's employment, Ruyu's indifference translates into

a convenient and effective malleability; Ruyu can both sense what others desire of her and perform

these capacities while maintaining her own dismissiveness and detachment. The novel notes the

many roles into which Celia and her wealthy friends project Ruyu: to Celia, "the woman Celia

thought of as Ruby should have unwavering attention as an audience," while to Celia's friends Ruyu

is a "woman of many possibilities: a Mandarin tutor, a reliable house- and pet-sitter, a last-minute

babysitter, a part-time cashier at a confection boutique, an occasional party helper,"[226] the varying

and changing demands of which Ruyu understands clearly and performs successfully.

Ruyu, however, manifests the absence of caring affects even within caretaking relations.

Privately, though Ruyu purports to hold some affection for Celia, she also thinks of her as "[p]oor

gullible Celia" who depends on Ruyu's responsiveness and whom she pities as someone who "cared

too much" about being at the center of everything and thus presents yet another narcissistic contrast

to Ruyu's detachment.[227] Alongside the careful calibration of affect and appearance in which Ruyu

must engage as part of her employment, Celia's dependence on Ruyu's attentiveness and skills also

suggests the extent to which Ruyu exerts influence over and is able to manipulate their relationship

to serve her own interests. Like Jin in *The Crazed*, Ruyu engages in caretaking without the valorized

affective attachments and valences that are tied to gendered domestic care. She deploys these

affective and caretaking practices without sustained affective attachments of any kind to make a life

in the U.S. and, in the process, transforms from within a form of affective labor that numerous

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[226] Li, 29.
[227] Ibid., 263.

scholars have identified as central to global capital, disrupting these gendered associations with nurturing on the one side and vulnerability on the other.

Like Ruyu, the circumstances of Shaoai's poisoning have also shaped Moran's relationship to indifference in the present. Before Shaoai was poisoned, Moran had seen Ruyu take a test tube of a chemical from the lab of their friend's chemistry professor mother, and when the doctors discover that Shaoai's symptoms increasingly converge with an earlier case of poisoning, Moran feels compelled to reveal this information to Shaoai's parents and the police. As a result, the doctors administered the antidote and saved Shaoai's life, but her brain damage had already progressed to the extent that she was left "near blind and with the intelligence of a three-year-old."[228] Moran speaks out of a sense of moral responsibility, that they "can't sit here, doing nothing,"[229] a sentiment that Ruyu counters through her paradigm of indifference: "Why? What's wrong with doing nothing? The world would be a better place if people did less."[230] When Moran remains resolved to act, she senses that Ruyu looks at her with a "mixture of pity, derision, and curiosity," which years later Moran can only interpret as "Ruyu's tepid effort to save Moran from taking a wrong turn."[231] Indeed, Moran has regretted her actions ever since, and "[o]ver the years, "had never stopped imagining that alternative of *not speaking*,"[232] in which case "Shaoai would have died young, a heroine whose death could be explained only by fate,"[233] through which Moran believes the circumstances of her death would eventually become closed rather than remaining an open mystery and prolonged case of suffering and caretaking labor for both Shaoai and her family. Like Ruyu, Moran thus comes

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[228] Li, 137.
[229] Ibid., 255.
[230] Ibid.
[231] Ibid., 256.
[232] Ibid., 256; italics in original.
[233] Ibid.

to perceive the unforeseen consequences of intervention, but unlike Ruyu's turn to total indifference, Moran desires to care but remains fearful of intervention's consequences.

This fearful desire to care, but not too much, manifests in Moran's approach to the routines of daily life. As a highly-educated immigrant, Moran has a doctorate in chemistry and works in a lab for a pharmaceutical company in the U.S. Rather than a prestigious and well-paying career, however, she "occupied a small testing room alone," and, in spite of her extensive qualifications, "her work did not require much skill beyond a tolerance for tedium" and provided only and exactly what she needs: "a stable livelihood, and a reason to be in America."[234] Moran thus expresses a desired stagnation that allows her only to continue living from day to day rather than to pursue goals of economic success and immigrant uplift. In her daily life, she applies the same sterilized laboratory methodology to the quarantine of her life at large. She "lived alone in a rental," in an "uncluttered space where, other than a few pieces of impersonal furniture from IKEA, a small collection of objects kept her company."[235]

Moran's careful quarantine of her daily life extends to her treatment of her memories and relationships. Rather than allow her parents to visit her where she lives, Moran pays for them to meet her on vacations elsewhere so that her old life never mixes with the present.[236] When Moran receives a call from her parents informing her of Shaoai's death, she carefully shuts the door to separate the objects of her life from the contents of the call, so that "[l]ater she would not once think of them as burdened witnesses of a death from a distant past."[237] The objects of her life thus take on the neutral and ahistorical sense of laboratory objects that are carefully sterilized and kept in a hermetic environment, through which Moran careful refuses imperatives to recapitulate the past

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[234] Ibid., 59.
[235] Ibid., 54.
[236] Ibid., 57-8.
[237] Ibid., 55.

and to reproduce the conditions of futurity rooted in progress. She explicitly rejects the concept of moving forward or moving on,[238] not by dwelling in the past but by deliberately remaining rooted in the present. While Moran cares too much to achieve total indifference, she is able to cultivate a second-best daily practice of refusal:

> [i]f forgetting is the art of eliminating a person, a place, from one's history, Moran knew she would never become a master at it. Rather, she was like a diligent craftsman, and never gave up a moment of vigilance in practicing the lesser art of not looking back, not thinking about the past.[239]

Her sense of history is thus negative. While Moran cannot achieve the ideal of complete "forgetting" and thus total indifference, Moran must actively "practice[e]" the daily acts of "not looking" and "not thinking" as a deliberately cultivated myopic presentism that quarantines herself both from the determining historicity that might be imposed on her life through her experience in China and from the injunction to assimilate into American life.

Accordingly, though Moran was once briefly married, she expressed an "adamant disinterestedness in motherhood" and,[240] despite her husband's affection for her and hope for their relationship, she herself hoped only that Josef's previous happy marriage that ended when his wife died would be "enough of a sheltering shadow for [Moran] to be nothing more than a replacement" while never attaining the full intimacy of romantic partnership or full legitimacy as a wife.[241] Moran would frequently imagine a life apart even during her marriage, and she remarks from the present of the novel, after they are divorced, that "the life imagined in the kitchen of Josef's house was not far from what Moran conducted now: loneliness and solitude had been rehearsed while she chopped vegetables."[242] Moran's active creation of "loneliness and solitude" in the midst of domestic

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238 Ibid., 238.
239 Ibid., 136.
240 Ibid., 64.
241 Ibid., 127.
242 Ibid., 69.

belonging enacts a refusal to desire the fantasy of assimilation. Much like her work in the laboratory and her quarantine of the objects in her own home, her bodily orchestrations in the contexts of everyday life allow Moran to exercise the perpetual deferrals and refusals that enable her to refuse the impositions of historicity and the false promises of future belonging. When Josef becomes ill, Moran cannot stop herself from going to him to take care of him, though she acknowledges that she does so more for herself than out of his necessity. She does so, however, from the safe distance of friendship from which there is no question of Moran ever desiring a relational progression to romance, again formulating a provisional means of caring but not too much.

Like Jian in *The Crazed*, Ruyu and Moran thus formulate forms of detachment in China in the wake of Tiananmen that carry them into the contemporary U.S. and enable them to refuse narratives of immigrant uplift, progress, and assimilation. The forms of flatness these figures deploy elaborate the gendered modes through which they are able to flexibly adapt to the conditions of neoliberal capital they must navigate while simultaneously refusing full affective commitment to reproducing dominant discourses and structures of the nation and capital across China and the U.S. As they exist in the world, they are modes through which an emergent politics of the present that considers their historical particularities must travel. In contemporary China, this ambivalence becomes a healthful, embodied orientation that is actively cultivated through health practices. This embodied, affective orientation accommodates the incommensurability between the bewildering scale of change in China's reform trajectory, ongoing uncertainty and contingency in the present, and hopes for a stable and prosperous future, to which I turn next.

Chapter 2

Literary and Ethnographic Narratives of World-Making: Affects and Attunement in

Contemporary Beijing

As my readings of *The Crazed* and *Kinder Than Solitude* suggest, ambivalence and detachment are also nonvalorized modes of continuing to live on amidst fundamentally destabilizing large-scale change while refusing the hegemonic imperatives of nation-based politics. The characters that I explore do not relate to structure through revolutionary modes; indeed, the possibilities of revolution are thoroughly foreclosed. Instead, the mundane everyday becomes the site through which reckoning with and adjustment to ongoing contingency is negotiated. Building on this analysis, this chapter turns to ethnographic research to suggest linkages between this diasporic Chinese imagination of everyday modes and forms of embodiment that emerge in everyday engagements with health in contemporary China. This chapter considers literature's engagement with conditions in the world in direct conversation with the narrativized experiences of individuals who live these conditions in order to bring together mutual concerns in anthropology and literary studies with the text's relationship to a given world. There remains ongoing conversation in both fields concerning the status of literature's relationship to reality and the consequences of literary engagement in the world. While anthropologists interested in experimental forms of ethnographic writing draw on literature and literary elements, questions of form and genre remain largely uninterrogated and in need of nuance. Meanwhile, literary critics who call for more expanded considerations of literary interpretation beyond a "hermeneutics of suspicion" are building theorizations of textual engagement that draw on phenomenological, embodied, and affective approaches that intersect with anthropological analysis that foregrounds materiality and embodied, intersubjective constructions of lived social worlds. This theoretical conversation can be augmented,

I suggest, through sustained interrogations of textuality in direct relation to lived experiences and events in the world. I seek to contribute to these discussions of narrative and textuality's relationship to lived events in both literary studies and anthropology by suggesting how the methods of both fields might be productively brought together.

This chapter takes my consideration of the texts in chapter one and original ethnographic analysis as a case study. I place my attention to affect and embodiment in the first chapter in direct conversation with ethnographic interviews on health and the body as an adaptive mechanism for large-scale historical change. Over the course of five months in 2017, I conducted ethnographic interviews on popular conceptions of health and wellbeing in Beijing, China who self-identified as participating in the popular health and wellbeing discourse of *yangsheng* (养生). Ambivalence in both the literary and ethnographic narratives emerges as an adaptive strategy that encompasses multiply nuanced affective valences and myriad practices and contains the flexibility to adjust to the unexpected. I seek to place the negative valences of the novel in direct conversation with the more overtly positive stances of wellbeing to suggest a broadened and more nuanced consideration of ambivalence as an ongoing adaptive strategy that attends the uncertainties and changes of post-reform China into the contemporary moment. Unsettling neutrality and negativity in the novels are in ethnographic narratives constructed as more positively-inflected notions of balance, equilibrium, and mildness necessary for adapting to ongoing changes in large-scale social and life circumstances. Finally, this chapter also seeks to make an intervention in the study of narratives in the medical and health humanities. Rather than straightforward divisions between narratives of health and pathological illness, this joint literary and anthropological analysis suggests how narratives that attend embodied, everyday negotiations of wellness in relation to large-scale social circumstances

blur these boundaries and articulate how individual health is imagined in relation to these social and material environments.

This chapter suggests that interrogating these forms of narrative together as coeval interpretations of the world draws out the shared kinship between differently affectively-inflected modes and holds the potential to disrupt normative and hierarchical understandings of orientations and behaviors. Rather than pathological and normatively healthy ways of orienting to and being in the world that lend themselves to straightforward conceptions of political subjectivity and agency, this chapter proposes that expanded considerations of narrative that are attuned to affect and embodiment can suggest non-categorizing ways of making room for and recognizing the usefulness of a multiplicity of shifting, contingent relations to lived circumstances.

Questions of genre: Narrative in literature and anthropology

Literary studies and anthropology have long been entangled. From the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss, which drew on structural linguistics to interpret cultural phenomena as a code for underlying meaning, subsequent anthropologists from Clifford Geertz to the post-structuralists who came after him have increasingly attended to the subjective and highly variable nature of ethnographic interpretation. Building on Geertz's call for a methodology of "thick description" to convey the "texture" of culture,[243] poststructuralists have increasingly considered culture as situated discourses that emerge contingently in relation to particular subject positions and sociocultural and historical circumstances. Rather than a single unified truth that can be empirically verified, poststructuralists considered the cultural discourses they studied as reflections of partiality and positionality and the acts of ethnographic observation and writing as themselves necessarily reflective of this partiality.

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[243] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

Even as anthropologists began to take seriously this interrogation of writing as a situated practice that engages partial truths, however, there remain unresolved anxieties in the field about the concrete consequences of literary writing in the world, and these concerns in fact dovetail with similar concerns in certain strains of literary studies. In her overview of theoretical turns in anthropology, Sherry Ortner notes that materialists primarily concerned with the concrete workings of power viewed the treatment of culture as "literary text" as "effete."[244] Ortner's observation resonates directly with anxieties about textuality that also attended the 1987 publication of James Clifford and George E. Marcus's seminal volume *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, which is widely cited as central to inaugurating a "literary turn" in anthropology that has persisted into the present. In a 1987 review, anthropologist Bob Scholte asserts that Marcus's afterword reflects on how attention to textual practice and subjectivity may be self-serving for anthropologists advancing their academic careers at a moment in which textuality is in vogue. As Scholate argues, "spinning textual tapestries inspired by native designs does not, of course, guarantee a moral center. In fact, the latter threatens to disappear from anthropological praxis altogether," while "[p]olitics may become merely academic—literally so."[245] Marcus's afterword, however, asserts that expanded considerations of ethnographic practice in the profession is "by no means a hermetic or naïve enterprise, as some may fear, since the concern of much contemporary literary criticism is to expose the historical and political contexts of writing—precisely the dimensions ethnography of an interpretive bent has long been criticized for eliding or skirting."[246] While Marcus certainly attends to dominant forms of ethnographic writing throughout an anthropologist's career, a closer reading of

[244] Sherry Ortner, "Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*. 6.1 (2016)."

[245] Bob Scholte, "Review Article: The Literary Turn in Contemporary Anthropology (*Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford and George E. Marcus (eds)). *Critique of Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1987), 40.

[246] George E. Marcus, "Afterword: Ethnographic Writing and Anthropological Careers," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 266.

the afterword suggests that Scholte's criticism and concerns are perhaps much more his own rather than directly attributable to the volume.

Despite these projected anxieties, strains of the unresolved question of what literary writing can do in the world can also be found in *Writing Culture*. Clifford's introduction acknowledges criticisms of paradigms that overly privilege form and textuality. As Clifford notes, "[t]extual, epistemological questions are sometimes thought to be paralyzing, abstract, dangerously solipsistic,"[247] and he later repeats that "extreme self-consciousness certainly has its dangers—of irony, of elitism, of solipsism."[248] Clifford's assertions about the status of the literary, poetry or prose, suggest that with their claim of opening up ethnography as a "hybrid" genre entails confrontations and uncertainty with how these various genres relate to one another and with actions, events, and individuals in the world. These critiques and anxieties about textuality's ineffectualness resonate with anxieties within literary studies more broadly. Clifford asserts that "[e]thnography is moving into areas long occupied by sociology, the novel, or avant-garde cultural critique,"[249] and Clifford's pre-emptive counters to critiques of ineffectualness and solipsism point to these already-existing critiques in relation to avant-garde and experimental literature.[250] Indeed, the emphasis on writing practice in anthropology coincided with a turn to discourse analysis in literary studies in the wake of poststructuralist theories that located text within its historical and sociocultural contexts, including New Historicist and cultural studies approaches. Writing on literature and anthropology in 1996, literary scholar Jeffrey M. Peck notes that poststructuralism "and its insistence on textuality and feminism, its preoccupation with patriarchy and logocentrism and minority discourse/ethnic studies, and its attention to power, authority, and hierarchies turned the activity of those who were

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[247] Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture*, 24-5.
[248] Ibid., 25.
[249] Ibid., 23.
[250] See, for instance, considerations of the avant-garde in Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

trained in the literary disciplines into a revitalized project" that had historical and cultural relevancy.[251] This ability for literary texts to speak to culture and literary studies' and anthropology's mutual emphasis on "textuality and the potential to textualize or read all situations as a text made it possible for anthropologists and cultural critics to meet in the same cultural domain, albeit using different resources and methods."[252] More recent attention to incorporating literary elements in ethnography continue to build on the investments articulated in Clifford and Marcus's volume and stress the centrality of the literary to writing processes that are self-reflexive and aware of their positioning within structures of power. The introduction to a 2012 collaborative project between the journal *Cultural Anthropology* and *American Short Fiction* provides an overview of literary anthropology that stresses that the "epistemic crisis of cultural representation that was brought to the fore by post-colonial literary theory and the politics of racial difference and gender recognition, these anthropologists sought to redefine both the poetics and the politics of ethnography."[253]

While anthropologists are continuing to grapple with the possibilities and methods of textual practice, there remains a tendency in anthropological writing to treat literary texts as cultural artifacts from which meaning can be uncovered in a hermeneutic tradition; for instance, numerous volumes on literature and anthropology spanning the 1980s to the 2000s consider texts as cultural artifacts that correspond directly to conditions in the world.[254] Returning to Clifford and Marcus's volume, however, suggests more rigorous questions of form and genre that remain open-ended. The

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[251] Jeffrey M. Peck, "Introduction," in *Culture/Contexture: Explorations in Anthropology and Literary Studies*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel and Jeffrey M. Peck. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 18.

[252] Ibid., 20.

[253] Collaborative project between Cultural Anthropology and American Short Fiction on "Literature, Writing, and Anthropology"; Darren Byler and Shannon Dugan-Iverson, "Introduction to Literature, Writing & Anthropology: A Curated Collection of Five *Cultural Anthropology* Articles," in *Cultural Anthropology* (2012).

[254] *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); *Culture/Contexture*, ed. Daniel and Peck; Rose De Angelis, "Introduction," *Between Anthropology and Literature: Interdisciplinary Discourse*, ed. Rose De Angelis (London and New York: Routledge, 2002); Introduction, *Literary Anthropology: A New Interdisciplinary Approach to People, Signs and Literature*, ed. Fernando Poyatos (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988); Jürgen Schlaeger, "Cultural Poetics or Literary Anthropology?" in *Aesthetics and Contemporary Discourse*, *REAL: Yearbook of Research in English and American Literature* Volume 10, ed. Herbert Grabes, Winfried Fluck, and Jürgen Schlaeger (Tübingen: Gunter Varr Verlag, 1993).

question of what constitutes a "realist" account is, as Clifford asserts, "now a matter of both theoretical debate and practical experimentation,"[255] and his own engagement with realism and genre is unresolved. Clifford's brief reflections on poetry are also revealing of these generic tensions. At the close of his introduction, he asserts that to "recognize the poetic dimensions of ethnography does not require one give up facts and accurate accounting for the supposed free play of poetry." Indeed, Clifford asserts that "'poetry' is not limited to romantic or modernist subjectivism: it can be historical, precise, objective" and "just as conventional and institutionally determined as 'prose.'" At the same time, Clifford's counter to accusations of solipsism is to assert that sustained theorization and the rigorous practice of ethnography are not mutually exclusive: "In practice [...] such questions do not necessarily inhibit those who entertain them from producing truthful, realistic accounts."[256] The authors of the volume are not, Clifford asserts, claiming that all standards of ethnography are relative, though they simultaneously also do not specify what the standards of "truthful" and "realistic" might be. Clifford then turns to a distinction between literature and writing that ambiguously locates the literary in relation to ethnography. He asserts that ethnography is a "hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines. The essays in this volume do not claim ethnography is 'only literature.' They do insist it is always writing."[257]

More recent conversations in anthropology center on the tension between conceptions of truth and the real to which Clifford also refers. An introduction to a collaborative project between *Cultural Anthropology* and *American Short Fiction* suggests that the literary elements allow for greater attention to the experiential dimensions of both the anthropologist and participants; it notes the "similarities between the worlds of literary anthropology and fiction: both genres are able to reveal

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[255] Clifford, "Introduction," in *Writing Culture*, 25.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid., 26.

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more of the desire, emotionality, and vulnerability of their authors and subjects."[258] Didier Fassin,

however, argues against what he perceives as a popular perception in anthropology that literature

and literary approaches speak more clearly to truth.[259] Fassin asserts that ethnography has a

particular approach to truth that derives from the anthropologist's particular perspective on that

which they have "empirically" determined. Anthropologists "can only access certain forms of truth,

which they know are never definitive or absolute," but the "fragments they gather in complement

with the layers they identify produce a specific approach to the truth of life and lives."[260] They

produce this truth through the widened and critical perspective that their position entails: by

> [t]aking the liberty to explore beyond what the subjects of their research know and tell, they
> bring together biographies and history, story-telling and political economy, the text of the
> narratives they collect and the context in which they are inserted, the empirical facts they
> observe and the theoretical frames with which they interpret them.[261]

While this is certainly an act of authority, Fassin argues that "[i]t might therefore be preferable to

acknowledge the authority one has rather than deny it—and consider the ethical and political

consequences of being granted this authority."[262] Fassin's assertions of ethnography's claim to truth

again highlight both the need to reconcile the anthropologist's particular subject position and

interpretation with an empirical world as well as the indeterminate status of literature's relationship

to the world. Fassin argues that there is room in ethnographic interpretation both for the

anthropologist to consider and analyze elements that have been "elided" in an informant's narrative

and the informant's own formulation of events.[263] Unlike literature, however, which claims no

fidelity to empirical events, "ethnography's reliance only on facts that can be said to have 'really'

happened and are regarded as such by the public is essential not only for the ethos of the researcher

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[258] Byler and Dugan-Iverson, "Introduction to Literature, Writing & Anthropology."

[259] Didier Fassin, "True life, real lives: Revising the boundaries between ethnography and fiction," in *American Ethnologist: Journal of the American Ethnological Society* vol. 41 no. 1 (2014), 53.

[260] Ibid., 49.

[261] Ibid.

[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid.,

but also for the impact his or her writing may have."[264] That an ethnography "corresponds to what was observed or told—and differentiating between the two—is crucial in defining the passage from fieldwork to writing and in establishing the credibility of a text" and "gives ethnography a form of authority that has important ethical and political consequences."[265]

While conversations about literary ethnography center around the issue of "truth" and whether literary writing has some purchase on truth that, unlike ethnography, is not necessarily based in concrete observations of the world, I would like to suggest that we can begin to address these uncertainties through more nuanced attention to common questions between literary criticism and ethnographic practice. Rather than generalizations about the nature of literary writing and a largely uninterrogated sense of "truth," I suggest that attention to how particular narrative forms and genres relate to the given, physical world can help to clarify and suggest intersections between literary and ethnographic projects. In particular, I would like to consider whether it is possible to move our analysis away from a paradigm of truth versus the real to one that considers how narratives construct and communicate a stance or stances towards given environments and events. What might we gain if we approach the concept of the world through these stances and see these orientations as themselves constituting worlds? This emphasis on worldly orientations is not to suggest that everything is relative and thus holds the same political consequences. Instead, I would argue that this approach in fact allows for more rigorous and non-hierarchical interrogations of the lived consequences that emerge in the intersections between multiple empirical, structural, subjectively experienced, and narratively constructed worlds that are all simultaneously both real and true. Rather than positing a truth or reality that exists elsewhere to these constructions, the

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[264] Ibid., 52.
[265] Ibid., 52-3.

constructed relations between these worlds and the consequences that these constructions hold for the other worlds with which they coexist become the objects of analysis and reflection.

This chapter places literary and anthropological engagements with world-making in conversation with one another. Recent anthropological studies of narratives in everyday lives call attention to its multiple intersecting dimensions that gesture to different meanings, rather than always constituting a coherent whole. As anthropologists note, to live in the world is to constantly be engaged in the act of remaking one's sense of both the world and oneself through narration. I draw on considerations of narration in anthropology that explore its embodied and indeterminate dimensions, which resonates directly with the investments of literary studies to hold open rather than close down and fully determine interpretation. While incorporating poetry and fiction into ethnography is commonplace, this incorporation typically takes the shape of epigraphs meant to gesture to content or meaning, which are not then analyzed in the body of the ethnography, or forms of evidence to support theorizations that are already fully developed through ethnographic analysis. Studies at the intersections of literature and anthropology have not fully explored how literary criticism might be methodologically useful for developing analytic frames for considering orientations to the world in conjunction with ethnographic practice, rather than as pieces of supportive evidence.

To consider analytic methods that draw on both literary and anthropological approaches, I build on and seek to extend a variety of work in both anthropology and literary studies concerned with the relations between a narrative and the world. As the authors in Clifford and Marcus's volume and many subsequent ethnographers note, the writing of ethnography is itself a world-making activity in that the culture it represents is necessarily always a partial interpretation and thus itself a new creation and orientation to the world. In the introduction to a 2013 volume on literary

anthropology, Marilyn Cohen draws on George Eliot's conception of the literary as engaged in a

"veracious imagination" and quotes Eliot at length:

> By veracious imagination, I mean the working out in detail of the various steps by which a political or social change was reached, using all extant evidence and supplying deficiencies by careful analogical creation. How triumphant opinions originally spread; how institutions arose; what were the conditions of great inventions, discovered or theoretic conceptions; what circumstances affecting individual lots are attendant on the decay of long-established systems… I want something different from the abstract treatment which belongs to grave history from a doctrinal point of view, and something different from the schemed picturesqueness of ordinary historical fiction. I want briefly, severely conscientious reproductions, in their concrete incidents, of pregnant movements in the past.[266]

Cohen's reference to Eliot again calls up questions of genre in relation to Eliot's realism and in fact

asserts an expansion of generic considerations with regard to how anthropologists view ostensibly

"realist" writing. Eliot's realism is widely considered in literary historical analyses to be deeply

intertwined with and advancing certain reflections on the world, as Eliot's own formulation of

"veracious imagination" suggests. Realism in a literary sense is thus not a transcription of worldly

events but entails formal and imaginative experiments that must nevertheless make clear that the

world to which they are speaking is a world that is already in existence.

Eric Hayot's imagination of genre as worlding is illuminating for considering expanded

formulations of reality and truth. Hayot proposes that reconsidering texts through foregrounding

their orientations to the world upon which they reflect and the formal elements that contribute to

the creation of these orientations can disrupt hegemonic textual groupings along historical and

national lines.[267] Hayot proposes that rather than considering realism as a distinct and unified literary

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[266] Eliot in Marilyn Cohen, "Introduction: Anthropological Aspects of the Novel," in *Novel Approaches to Anthropology: Contributions to Literary Anthropology*, ed. Marilyn Cohen (New York: Lexington Books, 2013), 4.

[267] Eric Hayot, *On Literary Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012). Hayot's study of literary worlds argues that attention to aesthetic forms as orientations to the world, rather than a modernist, linear conception of literary development that must necessarily always place texts from other parts of the world behind the "innovations" of Euroamerican authors. Both Hayot's and Pheng Cheah's engagements with the concept of world literature stem from disputes with an earlier tendency to treat the "world" as a spatial network defined by network theory, globalization, and a global marketplace (see works by David Damrosch, Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti). In contrast, both Hayot and Cheah call for more nuanced interrogation of the concept of "world" in distinction from this networked space. For instance, in discussing world literature as world-making, Pheng Cheah defines the "world as an ongoing, dynamic

historical category, it is fruitful to consider "what *kinds of realism there are*, opening up inside the field

of realism [and other literary categories] as a world-oriented aesthetic an analytic category that allows

us to describe new kinds of difference and similarity."[268] Hayot specifies that

> [t]o be oriented toward a world-view (or by it) does not necessarily mean agreeing with it.
> 'Modern' works would not therefore necessarily replicate the world-view, acting as vehicles
> for the representation of the geometrization of space, time, and so on. But they would
> *respond* to that view; they would position themselves in relation to it, interact with it in some
> way. At a bare minimum they would take its status and stature for granted.[269]

Realism as a stance towards the world, which Hayot distinguishes with a capital "R" from realism

the historical category, "is empirical and world-affirming;" it "frames, conceptualizes, and

normalizes the cultural experience of a period," and these orientations emerge both thematically and

formally.[270] The "force of Realism at any given moment lies in its reproduction of the formal

properties that govern the normative view that it reflects and responds to,"[271] though it can affirm

the dominant worldview in a variety of ways. Realism with a capital "R" is therefore "not the

product of a particular historical consciousness—it is a possibility inherent in a system of meaning

organized around a world-view."[272] Hayot states that the "trajectory of world-oriented Realism is not

toward an ever-increasingly accurate representation of reality but toward the *continuingly* accurate

production, and reproduction, of the social and ideological norms of its world-picture," in other

words, towards the production and reproduction of a stance towards the world.

    Alongside Realism, Hayot also identifies Romanticism and Modernism as two dominant

world-orientations in modern texts that can also blend with one another. Hayot designates

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process of becoming, something continually made and remade rather than a spatial-geographical entity" (Cheah, *What is
a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016)), while Hayot asserts that
"worldedness emerges as the unconscious of the work, as the establishing framework for the unmentioned rules that
constitute the work as a total whole" (Hayot 54).

[268] Hayot, 46; italics in text.

[269] Ibid., 118.

[270] Ibid., 124.

[271] Ibid., 127.

[272] Ibid., 125.

Romanticism as an orientation as "world-creating": "[i]n it the particular limits of the modern's empirical reality—its 'content,' from one perspective—are tested, reshaped, and reimagined." By "illuminating the world's limitations, it envisions its uniqueness, and thus the possibility of its transformation, alteration, or loss":

> [b]y not taking the world for granted, Romance restores to world the idea of its being a work; and if the world is a work, then it has been (and can be) made. Romantic works thus make visible the world's *contingency*. That is why Romance is the mode of the political and the politically possible.[273]

Hayot is careful to note that "there is never in the art work such a thing as a pure Realism or a pure Romance." Their difference "may simply involve a shift in the emphasis of certain formal features, rather than a wholesale disappearance of one or the other mode."[274] Finally, Modernism is "world-denying" in modernity and reflects "situations—no longer worlds—in which no single shared experience dominates, in which communication becomes cacophony."[275] A work of pure Modernism would "assert a total ontological rejection of the normative worldview of its era. To do its job perfectly well, it would have to be incomprehensible, not even recognizable as a work of art."[276] Hayot's conception of Modernism, then, is a "limit" that much Euroamerican modernism does not reach, tending instead in either Realist (world-affirming) or Romantic (world-altering) directions.[277] In Hayot's formulation, it is therefore possible for these orientations towards the world to mix; for instance, a "Realistic Romanticism" reflects a "socially acceptable transformation of the real," and "[i]nsofar as the great historical realisms of nineteenth-century European fiction—Dickens, Stendhal, Dostoyevsky—produce a near-total or perfect version of what we think of today as reality, they do so by openly *imagining* that reality into being."[278] I thus take Hayot's sense of

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[273] Ibid., 129.
[274] Ibid., 130.
[275] Ibid., 131.
[276] Ibid., 132.
[277] Ibid.
[278] Ibid., 139.

"worlding" to suggests that a text's orientation *is* its world, though this world nevertheless has an undeniable and formal relationship to the physical world.

Taking the concept of worlding as an intersection between literary studies and anthropology opens the space to consider how different narratives imagine and evoke stances that constitute worlds and how these worlds can be considered alongside one another rather than along a hierarchy of "truth" and "realism" that becomes stagnated in indefinable abstract terms. Hayot writes that attending to the world-orientations of texts does not suggest that

> the work of art always 'discovers' society or the world, that it is invariably ahead of the imaginative curve whereby the social comes to be represented to (versions of) itself. We can only say that the artwork encodes and makes legible a set of relations that are expressions of a world-view in whose origin, conceptualization, and transcendence works of art themselves play a vital role—and to which, through the commitment to making, the aesthetic will have a privileged and shared relationship.[279]

These textual "expressions of a world-view" thus "demonstrate[] art's coevality and engagement with the historical, and confirms its imaginative power and its verdant social force."[280] Hayot's elaboration of genre as world-orienting suggests the beginnings of a project that brings together and considers the relations between a variety of worldly orientations that can be considered with joint literary and anthropological methods beyond hermeneutic interpretations of text and culture. Expanded and evolving literary critical analyses of the relationship between narrative, genre, and lived worlds can, along with ethnographic attention to materiality and the multiple dimensions of embodied narratives, productively build tools for considering the relations between worlds of interpretation and their consequences for one another.

This attention to the worlds that narratives evoke resonates with ongoing work in literary studies, anthropology, and in the medical and health humanities to rigorously interrogate relationships between narratives and lived worlds. Literary scholar Brooke Thomas draws on

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[279] Ibid., 144.
[280] Ibid.

Wolfgang Iser, an important figure in developing the concept of the imagination in literary anthropology, to argue that literary studies must also attend to the phenomenological, imaginative dimensions of engaging with literature.[281] Thomas argues that literary critical studies that are heavily historicist continue to grapple with a "daunting methodological problem: What, if anything, do literary and especially fictional representations adequately represent?"[282] Thomas argues that in order to undertake a "truly literary history rather than one that uses works of literature to reflect (accurately or ideologically) historical forces that we know about primarily from having read other, nonliterary, works," literary scholars must attend to "Iser's reminder that works of literature do not represent an already existing empirical world,"[283] but rather imaginative engagements with the world that themselves participate in the possibility of "help[ing] to realize something that does not yet exist."[284] Thomas's elaboration of Iser and the explicit connection Thomas makes to other considerations of "world-making" projects resonates directly with and suggests extensions of Hayot's concept of literary worlding as acts that have lived consequences in the world.[285]

Thomas's argument thus suggests that engagement with the worldly orientations of literature can also generate lived worlds, an implication that resonates with calls to take seriously a range of engagements with literature beyond the "hermeneutics of suspicion" that has come to dominate

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[281] See Wolfgang Iser, *The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[282] Brook Thomas, "'The Fictive and the Imaginary: Charting Literary Anthropology,' or, What's Literature Have to Do with It?" in *American Literary History* vol. 20, issue 3 (2008), 499.

[283] Ibid., 628.

[284] Ibid., 625; Thomas quotes Iser at length to elaborate on the relationship between the fictive, imaginary, and the real. According to Iser, the "time-honored opposition between fiction and reality has to be discarded and replaced by a triad, the real, the fictional and the imaginary"; "Within this context, the act of fictionalizing is seen as a constant crossing of boundaries between the real and the imaginary. By transforming reality into something which is not part of the world reproduced, reality's determinacy is outstripped; by endowing the imaginary with a determinate gestalt, its diffuseness is transformed" (Iser in Thomas, 626).

[285] Ibid., 626. Thomas cites Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's consideration of queer worlds, which argues that queer world-making is an ongoing and fragile process in which cultural forms actively participate, rather than a concept of a social world as inherently self-reproducing (Lauren Berlant and Warner, "Sex in Public," in *Critical Inquiry* vol. 24, no. 2 (1998): 561).

literary criticism. Eve Sedgwick, for instance, calls for more "reparative" modes of reading,[286] while

Rita Felski argues that taking phenomenology seriously in literary studies enables a consideration of

how literature functions in its contemporary social context in relation to the lived experiences of its

readers. Rather than Iser's sense of imagination and other phenomenological variations of reader-

response theory, which Felski argues "assume a highly formalist model of aesthetic response as a

universal template for talking about how readers respond to books," Felski stresses a

phenomenological engagement with the literary that can consider the contingent and indeterminate

intersections between "ordinary structures of experience that are also political, philosophical, and

aesthetic concepts fanning out into complex histories."[287] Felski argues that "[e]veryday attitudes"

towards literature are thus "neither invalidated (as they are in poststructuralism and much political

criticism) nor are they taken as self-explanatory (as in humanist criticism)." Instead, they become

"worthy of investigation in all their many-sidedness."[288] Meanwhile, in the growing field of the

critical medical and health humanities, numerous scholars call for engagements with the humanities

and literature beyond straightforward applications of teaching empathy to doctors.[289] Ann Jurecic

specifically identifies illness narratives as a site through which to contest a dominant critical mode of

suspicion in literary scholarship. Jurecic calls attention to the pervasiveness of a hermeneutics of

suspicion that discounts the availability of authentic lived experience in autobiographical or life

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[286] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

[287] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 17.

[288] Ibid.; Felski identifies recognition, enchantment, knowledge, and shock as various "ordinary" dimensions of responses to literature. Across these dimensions, Felski emphasizes that phenomenological approaches enable a consideration of the complex incoherences, limits, and alienations that are interfused with moments that might present clarity or relational identification.

[289] Megan Boler, "The risks of empathy: Interrogating multiculturalism's gaze," in *Cultural Studies* vol. 11, no. 2 (1997): 253-73; Delese Wear and Julie M. Aultman, "The limits of narrative: medical student resistance to confronting inequality and oppression in literature and beyond," in *Medical Education* 39, no. 10 (2005): 1056-1065; Rebecca Garden, "The Problem of Empathy: Medicine and the Humanities," in *New Literary History* vol. 38, no. 3 (2007): 551-67; Rebecca Garden, "Distance Learning: Empathy and Culture in Junot Diaz's 'Wildwood,'" in *Journal of Medical Humanities* vol. 34, no. 4 (2013): 439-50; Claire Hooker, "Understanding empathy: why phenomenology and hermeneutics can help medical education and practice," in *Medical Health Care and Philosophy* vol. 18, no. 4 (2015): 541-552.

writing.[290] In contrast to this critical mode, Jurecic engages with various literary scholars such as

Sedgwick, Felski, and Paul Ricoeur to consider other possible reading practices, such as reparative

and phenomenological approaches and those that emphasize the "ordinary" ways that readers might

engage with texts.[291] These emphases on phenomenological and subjective lived relations to texts

emphasize that the varied ways in which these relations, which involve difficulty and confusion as

well as identification, suggest different ways for being in the world.

Converging with this relatively recent articulation of an expanded attention to narrative in

literary studies and the critical medical humanities, a large body of medical anthropology also

examines the ways in which illness experience and everyday social worlds inform one another

through narrative. Medical anthropologists Cheryl Mattingly and Linda Garro point to "how

narratives from healers and patients serve to illuminate aspects of practices and experiences that

surround illness but might not otherwise be recognized."[292] They cite proponents of integrating life

narratives with clinical encounters and illness experience such as Oliver Sacks, Arthur Kleinman,

Arthur Frank, and Rita Charon,[293] and Mattingly and Garro, as well as recent scholars in the medical

and health humanities, build on and expand Kleinman, Frank, and Charon's focus on first-person

illness narratives. Mattingly and Garro attend to how narratives about and surrounding illness are

themselves forms of action that shape and are enfolded into everyday life and therefore help

elucidate illness in contexts intersecting with and exceeding the explicitly biomedical.[294] The study of

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[290] Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 3.

[291] Ibid., 3, 93.

[292] Cheryl Mattingly and Linda C. Garro, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," in *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, ed. Cheryl Mattingly and Linda C. Garro (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 5.

[293] Ibid., 8-9; The writers in this volume foreground illness experience in the broader contexts of patients' lives and worldviews rather than standardized explanatory models of biomedicine. In doing so, they also argue that patient narratives about illness, including written and verbalized testimonials, are integral to understanding the sociocultural and personal significances of illness as well as to the healing process. See also Arthur Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Arthur Kleinman, *Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing, and the Human Condition* (New York: Basic Books, 1988); Oliver Sacks, *Awakenings* (New York: Vintage Books, 2013).

[294] Mattingly and Garro, "Narrative as Construct and Construction," 17.

narrative is thus an "investigation of social life as an interplay of differently positioned actors and different moral and persuasive voices," allowing us to see not only what is presented but gaps and alternatives to what is articulated.[295]

Many of these theorists build on Paul Ricoeur's consideration of fictive and lived narratives in *Time and Narrative*. In Volume Two, Ricoeur considers how the horizons of a fictive world intersect with the lived world, which is not limited to experiences in the particular "life-world of the reader."[296] Ricoeur calls the fictive world's capacity to be both "closed upon itself" and open to an "'outside' that it projects before itself and offers to critical appropriation by the reader" a "transcendence immanent in the text."[297] Ricoeur's theorization of a fictive world that intersects unevenly with lived reality centers on the "refiguration of time by narrative."[298] Ricoeur contains the possibility for infinite relations with different types of time that generate different meanings for the narrative. Along these lines, many commentators on the "narrative turn" in medical anthropology express concern with the straightforward availability of coherent narratives as the basis for both illuminating and shaping lived experience. Mattingly argues that the challenge is to attend to both the phenomenological richness of lived experience and the constructed complexities of narrative.[299] Other engagements with narrative even more insistently push on and challenge the "gaps and alternatives" in narratives to question the extent to which an emphasis on narrative coherence can illuminate lived experience. Laurence Kirmayer, for instance, calls for a "discourse poetics of the clinical encounter" that emphasizes metaphor over coherent narrative structures.[300] Kirmayer argues that in contrast to the structured forms of narrative, metaphors "present narrative possibilities" and

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[295] Ibid., 18.
[296] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Volume 2, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 100.
[297] Ibid., 100-101.
[298] Ibid., 100.
[299] Cheryl Mattingly, "Emergent Narratives," in *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, 206.
[300] Laurence Kirmayer, "Broken Narratives: Clinical Encounters and the Poetics of Illness Experience," in *Narrative and the Cultural Construction of Illness and Healing*, 156.

"evoke a whole conceptual space or world" that encompass a wide array of intersecting narratives, including those explicitly about illness and otherwise. An attention to potentially "divergent metaphors" as "gestures toward a story that is not taken up and completed or as reminders of a story that is already authoritative (even if it remains implicit or untold)" thus "occupies an intermediate ground between embodied experience" and more coherent narrative structures.[301] Elsewhere, Mattingly also draws on Ricoeur to similarly consider how language can "point us to different worlds, different imaginative spaces."[302]

I would like to build on these suggestions of the complex and multiplicitous dimensions of narratives as worlds. This chapter further considers how multiple worlds coexist and intersect not only through individual narratives and literary and ethnographic writing as coherently bounded bodies of analysis but also within a single text or narrative. Scholars of narratives that are lived and read in everyday life contexts and theorists of affect already begin to suggest how the possibilities of multiple worlds are gestured to and contained within a single narrative. As the scholars above note, Ricoeur's theorization of time and narrative suggests the possibility to consider different worlds that emerge through different relations with narrative time. For instance, Ricoeur elaborates on confrontations between the internal and external elements of everyday experience and the "monumental time" that is marked by clock time and shaped by "figures of authority and power."[303] These other everyday relationships with time generate open-ended meanings for the narrative in relation to each other, even as they remain in contact with this ongoing "monumental time." These

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[301] Ibid., 155; Elsewhere, Kirmayer similarly points to the importance and difficulties of situating articulated narratives within multiple personal and cultural frames to consider, for instance, attention to "the extent to which individuals are able to fashion their own self-narratives or have them imposed by local or global systems of status and power." The intersection of sociocultural, biomedical, and individual narratives and embodied experiences thus calls for a "critical perspective on these multiple levels of meaning" (Laurence Kirmayer, "Beyond the 'New Cross-cultural Psychiatry': Cultural Biology, Discursive Psychology and the Ironies of Globalization," in *Transcultural Psychiatry* vol. 43 no. 1 (2003): 133).

[302] Cheryl Mattingly, *Moral Laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for the Good Life* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 159-160.

[303] Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* Volume 2, 106.

diverse experiences of time become mutually constituting in "infinitely varied ways" in the narrative,[304] including non-verbal points of intersection such as a shared "point in space" that becomes a "footbridge between two temporalities foreign to each other."[305] Insofar as these personal, lived experiences are "inexpressible at their limit," they can become legible and significant in the narrative through these encounters with one another and other forms of narrative that the text evokes.[306]

These considerations of narrative and its engagement with the nonverbal, fundamentally inexpressible contours of experience resonate with theorizations of affect in narratives. Considerations of affect emphasize its open-ended, contingent, and speculative nature and the possibility that narratives can affectively suggest multiple possibilities that are not necessarily reconcilable and can emerge and dissipate at different moments. These theorists also speak to the role of affects in creating worlds through the process of attunement. Kathleen Stewart writes about affects as "atmospheric attunements" that are "a process of what Heidegger (1962) called worlding—an intimate, compositional process of dwelling in spaces that bears, gestures, gestates, worlds."[307] This process of worlding is one of becoming aware of and attuning to how things matter in a given conception of a world, "not because of how they are represented but because they have qualities, rhythms, forces, relations, and movements."[308] C. Jason Throop considers how an "underlying and intersubjectively discernable mood" such as "being 'a bit down'" disclose orientations to events and conditions.[309] In the case of Throop's Yapese interviewees, the "nostalgic-like moods" that pervaded their conversations "almost always entail not only a standpoint toward

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[304] Ibid., 108.
[305] Ibid., 105.
[306] Ibid., 109.
[307] Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric attunements," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* vol. 29 (2011): 445.
[308] Ibid.
[309] C. Jason Throop, "Moral Moods," in *Ethos* vol. 42, issue 1 (2014): 66.

the past, but also an orientation to present concerns, moral failings, and transgressions that serve as a basis from which to further comment on what the future should ideally entail, and yet is unlikely to achieve."[310] As Jarrett Zigon notes, the temporality of these moods are central to subjects' negotiation of a "singular life-trajectory" with multiple temporalities that "continually pull[] in various pasts and hoped-for futures."[311] For Zigon, all subjects have the capacity for "attunement," which "manifests itself as the potentiality to become engaged with and become entangled in diverse and particular relationships that make possible the vast diversity of ways of living we find in the social world."[312] This attunement is what enables the creation of and living in "a world that has value" for each particular subject.[313] Furthermore, attunement is "not done by an individual who psychologically adjusts" but is instead a "foundational capacity that allows relationships to assemble."[314] As such, the process of attuning is fundamentally engaged with affects that emerge from lived situations: for Stewart, "[w]hat affects us—the sentience of a situation—is also a dwelling, a worlding born from an atmospheric attunement."[315]

This attention to attunement in the lived process of worlding converges with literary studies that foregrounds a text's stance towards the world as a form of world-making.[316] Following these theorists, I suggest that attention to the affective dimensions in narratives allows for consideration of how elements of texts suggest their stances towards, and thus constructions and conceptions of, a world. Rather than singular worlds that correspond with coherent bodies of narrative, I consider how attention to affect in narratives, textual or embodied, can allow the shifting, momentary, and sometimes incoherent possibilities of different worlds to come to the fore. These worlds are evoked

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[310] Ibid.

[311] Jarrett Zigon, "Attunement and Fidelity: Two Ontological Conditions for Morally Being-in-the-World," in *Ethos* vol. 42, issue 1 (2014): 24-25.

[312] Ibid., 22.

[313] Ibid., 24.

[314] Ibid., 22.

[315] Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," 449.

[316] Hayot, *On Literary Worlds*.

through the embodied acts of orienting to a given set of circumstances, and they are emergent, speculative acts of processing and responding to others and the world that are engaged through a spectrum of cognitive and non-cognitive modes. These orientations open, posit, and test out modes of conceptualizing and being that can shift from moment to moment.

My sense of speculative is not utopian and does not imagine a wholesale overcoming of the world as it is in the present. As Sara Ahmed argues, attention to affect suggests lines of becoming that constitute forms of possibility and potentiality, albeit ones that are not always coherent or fully formed, as well as normative social reproduction that does not necessarily feel positive or welcome.[317] To attend to momentary suggestions and possibilities, then, is not to assert a revolutionary capacity that can straightforwardly alter the world or even to suggest that such possibilities are desirable. Instead, I would like to consider these fragmentary suggestions of different worlds as entities that suggest indeterminate and shifting means that enable living on in the present within forms of structural determination. As such, they are always attending and in response to the conditions of the present world even as they imagine, engage, and reach towards other past and future ones. In *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart writes that affects are "[r]ooted not in fixed conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a *something* coming together calls to mind and sets in motion."[318] These affects suggest that engagements with power and structure constitute a "scene of immanent force, rather than […] dead effects imposed on an innocent world."[319] Instead, the scene of the ordinary everyday is "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life."[320] According to Stewart, "[o]rdinary affects are

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[317] Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 16-18.
[318] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 1.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid., 2.

things that happen. They happen in impulses, sensations, expectations, daydreams, encounters, and habits of relating, in strategies and their failures, in forms of persuasion, contagion, and compulsion, in modes of attention, attachment, and agency, and in publics and social worlds of all kinds that catch people up in something that feels like *some*thing.[321]

I take these fleeting, momentary senses of "*some*thing" as suggestions within narratives of shifting possible worlds that reflect conceptualizations of and orientations towards events, others, and possibilities for being that take shape through both cognitive and non-cognitive modes.

I also, however, suggest that worldly orientations take shape through affects that feel less significantly momentous; perhaps not clearly something, perhaps more like letting go, settling into habit, resignation, mindlessness, detachment, more like nothing. In this attention to more mundane, unclear, and muted affects I also follow Sianne Ngai's consideration of "minor," negative, and ineffectual affects and Lauren Berlant's attention to the ways that attitudes such as passivity, a "coasting sentience," and anonymity might also serve us under certain condition.[322] Stewart writes that her project is committed to "speculation, curiosity, and the concrete,"[323] and I echo these investments. I take affect as indicative of forms of agency without clear linguistic categories or corollaries, and this chapter reflects an attempt to listen for, perceive, and write the modes through which individuals articulate moments of attunement and adjustment in their life courses, moments in which they sense themselves bumping against the large-scale conditions of their lives and the affective stances that become attenuated, foreclosed, shift, and take new directions in the wake of this perceived contact.

Narrative and embodied affects

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[321] Ibid.

[322] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 43 and 91.

[323] Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1.

To pursue this sense of affective worldly orientations that emerge through both literary and ethnographic narratives of the body, I take as a case study my readings of *The Crazed* and *Kinder Than Solitude* from Chapter One placed in conversation with ethnographic analysis of interviews that I conducted in Beijing, China in 2017. While the bodily suffering and flatttened tones of the novels overtly suggest negativity, my interviewees in Beijing emphasized positivity attitudes as central to good health. While these dominant affective valences appear at first diametrically opposed, I would like to suggest that their mutual invocations of neutrality, detachment, and ambivalence suggest affinities that lend themselves to considering modes of living on that do not necessarily rely on utopian beliefs in the possibility for a better, radically altered world.

My approach considers these literary and ethnographic narratives as coevally situated within history and reflective of stances that emerge in relation to shifting and unpredictable historical conditions. I therefore highlight their mutual contingency and the uncertainty that necessarily attends orienting to a set of historical circumstances that are continuing to take shape in the present into an unknown future. Though the narratives I examine originate in different geographical locales, I place them in relation to one another as different orientations to the process of post-1978 reform in China. I consider how the myriad affective valences of these narratives in relation to embodiment suggest possibilities for attuning to narrative suggestions of worldly orientations that can intersect and coexist without fully resolving into a static and coherent picture of the world or of the self in the world; instead, senses of the world emerge through the juxtapositions, intersections, and amplifications of the range of orientations that emerge within and between these narratives. I present my consideration of literature and ethnography together as a case study for considering the methods and possibilities of a risky proposition for both anthropology and literature: that, for anthropology, aesthetic and formal considerations of ethnographic narratives can suggest insights into lived experience that do not disregard lived consequences and relations with real people and

events in the world; and that, for literary studies, considering texts in direct relation with lived narratives can expand considerations of genre without descending into relativism that disregards rigorous attention to what is present in the text. My joint literary and ethnographic analysis and writing thus also constructs my own sense of the world that is informed by my investment in non-allegorical and non-normative ways of considering relations to historical circumstances, and in this case specifically, the trajectory of post-reform China and its radical changes into the present moment.

I am particularly invested in how forms of agency that are not immediately legible as such, because they are not always actively directed towards a clear object or because they do not fall within rubrics of resistance and subjugation, might emerge through shifting, momentary, non-verbal, or incoherent suggestions of affect. This chapter builds on my elaboration on the detachment and neutrality in *Kinder Than Solitude* as a mode of living on in the present. As I noted in Chapter One, reviews of the novels foreground allegorical readings and center on its neutral and opaque tone. A review of Kinder Than Solitude in The *Guardian* critiques the "punitively bleak and sterile" majority of the novel that "make[s] for some pretty dull reading," in contrast to Shaoai's poisoning as "elegiac allegory" that "compels a political reading": in Shaoai, "the hopes of a more open China are slowly and agonizingly extinguished."[324] Similarly, a New York Times review notes the novel's "unthreatening watercolor ambience" and the "passivity" of its tone, which is nevertheless layered over a "withering, vibrating sarcasm" that serves as a direct critique of China's post-Tiananmen situation;[325] another in the Boston Globe reads the novel as a "fictional form of grief for women like Shaoai, the ones who stayed behind, were outspoken, and paid a price during Tiananmen."[326] Other

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[324] James Lasdun, "Kinder Than Solitude Review—'The Aftermath of Tiananmen Square,'" *Guardian* (March 28, 2014).
[325] Jess Row, "Strangers to Themselves," *New York Times* (March 7, 2014).
[326] John Freeman, "'Kinder than Solitude' by Yiyun Li," *Boston Globe* (March 15, 2014).

reviews focus on the central plot of Shaoai's poisoning as the tragic "human" and emotional centerpiece through which the "attenuated" and "limper" contemporary portions of the novel can be understood.[327] What underlies these reviews is a shared preoccupation with the novel's tone, which these reviews deem muddled, boring, and confusing in its contemporary portions in contrast with the clear political allegory of Shaoai's death.

The *Guardian* review in particular specifies the novel's tendency to "indulge[] a habit of moralising authorial commentary that clogs the flow of individual scenes, and casts an aura of ponderous solemnity over the action." The review goes on to assert that "[i]t's not that the comments aren't illuminating; they sometimes are, but they are often so complicatedly expressed that by the time you've deciphered them, you've also disengaged from the moment they were supposed to illuminate."[328] To give some examples of the statements the review ostensibly references, in the novel, Li populates the narrative with first-person indirect observations that assert broad generalizations about life attitudes that reflect ambivalence. Moran, for instance, repeats to herself that "[a]*nything concerning the heart leaves it in confusion*; she had found this motto in one of the Buddhist books she had read after Shaoai's poisoning; *to desire nothing is to have no vulnerability*." [329] Ruyu similarly observes that ""much of life's comfort comes not from the absoluteness of happiness and goodness but from the hope that something would be good enough, and one would find oneself happy enough."[330] Later, Moran reflects that as adults, they must live in pursuit of "feeling less, suffering little."[331] The review's assessment of the distancing effect of these statements implicitly suggests that lack of identification and clear emotion is a failure on the part of the text. I argue in

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[327] Marie Arana, "Book review: Yiyun Li's 'Kinder than Solitude' dives into the weight of memory," *Washington Post* (March 17, 2014); Marian Ryan, "After the Poisoning: An unconsoling novel of four Chinese teens and the incident that changes their lives," *Slate* (March 3, 2014.

[328] Lasdun, "Kinder Than Solitude Review."

[329] Yiyun Li, *Kinder Than Solitude*, 127.

[330] Ibid., 157.

[331] Ibid., 254.

Chapter One, however, that while these statements evoke disillusionment, they also suggest that

detachment and neutrality can be everyday modes for continuing to live in unhopeful and

insignificant ways under non-optimal conditions. In the novel, these statements ambiguously apply

to both the personal and political, which overlap without the possibility of clearly delimiting how

one affects the novel's stance on the other. The reader must therefore dwell in the irresolvable

uncertainty about what the novel is truly "about," a question to which the novel's tone offers no

clear solutions, instead refusing interpretation and leaving only a flattened ongoingness that is not

clearly directed towards any goals other than maintaining this flatness.

In Ngai's study of "minor" affects such as irritation, animatedness, and disgust, Ngai deems

tone an element of a text that is "'loosely fastened' to signifying practices, even if it is not literally a

sign itself."[332] Ngai argues that tone's diffuse association with formal characteristics inhibits a purely

formalist critique that seeks to pin the effects of the text to clearly identifiable concrete elements.

This diffuseness, however, lends itself to the "analysis of ideology," which in a text is a "materially

embodied representation of an *imaginary relationship* to a holistic complex of real conditions" and thus

"clearly shares tone's virtual, diffused, but also immanent character."[333] Ngai's analysis of tone

suggests that it is closely tied to a text's stance towards the world as ideology, and Ngai argues that

because of ideology's diffuse nature, it is perhaps revealed more clearly in a text's tone than in "any

of its formal features."[334] A text's affective resonances emerge through tone and are actively

suggestive of something other than what is explicitly or formally present in the text: "affective

amplification does not simply turn up the volume on what is already there, but points to the

presence of something 'separate'."[335] Tone then becomes an important element of analysis in

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[332] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 46.
[333] Ibid., 47; italics in text.
[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid., 74; Ngai draws on Silvan Tomkins and Brian Massumi to postulate the capacity of affect to "resonate" and point to something other than what is explicitly present in the text.

determining a narrative's worldly orientations through the capacity of affect to point to *something else* and, in doing so, to indicate significance and a worldly orientation.

Far from insignificant and superfluous, then, the detached and ambivalent tone of the novel and its role in disrupting straightforward associations between events in the characters' personal lives, relationships between characters, and the novel's historical and political contexts suggests the novel's own ideology in its refusal to delineate clear causality and explanations through either personal events or through large-scale history. Through Ngai's attention to affect and tone as loosely attached to textual elements, detachment and ambivalence can also be seen as formal structures and relations to the world to which varying affective tones can be attached. This consideration of tone resonates with Berlant's consideration of attachment as a "*structure* of relationality" to which the varying affects of optimism, as a belief that the thing to which one is attached is enabling in some way, are attached. Berlant elsewhere elaborates on Raymond Williams's formulation of "structures of feeling" rather than affective intensities that Berlant asserts "lead[] back to an image of the subject's ordinary life as a melodramatic stage, a scene in which feeling states find their true expression in expansive bodily performance."[336] In contrast, Berlant argues that "a structure of feeling is beneath the surface of explicit life that is collective, saturating atmospheres of held but inexplicit knowledge."[337] Berlant stresses that in a "recessive" and "underperformativ[e]" mode, as a "flat or flattened affect that shows up to perform its recession from melodramatic norms,"[338] they can ambiguously point in multiple directions without clear resolution: tending to either comedy or traumatic tragedy,[339] indexing "a big emotion under the discipline of comportment and crisis," "expressive of a non- or light-touch, or a diffused experience," or simply "not be hiding anything" at

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[336] Lauren Berlant, "Structures of feeling: *Mysterious Skin*," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* vol. 28, no. 3 (2015): 194.
[337] Ibid.
[338] Ibid., 193.
[339] Ibid., 194.

all.[340] Berlant thus foregrounds the ambiguous relationship between affectively flattened

"underperformativity" and the emotions and events that these affects index, a relationship that

elaborates affect's indeterminate and contingent relationship to the social and historical. Though

Berlant theorizes flattened affect itself as a structure of feeling, which speaks to Ruyu's and Moran's

detached orientations, my interest is not only in considering the emotions and events that these

affects might suggest but also in how different affects are attached to a similar orientational

structure. In contrast to the novel, in my ethnographic interviews, ambivalence and detachment are

constructed with positive and healthful valences. Ambivalence and detachment, then, can be viewed

as orientational structures to which varying affective resonances can be attached that further build

different orientations towards social and historical circumstances and thus different senses of the

world.

Rather than viewing detachment and ambivalence as inherently problematic stances in both

textual and lived orientations to worldly events, I suggest that reading this tone in the novel in

conversation with ethnographic interviews that construct ambivalence through positive, rather than

negative and unsettling, affective valences can further suggest how ambivalence and detachment are

orientations that can be useful and helpful under certain historical and life conditions. To conduct

this joint literary and ethnographic analysis, I interviewed a total of 26 individuals between the ages

of 50 and 70 about their everyday health practices and definitions of health and wellbeing in Beijing,

China. I conducted one-time structured interviews with all of my interviewees and repeated semi-

structured interviews with twelve interviewees with person-centered interview methodology.[341]

Through semi-structured interviews, I sought to establish how individuals practicing *yangsheng* (养生)

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[340] Ibid., 195.

[341] Robert I. Levy and Douglas Hollan, "Person-Centered Interviewing and Observation in Anthropology" (1998), in *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology: Second Edition*, ed. H. Russell Bernard and Clarence C. Gravlee (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015): 313-342.

in their everyday lives defined healthful approaches and practices and to ask how these individuals

connected their present health practices and life experiences with past experiences that, due to the

age range of my targeted population, extended from before the reform period in the 1980s and

1990s into the present. I also conducted extensive participant observation in Beijing's public parks

and in the dance practices, art and music classes, daily walks, and informal meals and gatherings to

which I was invited. Though I had originally intended to interview an equal number of male- and

female-identifying practitioners, I found that it was much easier for me to make contact with female

interviewees through social networks, group activities, and in public spaces.

My interest in contemporary popular wellbeing discourses in China was sparked by the

massive popularity of a popular discourse termed *yangsheng* and its overt emphasis on positivity. In

recent years, *yangsheng,* or everyday wellbeing practices including tai ji, calisthenics, and art, has gained

widespread popularity in China, particularly among older retirees.[342] Indeed, any survey of Chinese

mass media cannot but note the popularity of *yangsheng* television programs such as *Yangsheng House*

(养生堂; *Yangsheng Tang*), *Yangsheng Path* (养生之路; *Yangsheng zhi lu*), and numerous others. While

the emphasis on bodily health is clear, individuals also practice *yangsheng* to regulate their lives

emotionally, stressing the importance of cultivating individual positivity and equilibrium in relation

to large-scale social changes.[343] Though *yangsheng* is a body of health knowledge and practices that

has ancient medical roots, anthropologists Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang elucidate in their

ethnography that it is a "living tradition" that continues to shift and take different shapes in the

contemporary moment.[344] Farquhar and Zhang elaborate *yangsheng* enjoys widespread popularity for

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[342] Judith Farquhar and Qicheng Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing: Pleasure, Sovereignty, and Self-Cultivation in China's Capital," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 20, no. 3 (2005): 303-27; Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things: Nurturing Life in Contemporary Beijing* (New York: Zone Books, 2012).

[343] Ibid.

[344] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 31.

its capacity to promote physical health and cultivate positive outlooks in relation to difficult life experiences.[345] Each of my interviewees asserted that maintaining a positive attitude is a notable feature of *yangsheng* practitioners' characterization of their activities and a desirable mindset for cultivating health, a conviction that Farquhar and Zhang also note. Though all of my interviewees identified maintaining good spirits (心情; *xin qing* or 心态; *xin tai*) as central to health, however,

when I asked them to elaborate on what this approach to life entails and how it is cultivated and maintained, their answers also foregrounded ambivalence and uncertainty about the twentieth- and twenty-first-century conditions, including conditions that directly affect their conceptions of the biological body, through which these orientations emerged. They identified as positive and healthful an expansive feeling state that was itself evoked through recourse to affect rather than one that could be clearly articulated in coherent narrative form. An attention to the affective resonances of their narratives leaves room for the extent to which the massiveness of this change is incomprehensible and unassimilable, even as individuals must construct some way of continuing to live viable and, if possible, flourishing lives.

Though this construction of detachment as healthful resonates with conceptions of orderliness in Traditional Chinese Medical conceptions of health,[346] I am also interested in pursuing the connections and tensions between healthful detachment and the twentieth- and twentieth-century life conditions that they discussed, and specifically how these stances of ambivalence and detachment articulate with their sense of actively constructing a desired social world that is stable and prosperous. My interviewees amalgamated discourses of the body in Traditional Chinese medicine with bioscientific ideas of bodies and environments and evaluations of the changing circumstances of their life courses. Rather than strictly and coherently bounded bodies of knowledge

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[345] Ibid., 180.
[346] Judith Farquhar, *Knowing Practice: The Clinical Encounter of Chinese Medicine* (New York: Westview Press, 1996):

and concepts, they elaborated ad hoc, colloquialized, and everyday usages to convey an affectively

felt sense of bodies and environments in dynamic interchange with one another. In doing so, they

posed theories of embodied adjustment to these ongoing changes and possibilities for flourishing

under large-scale contingency that entailed bodies in dynamic relation to other bodies and their

environments. Crucially, affect also centers around the capacity to affect and to be affected by one

other and the world, and in their discourses of adjustment, they were not only affected by the social

conditions in which they found themselves but are actively engaged in constructing a desirable

present and future. As such, they were broadly engaged in the process of attuning to their worldly

surroundings, as a capacity that involves "the sentience of a situation" as well as a "dwelling" and

the active creation of a world.[347]

I argue that this sense of active participation diverges from the model of Maoist socialist

participation, but neither can it be wholly encompassed by arguments that limit individual actions

and desires to forms of neoliberal governance and privatized interest. While scholars are increasingly

attending to postsocialist affects of anxiety and disillusionment at the failures of the state to achieve

a socialist utopia and the pervasive insecurity that marks life under postsocialism,[348] my interviewees'

affective imaginations of adjustment included but did not only index negativity. Instead, even as they

contained more negative registers of disillusionment, disbelief, and resignation, my interviewees

identified ambivalent stances of neutrality and detachment as positive orientations that lend

themselves to ongoing adjustment and the active production of desirable present and future social

environments in the face of ongoing precarity and large-scale contingency. *Yangsheng* as a colloquial

everyday category of health also provides a vehicle for articulating a particular form of social

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[347] Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," 449.

[348] Christina Schwenkel, "Post/Socialist Affect: Ruination and Reconstruction of the Nation in Urban Vietnam," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 28, no. 2 (2013): 252-77; Jean-Baptiste Pettier, "The Affective Scope: Entering China's Urban Moral and Economic World Through Its Emotional Disturbances," in *Anthropology of Consciousness* vol. 27, issue 1 (2016): 75-96.

activism, one that simultaneously cultivates the self and is oriented towards shaping society without the rupture of resistance and revolution.

Producing a sense of "socialism with Chinese characteristics": Individual interventions into environments of ongoing change

Recent scholarship in medical anthropology on East Asia attempts to nuance examinations of subjective relations to lived conditions that cannot simply be explained by clear-cut attributions to hierarchal notions of top-down governance. These analyses both directly engage biopolitics and neoliberal governmentality and suggest related but alternative framings of health practices that draw more extensively on Chinese contexts and genealogies of thought. Scholars of contemporary China continue to discuss the consequences of China's post-reform for the individual.[349] Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong elaborate on the increasing imperative to "care for the self" in post-Mao and post-reform China as a mode of governance "from afar,"[350] while others such as Yunxiang Yan assert that China, because of the authoritarian nature of its central government, cannot be considered neoliberal in terms analogous to Western liberal democracies.[351] In the arena of health, however, assessments of biopolitical governmentality that rely on assessments of neoliberalism continue to predominate. As numerous scholars have pointed out, the privatization of healthcare in particular has resulted in much conflict and anxiety over medical care, and the turn to increasing attention to individual health in everyday life can certainly be understood as an increasing imperative to "care for the self" as a result of diminished social welfare.[352] Wanning Sun, for instance, characterizes *yangsheng*

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[349] Arthur Kleinman, Yunxiang Yan, Jing Jun, et al., *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Yunxiang Yan, *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2009).

[350] *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar,* ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[351] Yunxiang Yan, "The Chinese Path to Individualization," in *The British Journal of Sociology* vol. 61, no. 3 (2010): 489-512.

[352] Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Nikolas Rose and Carlos Novas, "Biological Citizenship," in *Global Assemblages:*

television programs as hierarchical pedagogical tools for cultivating subjects invested in taking responsibility for their own health.[353] In the arena of mental health, recent scholarship on wellbeing and psychotherapy in China similarly suggests that the state's advocacy of psychological wellbeing produces more docile, efficient individuals to contribute to economic growth and social stability.[354]

In a 2017 issue of *Medical Anthropology*, Li Zhang and Amy Borovoy write in relation to biopolitics in East Asia that "Foucault's notion of power as acting on and producing subjectivity also pointed to the workings of power as 'productive' and producing new things," and that there exist "fine lines between exercises of social power that are repressive and controlling and those that are productive, caring, supportive, effective, or generous" that must be further explored. Meanwhile, Farquhar and Zhang acknowledge the biopolitical dimensions of *yangsheng* but also deliberately turn away from a biopolitical framework as explanatory. In a 2005 article on *yangsheng* they engage directly with practitioners' awareness of and relation to power,[355] but their work seeks to clarify how the non-revolutionary, non-subversive, and seemingly contented, perhaps even complicit, subjectivities of *yangsheng* might also constitute responses to power that are not adequately accounted for in a framework focused on "neoliberal governmentality or biopolitics," which they explicitly move away from in their 2012 monograph.[356] In 2005, they articulate that *yangsheng* practitioners "insist[]on the pleasure and creativity involved in occupying the politically quietist mainstream." This daily pleasure is responsive to power in ways that they assert exist beyond categorical terms that straightforwardly describe power relations: "people obscurely realize the distribution of powers in their environment,

Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems First Edition, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 439-463.

[353] Wanning Sun, "Cultivating self-health subjects: Yangsheng and biocitizenship in urban China," in *Citizenship Studies* 19.3-4 (2015): 285-98.

[354] Li Zhang, "The Rise of Therapeutic Governing in Postsocialist China," in *Medical Anthropology* vol. 36, issue 1 (2017): 6-18; Jie Yang, "'Fake Happiness': Counseling, Potentiality, and Psycho-Politics in China," in *Ethos* vol. 41, no .3 (2013): 292-312.

[355] Farquhar and Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing," 308.

[356] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 21.

and they routinely craft responses to power–and forms of personal power–that go beyond collaboration, co-optation, or any narrow understanding of resistance." These orientations constitute "political but nonconfrontational forms of life [that can be found] in *yangsheng*."[357] Further, they assert, in relation to Giorgio Agamben's notion of bare life,[358] that

> [t]o see the enjoyment of fully clothed life as a political gesture is not to simply add a few words to the anthropology of resistance. Rather it is to see how modern penetrations of power into every detail of mundane activity have served to produce singular-but-sociable human beings with an acute sensitivity to potential violence and an impressive creativity in building and using alternative spaces.[359]

Farquhar and Zhang's reference to the "anthropology of resistance" calls up a body of scholarship that Sherry Ortner writes is concerned with a broad "range of modes of (anthropological) engagement with political issues: critical theoretical discussions; critical ethnographic studies; studies of political movements of all kinds; activist anthropology," and beyond, including "creative adaptations to neoliberalism, as well as resistance movements against it." Ortner elaborates that this approach to scholarship declined following the 1960s and 1970s in the US, which Ortner attributes to a waning of the political movements and promises of these decades and an increasing perception that "'governmentality,' the myriad ways in which people and populations are molded and regulated, may have seemed increasingly relevant to the real-world conditions of life" in the decades to follow.

Scholarship invested in resistance, however, is again on the rise, spanning cultural critique, theoretical writings, and scholarship on social movements "that have taken shape in the neoliberal period." Ortner writes in response to what she sees as a movement away from "dark anthropology" that dwells on suffering and violence to what Joel Robbins has termed the "anthropology of the good," which Robbins characterizes as the "modest aim … to explore the different ways people organize their personal and collective lives in order to foster what they think of as good, and to

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[357] Farquhar and Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing," 310.
[358] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1998).
[359] Farquhar and Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing," 320.

study what it is like to live at least some of the time in light of such a project."[360] Ortner, however, argues that while studies of "happiness and/or well-being" in psychological/medical anthropology and of "virtue and the good" in moral/ethical anthropology risk drawing too stark a divide between their commitments and the effects of power. Instead, she writes that anthropologists must keep "these two kinds of work, or more broadly these two perspectives, in active interaction with, rather than opposition to, one another." For Ortner, the range of scholarship in the anthropology of resistance suggests avenues for "understanding the extraordinary range of creative ways in which challenges to the existing order can be constructed, but also for understanding the alternative visions of the future embedded in such movements." As such, they interrogate how the "violence of power and inequality is not simply physical force and/or deprivation, but always at the same time the ways in which it limits and deforms projects of what Veena Das has called 'the everyday,' projects of care and love, happiness and the good life."[361]

This chapter's elaboration on the multiple affective valences of healthful orientations and their constructions of the relations between individual and collective social health seeks to elaborate on the lived relations between "the good" and structures of power beyond the language of resistance.[362] Rather than conceiving of spaces and subjectivities exterior or resistant to power, I

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[360] Joel Robbins, "Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* vol. 19, no .3 (2013): 457.

[361] Ortner, "Dark anthropology and its others," 47-73.

[362] My attention to wellbeing and "the good" also resonates with other anthropologists who call for studies beyond the pathology of suffering. Nancy Chen articulates in her examination of qigong and healing, "[a] focus on illness narratives, which relates illness to social and moral worlds, still retains a paradigm of pathology. On the other side of illness, however, lie the journeys and attempts made in search of healing" as a means of attending to "how people still manage to shape and experience their worlds" (Chen, *Breathing Space*, 188). Meanwhile, Neil Thin points to a "clinical pathologism" as the "shared assumption among social scientists that pathologies are more interesting and worthy of study than the good things in life" (Neil Thin, "'Realising the Substance of Their Happiness': How Anthropology Forgot About *Homo Gauisus*," in *Culture and Well-being: Anthropological Approaches to Freedom and Political Ethics,* ed. Corsín Alberto Jiménez (London: Pluto Press, 2007): 138.). Thin and other anthropologists in edited volumes on wellbeing by Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2007) and Gordon Marthews and Carolina Izquierdo (*Pursuits of Happiness: Wellbeing in Anthropological Perspective* (New York: Berhahn Books, 2009)), as well as a special issue on happiness in *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* (*HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* vol. 5, no .3 (2015)), articulate a call for more studies of wellness in anthropology.

suggest that my interviewee's considerations of healthful orientations and embodied interchange

with the social world theorize active participation in shaping desired present and future

circumstances while also preserving the self. While Farquhar and Zhang draw on terms of "power,"

"resistance," and "alternative spaces,"[363] I read the trajectory of their work on *yangsheng* as suggestive

of a movement away from the available language that would circumscribe these subject positions to

clear-cut categories. Instead, they reach towards deepened elaboration of the stances that constitute

their interviewees' relations to the political order. They consider that in the daily practice of *yangsheng*,

"perhaps, it is action itself that is being resisted" in a context in which "[a]ctivism under Mao led to

severe moral compromises and shattered social relations";[364] instead, these practitioners substitute "a

rewarding notion of health that is beyond contradiction and even action itself."[365] In 2012, they

further elaborate that while "*yangsheng* is not about freedom or overt political power," it "allows

people to 'escape without leaving' a sometimes uncertain social and political order that is both

experienced and remembered as hand built, but fragile, always threatened by 'chaos' (luan)."[366] I

would like to suggest that in drawing out these nuanced positionings and orientations that can exist

within the structures of power, Farquhar and Zhang's analysis of Chinese conceptions of the body,

society, and politics shares kinship with theories of affect and embodiment that seek to think

possibilities for agency that are thoroughly embedded within, rather than positioned against,

structures of power.

Ultimately, Farquhar and Zhang's analysis continues to draw on terms of agency that share

the terms of resistance; for instance, they draw on Michel de Certeau's notion of tactics to state that

"[t]he politics of everyday tactics developed by de Certeau can accommodate the classical Chinese

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[363] Farquhar and Zhang, "Biopolitical Beijing," 302.
[364] Ibid.
[365] Ibid., 321.
[366] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 22.

notion of nonaction with respect to sovereignty, even as it emphasizes an almost resistant agency."[367]

This chapter attends to the affective resonances in narratives about *yangsheng* to build on these important insights into the nature of *yangsheng* to elaborate on the possibility to conceive of agency beyond and without these terms.[368] Far from a single note of pleasure, my interviewees' accounts of their life courses index a multiplicity of affects that lead to varying assessments of China's reform and post-reform trajectory. Their narratives do not ultimately settle on a final assessment and thus close down speculation; instead, these affective lines remain open-ended and indeterminate, while their narratives turn to healthful detachment, which they construct as positive orientations to the world, in response to the pervasive contingency of the world. Agency and attunement as processes of worlding, then, involve ambivalences and detachment that resign oneself to not knowing, not resolving, and nevertheless moving uncertainly forward with the pleasures and securities that one can perceive at hand in the immediate present. These senses of pleasure and security sustain the self even as they are also directed towards actively constructing a desirable present and future social world.

The terms that my interviewees used to describe this orientation of this positivity drew on the heart (心; *xin*) in a more holistic and all-encompassing "bodily disposition," in the words of Judith Farquhar,[369] than a cognitive approach that isolates the mind from the body. In traditional Chinese medicine, the heart is considered the center of both cognition and emotion.[370] I interpret *xin*

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[367] Ibid.

[368] Similar to Farquhar and Zhang's attention to "alternative spaces," Nancy Chen investigates how the increased popularity of qigong, a form of "breathing exercises and visualization," in the 1990s corresponded with increased privatization (Chen, *Breathing Space*). Chen, however, seeks to investigate how qigong "offered pleasurable somatic experiences but also generated new breathing spaces that transformed the contours of daily life" (Chen, ix) beyond a "polemicized […] dichotomy between the people and the state" (x). Chen writes that "[b]y breathing deeply and slowly, either with others in unison or in solitary meditation, experiences of public spaces and urban sites could become infused with personal meaning and cosmological order rather than remaining solely official" (xi).

[369] Judith Farquhar, *Appetites: Food and Sex in Post-Socialist China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

[370] Sonya Priztker, "Thinking Hearts, Feeling Brains: Metaphor, Culture, and the Self in Chinese Narratives of Depression," in *Metaphor and Symbol* vol. 22, issue 3 (2007): 252.

qing and *xin tai* as embodied orientations that that are not isolated to the considerations and calculations of the cognitive mind. Many of my interviewees expressed an emphasis on balance and equilibrium that constructs an excessive degree of resistance or pursuit of one's own desires as actively detrimental to health and the broader possibility of building a society that is conducive to individual and social flourishing. Wang Li, a woman in her late sixties whom I met at a popular park in Beijing filled with congregational dancers, described it to me this way: health is fundamentally about *moving with* rather than going against, a movement that she described as *sui* (随), in contrast with the frustrated and pointless struggling that is *jiao jin* (较劲). Activities such as dancing and tai ji are healthy because they involve *sui* and *moving with*, rather than tension or aggression. For Wang Li, the harmony with oneself developed through *sui* promotes harmony with others in one's life and, ultimately, society at large.[371] In this way, one's own health contributes to the health of not only the nation at large but the collective others who make up this nation by cultivating health-promoting affects and harmonious social relations that these others will then feel in their own bodies and lives. In an ongoing cycle, this social environment will continue accruing benefits to the individuals who live their lives within it.

While at first glance this sense of *moving with* and social participation might suggest smooth reproductions of the status quo, my interviewees also commonly noted tensions and anxieties about contemporary society into their discussions of individual health. Though increased prosperity is currently manifesting in many ways, they cited social and environmental problems and inequities that could not be fully assimilated into coherent formulations of smoothly reciprocal relations between harmonious social and individual bodies. Towards the end of our conversation, Wang Li also

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[371] Interview with author. April 24, 2017.

revealed to me that she is quite glad that guns and other weapons are restricted in China because otherwise, public violence would be a much more regular occurrence.[372] Her reference to social upheaval and violence as an active, though not present, danger converges with widespread assessments that increasing marketization in contemporary Chinese society has brought with it myriad social issues and moral crises that did not previously exist.[373] Wang Li's suggestion of overt violence indexes a sense of social tension that dovetails with a widespread perception that accelerating market-based system has resulted in an over-emphasis on material wealth and sense of social distrust and misplaced values, concerns that many of my interviewees also referenced. While other scholars have pointed to nostalgia for a Maoist past among some members of the Cultural Revolution generation in response to social changes and problems,[374] my interviewees did not express a desire for society to be the way it once was. Instead, they expressed ambivalence and uncertainty over how to evaluate the relative benefits and harms that attend life under contemporary state-directed market conditions as opposed to life in the socialist past; they differentially asserted at different moments that life was better then or now without coming to final assessments, suggesting that this evaluative process is an open-ended one that requires ongoing sensing into an indeterminate future. This ambivalence also reflects their assessments that no one could have predicted the massive changes that they lived through and that no one can predict how their futures in China will continue to unfold into the future. Their evocations of embodied harmony and reciprocity are thus imaginations of desired futures as much as they are assertions about the present,

[372] Interview with author. April 24, 2017.

[373] Kleinman, Yan, Jun, et al., "Introduction: Remaking the Moral Person," in *Deep China*, 8. Yunxiang Yan also elaborates on this perception of moral crisis with regard to food safety (Yan, "Food safety and social risk in contemporary China," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 71, no. 3 (2012): 705-29).

[374] William J. Hurst, "The Power of the Past: Nostalgia and Popular Discontent in Contemporary China," in *Laid Off Workers in a Workers' State: Unemployment with Chinese Characteristics*, ed. Thomas B. Gold, William J. Hurst, Li Qiang (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 115-32.

in that they reveal how this harmony has not yet been fully achieved. Instead, it is actively being

sought after and built through the embodied modes that individuals live their everyday lives.

My interviewees' emphasis on social stability and harmony as critical for good health is

reflective of the trajectory of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Chinese history that is decidedly

marked by upheaval; war and social upheaval are very much still a part of living memory in

contemporary China, including twentieth-century resistance against Japan (1937-45), the Chinese

Civil War (1945-49), and the socialist histories of the Great Leap Forward (1958-60), which

collectivized farming and resulted in widespread famine, the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), and

Tiananmen (1989).[375] This is a generation who, as Farquhar and Zhang note, lived through "the

heart of several cultural revolutions, one of the most dramatic having been a radical turn toward

global capitalist participation in the early 1990s."[376] My interviewees' assertions of the need for peace

and prosperity reflect an implicit desire that this upheaval never again intrude directly into their lives.

Rather than passive recipients of social and political situations in the present, however, they

are active participants who shape and produce their lived social contexts and their desired stable,

peaceful, and prosperous circumstances through the very attention and cultivation of their own

bodies and minds. Numerous scholars of health and science in China have shown how discourses

about and state policies governing individual bodies have been explicitly linked to the strength and

modernity of the nation in China's twentieth-century history; medical and public health discourses

have explicitly sought to govern the health of the individual body in the service of China's

modernity,[377] while other discourses of the body have also sought to construct proper communist

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[375] Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 1.

[376] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 16.

[377] Wang Hui, "Discursive Community and the Genealogy of Scientific Categories," in *Everyday Modernity in China,* ed. Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua L. Goldstein (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006): 80-120; Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004); Benjamin A. Elman, *On Their Own Terms: Science in China 1550-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard

citizens for the new Chinese state.[378] Farquhar and Zhang note the concept of the socialist

model/exemplar soldier or worker that was seen to "demonstrate that an effective revolutionary life

could actually be successfully embodied." With regard to *yangsheng*, they also note a "slippage

between 'the individual' and 'society,'" where "healthy old folks simply are the substance of a healthy

society and a sound nation." They assert that the "elderly exemplars" of *yangsheng* have come to take

the place of the socialist model soldier and worker in embodying a strong and healthy nation.[379] I

would suggest, however, that their embodiment of healthy nationhood is not a straightforward

equation and one-to-one correspondence between individual and national health, in large part

because what constitutes individual and national health is highly ambiguous and being actively

negotiated in popular discourses in the present. While scholars have also shown how the

embodiment of socialist ideals is contested and uneven in how individual people take them up,[380] the

contemporary moment marks an openness as to what constitutes desirable national wellbeing as well

as how individuals contribute to this collective social ideal.

These invocations of a sense of something that is affectively felt through the body resonate

with work by anthropologists attending to embodiment, which stresses an ethnographic practice that

can communicate some of the body's sensory experience without ascribing this experience to

structuralist analyses that allegorically read for meaning. For instance, Michael Taussig critiques "a

dominant critical practice which could be called the 'allegorizing' mode of reading ideology into

events and artifacts […] in which the surface phenomenon, as in allegory, stands as a cipher for

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University Press, 2005); Sigrid Schmalzer, *The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

[378] Ann Anagnost, "The Politicized Body," in *Body, Subject, and Power in China*, ed. Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[379] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 198.

[380] Lisa Rofel, for instance, elaborates on how different generations of women workers relate to ideas of revolution and socialism following reform (Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China After Socialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999)).

uncovering horizon after horizon of otherwise obscure systems of meanings."[381] In contrast, Taussig

calls for an ethnographic practice that attends to wandering, tactile, and associative forms of

attention in everyday life. Similarly, Farquhar, writing on how ethnography might evoke the

importance of different tastes to Chinese medicine in contrast to structuralist analysis that is limited

to cognitive logic, asserts that "[i]f bodies are capable of imagining, we should be able to carnally

imagine other lifeworlds, or sensory realms, through an ethnographic description that attends to the

concrete and the everyday."[382] In other words, this engagement with materiality and concreteness

connotes some *sense* of a world as the people who live it experience it, and it is this sense that I seek

to elaborate through how individuals conceive of embodied contributions to desired social presents

and futures.

While the designation of postsocialism from scholars of China and China's adoption of

market economics might suggest an unambiguous triumph of global capitalism, China continues to

be in the midst of ideological and policy shifts on the part of the state that are unpredictable but

hold important consequences for the everyday lived realities of ordinary people. Official state

discourses continue to stress China's designation as "socialist with Chinese characteristics," rather

than capitalist or even postsocialist. This official designation emerged with Deng Xiaoping's

program of reforms following 1978 and purported to unify Marxist thought and the state's Maoist

past with the "concrete realities of China,"[383] a program that attended China's "reform and opening

up" (改革开放; *gai ge kai fang*) and integration of market-based and privatized policies into its

economy. The official state designation might sound like empty propaganda from a Western vantage

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[381] Michael Taussig, "Tactility and Distraction," in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, ed. Margaret Lock and Judith Farquhar. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 264-5.
[382] Judith Farquhar, "Medicinal Meals," in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, 287.
[383] Deng Xiaoping, "Opening Speech at the Twelfth National Congress of China." September 1, 1982. Accessed at http://en.people.cn/dengxp/vol3/text/c1010.html.

point that stresses China's dual capitalistic and authoritarian characteristics. I wish, however, to take seriously this ambiguous designation as central to China's self-construction and how individual people imagine their participation in the nation in the present; beyond the interests of the state, the designation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" suggests contemporary aspirations for the nation to which individual people construct themselves as active participants.

Alongside other scholars who continue to debate the nature of Chinese postsocialism, I wish then to stress how China's post-reform trajectory remains heavily contested and actively constructed; anthropologist Mei Zhan, for instance, asserts that Chinese postsocialism is an uneven and contingent process that is actively negotiated across disparate sites, rather than a "unidirectional transition toward neoliberalism,"[384] while other scholars continue to debate the how neoliberal policies intersect with continued state intervention.[385] While these conversations about how to designate China within these ideologies remain ongoing, my intention for elaborating on the concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is not to take a decided position on the nature of Chinese governance but instead to more closely attend to what this designation might suggest for how ordinary people conceive of themselves as active, embodied participants in constructing desired social and historical circumstances. Rather than a conception of postsocialism that is a closed and fully realized process, we might consider the concept of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in contemporary China as a vehicle for articulating ongoing shifts in national aspirations for a particularly Chinese future and state of flourishing that are actively and uncertainly being built in the present.

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[384] Mei Zhan, "Human Oriented: Angels and Monsters in China's Health-Care Reform," in *East Asian Science, Technology, and Society* vol. 5, no. 3 (2011): 295.

[385] Kean Fan Lim, "'Socialism with Chinese characteristics': Uneven development, variegated neoliberalization and the dialectical differentiation of state spatiality," in *Progress in Human Geography* vol. 38, no .2 (2014): 221-47; Aihwa Ong, "Neoliberalism as Mobile Technology," in *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* vol. 32, no. 1 (2007): 3-8; *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar,* ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong; Jamie Peck and Jun Zhang, "A variety of capitalism … with Chinese characteristics?" in *Journal of Economic Geography* vol. 13 (2013): 357-96.

The designation is suggestive of indeterminate intersections between China's past and its post-reform present and future; it is a phrase that marks both continuity with and departure from the past. Rather than the distinct break that the "post" of postsocialism or the designation of capitalism entails, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" stresses a vision of dynamic continuity with the past that encompasses shifts but not radical breaks. Beyond the obvious utility to the state of maintaining the continuous authority of the Chinese Communist Party even as it inaugurates radical policy shifts following reform, the capacious ambiguity of the designation for ordinary individuals encompasses contradictory valences that attend China's post-reform trajectory. As Wang Li's imagination of dynamic social equilibrium does, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" indexes the state's continuous articulated investment in a more stable and prosperous future for more people, which is reflected in China's continued goal of achieving "moderate prosperity," or a "relatively comfortable life" (小康; *xiao kang*) for all.[386] The concept of "moderate prosperity"

emerged through Deng Xiaoping's program of reform and suggests a "level of material well-being *after* […] basic needs have been satisfied,"[387] and this goal was reaffirmed at the party's 2017 19th Party Congress.[388] Meanwhile, its historical trajectory following 1978 also encompasses the upheaval, radical change, and social inequality that formed a part of the reform process and continues to remain a pressing social issue.[389] The designation's capacious encompassing of these undesirable past and present realities and desired futures suggest, for ordinary people who live these histories, an

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[386] John Wong, "*Xiao-kang*: Deng Xiaoping's Socio-economic Development Target for China," in *Journal of Contemporary China* vol. 7, no .17 (1998): 141-52.

[387] Ibid., 142.

[388] Joseph Fewsmith, "The 19th Party Congress: Ringing in Xi Jinping's New Age," in *China Leadership Monitor* no. 55 (2018): 14.

[389] Scholars of neoliberalism in China, including Wang Hui, David Harvey, and Aihwa Ong, point to the social inequality that was generated through the process of economic reform, which the central government introduced unevenly (Wang Hui, "The Year 1989 and the Roots of Neoliberalism in China," transl. Rebecca E. Karl, *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 12, no. 1 (2004), 14-15; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006)).

active negotiation of a desired future that remains ongoing in the present. Many of my interviewees told me that though China was in a negative cycle during this period of accelerated growth, the state has recognized these social problems and is actively working to correct them.[390] Xi Jinping's "China Dream" initiatives, which include anti-corruption programs and promises of social welfare and growing Chinese wealth and geopolitical influence, have created a growing popular sense that China is continuing to develop towards increasing stability and away from the rapid but uneven economic growth that resulted in pronounced social inequality and conflict in the 2000s. China's 13th Five Year Plan, which spans 2016 to 2020, articulates wide-ranging social welfare goals, including the development of more equitable and affordable health insurance, prescription drug coverage, housing, and education.[391]

These ongoing developments are explicitly articulated in official policy with connections to the past. During the months I was in Beijing in winter to summer of 2017, the state was heavily broadcasting its Belt and Road initiative (一带一路; *yi dai yi lu*), which seeks to build China's

economic connections with Asia and Europe. A national evening news report on the initiative issued an official statement that China would continue to deepen its commitment to Marxist thought as it developed these economic and geopolitical projects. Much can be said about China's relationship to Marxist thought and the consequences of its economic reform and market developments, and many scholars of China dispute the characterization of China as neoliberal due to its ongoing state intervention in the market and its authoritarian governmental structure. Setting aside the actual ideological implications of such a statement for a moment, the explicit invocation of Marxism

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[390] Interview with author. April 17, 2017.
[391] "13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020)," Compilation and Translation Bureau, Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/newsrelease/201612/P020161207645765233498.pdf; Katherine Koleski, "The 13th Five-Year Plan," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. https://www.uscc.gov/Research/13th-five-year-plan (February 14, 2017).

suggests the state's determination to continually reassert the continuity of the present with the past. In its current construction, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" also invokes socialist past, as well as a history that extends beyond the Chinese Communist Party's victory in 1949. Throughout these policy developments runs an increased emphasis on China's own national historical culture that has continued to grow from the 2000s, including an emphasis on "national studies" (国学; *guo xue*) that stresses China's unique and unbroken cultural lineage.[392] The Belt and Road initiative, for instance, explicitly evokes the imagery of the Silk Road and China as a dynamic and rich center of cultural vibrancy. While these constructions of continuous Chinese tradition certainly elide the fractures, contradictions, and destruction that has also attended modern Chinese and socialist history, the construction of an ancient Chinese past is also useful for attuning to a particular contemporary imagination of China's future. Rather than constructions of modernity that have historically relied on Western trajectories of development and have framed China's development as seeking to catch up with the West,[393] China is increasingly asserting that it is building a future that is distinctively Chinese and cannot be conceptualized in purely Western categories.

For ordinary people who differentially live the indeterminate shifts and stretches of time that accompany the pursuit and adjustment of these goals based on their own live circumstances, the recent past and present remain marked with multiply intersecting and divergent experiences and tonalities, including those of uncertainty, suffering and disillusionment at uneven social development, and aspirations towards a more equitable future. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" thus entails an atmosphere of ongoing change that contains multiple affective valences, including disruption, upheaval, unpredictability, and conflict as well as optimism, stability,

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[392] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 302.

[393] Shu-mei Shih, *The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

and positively-inflected desire. My middle-class interviewees, all of whom were Beijing residents, are

located within a particular cluster of these experiences and affects. Though their life trajectories

differed from one another and none were extremely wealthy, they were also not part of segments of

Chinese society that have suffered most sharply from the social inequalities of the reform process.

All were comfortably well off to differing degrees, owned their homes, and were able to pursue

leisure activities that required capital, including international and domestic travel. As individuals who

self-identify as practitioners of *yangsheng*, they also constructed themselves as particular participants

in building this distinctively Chinese future. The emphasis on a particularly Chinese future lends

added meaning to Farquhar and Zhang's articulation of *yangsheng* as a "living tradition" that stems

from classical Chinese discourses and "has been brought back to true liveliness quite recently" and is

continuing to evolve.[394] The imagination of a dynamic, embodied environment suggests that an

expansive definition of individual health that is directed beyond the individual body and brings an

eclectic amalgamation of health discourses to bear on shaping the present and future. In her

examination of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Farquhar characterizes patients as adopting an

"attitude of activism" through which they actively co-produce diagnoses and treatment along with

the practitioner and in conjunction with individual and family practices, which extend outward to

other interconnections with social networks, food and drugs, and conceptions of healthful activity.[395]

This sense of an activist stance as an orientation to individual health can also actively contribute to a

desired present and future that constitute "socialism with Chinese characteristics" rather than

passively experiencing its consequences.

Much like Wang Li in the park, Dr. Wang painted a picture of dynamic equilibrium that is

ultimately balanced and harmonious. "Real" health, she claimed, is based on a social stability that

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[394] Farquhar and Zhang, *Ten Thousand Things*, 28.
[395] Judith Farquhar, "Multiplicity, Point of View, and Responsibility in Traditional Chinese Healing," in *Body, Knowledge, and Power in China*, 94.

one can sense in the body, and she describes this sense by building firstly from an individual's

psychological and emotional wellbeing. Dr. Wang asserted that "real" or "true" (真正; *zhen zheng*)

health is based not only on bodies that experience the absence of disease but also includes

psychological and emotional health. She asserted that whereas in the past, people would deem

bodies that did not experience disease healthy, people today have a completely different conception

of health that recognizes emotional and psychological health as part of a holistic health state that is

both individual and collective; this true state of health can only be achieved in relation to social

stability that broadly minimizes anxiety. I quote her here at length to provide a sense of the

embodied dynamism that she attempted to evoke in our conversation:

> I feel that this [holistic health situation] needs to include society's peace and harmony (和谐; *he xie*). Only after a broader environment (大环境; *da huan jing*) becomes better can there be a real healthy state (状态; *zhuang tai*). Isn't that right? […] If in society, today you have violence here, tomorrow you have chaos (闹; *nao*) there, everyone is very nervous and anxious (紧张; *jin zhang*). Without meaning to, this will cause people to become very anxious in their hearts.

Her references to psychological health resonate with the increasing attention to

psychotherapy and psychological wellbeing in mainland China today;[396] indeed, these discourses have

become so pervasive that billboards around Beijing today encourage their readers to "Attend to

psychological health and enjoy life's sunshine."[397]

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[396] Teresa Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015).

[397] See figure 1.

Figure 1. A billboard on the street in Haidian District, Beijing, enjoining readers to "Attend to psychological health and enjoy life's sunshine." 5 May 2017.

While scholars suggest how these categories converge with the demands for productivity under neoliberal conditions, Dr. Wang's sense of complete health gestures affectively beyond the utility of healthy subjects for the nation and a capitalist economy even as it draws on this psychological discourse in a collective social context.

She elaborates that

> If we do not have these forms of health, we cannot have complete (完全; *wan quan*) health for individuals. Even if your body does not have diseases, your emotions and psychology (心理精神; *xin li jing shen*) will still cause a certain degree of anxiety (紧张; *jin zhang*). So these things are all mutually informing and constructing (相互相成; *xiang hu xiang cheng*) relations (关系; *guanxi*). These things cannot leave one another.

The reciprocity that she constructs is one in which not only health for individual bodies is itself a holistic entity in which individual bodies and social forces cannot be clearly distinguished and divorced from one another; they are "mutually informing and constructing" and thus utterly inseparable. The boundaries between these entities are undefinable, and Dr. Wang's sense of "complete" health is an intertwined bodily, psychological, and social state that cannot fully be captured by the individual entities and terms she references. She constructs this mutuality as an expansive ecology, in which human bodies as holistic entities respond to the general conditions of their environments:

> So only a broader environment, a society's environment, what we call an ecology (生态; *sheng tai*), not only a plant ecology but a greater ecology (大生态; *da sheng tai*) that includes psychology and emotions (精神心理; *jing shen, xin li*) and a holistic (整体; *zheng ti*) health, can produce a healthy state (状态; *zhuang tai*) for humans.

Dr. Wang layers terms such as "greater ecology" and "broader climate" that do not correspond to particular scientific or cultural concepts but instead evoke a sense of something for which she does not have precise words. The broader environment that Dr. Wang imagines includes "politics, state policies, the stability of people's lives, the stability (平衡稳定; *ping heng wen ding*) of relations between nations," which she also characterizes as a "broader climate" (大气候; *da qi hou*). "Greater" and "broader" here gesture affectively beyond the linguistic categories she presents; they evoke an expansive feeling of reciprocity that the material body, located within and sensitively attuned to this climate and ecology, can sense.

Dr. Wang's evocations of holistic health that is fundamentally extend beyond linguistic terms that can adequately capture her expansive senses of health and ecology. Instead, Dr. Wang evokes a deep-seated *sense* of wellbeing that one can feel and perceive in the world in one's body:

So now… how do I put it? If you go into a park to walk, you will feel, 'Ah, really.' Of course, ordinary citizens' health needs and the health state (状态; *zhuang tai*) they are able to do and achieve, when you walk there, you will feel [pause] deeply good [laughs]. You will feel very [pause] happy (快乐; *kuai le*), you will feel that everyone is experiencing an age of prosperity and flourishing (盛世太平; *sheng shi tai ping*), I guess you could say. There is singing, there is dancing. [laughs] It feels unimaginably good (好的不得了; *hao de bu de liao*).

Rather than strict biomedical categories, a healthful state is healthy primarily because it is sensed as such. These affective evocations of dynamic embodiment explicitly construct an inseparable relationship of mutual constitution between the material environment, the biological body, and the social world. This equilibrium explicitly formulates porous interchange between the individual and society in the form of affect; the harmony that one experiences in oneself is inseparable from the harmony of the world, which can be sensed and built through the intertwined materiality and affective stances of individual bodies.

Wang Li's and Dr. Wang's conceptions of balance and equilibrium resonates with concepts in traditional Chinese medicine in which the body emerges from and is situated within a world of constant motion. In Judith Farquhar's study of clinical encounters in traditional Chinese medicine, Farquhar writes that movement and dynamism are considered healthy, while stasis is equated with stagnation and death.[398] This dynamic embodiment resonates directly with Thomas Csordas's conception of embodiment as an emergent and open-ended intersubjective process. Csordas argues that, "[m]uch as Barthes (1986) draws a distinction between the work and the text, a distinction can be drawn between the body and embodiment." In this analogy, the body, like Roland Barthes's conception of the work, consists of the material entity, while embodiment, like text, can be "understood as an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the

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[398] Judith Farquhar, *Knowing Practice.*

mode of presence and engagement in the world." Rather than culture that can be read as a static artifact, the "paradigm of embodiment means not that cultures have the same structure as bodily experience, but that embodied experience is the starting point for analyzing human participation in a cultural world."[399] In such a way, Csordas argues that an attention to embodiment brings together the intersubjective and the social to interrogate what Csordas terms "somatic modes of attention," which are "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others."[400] Csordas's sense of embodiment directs our attention to how explicitly articulated and affectively gestured-to forms of embodiment relate to socially- and culturally-mediated ideas of bodies and environments.

These affective imaginations do not only involve discernment and sensing but also active production in a collectively embodied atmosphere and ecology that has direct psychic as well as material consequences. These dynamic forms of sensing and adjusting resonate with Zigon's concept of attunement as a fundamental, ongoing capacity to "become engaged with and become entangled in diverse and particular relationships" and extend these relationships to a diverse array of worldly bodies and entities.[401] Far from abstractions, these assessments of change and adjustment take place through a material body and material interchanges with the environment that are viscerally imagined and felt; they are affective imaginations that cannot be adequately captured in linguistic terms but entail visceral attunement to feel these imaginaries through the body. The imagination of social harmony that is built through deep interconnections between bodies and environments is thus deeply material and shaped by the concrete material factors of everyday life. In many instances, my interviewees constructed bodies that evolved over time in relation to their holistic environments, which included social and material conditions. One of my interviewees echoed the popular attention

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[399] Thomas J. Csordas, "Somatic Modes of Attention," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 8, no .2 (1993): 135.
[400] Ibid., 138.
[401] Zigon, "Attunement and Fidelity," 22.

to the importance of "positive energy" (正能量; *zheng neng liang*) for the good of the broader

environment and one's own health. In describing how important *zheng neng liang* is for health, she

asserted that if you are happy and contented when you cook, this positive energy will become

imbued in the food that you eat and serve to those around you. She told me about a study done by a

Japanese scientist that showed that negative emotions have a physical influence on food. She was

likely referring to Masaru Emoto's claim that expressing negative emotions to cooked rice causes it

to grow mold and rot more quickly than rice to which positive emotions were expressed.[402] Though

Emoto's demonstration might not pass the standards of peer-reviewed science, my interviewee's

reference to an ostensible experiment was notable in that it demonstrated an appeal to bioscientific

reason and mutual biological and material influences between the individual and environment, rather

than construct positivity and adjustment as abstract qualities of emotions or mind that remain

divorced from materiality. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" is thus not simply policy

articulated from the top down; it also constitutes the lived and desired realities that individual people

are actively materially and affectively engaged in shaping in the course of everyday lives.

Affective ambivalences: conserving the self within large-scale contingency

As the above imaginations of dynamic social interchange suggest, cultivating one's own

health cannot be straightforwardly categorized as a turn to responsibility for the self in the absence

of broader structural change, a phenomenon that theorists of health and neoliberalism commonly

discuss. Healthfully embodied, affective cultivation is not solely directed at one's own individual

wellbeing but towards actively building a desired present and future. Social wellbeing is imagined

through the wellbeing of individual bodies, even as the individual cannot be clearly divorced from

the collective. However, neither does this cultivation involve straightforwardly utilitarian

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[402] Masaru Emoto, *The Secret Life of Water*, trans. David A. Thayne (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005).

contributions to the good of the nation at all personal cost. Between these poles, imaginations of the capacities and limits of an adaptive body within the embodied reciprocity with desired social circumstances negotiate the fluid balance between conserving the self and its participation in a collectively constructed social harmony.

As the above imaginations of social harmony and individual wellbeing suggest, there is much that is positive about my middle class, retired interviewees' lives in post-reform China. China's current retirement policy was formulated in 1978 and stipulates that all males retire at age 60, female cadres at 55, and female workers at 50,[403] enabling many of my interviewees to pursue the drawing, dancing, and singing that they had loved as younger people but had never had the time or energy to pursue until now. The state has begun to consider and make changes to the provision of care for retirees as they leave the work force and age. Government-funded community centers and community-based services for older adults are on the rise, dovetailing with the increased popularity of health and wellbeing discourses in popular culture, and in the 13th Five Year Plan spanning 2016-2020, additional resources have been allocated for strengthening community-based care and health services for older adults.[404] In conjunction with these proliferating services, my interviewees pointed to the indisputable diversity (丰富; *feng fu*) of material life and characterized life now as one of "many colors" (多彩; *duo cai*) in terms of possibilities for their own pursuits, in contrast with the much more monotonous rhythm of life during their childhoods.[405] When I asked whether people were healthier in the past or today, many interviewees answered confidently that people were much

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[403] Hualei Yang, "The choice of pension and retirement systems when post-1960s baby boomers start to retire in China," in *Finance and Economic* Review vol. 4, no. 11 (2016): 1-15.
[404] "13th Five Year Plan for Economic and Social Development of the People's Republic of China (2016-2020)."
[405] Interviews with author February 6, 2017; February 10, 2017; March 19, 2017; April 28, 2017.

healthier today, commonly in reference to the lack of food and material goods in their youths.[406] The social ills that I earlier referenced, however, also extended to a pervasive ambivalence regarding their senses of the diversity and healthfulness in contemporary life; though diversity enables choices deemed more healthful, it also introduces anxieties and detriments that did not previously exist. While the vastly greater number of choices in terms of consumer goods, activities, and lifestyles in the present lend themselves to paying closer attention to one's own health, my interviewees also widely cited environmental and food safety issues as pervasive social issues over which individual people can exert little control. These uncertain assessments of life conditions suggest that it remains unclear how to orient towards the trajectory of China's radical post-reform change and to assessing life in the present, including in relation to conditions that shape health.

This ambivalence in attempting to assess life circumstances emerges through multivalent affective registers in the narration of their own life experiences attending the reform process. One of my interviewees who, like many of her generation, spent time working in a factory during her youth, told me with tears in her eyes that her generation had been instructed to labor dutifully for the nation and that they had done so with no thought for themselves. Suddenly, after reform, they were expected to understand profit and to labor for their own and other entities' gain. The trajectory of this injunction to self-interest, which is the trajectory of China's economic reform, contains multifarious, divergent affective registers. Although this interviewee told me of a long and successful career after the beginning of reform, some of which was spent in industry, she also maintained that her wholehearted response to the call to labor for the nation rendered her unprepared to shift suddenly to the demands of reform. This lack of preparation would make her always part of the "lowest tier of society," though by any objective standards, her home ownership, retirement benefits, and Beijing residency make her more well-off than many. My intent here, however, is not

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[406] Interviews with author. February 7, 2017; March 30, 2017.

to evaluate how her assessments of either pre- or post-reform life align with objective standards for comparing her life circumstances with others'. Instead, I seek to call attention to how the experience of orienting to the trajectory of reform and its radical changes into the present can involve multiple affective registers that do not always cohere into a single clear and overarching meaning. As my interviewee's tears indicate, her feelings of disorientation and being misled are real to her and remain present to her even in their telling many years later. Also real, however, were her expressions of appreciation for the opportunities that her post-retirement life has given her to devote more energy to her own health and the enjoyment that she professed at her weekly dance practices, though this enjoyment is also ambiguously positioned in relation to the sudden transition to self-interest that she narrated to me. She told me that after her retirement, she stayed at home for multiple months and did not have the will or energy to do anything, an exhaustion that stemmed from overwork as well as sadness at relinquishing clear purpose in life. She began developing many health problems, and her husband finally convinced her to start coming to dance practice. The turn to individual health, then, can fulfill a diverse array of needs, while ambivalence contains multiple registers that constitute diverse orientations to their experiences of the post-reform trajectory into the present.[407]

Within these ambivalences and uncertainties, the construction of detachment and *moving with* as a healthful and positive orientation to life contains a recognition and acceptance of the inability to fully and coherently assess the benefits and detriments of China's post-reform trajectory. My interviewees commonly asserted the belief that one must allow life to proceed naturally, a state that cannot be assessed through concrete or quantifiable terms but is sensed as that which does not contain an excessive degree of resistance that is itself something that is felt. One cannot remain too aggressively attached to a singular understanding or way that one wills or desires things to be. As my conversation with Professor Liu suggests, the relinquishment of certainty and control emerge from

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[407] Interview with author. April 19, 2017.

and suggest an orientation to a deep-seated sense of contingency attending reform that persists into the present. As such, this relinquishment and the turn to positivity also suggest how these individuals have learned to conserve the self against the unpredictable demands and vicissitudes of state-driven discourses even as they present themselves as active contributors to a social whole.

Professor Liu, a retired professor in her early sixties, now spends much of her time going to recreational activities for retired people in her housing complex and at her old work place. She dances multiple times a week with two groups, one of which regularly enters competitions and was once featured on the local news. She has also traveled extensively abroad, though now she wants to spend more time seeing China's famous sites and, in particular, climbing the "four great famous mountains." Her life activities are representative of a growing number of retirees who, as a result of the state-mandated retirement age for women at 55, are still young and energetic and thus can devote themselves to pursuing leisure that was unavailable and unthinkable in their youths. As did all of my interviewees, Professor Liu spoke to me of the importance of having a positive attitude in one's life and the centrality of positivity to health. As other interviewees did, she articulated that the benefits of this positivity for oneself cannot be distinguished from its importance in producing a social environment that is stable and harmonious, which then promotes the health of all those who experience this environment.

Professor Liu's invocation of positivity and the importance of maintaining positivity for oneself and one's social world, however, coexisted unevenly with a mixture of anxieties, sadness, self-assurance, and satisfaction towards the social situations that have shaped her current and future life circumstances. When our conversation turned to her future life circumstances, she told me confidently that she and her husband have already decided that they will simply live in a better nursing home, a comment that casually gestures to the fact that they have the means to support such a choice. Professor Liu and other retirees are grappling with their future livelihoods as retired people

at a time when healthcare has become increasingly privatized and the lifelong protections they were promised as young members of the socialist workforce are no longer in place. These individuals have only one child and, as many of my interviewees told me, must take care of their own health so as not to burden their adult child, who, if married, will have two sets of parents to care for. Professor Liu told me, with tears in her eyes, that people of her generation are the last to care for their parents and the first to be forsaken by their children,[408] a subject to which Professor Liu returned multiple times over the course of our conversation. In fact, numerous of my interveiwees articulated that taking care of their health was imperative because they did not want to burden their children with the financial and physical demands of caretaking in their old age. This lament of the burdens placed on a single child emerges directly from the one child policy implemented by the central government in 1979.[409] Professor Liu, however, gave me a knowing look and conspiratorially shared that the government understands the difficulties and as a result, her generation has really benefited. In her look and tone, she gestured to the benefits she had previously referenced in our conversation, her participation in diverse activities and her good health. She trusted that I could perceive the overall sense of comfort and wellbeing that her life and the details of her leisure and obvious good health evoked.

Professor Liu's characterization of the reform process that has led to this moment, however, also reflected disbelief at the scale and unpredictability of changes and ambivalence and uncertainty over how to evaluate these changes. Later in the conversation, Professor Liu confided that she often wonders whether leaving China in the 1980s and 1990s was the "correct" choice for one's life: she looks at her friends who left and still live in the US and feels that their lives are less stable than hers

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[408] Interview with author. February 28, 2017.
[409] As Susan Greenhalgh notes, this policy entailed biopolitical constructions of the health of the nation through direct intervention into individual people's lives. (Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008)).

and that they do not have as many assets has she does. Our subsequent exchange illustrates some of the indeterminacies that attend assessing life conditions and the changes that rendered today's China radically different from the one that Professor Liu's friends, and many others of their generation, left. Though Professor Liu initially asserted her belief that her friends who left China are less well off than she, the sequence of her subsequent comments also belies some hesitancy and an ongoing desire for objective comparisons that will help her decisively assess her claim. "My friend who lives in Ohio," she said, "how much could her house cost? I think not as much as my house in Beijing." She paused, then asked, "How much does your parents' house cost?" When I hesitated, she proceeded to ask me in detail about where my parents live, how many rooms their home has, the square footage, and where my friends' parents owned homes and how much they cost. She assuredly concluded that a house in the US, even in a relatively well-off area, could not cost as much as a comfortable but not terribly remarkable home in Beijing. When I asked directly if she felt that it had been better to remain in China, however, she hesitated and said that she did not necessarily feel that it was better. She stopped and started a few more times before sighing and saying, "In reality, if a person is happy, then oh well, it doesn't matter (算了, 无所谓; *suan le, wu suo wei*). Life is about your

own mood and mindset (心情; *xin qing*), so you really ultimately don't have to consider so much."

Considered in this context, Professor Liu's assertions of the importance of one's own attitude towards life comes as a response to the inability to confidently assess lived trajectories that are so apparently marked by historical contingency. Her turn to one's own attitude comes following a moment of marked hesitation tonally suggests a measure of resignation and the recognition that she cannot absolutely determine which life course is "better" despite her initially confident pronouncement. The arc of her narrative unspools outward in the pursuit of certainty, only to pause in her recognition of the impossibility of this certainty and return to herself: her invocation of

positivity and the healthful activities and stance that this positivity indexes provide an orientation and a solid sense of wellbeing that she can grasp in the midst of indeterminacy and manifest as a pause and gathering in her narrative arc. In the absence of certainty, Professor Liu turned to an affective orientation to contingency that, though couched in positive terms, also indexes resignation and recognition of the extent to which individual life is subject to large-scale contingency: in the end, "life is about your own mood and mindset."

Professor Liu herself acknowledged and reflected on this contingency in her narrative. She asserted that because she had remained in China, she has been able to achieve a great deal here, though she self-reflexively acknowledged that her life trajectory has conveniently lined up with "reform and opening up" (改革开放; *gai ge kai fang*). Housing prices have skyrocketed since the 1990s, when private homes first started being sold,[410] which was a stroke of luck, Professor Liu said, for the people like her who had bought homes early on from their work units (单位; *danwei*) and then remained in possession of them. This self-reflexivity indexed a moment in which she actively attempted to process how her life trajectory has been shaped by large-scale forces that are nevertheless beyond her grasp and to process how easily things might have been different. Despite her relative good fortune, she sighed and reflected with lingering disbelief that "[t]his situation is not normal; how could this have happened in our generation? To go from not being able to own a home to 1995, when people's work units started selling and distributing houses to their workers." But, Professor Liu said, your work unit had to have houses to sell you, and not everyone was able to catch this situation, and here Professor Liu reflects on a group of people who were not as fortunate as she in how their lives were impacted by the rapid pace of reform.

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[410] See Li Zhang on private properties and homes in *In Search of Paradise: Middle-class Living in a Chinese Metropolis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Her narrative again unspooling outward in her reflection on contingency, Professor Liu told me that there were no more properties at her workplace to sell after 1998. She asserted that some of these people might not have gone out and bought houses themselves, but they felt that homes were too expensive and they did not make much money, particularly since some of these people were slightly younger than Professor Liu, just beginning to work, and had families to support. This, Professor Liu noted, created a huge gap in life circumstances, and some of these people still do not own homes. These people, Professor Liu stated, did not realize (没有想到; *mei you xiang dao*); what she left to implication was that these people did not realize that though they already felt that these properties were expensive at the time, prices would continue growing until they were priced out of the real estate market altogether. Taking yet another tonal shift, she paused and reflected that "it's not much use [to have a well-valued house] anyway, it's just a number and you still need to live in the house, you can't sell it." Similar to her earlier relinquishment of pursuing definitive answers for whether staying or leaving was better with "it doesn't matter" (*suan le*; 算了), her comment that "it's not much use" marks a tonal shift from her confidence in her own prosperity and the good fortune of her smooth life trajectory.

Professor Liu's uncertainty and the multiple, sometimes contradictory valences of her narrative of post-reform life trajectories reflect the cobbled-together nature of her attempt to make sense of a life course in which certain moments, which were not obviously determining in the moment of their unfolding, proved transformative. The unfathomable nature of contingency emerges piecemeal through the various directions of thought contained within her narrative; even in retrospect, she is still unable to fully believe the scale of change and how easily her life might have been different had she unknowingly made other choices. While I take seriously her pronouncements of good health and good life conditions, I also seek to make room for the multiple trajectories

gestured to in her narrative, which contribute to an affective sense of the enormity of change that is not restricted to past events but remains ongoing. Without clear answers, Professor Liu returns in multiple instances in her narrative to a stance of letting go and turns toward the healthful pleasures that she enjoys in her current life, both for herself and to point me to her pleasurable and comfortable life circumstances that are self-evidently apparent. A positive, detached orientation and her healthful, pleasurable activities thus also take on valences of self-reassurance, marking moments in the narrative in which she gathers herself again from reaching towards answers that are unavailable. They thus enact a feeling in the world that she desires; rather than merely reflective of circumstances, they are also actively productive of the healthful feeling states and tangible senses of fullness and certainty for which she reaches.

Theorists of precarity argue that it is primarily a condition of millennial capitalism and have explored its experience through unstable employment and socioeconomic conditions. Speaking to precarity as a pervasive condition of the present, Anna Tsing defines precarity as "life without the promise of stability." Tsing writes that precarity was once understood as "the fate of the less fortunate," but "[n]ow it seems that all our lives are precarious—even when, for the moment, our pockets are lined."[411] While this sense of precarity is oriented primarily towards the possibility that the future will be less certain and stable, Professor Liu's narrative and the contingency upon which she dwells also suggests that precarity can be experienced as a narrow miss and a mixed sense of relief and fear at the near disastrous contingency that one only grasps after the fact. The temporality of this trajectory is long; it is not an immediate realization but rather necessitates watching the arc of a history unfold for a time. An invocation of positivity and health can thus act as buffer against the

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[411] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

powerful destabilization of this sense of precarity and defer the desire for answers indefinitely into the future, until perhaps one day that desire will no longer even exist.

The socially stratified differential experiences of precarity, however, are also differentially experienced over multiple temporalities. While Professor Liu herself experiences precarity over an extended timeline, her narrative also points directly to the uneven distribution of precarity that can emerge through a confluence of factors that shape how decisions are made. A family to care for, the year one enters the work force, the desire to save money, these lived details and how they converge at a single point in time come to be experienced as either fortuitous chance or a chance miss, both of which come to decisively shape the trajectory of future life but might also hold more immediately felt consequences, depending on one's situation. A pervasive sense of precarity thus also indexes diverse stakes. Stories of individuals who could not have predicted that the values of their homes would skyrocket in the years after selling them are commonplace in Beijing, and the lament is always the same: it's such a pity, how could that person have known how much that house would cost now? The stakes, however, are not always clear; are they the promise of great wealth or the necessity of survival? What of the precarity experienced by Beijing's many migrant workers, who come from rural areas and smaller cities to labor? The multiply layered and intersecting affective valences of Professor Liu's narratives thus suggest multiple coexisting worlds in which she lives: that of post-reform prosperity and comfort, pleasurable life activities, and uncertainty, anxiety, sadness, and resignation over past, present, and future life circumstances that are shaped though not fully determined by state policies. These worldly orientations are intimately and individually felt and simultaneously also point to the multiple temporalities and stratifications of "life without the promise of stability" as a condition of the present.

The multiple valences contained within ambivalence thus reflect the divergent senses of reality that coexist within this indeterminacy. Meanwhile, the turn to positivity and the healthful

137

pleasures of the present is also inflected with resignation that guards against an over-investment in attempting to discern coherent answers and assessments that are not available. As Professor Liu's narrative suggests, this over-investment might easily shade into fixated dwelling and insistence on that which cannot be determined, exactly the kind of excessive resistance that my interviewees deemed unhealthy. This excessive investment is an over-extension of one's energies to will and desire something that is at present impossible. In the face of this impossibility, the pleasures of detached self-cultivation and health are also concrete means to stabilize and protect the self.

Bodily capacities and limits for change: Concepts of flourishing under conditions of uncertainty

The detachment contained in positivity is thus central to limiting and stabilizing one's investment and desires in relation to social changes, even as the self exists in dynamic, embodied interchange with a broader social environment that continues to be in flux. Returning to the sense of collectively built social harmony that my interviewees evoked, this sense of conserving the self also informs one's embodied capacities to contribute to this collective social environment. Rather than a coherent and bounded body of health and medical knowledge, these constructions of bodily adjustment to the changing world drew on an indeterminate amalgamation of concepts from Chinese medicine, imaginations of a body that interacts with its environment, and concepts from the biosciences to evoke an affective orientations to the world. Their narratives reflect the diverse discursive genealogies that bring together Traditional Chinese Medicine and biomedicine that scholars such as Mei Zhan and Sonya Pritzker analyze within twentieth-century Chinese conceptions of health and the body, which cannot cleanly be separated into Chinese and Western, Chinese medical and biomedical and which are thoroughly inflected by national goals and China's modern

history.[412] Their senses of embodiment suggest how these cultural and medical ideas of the body contingently articulate with emerging conditions in the present within everyday life circumstances.

Their imaginations of social harmony that is being built through individual materially and affectively embodied participation are articulated in relation to material bodies that contain limits as well as capacities for dynamic change. As the above discussion illustrates, these limits take shape as affective self-conservation, and they are also asserted through limits of the material body's ability to adapt. In relation to the ongoing rapidity and drastic nature of change that has attended the reform process into the present, these articulations of bodily adjustment and limits further nuance imaginations of a "socialism with Chinese characteristics" that builds social stability and harmony through the participation of individual bodies. The bodies that participate in this interchange are not infinitely giving of themselves and wholly devoted to a collective social ideal. Instead, they negotiate material and affectively sensed boundaries and limitations on an ongoing basis that also mark the imagination of social harmony as one constructed through a distinctly middle class body.

My interviewees articulated these limits and capacities in direct relation to the drastic changes in their material environments. Many of my interviewees noted the increasing prevalence of diseases that they associated with excess consumption, which they assert were virtually nonexistent in China in the past. My interviewees did not know people with diseases such as diabetes and heart disease in their youth because people were concerned about not having enough to eat during the famine of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution's strict food rationing during, rather than having too much. In contrast, Dr. Wang, who is a physician, pointed to the need to ensure that her patients are limiting their consumption of fat, oil, and sugar, which she asserted was not a concern in earlier

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[412] Mei Zhan, *Other-worldly: Making Chinese Medicine Through Transnational Frames* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Sonya E. Pritzker, *Living Translation: Language and the Search for Resonance in U.S. Chinese Medicine* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014).

years.[413] Though Dr. Wang brought her professional experience to bear in our conversation, she was not the only one who reflected on the prevalence of diseases that they associated with excess in current life. As Zhao Mei, a woman in her early sixties who grew up during the Cultural Revolution years, put it to me, "who had ever heard of someone having diabetes when we were children? If someone had had diabetes, we would have held him up as some sort of deity (佛; *fo*),"[414] a joke that reflects the amazement that would attend having enough, not to mention too much, to eat at that time. In relation to the ambivalent senses of the present moment's benefits and detriments, my interviewees constructed a sense of an adaptive body that contains a tension between bodily capacities and limits for change; the body is simultaneously malleably responsive as well as assertively resistant to too much change. Zhao Mei declared that "our parents came through life hungry (*e zhe guo lai de*), so how could our bodies possibly be prepared for such excess?"[415] Zhao Mei's reflection suggests that their bodies as biological entities are not fully able to keep pace with the rapidity of change in their environments. Though they were eager to assert their openness to new things, my interviewees also returned to this adaptive limit as affirmation of the particular Chinese nature of their bodies and the Chinese environment to which their bodies are most well suited.

The tension between capacities and limits to adjustment are articulated as a tension between acknowledgement that different bodies are able to adjust to different environmental situations and visceral reactions that reinstantiate their own conceptions of what constitutes healthful flourishing. Li Jin and Sun Zhimei were two women in their mid-fifties with whom I spoke over snacks and tea at one of the women's homes. Both of them have children who are now living abroad in the U.S.,

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[413] Interview with author. February 7, 2017.
[414] Interview with author. March 30, 2017.
[415] Interview with author. March 30, 2017.

and they have each visited them multiple times in the past few years. Li Jin told me that she is not

used to drinking cold water when she is in the U.S., an observation that I have often heard from

Chinese people who have traveled abroad. Hot or warm water is considered to be much better for

health in China, and I myself am often directed to guard against cold things and reprimanded by

both family members and casual acquaintances when they observe me drinking a cold beverage.

While the injunction against cold would take shape in relation to other symptoms in a diagnosis in

Traditional Chinese Medical practice,[416] this generalized injunction also relates to long-standing

conceptions that the body must be protected against cold and winds. Shigehisa Kuriyama writes that

in ancient Chinese medical doctors "suspected [wind's] ravages in nearly all" as the cause of

afflications ranging from "chills and headaches, vomiting and cramps, dizziness and numbness, loss

of speech" to madness and death.[417] These long-held beliefs shape contemporary colloquial ideas of

bodily health that articulate bodily boundaries in relation to the conditions of the present.

Rather than straightforwardly condemn cold for all bodies, Li Jin self-consciously reflected

that cold's harmfulness depends on the conditions to which a certain person's body has become

accustomed over time. She elaborated that she is close friends with a couple who has two daughters

in the US and brought their daughters back to China to visit. She said that when the girls were

young, they like to take baths in cold water, and they were "as skinny as monkeys," an expression

commonly used to signal lack of proper nutrition or nourishment, if somewhat affectionately and

playfully. Li Jin felt almost as if her friend were mistreating her daughters, but her friend shrugged

and said that they were used to it and that they always took cold water baths in the U.S. And lo and

behold, Li Jin told me, years later, the two daughters have both grown very well into successful

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[416] See, for instance, Sonya Pritzker's attention to "thirst with aversion to ice cold drinks" as a particular
symptom that is articulated and elaborated upon within the diagnostic process (Pritzker, *Living Translation*, 179).
[417] Shigehisa Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine* (New York:
Zone Books, 2002), 234.

young women, one of whom is at MIT and one of whom is at Harvard. I took these markers of success as an acknowledgement of their flourishing in spite of what Li Jin herself would assume to be harmful caretaking; these successes gesture to the possibility that other bodies, even those of Chinese origin, might survive and even flourish under radically different conceptions of the relation between bodies and environments.

Although Li Jin makes this explicit acknowledgement, she also maintains a visceral reaction against the idea of bodies subjected to what she deems harsh environmental exposure. At Li Jin's story, Zhimei showed us a video that had been circulating among her friends on WeChat, a very popular social media and texting app that almost everyone I encountered in China uses. It was a video in an unspecified European country in which a group of women, all wearing bathing suits, took young infants they were holding in their arms out into the winter cold to splash a little bit of cold water on them. The babies' wriggles and squirms caused Jin Li and Zhimei to giggle good-naturedly; "look at the babies!" they exclaimed, "look, it's so cold this one can't even cry out!" The specifics of the video's time and place seemed unimportant to Jin Li and Zhimei; at least, these details were not asked after or acknowledged. What mattered was that the women (whom Li Jin and Zhimei identified as the babies' mothers) and children were foreign. This video, they asserted, showed how foreigners differed so sharply from themselves in terms of the conditions to which they expose and acclimate the body from birth, and the ruthlessness with which they could do so. While Jin Li and Zhimei were amused by the video, both women also playfully shuddered, and Jin Li referred to the women in the video as "wolf mothers" (狼妈妈; *lang mama*) because they could

subject their children to such treatment; regardless of her earlier acknowledgement that exposure to cold water might do no harm, the thought of splashing cold water on their children still viscerally repelled them. Li Jin implicitly asserts with her body language and her reaction to both situations

that she would never be able to do what both her friend and these other mothers were able to do, as her earlier reflection on her friend's use of a cold bath as "mistreatment" also suggests. However playfully communicated, our exchange about cold water suggests a visceral reaction to the possibility of submerging one's own child in a substance deemed detrimental to healthy flourishing.

Li Jin and Zhimei used the term *minzu* to describe these cultural and racial classifications, a term that Louisa Schein has elaborated blends national and racial designations.[418] In official state discourse, *minzu* designates 56 officially recognized non-Han ethnic minority groups, and Schein examines specifically how in relation to the Miao these designations produce discourses of the nation and modernity against non-Han backwardness that must be assimilated into the modern nation. Jin Li and Zhimei, however, matter-of-factly assert that this other *minzu*, that is located outside of China, simply has a different set of life practices, even as this recognition coexists with their own visceral reactions to it. Their recognition that other bodies might flourish under other circumstances reflects an open stance that recognizes that their own lifeways are not objectively correct and healthful. In the same moment, however, their inability to suppress some degree of visceral repulsion also marks the limits of their acceptance, beyond this intellectual acknowledgement. These visceral limits and their coexistence with intellectually-based recognition suggest a deep-seated and holistic set of sensations, perceptions, and beliefs about the body and self that other theorists of embodiment have deemed a gestalt. Maurice Merleau-Ponty elaborates on gestalt as the totality of subjective perception that is the ground of subjectivity.[419] With regard to particular historical contexts, Barbara Duden, for instance, elaborates on the "epoch-specific gestalt of the sensory perception of womanhood" in eighteenth-century Germany as a holistic sense of how

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[418] Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 1, 65.

[419] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (New York: Routledge, 2012).

embodiment was apprehended.[420] Li Jin and Zhimei's visceral reactions and colloquial invocation of *minzu* as a national ethnic marker suggest a similar overarching and deep-seated *sense* of healthful bodies that stands in some tension with their cognitive interpretations. Without taking the visceral and intellectually-articulated as entirely separate or one as more fundamental or true, this tension simultaneously articulates possibilities and limits for embracing divergent relations between bodies and environments and possibly signals a gestalt, as a sense of embodiment, that is undergoing revision.

The ambivalences within Li Jin and Zhimei's invocation of *minzu* as a marker of racial differences in how the body is treated suggest how these national and racial designations remain potently evocative and viscerally felt even as they are undergoing shifts in the contemporary context. The tension between new experiences and a sense of bodies that are accustomed to certain environments was common in my interviews. People who were well-traveled and expounded on the enjoyment and fulfillment they derived from travel told me that although they themselves were open to other practices and ways of life, their bodies were not always accustomed. Zhao Mei, who visits her son from time to time in Boston, told me that though she likes Boston very much, ultimately, her "body belongs in Beijing." Similarly, Zhang Yibo told me that though she loves to travel and try new things, her stomach sometimes rejects these foods and, implicitly, these different environments. She was careful to specify that it was not she herself who was not accustomed or reacted negatively: "It's not that *I* do not like them, it's that my *stomach* does not like them." They asserted that their bodies register and respond to environmental difference separately from their conscious minds, even as they also embrace the new experiences in different places that travel brings them. While these limits are articulated with respect to geographies and practices outside of China, they also resonate

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[420] Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-century Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991): 180-1.

directly with the sense of rapid and sometimes disorienting change within China to which their bodies, descended from people who "came through life hungry," cannot keep pace. Their assessments of the close relationship between body and place articulate the commonly held belief that a particular environment will produce a particular kind of person. A popularized belief from Traditional Chinese Medical discourses holds that health habits must be determined by one's current environment; for instance, a person from Sichuan, where spicy foods are popular in part to combat the wetness and humidity, cannot do the same in Beijing, where the air is too dry for consuming such foods. Simultaneously, the particularities of one's environment throughout one's lifetime also determines one's embodied being; as the saying goes, "one set of soil and water grows one set of people" (一方水土养一方人; *yi fang shui tu yang yi fang ren*), a formulation that suggests limits for the extent to which a person whose body has been cultivated under different circumstances can fully adjust to a different environment.

The close relationship between bodies and places, however, also leaves the potential for bodies to change. Li Jin and Sun Zhimei's own children live in the US, and they noted that their children do not get sick as often as their American peers because, they claimed, they were raised in China, where the environment is poorer, so they have stronger immune systems. Detrimental environmental conditions, then, can also cultivate strength and resilience. When I spoke with a Chinese medical doctor about people adapting to food and pollution-related changes in their environments, he drew on an explanation of plant bodies that possess properties to combat the environments in which they grow. Dr. Cui elaborated that medicinal plants that are able to grow under certain conditions can be used to treat the same qualities that are found in these environmental conditions; for example, plants that grow under shade and cool conditions must contain qualities that are resistant to these attributes in order to thrive and can thus be used to treat

cold in humans. His explanation suggests that body's flourishing is not built through correspondence with environments that mirror and nurture qualities of sameness but dynamic and reciprocal relations that encompass opposition and antagonism.[421] Removed from the continuous shaping of Beijing's environment, Li Jin and Zhimei's children often become sick when they return to China because they have not been exposed to the environment, and specifically the air pollution that has become more severe. Within this formulation, bodies continue to develop under changing environmental pressures, not only their children's but also their own. Li Jin and Zhimei did not explicitly state the full implications of this formulation, but the very fact that they themselves are not constantly and noticeably ill while living under polluted conditions that their children's bodies can no longer fully tolerate also speaks to the ongoing adjustment that is happening within their own bodies. This healthful adjustment does not present itself as a dramatic event that calls attention to itself but rather as the uneventful ongoingness of everyday life.[422] Adjustment might then also happen in one's body without one's own full conscious awareness in relation to less than ideal environments, social and material, through the course of simply living everyday life, even as these environments might also continue to cause unnoticed harm.

This tension between adaptive potential and limits speaks at once to a concept of a particularly Chinese body and to the instability of what can be termed Chinese in the face of such rapid change and my interviewees' own embrace of transnationality. Though many of my interviewees culminated their figurations of bodily rejection in assertions that in the end, they are Chinese people who belong in China, the tensions they articulated between capacities and limits for adjustment destabilize the coherence and unity of these very categories. While they articulated a

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[421] This explanation of opposition and compensating for environmental lack resonates with articulations of the centrality of dynamism and mutuality in Traditional Chinese Medicine (Farquhar, *Knowing Practice*).

[422] This sense of health as unnoticeable and embedded in everyday life resonates with Drew Leder's phenomenological consideration of how the body often does not enter into consciousness until it breaks down (Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

sense of disbelief at the scale of change within China, they are also people whose children attended universities abroad, who traveled internationally, and who repeated to me that Chinese people had much to learn from foreigners. These markers of middle-class prosperity also suggest limits to who can even participate in negotiations of ethnic nationality, namely those who have the means to pursue these opportunities. Their social situation allows them to speak about Chinese bodies as a broad national category in particular ways, while other differently situated individuals live contestations over smaller scales of embodied identification within the nation. I do not wish to imply here that other people do not hold different opinions about China as a nation, but rather to attend to how my interviewees' relatively privileged status enabled them to have experiences and senses of their bodies as Chinese that might be precluded to others without the same opportunities.

These implicitly exclusionary limits converge with discourses of the quality of individuals, or *suzhi* (素质), in contemporary society. *Suzhi* was first widely used to justify the one child policy as

the concentration of resources on the production of high quality children who would contribute to a high quality national population and thus strengthen national modernity.[423] Scholars who trace contemporary colloquial usages of *suzhi* point to the diversity of its meanings and the slippage between individual qualities that can be cultivated and an overarching assessment of an individual's overall quality.[424] Derogatory assessments of low *suzhi* are often used in relation to migrant workers from China's rural areas who have traveled to larger cities to work and include assessments of poor hygiene and manners; they also, however, are still commonly used to deplore Chinese people's overall lower quality compared to other Western developed nations and the need for China to catch

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[423] Susan Greenhalgh and Edwin A. Winkler, *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); Andrew Kipnis, "Neoliberalism reified: *suzhi* discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China," in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Society* vol. 13 (2007): 388.
[424] Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach," in *China Quarterly* (2006): 303.

up to these countries, which they are in the process of doing.[425] Wanning Sun argues that *suzhi* is a

"highly mobile" category that is "capable of being deployed in almost any context in which

comparisons between individuals, communities, and populations are being made regardless of

gender, location, class or ethnicity (or indeed because of them)."[426] With regard to migrant domestic

workers, or *baomu* (保姆), Sun elaborates that the distinctions between low quality rural migrant

workers and high quality urbanites are constantly reproduced in markers that display *suzhi* through

the details of everyday life, including clothing and manners.[427]

　　This distinction also centers around the migrant workers' status as "outsiders" (外地人; *wai*

di ren) in discourses where being native to a place (本地人; *ben di ren*) holds crucial cultural capital.[428]

Moreover, these distinctions are further differentiated according to specific geographies in China,

where particular provinces and cities hold particular connotations and construct particular types of

bodies. *Baomu* from southern China, for instance, are thought to be more hygienic, an idea that Sun

traces to particular environmental conditions that are tied with bodily habits; a northern region that

is drier and experiences more drought might demand more daily water conservation, and *baomu* from

that region might not be in the habit of bathing as frequently as a result.[429] *Suzhi* is thus a discourse

of quality that is intimately and complexly bound to cultural and social senses of place that are also

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[425] Ibid.

[426] Wanning Sun, "*Suzhi* on the Move: Body, Place, and Power," in *Positions: Asia Critique* vol. 17, no .3 (2009): 618.

[427] Yan Hairong argues that post-Mao uses of *suzhi* "mark a sense and sensibility of the self's value in the market economy (Yan Hairong, "Neoliberal Governmentality and Neohumanism: Organizing Suzhi/Value Flow through Labor Recruitment," in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 18, no .4 (2003): 494), while Ann Anagnost similarly asserts that it is invoked in conjunction with urban middle class aspirations and constructions of culture, education, and self-cultivation that are poured into the development of only children in direct contrast with low *suzhi* migrant workers (Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," in *Public Culture* vol. 16, no .2 (2004): 189-208).

[428] Sun, "*Suzhi* on the Move: Body, Place, and Power," 632; Sun traces this emphasis on insider and outsider status to China's *hukou*, or personal registration, system, which ties an individual to the place s/he is officially registered and has effectively maintained a strong urban/rural divide (622).

[429] Ibid., 633.

environmentally determined.[430] While *suzhi* involves valences of self-cultivation, it also indexes the limits of self-cultivation; within these discourses, even greater socioeconomic success and more education for these individuals would not necessarily result in assessments by others of higher *suzhi*.[431] An invocation of Chinese bodies suited to living in China, then, involves multiple tensions, stratifications, and exclusions. Although my interviewees articulated the possibility of adjustment that can create the conditions for suitability to new environments, both in China and elsewhere, this adaptive imagination is thus also a distinctly middle-class imaginary that is highly determined by socioeconomic situation and inflected by *suzhi*.

These bodily limits and ongoing forms of adjustment are thus articulated in relation to a middle-class body whose adjustments to the changes of reform into the present are the site through which articulations of a particular Chinese body and a collectively built Chinese future continue to be negotiated. The boundary between the Chinese body and outsider remains relevant to defining this Chinese future and for conceptualizing adjustment to a China that is itself rapidly changing and increasingly blurring the boundaries between China and the world. While national identifications remain powerful markers for articulating investments in political subjectivity, how outsiders are conceptualized and who can participate in the active negotiation of Chineseness remain spatially differentiated even within China. Returning to the imagination of embodied social harmony that constitutes part of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," this "broader environment" and "ecology" do not constitute an undifferentiated and uncontested imaginary but is in the process of being actively conceived and embodied in relation to multiple social stratifications and differentiations.

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[430] Tamara Jacka, "*Suzhi* (Quality) Discourse in the PRC," in *positions: Asia Critique* vol. 17, no .3 (2009): 531.
[431] Kipnis, "Neoliberalism reified," 389; Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," 193.

Meanwhile, articulations of adaptive limits, even as adjustment might necessarily be taking place unconsciously, also suggest the limits individuals place on the demands to which their bodies can be subjected. These are not bodies that are fully malleable, and indeed my interviewees' conscious articulations of the limits to this malleability suggest some reservation in relation to the large-scale change still taking place within China today and thus to the ongoing construction of a desired present and future. The body that actively contributes to this social ecology is an ambivalent body who cultivates its own pleasures and conserves and protects the boundaries of the self even as these very acts seek to produce desired social reality. Rather than either total self-sacrifice or a straightforward turn to private interests, this distinctively Chinese future is negotiated through the dynamic interplay between a body's adaptive potential and its articulated limits. Oriented towards an uncertain and still-changing world, healthful detachment, constructed as positivity, can index a wide range of stances, including resignation, letting go, and deferral. As such, the multiple affects of detachment enable its practitioner to live the life that is available in the present, an act that in certain orientations also actively produces a desired world.

Chapter 3

Affective Labor as Technology in Speculative China-U.S. Circuits: Chai Jing's *Under the Dome* and Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea*

Chai Jing's Chinese environmental documentary *Under the Dome* (2015) and Chang-rae Lee's Asian American imaginative novel *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) render the scale of material changes that attend China's entry into global capital explicit with their imaginings of post-environmental-apocalyptic worlds. As my ethnography elucidates, the other face of increased prosperity and accelerated development are the indeterminate health risks and environmental degradation that attend the unbridled pursuit of industrialization and profit. Chai's and Lee's narratives make explicit

and, in Lee's case, imagine into a dystopic future, an extreme iteration of this destruction, in which the presents and futures of China and the United States unevenly and uncertainly converge.

These two narratives together suggest how the flexible demands of capital underlie and ultimately persist beyond the programs of the state, rendering Asiatic racial form broadly constructed a site of imagined subjugation and contestation that is nevertheless shaped by the legacies of nation-based programs and politics. Chai elaborates on China's smog and air pollution problem, which she directly traces to China's use of coal in its pursuit of accelerated industrial development in the decades following the beginning of economic reform in 1978. Meanwhile, Lee sketches a future dystopic world that has already succumbed to the environmental disaster wrought by industrial development but in which capital remains all the more ruthlessly and adaptively persistent in the face of this destruction; the emergency needs of environmental apocalypse have rendered national governments obsolete, and a "directorate" of pharmaceutical corporations structures all aspects of life in this post-national world, does away with any question of protected rights, and continues to ever more creatively extract laboring and resource potential from the bodies that are fully subject to its demands. In this future world, descendants of Chinese environmental refugees offered sanctuary in exchange for their and their descendants labor bring together industrial and experimental biomedical labor within a limit case of totalized capitalistic control, a convergence to which Chai also obliquely calls attention in contemporary China in relation to smog, whose unknown or undisclosed health effects renders ordinary people experimental subjects.[432] While Lee's novel proceeds from a point of Asian American anxiety about China, it suggests that Asian Americanist considerations of how Asian/American racialization will continue to transform in conjunction with conditions shaped by global capital must grapple with the convergences between

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[432] Chai Jing, *Under the Dome* (2015).

the Asian American figure and the Chinese,[433] specifically in how persistent U.S. desires to neutralize the Chinese economic and geopolitical threat would fully subjugate the Asiatic figure writ large.

Chai and Lee thus obliquely evoke dual senses of apocalypse: both environmental and, in relation to the pursuit of capital that brings about this apocalypse, also obliquely and implicitly the apocalypse that attends the end of world communism and the rise of global forms of neoliberalism.[434] China after Mao and the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 is commonly referred to as "postsocialist" outside of China by Western scholars, while in official Chinese discourses it remains named as "socialism with Chinese characteristics." As I have earlier elaborated, the indeterminate meanings and convergences of these terms suggest how China's post-reform trajectory, into the present and an uncertain future, remains in open-ended development. Asian American scholarship has substantially chronicled the structural racial injustice that has belied the false promises of U.S. liberal democracy, while an emerging body of scholarship seeks to consider the global solidarities and forms of racial justice imagined through Maoism and global communism that converged with this disillusionment.[435] However, scholars have thus far not substantively engaged with both the foreclosures and possibilities that are still emerging in the present that have attended global communism's waning as a viable alternative to capitalist modernity and the ongoing development of postsocialism/socialism with Chinese characteristics. Jason McGrath, writing on Chinese postsocialism, argues that

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[433] I use "Asian American" and "Asian/American" here as a way of distinguishing between Lee's location and specific situatedness within the U.S. and racialization and conflation of Asian/Americans as a single racial group. David Palumbo-Liu writes that "Asian/American" is a "constantly shifting designation" that is complexly situated within "a complex matrix of race, ethnicity, and nation" at a given historical moment (David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 13).

[434] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[435] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung-Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Christopher Connery, "The End of the Sixties," in *boundary 2* vol. 36, no. 1 (2009): 183-210; Colleen Lye, "U.S. ethnic studies and Third Worldism, 40 years later," in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* vol. 11, no .2 (2010): 188-93; Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Robeson Taj Frazier, *The East Is Black: Cold War China in the Black Radical Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

postsocialism is not just a condition that characterizes nearly all of the formerly communist 'second world' but is rather a global, universally shared condition. The international communist movement represented the only really serious threat and alternative to the spread of capitalism—as synonymous with modernity—around the world. The failure of the global communist movement and the apparently overwhelming triumph of capitalism are therefore conditions affecting the entire planet.[436]

The consideration of postsocialism's global nature converges with wide-ranging assessments of neoliberalism's increasingly pervasive reach, both geographically and into the realms of culture and intimate personal relations.[437] Scholars of neoliberalism in both China and the West argue that the increasing erosion of state protections in favor of private capitalist interests has resulted in capital's increasing influence over all dimensions of life and private, individual practices that internalize and are biopolitically structured by these broader forces.[438] These diffusions of power and capital suggest that conceptions of what constitutes individual agency, possibilities for difference, and emerging affinities are shifting and still contingently emerging alongside the local particularities that make up these global shifts.

Within the local particularities that are nevertheless interconnected through these global postsocialist conditions, reading Chai's and Lee's narratives together suggests unexpected affinities in Chinese and Asian American imaginations of navigating conditions in which capital has become increasingly pervasive in all dimensions of life and, in the wake of China's growing economic strength, is altering conceptions of Asiatic racialization globally. China's perceived hegemony in Asia and Africa is transforming historic resentments and aggressions, while these global dynamics also feed Western discourses that continue to ambivalently paint China as economic and geopolitical

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[436] Jason McGrath, 14.

[437] *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (New York: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Mitchum Huehls and Rachel Greenwald Smith, "Four Phases of Neoliberalism and Literature: An Introduction," in *Neoliberalism and Contemporary Literary Culture*, ed. Mitchum Huehls and Greenwald Smith (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017), 1-20.

[438] Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong, Introduction to *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*, ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

threat and potential resource.[439] Asian American scholarship itself has an ambivalent relationship to China. Invested in political revolution and, importantly, in highly visible forms of political subjugation and disenfranchisement, in which China, as an emerging world power, also participates, scholarship that engages neoliberalism and global capital has not substantively engaged with the vast changes within China itself that deeply affect its attitudes to and relations with the world. Moreover, on an individual level for those living these conditions, global postsocialism renders power more ambiguous and diffuse than initially appears in categorizations of national hegemony. While biopolitical mechanisms are sometimes more easily visible in a Chinese context in which the state remains authoritative, the fact that scholars of China draw on U.S.-based theorizations of neoliberalism also speaks to their shared contexts and concerns. Citing Lauren Berlant, anthropologists Amy Borovoy and Li Zhang, for instance, note that the "precarity of individual lived experiences and the promises of the good life are often deeply entangled."[440] They also, however, argue that "practices aimed at generating, crafting, and enhancing life despite insecurity, dislocation, and distress" are also "meaningful practices that should be taken seriously" rather than only as instances of "cruel optimism."[441] As such, these modes of navigating still-unfolding and uncertain conditions within the intersection of state structures and capital in China can contribute to considerations of how individuals apprehend and attempt to build livable lives within forms of neoliberalism from a non-Western vantage point that is equally significant for understanding emerging global conditions and the aesthetic forms that attend them. While this non-Western route intersects with U.S. contexts and dynamics most apparently in the transforming demographics and

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[439] Lydia Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Culture and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

[440] Amy Borovoy and Li Zhang, "Between Biopolitical Governance and Care: Rethinking Health, Selfhood, and Social Welfare in East Asia," in *Medical Anthropology* vol. 36, no .1 (2017): 3.

[441] Berlant, 43.

politics of Asian America, intersections in affective investments in capital and the imperative of resource extraction from certain kinds of bodies also illuminate shared logics between Chinese and U.S. contexts informed by capital, as well as possibilities for navigating these pervasive conditions that do not uphold hegemonic nation-based contestations.

This chapter seeks to consider emerging affinities and ambivalences between Chinese and Asian American navigations of these precarities, pursuits of the good life, and the pervasive influence of capital in the most intimate dimensions of everyday life. Asian American scholarship has elaborated on the Asiatic figure's association with the economic in the U.S. popular imagination, both as threat, in the form of individual and national competition, and potential resource, as a market and exploitable workforce. [442] Scholarship on this economic form in conjunction with neoliberalism elaborates on the Asian American model minority family as a central site for imagining this threat and as a model of flexible and successful entrepreneurialism, not only for other minorities but also white Americans.[443] Meanwhile, the Chinese model child and family are increasingly key sites that reproduce China's global aspirations for economic success in the pressure to produce highly successful children who are able to receive prestigious educations abroad and work in global contexts.[444] This convergence suggests shared modes in which affective investments in the good life that are reproduced through the family are leveraged as resources for reproducing national aspirations tied to capital. While Asian American political organization has sought to combat conflation with Asians in Asia and claim American citizenship by stressing identification as Americans, Asian American scholarship must also contend with the ongoing association between

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[442] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 9.

[443] Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings: Asian America in a Capitalist Culture of Emotion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); Susan Koshy, "Neoliberal Family Matters," in *American Literary History* vol. 25, no .2 (2013): 344-380.

[444] Vanessa L. Fong, *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

the Asiatic figure writ large and economic forces within the changing contexts of China's rising influence and perceived economic power, which has rendered China and the Chinese the paradigmatic sites of this economic imagination and threat in the present. Insofar as characterizations of this association between the Asiatic and the economic remain invested in neutralizing this threat,[445] Chinese audiences, with China's history of Western imperialism in mind, are particularly attuned to Western discourses that seek to dismiss and circumscribe China's growth and influence. Rather than upholding these nation-based politics, however, attention to affect as a key mode of apprehending and negotiating neoliberal conditions also suggests possibilities for more diffuse modes of contestation that also do not revolutionarily imagine an outside to conditions in which no clear outside exists. Chai's and Lee's narratives elaborate on these dual senses of affect. Firstly, they trace the shared ways in which particular bodies and their affective investments are imagined and leveraged as resources within capital's increasingly pervasive reach. They also imagine how these same affects nevertheless contain possibilities to be and relate otherwise.

Both Chai's and Lee's narratives are concerned with the aftermaths of these world-altering changes in the present and into an imagined future and how the adaptive bodies that remain in these post-apocalyptic worlds navigate capital's increasingly pervasive reach. Within these conditions, in which capital increasingly shapes understandings of bodies and culture, Chai and Lee locate gendered forms of affective caretaking as privileged sites through which to interrogate the ways that bodies are enlisted as resources for reproducing the nation and its intertwinement with capital, as well as possibilities for being and relating otherwise that might emerge from within these same bodies. They articulate contemporary transformations of the historical means through which gendered Chinese and Asian American bodies have been conceived and leveraged as resources for

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[445] *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, ed. David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

the nation and imagine, in these bodies, Chinese and Asian American convergences in both

embodied forms of subjugation and potentials for difference emerging in the present and future.

Across these narratives, female Asiatic bodies make visible the historic continuities and future

possibilities for capitalist exploitation to proliferate in ever more efficient ways and, in doing so,

expand definitions of "biocapital" to broadly consider the links between diverse forms of embodied

resource extraction for profit, which converge unevenly with the pursuits of the nation.

Chai's and Lee's narratives together trace gendered affective care as a logic and technology

of embodied resource extraction that underlies changing configurations of state policy and

technoscientific developments. Scholars of the contemporary bioeconomy consider how emerging

biotechnologies are changing conceptions of individual personhood, life span, and property and how

corporate interests leverage biological material for profit, from the sale of blood, organs, and other

bodily substances to the patenting of scientific developments on biological material and

biotechnologies.[446] Alongside these considerations of the emerging biotechnologies that are changing

conceptions of the human body, theorists of embodied and affective labor call attention to

biocapital's gendered and racialized dimensions that are continuous with imperialistic histories.

Melinda Cooper notes that particular gendered, racialized bodies must bear the burdens of desires

for limitless growth and regeneration before these biotechnical promises can be realized in

practice,[447] while Kalindi Vora argues that considerations of biocapital and the exploitation of

biological material from certain raced and gendered bodies must be examined in conjunction with

historic iterations of colonial and gendered labor.[448] Vora connects domestic labor, customer care,

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[446] Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell, *Tissue Economies: Blood, Organs, and Cell Lines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Eugene Thacker, *The Global Genome: Biotechnology, Politics, and Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005).

[447] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 131.

[448] Kalindi Vora, *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 3.

the production of biological commodities and services in the form of organ transplantation and gestation, and "noninnovative knowledge work" as iterations of "life support," which Vora defines as a "system of continuing the transmission of what [Vora calls] vital energy—the substance of activity that produces life (though often deemed reproductive)—from areas of life depletion to areas of life enrichment."[449] Through Vora's foregrounding of race, gender, and imperialism, biocapital is not a distinct and novel category that emerges with contemporary biotechnologies but "describes an overall market in life-supporting energies and services, produced through ways of inhabiting the body and understanding life that evolved out of earlier gendered and racialized social and economic forms."[450] Vora's "recasting" of biocapital as a continuous category of racialized and gendered exploitation that takes shape throughout histories of imperialism "sheds light on how biopower works together with what can be called the expanded realm of biocapital, human biological reproductivity, and reproductive labor, as a site of the generation of value."[451] Chai's and Lee's novel articulate this logic of biocapital as a fundamental logic of a postsocialist, post-apocalyptic, and post-national world. While Chai's narrative does not explicitly engage with the most visible markers of biocapital, her elucidation of everyday bodies as experimental subjects makes visible an underlying logic that cannot be divorced from China's twenty-first-century investment in these biotechnologies but that extends more broadly throughout the increasing primacy of economic growth as a determining value in state policy and private life throughout the reform process into the present. Meanwhile, Lee's post-national world is one in which the interests of capitalist conglomerates efficiently extract industrial and biological labor from bodies that are affectively invested in reproducing the conditions of their own subjugation through invocations of a cultural legacy of hard work and familial bonds. Together, Chai's and Lee's narratives make explicit the logic of ever more

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[449] Ibid., 1-3.
[450] Ibid., 4.
[451] Ibid., 15.

creative resource extraction that underlies changing configurations of the state and capital and leverages the affects tied to the good life that are reproduced through intimate ties, extending into Lee's dystopic future in which the state itself has been replaced entirely by corporate entities that do away with any notion of protected citizenship.

They also, however, begin to suggest alternative modes for disrupting the seamless reproduction of these histories that emerge from these same bodies and conditions. They ask what it means to feel for another in a world in which all affective relations are instrumentalized and suggest that alongside affective labor as a form of embodied resource extraction, bodies continue to possess affective potentials to be and relate otherwise that do not seamlessly reproduce the same hegemonic structures. Chai and Lee's protagonist, Fan, formulate oblique, ambivalent modes that take shape contingently through the very bodies that are biocapital's resources. These narratives imagine the cultivation of heightened capacities to sense the conditions of one's environment and the bodies within it, which begin to enable responsiveness and care for those beyond whom they are designated to care as kin. Rather than an exceptional and inherent quality that only some bodies possess, these narratives suggest that this capacity is based in the affective potential within all bodies and can be developed and practiced. While this cultivation is heavily circumscribed and threatened by the dominance and diffuse nature of the hegemonic structures that deeply shape everyday life and beyond which it is difficult to see and act, Chai and Lee imagine what might ensue with the introduction of a difference that slightly shifts one's orientation to these structures and makes what was once seamless potentially perceptible and actionable. As such, these potentials are not categorical differences that emerge from and enable a revolutionary outside to the conditions they seek to alter. Instead, they constitute an affective sense of a slightly different orientation, akin to but exceeding viewing something from a different angle, that makes palpable and possible a different sense of one's world and threatened, limited possibilities to be differently in relation to it.

159

Maternal sensing's ambivalent affectivity

Chai's attempt in *Under the Dome* to make the structural conditions that have made China's current smog problem perceptible and therefore potentially actionable by ordinary people is heavily circumscribed by the nation-based politics between China and the West and the dominant investment in economic growth and prosperity as China's privileged form of modernity imagined in "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

As a multimedia TED-style talk with a live studio audience, Chai Jing's *Under the Dome* (2015) aims to connect ordinary Chinese citizens with the scientific details and policy conditions that have been shaping China's current air pollution problem and its projected impacts on human health. Heavy smog that periodically blankets China's major cities has by now become a well-known and immediately recognizable image for audiences around the world, such that a concept of "Chinese smog" can be referenced without much detailed elaboration even for those who have not personally experienced it. As Julie Sze argues, "[r]eactions to Chinese pollution become a mechanism through which we can analyze how the United States culturally makes sense of our changing historical and political power in a moment of global environmental, social, and economic crisis."[452] As such, smog's particularly Chinese nature continues to invoke conceptions of China's backwardness and Western moral superiority, a dichotomy that becomes all the more important to uphold as China's global economic and geopolitical importance grows and indeterminately threatens U.S. hegemony.

Receptions of Chai's documentary in the West similarly evoke Chinese authoritarianism while lauding Chai's attempt to bring environmental awareness to China in the model of Western environmentalism. Western media coverage and scholarship on *Under the Dome* have focused on its

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[452] Julie Sze, *Fantasy Islands: Chinese Dreams and Ecological Fears in an Age of Climate Crisis* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015), 20.

near-immediate censorship by the Chinese government:[453] while Chai obtained broadcast approval

for the documentary's February 28, 2015 release, it was removed from the internet and banned by

March 6 and 7,[454] by which time it had already garnered over 200 million hits.[455] These Western

depictions enlist comparisons to Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) or Rachel Carson's *Silent

Spring* (1962) as a key step in China's environmental awakening, situating China behind these

Western developments. They also, however, implicitly recognize the global stakes of China's

environmental pollution and programs in the parallel to highly consequential U.S. environmental

activists who contributed to environmental awareness and action; in imagining a similar figure for

China, these assessments also articulate a hope that shared environmental action can mitigate climate

change and environmental degradation as global problems.[456] These multivalent suggestions of

China's environmental backwardness, authoritarianism, and environmental promise suggest the

difficult and ongoing ambivalence with which China continues to be portrayed in U.S. narratives in

conjunction with economics.

Meanwhile, China's own progress narrative has also consistently and ambivalently looked to

the West as a source of scientific and economic modernity to which China must catch up,[457] even as

the West is also the source of imperialism that has historically subjugated China. This history of

Western imperialism remains critical in the Communist Party's discourses of national modernity; for

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[453] Andrew Browne, "Pollution Film Too Popular for Beijing's Comfort," *Wall Street Journal* (New York, NY), March 17, 2015; Jess Fong, "China's Silenced Jing," *Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), March 11, 2015; Edward Wong, "China Blocks Web Access to 'Under the Dome' Documentary on Pollution," *New York Times* (New York, NY), March 6, 2015.

[454] Jean Patrick Hayes, "Under the Dome." *Environmental History* vol. 22, issue 2 (2017): 345-8.

[455] Fan Yang, "*Under the Dome*: 'Chinese' smog as a viral media event," in *Critical Studies in Media Communication* vol. 33, no .3 (2016): 232.

[456] In *Fantasy Islands*, Julie Sze points to this ambivalence with regard to U.S. attitudes to Chinese environmentalism and pollution at large. Sze writes that "Chinese eco-desire," which is invested in technocratic solutions to environmental problems, "is also in lockstep with American eco-desires, which hold China as both the environmental pariah and salvation in a fun-house distortion of our own environmental hopes and insecurities, paradoxes and failures" (27).

[457] Mei Zhan, *Other-worldly: Making Chinese Medicine Through Transnational Frames* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 43; Zhan elaborates on the popular slogan for China to "'get on track with the world' (*yu shijie jie gui*), a slogan that was first initiated by the central government but then quickly gained popularity in everyday discourse" (43).

instance, a permanent exhibit at the National Museum in Beijing titled "The Road of Rejuvenation"

(复兴之路; *fu xing zhi lu*) chronicles China's rise from the suffering and indignities of Western and

Japanese imperialism to the economic prosperity that the Communist Party's reforms have built and

are currently still growing. This ambivalence also extends to the global politics of the drive for

accelerated development and the global nature of its attendant harms. As Sze notes, pollution can

hardly be contained by national borders and categories; emissions in China are also produced by

factories manufacturing commodities for American and European consumers and multinational

corporations and spreads across national borders.[458] In considering the implications of common

Western media valorizations of *Under the Dome*'s viral spread following its release and its data and

tech savviness, Fan Yang argues that

> fact that most audience responses in and outside of China all but failed to acknowledge this
> linkage between China's pollution and economic globalization by overly focusing on the
> "informational" aspect of the video is again symptomatic of a long-standing global
> environmental discourse that privileges technological solutions over structural change.[459]

The global nature of economic growth, however is "not a condition that the postsocialist state can

easily denounce," like "many other nations of the 'developing' world," because its own investment

in economic growth draws on both this economic imaginary of progress and markets and resources

from other geographies.[460] Meanwhile, even the "temporal terms" of backwardness can be leveraged

as precisely the reasons why unregulated development should be allowed to continue unimpeded,

because nations such as China and India have not had the same amount of time as the West to

achieve development goals.[461]

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[458] Sze, *Fantasy Islands*, 8.
[459] Yang, "*Under the Dome*," 241.
[460] Ibid., 241.
[461] Ibid., 7.

Chai's narrative and its attention to the environmental degradation that she explicitly links with China's accelerated industrial development are thus caught within these multi-faceted and ambivalent nation-based contestations and investments in forms of modernity, geopolitical prominence, and economic growth. Chai must articulate her critique not only within the bounds of government censorship but to a Chinese audience that is particularly attuned and sensitive to national criticism in light of the pervasive and longstanding popular discourse about Western imperialism. She thus ambivalently draws on a narrative of environmental progress that dovetails with the party-state's dominant narrative of modernity, even as she makes visible and critiques the environmental costs and embodied harms this process has brought about. She does so by acknowledging the progress and opportunity for many in China that economic reform from 1978 onward has enabled and framing her critique as a mother's concern for her child within an environmental progress narrative

Chai articulates ambivalence in relation to the imperative to produce economic progress, which has fueled the vast changes in life conditions when she muses on the urban development that has gone hand-in-hand with industrialization. She acknowledges that

> [i]f it weren't for cities, I would still be in rural Shaanxi working a menial job that my parents found me, wearing blue overalls and working an abacus all my life. […] Cities gave us our personal freedom and this country three decades of prosperity.

This ambivalence pays tribute to the party-state's reform agenda and acknowledges the real changes in life circumstances for many that reform has brought about.

The main arc of Chai's narrative, however, draws on her background as an investigative journalist to elaborate on extensive scientific, public health, and regulatory data and interviews with government officials and public health experts about smog's health risks and the extent of exposure for ordinary people in both the city and the countryside. She identifies lax or non-existent enforcement as a key issue with China's environmental regulation and builds an argument that

singles out China's continued reliance on coal as the main cause of China's air pollution; environmental laws and standards are not consistently enforced, a dynamic that studies of China's environmental regulation elucidate as a product of the precedence that economic development has held over regulation.[462] Chai articulates alarm over the costs of the reform process by bracketing the ongoing changes that are taking place in the present and situating contemporary China in a development trajectory that includes environmental protection and regulation, which other Western industrialized nations have followed. While coal has so far been protected by state subsidies, Chai argues that it should now be treated as a commodity similar to any other, its price determined by the market. In doing so, she effectively argues that the phase of reform that required unregulated coal consumption is over and that "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has reached a new phase that must, similarly to other industrialized nations, prioritize environmental regulation and other forms of economic growth and stability. Citing the histories of other industrialized nations such as Britain and the U.S., Chai argues that though these countries faced similar environmental issues during their periods of rapid industrialization, their environmental regulatory frameworks became more robust and their reliance on coal decreased once they reached certain levels of advanced economic development, as Chai suggests China also now has.

Chai thus constructs a discourse of progress in the service of her message of dire health consequences, environmental awareness, and increased regulation. Similar to the ambivalence that dominant Chinese discourses of modernity have displayed in relation to the West, Chai also enlists a turn to the West as examples of how the environmental problems of industrialization can eventually be mitigated through governmental policy and the environmental activism of individual citizens. As part of the presentation, Chai shows interview footage that she shot in Britain and the United States

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[462] Peter Ho, "Embedded Activisim and Political Change in a Semiauthoritarian Context," in *China Information* vol. 21, no .2 (2007): 187-209.

and cites their own past air pollution problems to illustrate the possibility for change. In the final

moments of her talk, the presentation transitions to an apocalyptic montage that takes footage from

toxic waste dumping and air, land, and water pollution from other locales. Environmental

apocalypse's register here indexes the severity of health risks and degradation but also an

environmental progress narrative that might emerge from these ruins, a progress narrative that in its

teleology and imagination of modernity leverages the familiar discourse of "'get[ting] on track with

the world.'"[463]

She frames this scientific and policy-oriented argument with her own role as a mother and

the increased alarm and awareness of smog that emerged for her through the birth of her child. Her

daughter was born with a benign tumor that was removed immediately after birth, an experience

that Chai articulates made her deeply fearful for her daughter's health. While her maternal narrative

converges with normative gendered discourses that construct the health and wellbeing of the

heterosexual family unit's importance for the productivity and strength of the nation, and the

mother's disproportionate responsibility to care for this family, I would suggest that Chai's particular

imagination of the maternal body's ability to sense the still-unfolding conditions of China's

economic reform process and "socialism with Chinese characteristics" also ambivalently and

obliquely draws out the relationship between individual acts of caring and the evacuation of state

care in the pursuit of industrial modernity and into the contemporary moment.

Critics have attacked Chai from multiple angles; scholars point to Chai's uncritical upholding

of national imaginaries of gendered maternal roles and the familial unit,[464] while prominent artist and

dissident Ai Weiwei has argued that she misrepresents her daughter's tumor as a direct product of air

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[463] Zhan, 43.

[464] Alvin K. Wong, "Beyond Anthropocentric Futurism: Visualizing Air Pollution and Waste in Post-Olympic Beijing," in *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* vol. 43, no .1 (2017): 131.

pollution,[465] a causal connection that Chai's presentation does not assert.[466] While these critiques suggest that Chai's narrative is not subversive or radical enough, on the other side, some of Chai's Chinese critics have highlighted her hypocrisy in choosing to give birth to her daughter outside of China even as she calls attention to and promotes activism against Chinese pollution. I would like to consider what it means for her narrative to be disavowed from these multiple angles: on the basis of gendered and familial normativity, objective science and, finally, national loyalty. These critiques dismiss maternal anxiety and the material calculations and trade-offs that attend it as irrational and frivolous even as women continue to bear the disproportionate burdens of intimate caretaking and, in the process, of the biological and affective reproduction of masculinist hegemonic structures, including both the nation and revolutionary politics.

We might then consider Chai's narrative within these limitations in the kinds of critiques that Chai, as a Chinese woman still residing in China, is able to articulate vis-à-vis the nation and dominant nation-based discourses between China and the West. Scholars increasingly consider the complexities of increased opportunities for individual choice and changing conceptions of moral personhood in conjunction with neoliberal market and governmental characteristics,[467] particularly in relation to health.[468] These scholars argue that forms of care for the self and one's own private networks cannot clearly be distinguished from individualized instantiations of state-promoted market logics, in which the responsibility to care for oneself is increasingly linked with overlapping

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[465] As cited by Fan Yang (2016) and Shuqin Cui (2016), Ai Weiwei wrote in a Twitter post that Chai's "daughter's tumor may not be associated with smog, but the brain-damaged mother finds clear scientific data support" (posted 3 March 2015; accessed 28 March 2018). https://twitter.com/aiww/status/572913514341269506.

[466] Shuqin Cui notes that an exeptional relationship between mothers, children, and the environment, although common in ecofeminist literature, remains fraught and heavily contested. Beyond contentions of gendered essentialism and sentimentality (Shuqin Cui, "Chai Jing's *Under the Dome*: A multimedia documentary in the digital age," in *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* vol. 11, no .1 (2016): 30-45).

[467] The extent to which China can be classified as neoliberal remains under debate. See *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar,* ed. Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) and *iChina: The Rise of the Individual in Modern Chinese Society*, ed. Mette Halskoy Hansen and Rune Svarverud (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2010).

[468] Zhang and Ong, Introduction to *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar.*

market and state dynamics in China.[469] Yet as Borovoy and Zhang note, there exist "fine lines between exercises of social power that are repressive and controlling and those that are productive, caring, supportive, effective, or generous."[470] Chai's narrative suggests these intimate imbrications and ambiguities; while her invocation of the mother aligns with national agendas, her construction of maternal sensing also obliquely makes apprehensible and visible an underlying logic that leverages individual bodies as resources for the nation's project of "socialist with Chinese characteristics" modernity that extends from the accelerated industrialization with which she explicitly engages into a still-unfolding present.

As such, this bodily sensing elaborates on the meanings and possibilities of affective labor, as that which can be leveraged to reproduce dreams of national prosperity and modernity, as well as capacities within bodies themselves to sense and make actionable structural conditions. These possibilities for the same body whose labor is enlisted to reproduce hegemonic structures to affectively sense, articulate, and seek to alter the structural conditions and harms transforms the agentive potentials of affective labor. The possibility for this same body to cultivate and draw on affective awareness and subsequently labor in pursuit of alternative orientations and actions brings together and transforms assessments of gendered affective labor's centrality to ongoing transformations in the global economy,[471] with theorizations of the body's capacity to affect and be affected by its worldly surroundings and, in Heather Houser's terms, can begin to articulate the experiential dimensions the "imbrication of human and environment," including the structural conditions that shape it.[472] In Chai's formulation, maternal sensing that takes shape through the

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[469] Ibid.
[470] Borovoy and Zhang, 2.
[471] *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, ed. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford Universtiy Press, 2010).
[472] Houser's concept of "ecosickness" and the role of affect in illuminating in the imbrications of human bodies and environments that are increasingly transformed by technoscientific and biomedical developments. Houser draws on theorizations of affect to broadly define affects as "body-based feelings that arise in response to elicitors as varied as interpersonal and institutional relations, aesthetic experience, ideas, sensations, and material conditions in one's

body becomes another aspect of feminized affective caretaking work that is ambivalently situated in relation to China's post-reform, postsocialist trajectory. Her narrative bestows the maternal body with an exceptional anxiety that also enables the perception and pursuit of bodily environmental awareness that can subsequently be cultivated in all bodies and translated into environmental action. In doing so, she transforms a transnational ecocritical discourse that has configured a privileged relationship between the female body and the natural environment through her embrace of technoscientific knowledge-seeking as a form of care work and through this maternal sensing in relation to conditions that have been wrought by industrialized development.

Chai's narrative similarly suggests a heightened affectivity that links her body's non-cognitive awareness of its environment before her cognitive mind understands with her gestating and caring maternal body. Chai begins her talk with a graph of Beijing's PM 2.5 rates in January of 2013 and notes that there were 25 days of smog in one month, during which she was often traveling for work. Chai says that when she tries to reflect on the impressions and feelings that she had during this period of intense smog, she cannot clearly remember. At the time, people often said that this case of smog was caused by random weather patterns, so she didn't think too much of it. She had traveled to four other provinces during that time period, and when she looks at photos from those places, which she shows on the screen behind her, she says that the color of the sky makes clear that they were experiencing an instance of heavy smog that affected 25 provinces and 6 billion people, but at the time, "though she was in the middle of it, she did not have a sense" (但我置身其中, 浑然不觉; *dan wo zhi shen qi zhong, hui ran bu jue*). She goes on to say that "only her throat had a sense" or "impression" (只有我的嗓子有印象; *zhi you wo de sang zi you yin xiang*); she had coughed all night

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environment" in indeterminate ways. Sickness in Houser's sense speaks to a "pervasive dysfunction […] cannot be confined to a single system and links up the biomedical, environmental, social, and ethicopolitical" (Heather Houser, *Ecosickness in Contemporary American Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 11).

one night on a business trip without knowing the reason. Chai's narrative then links this bodily sense to her maternal body; immediately following this sleepless night of coughing, she returned to Beijing to learn that she was pregnant. Right after she was born, her daughter needed surgery to remove a benign tumor, an experience that illustrates for the audience her heightened sense of maternal fear and uncertainty. Chai says that she later quits her job to take care of her daughter and that her only wish is for her family to be together and to be healthy. On the car ride home from the hospital, however, she already felt deeply afraid. Whereas she had never taken precautions for herself in her daily life, she now experienced the smell of smog intensely: "the air was filled with a smoky, burning smell" (全是烟熏火燎的味; *quan shi yan xun huo liao de wei*). Prior to her daughter's birth, she had never felt afraid of smog and had never worn a face mask to protect against it, but the sense of "another life in her arms" (一个生命抱在你怀里; *yi ge sheng ming bao zai ni de huai li*) and her responsibility for her daughter's bodily wellbeing, her "breathing, eating, and drinking" (她呼吸，她吃，她喝; *ta hu xi, ta chi, ta he*) gave her a sense of fear that she did not have before. Her new status as a mother transforms her orientation to daily biological and material bodily needs and processes that she did not consciously heed to the same degree for herself. Her cognitive awareness of intense bodily attunement to conditions that have already been unfolding around her and that her body has already been registering thus consciously emerges through her awareness of her maternal responsibility and prompts a different orientation to these conditions.

Chai's bodily sensing and the conscious awareness of her responsibility for her daughter impel her to launch her investigation into smog and, in her narrative, her project to render possible the same heightened attunement for her audience. She says that everything she has done in the past year in the making of this documentary has been to answer the questions that her daughter will

surely ask her in the future: "What is smog? Where does it come from? What do we do?" (**雾霾是什么？它从哪来？我们怎么办？**) *(wu mai shi shen me? ta cong na lai? wo men zen me ban?)* To answer these questions, Chai seeks to make the large-scale, interconnected phenomena of smog and its historical industrial causes perceptible to individual bodies. Chai later consciously realized that this particular spell of smog was not a random, isolated occurrence that would not happen again but part of a larger pattern, which she links with the same smog that she experienced living in Shaanxi province 10 years ago, connecting the present with the historical trajectory of reform. Within these ongoing large-scale patterns that were not perceptible as interconnected, she reflects on the difficulties of consciously registering smog particles, known colloquially as PM 2.5 in reference to their diameter of 2.5 micrometers, and the health harms they can cause. Chai dims the lights excepting a single ray, whose illuminated dust particles are projected onto the screen behind her and narrates that PM 2.5 particles reflect so much light back into the atmosphere that they leave us with a "very low visibility world." Despite this relative dimness, our own "fleshly eyes" (**肉眼**) *(rou yan)*, a transliteration of the Chinese term for human eyes, to distinguish from mechanical parts, cannot see them; the smallest particles the human eye can see are twenty times their size, a limitation that is vividly illustrated by the tiny dancing dust particles projected onto the screen that the audience is able to see, which belie the invisible particulate matter that is also swirling among these visible particles.

Rather than accept the blindness of our own eyes, Chai asserts that a crucial tool for making PM 2.5 particles visible is a sampling device, which she shows onscreen. Chai tells the audience that she placed a clean filter into one such device and carried it with her for 24 hours on November 26, 2014, while the screen behind her projects photographs from her daily life as she carries the device:

walking on the street while wearing a face mask, cooking a meal in her kitchen, brushing her teeth.

Another screen juxtaposes a clean filter with the filter that she removed from the device, which was

completely black after 24 hours. When Chai submits her air particle sample to a Peking University to

be analyzed, he finds that there are 15 types of known carcinogens, including one of the strongest,

benzopyrene, at 14 times the Chinese standard for safety.[473] Chai's engagement with this

technological instrument thus serves as vivid physical illustration of the matter that bodies inhale,

rendering this matter apprehensible to human bodies who might not otherwise be closely attuned to

their volume and consistency. This technologically mediated imagination of PM 2.5 particles renders

visceral Chai's assertion that if she does not protect her own child, she will breathe in all of the

particles that the device captured, an illustration that also renders this awareness visceral for all

bodies by extension. While Chai's extensive use of data and information graphics has garnered some

criticism for its over-valorization of technological responses,[474] anthropologist Kath Weston has also

elucidated how technologically-facilitated knowledge about sub-organismal scales also enables

certain forms of interpersonal care.[475] In the context of Japan's 2011 earthquake and tsunami, which

resulted in the failure of the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power plant, Weston argues that in the face

of state failures to clearly stipulate safe and unsafe areas affected by radioactivity, ordinary citizens

armed with Geiger counters were able to advocate for clean-ups and take community-based actions

such as avoiding certain areas or alerting others of unsafe zone that were beyond the initial scope of

state programs. Weston dubs these actions around the perception of radioactivity "seizing the means

of perception,"[476] which, rather than "a simple bid for knowledge," would more often in Japan be

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[473] Chai, *Under the Dome.*
[474] Yang, 238. This criticism dovetails with Julie Sze's observation of China's glorification of technocratic solutions to pollution and climate change more broadly.
[475] Kath Weston, *Animate Planet: Making Visceral Sense of Living in a High-Tech Ecologically Damaged World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
[476] Ibid., 81.

characterized "in terms of what a person in a particular sort of relationship does to care for someone else" and, in this case, can include the use of technology.[477]

Much like critiques that would dismiss Chai's maternal anxiety as irrational, Weston also briefly notes the gendered dimensions of these aspects of technological knowledge-seeking and caretaking. Weston observes the increasing prevalence of "radiation divorces," a popular term that arose to refer to divorces that ensued in the wake of marital disputes over the extent of alarm over their children's radiation exposure and actions that should be taken.[478] Rather than take these fears seriously or recognize that women could be "earnestly troubled by marriage to a person who would not act to protect his children,"[479] critiques drew on culturally prevalent images of the "overprotective mother" or alleged that these women used their children as an excuse for a divorce they had wanted all along.[480] Without conflating the historical and sociocultural particularities of these two East Asian contexts, Weston's elaboration of technology use within relational caretaking frameworks usefully highlights Chai's use of technology to heighten embodied perception and awareness of environmental conditions as a form of care, as well as the interconnected ways in which these maternal framings, because they are gendered feminine, can be easily dismissed by dominant discourses even as they alter these discourses. Chai is willing to extend technoscientific mediation to experiment on her own body's exposure, making explicit her body's already ongoing status an instrument of smog perception. To the same professor who analyzes her sample, Chai also volunteers to stay in a controlled, high-concentration chamber filled with PM 2.5 particles so that her vital statistics and bodily responses can be measured. The professor, however, tells her that this direct experimentation would be prohibited under ethical standards that bar excessive harm to

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[477] Ibid., 98.
[478] Ibid., 99.
[479] Ibid., 100.
[480] Ibid., 99.

human subjects, even though in actuality, the levels in the chamber would be lower than the environmental levels to which she is routinely exposed. In other words, Chai says, "every one of us lives inside an experimental chamber that is revealed throughout our lives" (我们每个人都生活在一个终生暴露的实验舱里; *wo men mei yi ge ren dou sheng huo zai yi ge zhong sheng bao lu de shi yan cang li*),[481] particularly in relation to incidences of lung cancer that are difficult to trace directly to coal burning and these carcinogens. Chai's elucidation of this lifelong experimentation starkly articulates an instrumental logic that underlies the ongoing dream of economic prosperity. Chai is thus willing to risk herself to illustrate a critique that might possibly extend the care that emerges from her maternal role to others who are not her kin. In doing so, the affective labor of the maternal body's central role in reproducing and upholding the heterosexual family in the service of the nation also becomes an embodied sensing capacity that can be cultivated to pursue heightened awareness of structural conditions. Her elucidation of experimentation as a fundamental logic of capitalist development extends beyond the Chinese iteration of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" to bodies in the U.S. and elsewhere who are similarly subject to forms of experimentation that seek to maximize profit, whether in relation to health and environmental policies, surveillance, or data collection.

While she does not engage with the vast inequalities within China that have characterized both the reform process and contemporary conditions and herself occupies a privileged position of financial security and access to transnational healthcare, her project to extend sensing capacities that emerge first from a maternal body to others suggests some beginning for taking seriously bodies that are easily dismissed when they deviate from dominant narratives of the nation and capital. Yang

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[481] Chai, *Under the Dome*.

argues that Chai's presentation elides how her own recommendations can contribute to ongoing environmental degradation and toxicity for humans by valorizing "tech-savvy consumers as smog-fighting agents,"[482] which Yang asserts contributes to a "naturalization of the middle-class citizen as the default member of 'humanity' who will shield the 'poor' from potential environmental threats," while failing to recognize how their own investments in capital contribute to environmental degradation and inequity.[483] Ongoing examination and critique of these social inequalities remains deeply consequential for contemporary China, and whatever Chai's personal attitudes towards these issues, I would note that media that seeks state approval in contemporary China cannot in all likelihood explicitly address the vast issues and inequalities of current state policies that have not already been acknowledged by the state.[484] The gendered ways in which Chai's narrative is circumscribed and dismissed illustrate how critiques can also emerge from within subject positions that simultaneously also contribute to dominant structures. Chai's model of sensing that can be extended to others alongside careful consideration of the diverse grounds through which certain bodies and narratives are dismissed might also offer a basis through which to consider the dismissal and potential of other bodies. While we might importantly consider Chai's privilege, I would suggest that this consideration should not also dismiss the resources and orientations that she strives to offer against the grain of dominant narratives and in so doing, participate in the same gendered dismissal that her narrative has already garnered from multiple viewpoints.

At the same time, this consideration might also nuance recognition of the actions that Chai advocates in response. Chai acknowledges that individual people may not be able to fundamentally alter the state structures and instead, asserts her own form of experiment: she encourages her

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[482] Yang, 238.
[483] Ibid.
[484] Eliminating corruption, for instance, is a stated goal of the current premier Xi Jinping, although there remains substantial debate about the potential political motivations that might also be underlying Xi's initiatives.

audience to utilize state resources for reporting violations in environmental laws as an "experiment" to test one official's claim, which she catches on camera, that government workers will respond "one hundred percent of the time." The actions she formulates are provisional, and she acknowledges that she herself acts in the pursuit of provisionally assuaging her fears and feeling calmer and less anxious (踏实; *tashi*) every time she takes a concrete action, even as she clearly knows that her act is "such a small thing." This provisional pursuit, however, is also the same motivation that has driven Chai to draw on her considerable background and resources to take monumental action in producing *Under the Dome.* Chai thus also risks herself and expends tremendous energy to construct and make available a model of action based in provisional sensing and experimentation. As such, she also embodies a maternal figure whose investment in cultivating the bodily sensing capacities of others to make apprehensible and actionable large-scale conditions also suggests a model of care for others beyond her own kin on which Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* elaborates.

The model Asiatic subject's affective and biological reproduction

Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* makes clear how structures of care are fully imbricated in the reproduction of global neoliberal subjects able to flexibly labor for capital across all scales of the body. Lee's novel makes explicit the convergence of Chinese and U.S. national economic aspirations that imagine the Asian/American body as a privileged site of resource extraction. This underlying logic connects figurations of the Asiatic figure in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century U.S. with their contemporary transformations as forms of affective reproduction, which Lee reveals as technologies that efficiently facilitate capital capture and lead directly into a late twenty-first-century, Asian American dystopic future in which the figure of the Asiatic worker as a neutralization of the Asian economic threat becomes reality. Extending Chai's oblique and ambivalent model of maternal

sensing that can be extended to all bodies, however, Lee's protagonist Fan, who is herself pregnant, also suggests possibilities for these historically subjugated feminine, Asiatic bodies to possess and elicit affective potentials across other bodies through which different ways of being and relating become possible from within these conditions.

Making explicit the linkage between race, nation, and labor, Lee has stated in interviews that he wrote *On Such a Full Sea* as a result of the increasing attention paid to the ascendancy of China in the U.S. news media and the fascination and disquiet that this possibility caused him. Lee conducted months of research with factory workers in Shenzhen, a growing coastal city in Guangdong Province, China, that has arguably been at the center of China's economic reform from 1978 onward. Following Deng Xiaoping's famed "Southern Tour" of cities in southern China to promote market policies in 1980, the central government designated Shenzhen China's first Special Economic Zone as "a free trade zone for multinational factories."[485] In subsequent years, Shenzhen has also become notorious for debates over factory working conditions, such as the much-publicized Foxconn conditions, and at the center of China's growing biotech industry. The imaginative starting point for Lee's novel thus also reflects Asian American anxiety about the indeterminate outcomes that might attend the rise of China, which converge uncertainly with techno-orientalizing discourses about China's economic power and totalitarianism that have been critiqued from Asian American vantage points.[486] When Lee went to Shenzhen, however, he found workers engaged in the quiet routines of daily life in the factory dormitories that were their living quarters.[487] As Christopher T. Fan notes, Lee, however, "dwells with the negativity of orientalism" to imagine the Chinese

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[485] Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 11; David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119.

[486] See *Techno-Orientalism*, ed. Roh, Huang, and Niu.

[487] Noelle Brada-Williams, "On Such a Full Sea of Novels: An Interview with Chang-rae Lee." *Asian American Literature: Discourses and Pedagogies.* 7.3 (2016): 1-14.

economic threat neutralized in the reinscription of present-day Chinese economic prowess as oriental worker.[488]

In Lee's imagination of this dystopic future, B-Mor as a degraded and racialized U.S. ghetto is transformed into the site for a Chinese migrant colony that is offered escape and protections in exchange for their own and their descendants' perpetual labor. As Lee has articulated in interviews about his inspiration for writing the novel,[489] *On Such a Full Sea* proceeds from the point of post-apocalyptic experimentation: in the aftermath of environmental apocalypse that renders a Chinese village uninhabitable, Lee imagines what would happen if an entire migrant community were imported en masse to Baltimore, an American city that has been left in neglect to rot.[490] Due to environmental crises that have overwhelmed the capacities of governments, corporations have become the governing bodies that responsible for the organization and regulation of this world. The governing body that directly oversees B-Mor is known simply as the "directorate," with unknown multiple such structures existing in the geographies of other former nations.

The present conditions of Lee's world thus culminate and extend Rob Nixon's conception of "slow violence,"[491] which in Lee's novel has already become a crisis that has been mitigated to reach yet a new form of attritional slow violence that is felt as a universal condition of precarity,

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[488] Christopher T. Fan, "Animacy at the End of History in Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea*," in *American Quarterly* vol. 69, no. 3 (2017): 675-696; Fan reads Lee's portrayal of the novel's protagonist as a self-aware interrogation of orientalizing tropes of the Asian worker in relation to the conditions of late capitalism. Rather than attempting to resolve "orientalist animacy" with a turn to liberal humanist portrayals of Chinese "workers optimistically pursuing neoliberal self-fashioning" (Fan 686), Fan contends that Lee's novel is engaged in "imagining a form beyond history's end by replacing the liberal bourgeois subject that grounds the novel form with a posthistorical animacy" (677). Fan argues that the novel's articulation of the Chinese worker in a model of "waning protagonicity" converges with Berlant's theorization of "impasse" as a mode of relating to and living through late capitalism's ongoing crises that become normalized within the everyday (679-80). Rather than smooth equations between subjects of the neoliberal present wherever they may be located on the globe, or the unassimilable difference of orientalism, Fan considers that the novel might postulate a "new temporality is being born: one that might overturn 'slow death' but does not resume an orientalist urgency" (684).

[489] Brada-Williams, "On Such a Full Sea of Novels."

[490] Edward Wong, "Q. and A.: Chang-rae Lee on His Tale of Migrants from an Environmentally Ruined China." *New York Times* Sinosphere Blog: Dispatches from China. 20 March 2015.

[491] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

which Anna Tsing considers as "life without the promise of stability."[492] Lee's world is highly

stratified in terms of resource availability and the immediate mitigation of and exposure to precarity,

but precarity in fact underlies and structures every aspect of this world. Spatially and by wealth, this

future world's population is divided among production facilities such as B-Mor, which house and

provide services for families who produce food and other necessities for wealthy, elite Charter

villages, while around these enclosed communities are the lawless and ungoverned open counties,

which are plagued by violence and experience unmitigated precarity. While B-Mor, as a facility that

specializes in food production, is a center of labor and production, its residents also initially enjoy

the greatest social stability. B-Mor workers cannot expect to pursue high levels of wealth, but their

livelihoods within B-Mor are protected and provided for even after they are no longer able to work.

While precarity is increasingly entering into the B-Mor residents' lives as their protections and

welfares are slowly reduced, residents of the Charter towns enjoy a high level of wealth and luxury

but, as such, are also vulnerable to a high level of precarity; should they ever lose access to

astronomical incomes, which the novel notes happens periodically, they will quickly be expelled to

the open counties.

Cancer in Lee's world both reflects and continues to generate the basis for ongoing

displacements of risk and labor extraction. Everyone eventually develops cancer, known as "C-

illness," regardless of socioeconomic circumstance; the narrator articulates that "our tainted world

looms within us, every one,"[493] establishing a clear link between environmental degradation and the

incidence of C-illness universally across the population. Considering cancer in the contemporary

moment, S. Lochlann Jain argues that cancer's development reflects the industrial development of

the twentieth- and twenty-first-century U.S. Jain argues that "[e]ach of America's iconic industries—

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[492] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

[493] Chang-rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 65.

agriculture, oil and gas, cosmetics, plastics, pesticides, tobacco, medicine, construction, military—has

undoubtedly led to tens of millions of cancer deaths."[494] As e-waste processing of electronics from

across the world in China and China's production of commodities for the U.S. and European

nations suggest,[495] however, this U.S. industrial history is also a global history that is continuous with

later economic developments that directly affect Chinese environmental conditions.[496] U.S.

corporate imperialism has thus also actively contributed to the differential environmental

degradation that in Lee's imagination, benefits the pharmacorps as future iterations of these

corporations. The "tainted world" that "looms" within every body in Lee's world is thus a direct

product and record of this history of global economic and geopolitical dynamics and is the same

history that looms within the bodies of our world and its resulting degradation projected into the

future.

B-Mor and the world it supports are thus structures enabled by the imperialistic

displacement of risk and catastrophe, which are fundamental to speculative capital more broadly and

continue to generate the logics that fuel ongoing capitalist growth for the pharmacorps. In B-Mor,

"once a potentially terminal episode is diagnosed and treated, it will not be treated again,"[497] while

treatment is completely unavailable in the open counties and, on the other extreme, Charters "have

enough wealth to visit their specialists as often as they wish, theoretically ad infinitum, or at least

until their bodies eventually succumb to the accrued effect of the interventions."[498] As Joseph Dumit

argues, this perpetual treatment is a key aspect of the contemporary pharmaceutical industry,

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[494] S. Lochlann Jain, *Malignant: How Cancer Becomes Us* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2013), 21.

[495] Sze, *Fantasy Islands*, 34.

[496] In *Life as Surplus*, Cooper similarly argues in relation to the biotech industry that in spite of their discourses of limitless growth, the "new life science conglomerates have not overcome waste, depletion, or any other of the catastrophic limits to life on earth, but they have simply divested themselves of the costs" by "moving it offshore" or "fighting for deregulation" (24).

[497] Lee, 101.

[498] Ibid.

wherein conditions are attractive to pharmaceutical companies precisely because they cannot be

definitively cured.[499] Jain further notes that, in the present U.S., the industries that continue to profit

from cancer's diagnosis and treatment render cancerous development not just a record of industrial

growth but of contemporary transformations of capital as well:

> [t]he combination of a for-profit medical system, the rise of trials and institutionalized
> industrial methods of cancer research and treatment, and the enormous investments required
> for radiation and chemotherapy have created the perfect storm, turning the once-backwater
> specialty of oncology into a major economic force that ties together treatment,
> pharmaceuticals, insurance, law, and research. Cancer has the highest per capita price of the
> nation's medical conditions.[500]

These considerations of cancer's lucrative and multi-faceted profit generation resonate directly with

the pharmacorps' pursuit of Reg because of his potential to be "C-free forever" and thus suggest the

possibility for developing a cure, which the pharmacorps must either control and market or

neutralize as competition. This lucrative ability to treat and mitigate C-illness through

pharmaceuticals that are administered throughout a person's lifetime is directly linked with the

pharmaceutical corporations' pursuit of Reg: later in the novel, we learn that Reg had "become a

primary object of curiosity for the very pharmacorp that was buying Asimil,"[501] the drug that is used

to treat C-illness until death, with the rationale that either these corporations can find the source of

and market Reg's C-immunity or, if not, control him to enable the continued marketing of their own

drugs that indefinitely prolong treatment. The circularity between cancer, its causes, and treatments

thus underlies the maintenance of human research subjects and upholds the status quo of the

directorate's governing structures. Rather than an earnest quest for eradication, this world is founded

on the perpetuation of treatment and the biological labor that enables it; the continued proliferation

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[499] Joseph Dumit, *Drugs for Life: How Pharmaceutical Companies Define Our Health* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 5-6.
[500] Ibid., 25.
[501] Lee, 327.

of cancer is not the threat but the condition of possibility for the continuation of the biocapitalist status quo.

In B-Mor, experimentation and the capacity to labor for profit are the condition for the provision of structural care that at the same time maintains those in B-Mor as both industrial and experimental labor. While individuals in both the Charters and the open counties do not any enjoy protections, B-Mors are provided with educational and health services in exchange for their lifelong capacities to labor, which, in addition to industrial labor, also comprises their labor as experimental populations on which pharmaceutical drugs are tested and emerging biotechnologies are developed. As Rose articulates, the factory and the laboratory have always been linked in the bioeconomy through its intricate infrastructures of research, computing, marketing, and profit-generation,[502] and in the novel, B-Mor is a workforce that efficiently captures both industrial and biocapitalistic labor. B-Mor residents explicitly undergo extensive and carefully documented biometric tests throughout their lifetimes, the records of which are kept by the directorate.[503] Reg's C-immunity is thus ostensibly identified through the same procedures that monitor all B-Mor residents without exception.

Rather than spatially limited within the confines of a clearly delineated laboratory, the protected workforce of Lee's world also constitutes an experimental population maintained in a factory-laboratory structure as the biological foundation for endless biotechnical profit generation. The efficiently economized bodies of B-Mor residents enable these modes to reside in the speculation that endlessly captures the infinite regeneration of the "variable code source from which innumerable life forms can be generated, rather than the life form per se,"[504] while at the same time, B-Mors are also compelled to perform industrial labor that infrastructurally upholds the

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[502] Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*, 32.
[503] Lee, 65.
[504] Cooper, *Life as Surplus*, 24.

maintenance of the directorate structure. While cell cultures in the twentieth century have enabled the increasing mobility and operability of biological material as the foundation for biotechnologies,[505] B-Mor obviates the need to maintain immortal cell lines as privileged experimental materials by instead enabling the maintenance of the whole human organism as simultaneous industrial and biocapitalistic labor. Reg's captivity merely renders fully apparent a condition of all B-Mor residents: that of experimental organisms whose bodily subjugation to these biocapitalist structures is an extreme iteration of the continuity between life and economics that theorists outline in contemporary U.S. biopolitics. His removal to a confined laboratory is a difference of degree rather than kind, a continuity that in fact structures the entirety of Lee's world. While the novel does not specify whether the Charters must undergo the same testing, their investment in ongoing biomedical treatment and the tracking that must necessarily accompany it suggests that Charters are similarly tracked through a different but interrelated avenue of neoliberal choice. Meanwhile, the complete precarity and void of care in the open counties makes explicit and manifest the precarity underlying the conditional protections of the facilities and Charters, a void that is openly and literally waiting for those who fail to maintain their usefulness as producers or consumers. There is thus no outside to this iteration of biocapital, which leaves no spaces or persons untouched and in which culture and economic efficiency are indistinguishable. Lee's world is thus a fully non-humanist world, in which questions of bioethics and legal, ethical, or institutional rights, and even the protected status of those historically designated as human, do not register as salient concerns.

While the figure of the Asian cyborg or cloned worker produced through biotechnical means has occupied a central place in techno-orientalist neutralizations of Asian economic threats,[506] Lee's

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[505] Hannah Landecker, *Culturing Life: How Cells Became Technologies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 143.

[506] David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, "Repellent Subjects: A Conclusion," in *Techno-Orientalism*, 223.

imagination of B-Mor makes clear that the intertwined biological and affective structures of kinship and culture bypass and obviate the need to technically render these docile laborers. Extreme precarity compels B-Mors' own investment in reproducing the affective, cultural structures that are originally associated with their Chinese origin and that efficiently maintain their status as industrial workers/experimental subjects: "[t]he originals," in reference to the first settlers from New China to B-Mor, "were brought in en masse for a strict purpose but with their work- and family-centric culture intact, such that they would not only endure and eventually profit the seed investors but also prosper in a manner that would be perpetually regenerative."[507] The narrator elaborates that "[s]tability is all here in B-Mor; it's what we ultimately produce, day by night by day, both what we grow for consumption and how we are organized in neighborhood teams, the bonds of blood or sexual love relied upon equally to support our constitution."[508] B-Mor's origin and ongoing value thus lie in the explicit target and reproduction of culture as the basis for a self-regenerating work force whose values align and eventually become thoroughly intertwined with the reproduction of capital. As such, B-Mor also produces the conditions on which the entire directorate structure depends; B-Mor produces not just commodities but a structure and feeling of "stability," which lies in the assurance that it will never threaten a status quo that regenerates the feeling that the astronomical cost of provisional Charter safety is worth the price through the controlled and ostensibly C-free products B-Mor produces.

Lee thus points to the convergence of techno-orientalist desires for neutralizing Asian economic threat in the figure of the Asian worker with Asian/Americans' own reproduction of affective forms of care and kinship. In B-Mor, Asian/American affective and cultural investment in hard work, filiality, and collectivity form the basis for their own subjugation. Numerous Asian

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[507] Lee, 19.
[508] Ibid., 7.

American scholars have elaborated on the Asiatic figure's close ties with economic conditions and

transformations, from the figure of the coolie,[509] to imaginations of the yellow peril and the model

minority,[510] and finally to the Asian immigrant in relation to the promises of freedom in U.S. liberal

democracy.[511] These scholars argue that these figurations of Asianness are closely tied to the

ascendency of Asian economies and oscillate ambivalently between economic threat, through both

individual and geopolitical competition, and resource as a potential exploitable workforce and

through the availability of vast and lucrative Asian markets.[512] In relation to neoliberal capital, Susan

Koshy has also elaborated on the Asian American model minority family as a neoliberal form held

up not only as a model for other minorities but also increasingly for white Americans as figures able

to flexibly negotiate and entrepreneurially capitalize on the vicissitudes of neoliberal capital.[513]

Koshy's explication of the American public fascination with Amy Chua's Tiger Mother figure

centers on the exacting model minority mother and family's role in reproducing entrepreneurially

adept subjects. In recent years, as China has grown increasingly economically powerful, the Asian

American model minority as exemplary neoliberal subject also converges increasingly with the

entrepreneurial Chinese individual able to smoothly negotiate networks of global capital and

capitalize on China's financial boom. In addition to Chinese businessmen, who have increasingly

done business abroad from the 1990s onward,[514] Chinese university students have become notable

presences across American university campuses,[515] resulting from and generating immense pressures

for Chinese parents and families to raise children who are able to compete with their peers to secure

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[509] Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[510] Colleen Lye, *America's Asia*.
[511] Jeffrey Santa Ana, *Racial Feelings*.
[512] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire*.
[513] Susan Koshy, "Neoliberal Family Matters."
[514] Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Ong specifies that these subjects in the 1990s were indeed primarily men.
[515] Vanessa Fong, *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

prestigious placements abroad; and as Teresa Kuan elucidates in her ethnography on Chinese

mothering, the emotional burdens and anxieties of these pressures often falls disproportionately on

mothers.[516] These transnational students abroad, meanwhile, become potent sites for American fears

of China's ascendancy even as they present a growing lucrative market for Western degrees that

Anglophone universities cannot afford to turn away.[517] This convergence thus presents a

contemporary transformation of the economic threat that has historically conflated Asians and

Asian Americans in the Asiatic figure writ large. Within these China-U.S. circuits, the Asian

American model minority converges increasingly with Chinese model children and families, centered

around their shared concern to affectively reproduce offspring who are adept at negotiating global

economic networks.

B-Mor thus points to the self-regeneration of and investment in biopolitical imperatives that

render the Asian/American family able to adapt to ever-shifting conditions of capital in pursuit of

self-preservation and even some degree of the "good life," even as this affective cultural

reproduction also renders them ever more amenable to capital's exploitative demands. In Lee's

novel, these affective investments become technologies that contain the dystopic possibility of

annihilating any distinction between intimate, affective ties and the unfeeling efficiencies of capital,

which, as an Asian Americanist nightmare, would simultaneously also manifest the techno-orientalist

desire to neutralize Asian economic threats, both individual and national, by transforming the source

of competition into laborer and economic resource. In diagnosing these affective reproductions of

capitalist subjugation as a foundational logic that connects past and future iterations of the Asiatic

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[516] Teresa Kuan, *Love's Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015).

[517] Douglas Belkin and Miriam Jordan, "Heavy Recruitment of Chinese Students Sows Discord on U.S. Campuses," *Wall Street Journal* (March 17, 2016); "How International Students are Changing U.S. Colleges," *Wall Street Journal.*

figure's imbrication with capital, Lee's novel makes clear that biotechnical engineering is not the only, or even the crucial, technology that would render the dream of the docile Asiatic cyborg a reality. Instead, affective intertwinements of race and culture, produced primarily through kinship structures and intimate ties and unquestioningly inhabited in a neoliberal world, are already producing this future. In this fully non-humanist and circular world, all aspects of biological and cultural being are biopolitically structured by the imperatives of biocapital, broadly defined as the biological resource extraction that merges older forms of capitalistic labor with infinite biotechnical regeneration in a totalized system of capital capture. Lee's novel thus imagines a world in which there exists no ground outside these structures on which to stand, and affective relations of and investments in intimate care structures and what it means to do care work become the discomfiting and contested terrain through which an ethics that does not smoothly reproduce these structures might also become possible. While the novel thoroughly evacuates any potential for "authentic" feelings divorced from the conditions of capital and subjugation, neither do these compromised affects, including love, that are fully imbricated in reproducing capital foreclose possibilities for being and relating otherwise. Imbrication is therefore not a judgment but the condition from which the novel proceeds to imagine possibilities to feel for others that take shape from within these structures and, indeed, from the very bodies that are the ground of biocapital's resource extraction. As such, they take shape literally, through sensing bodies, rather than valorized, abstracted, and separate emotional empathy and affinity that these conditions render impossible.

Cultivating an (un)caring body

Those in B-Mor, who narrate the novel, posit and formulate these possibilities for caring otherwise that might emerge from within their conditions of subjugation through the tale they tell, which is centered around Fan, a young, Asian, female figure from B-Mor whose biological life

186

occurs at an unspecified time in relation to the B-Mor narrator's telling; we do not know whether

their narration is coterminous with Fan's life trajectory or takes place years, decades, or even

centuries after Fan's physical existence. The novel is structured through a collective third person

narrator, a "we," who narrates events from B-Mor that unfold at the same time that they tell the tale

of Fan. When Reg mysteriously disappears from B-Mor, Fan, who is also pregnant with Reg's child,

decides to leave in search of him. In what follows, I examine the narration of Fan's story in relation

to the social unrest that begins to arise in B-Mor, in the form of breaches of care in what were once

stable and rote practices.

B-Mor's very existence seems threatened by the Charters' sudden fear of consuming fish,

their most valuable product, because of a reported link to C-illness, a pervasive sense of growing

precarity as to B-Mor's continuation begins to threaten and indeterminately alter their unquestioning

affective and cultural reproduction. The collective familial structures that once operated

harmoniously now seem to be in increasing disarray as conditions within B-Mor become more

precarious, the cost of food rises, and the directorate increasingly curtails healthcare provision. In

contrast to B-Mor's usual placidity, incidences of domestic violence, suicide, and social disruptions

begin to occur with increasing frequency. While some elderly figures needing prolonged medical

treatment choose to end their own lives rather than burden their family members, others also begin

to show signs of physical abuse. The narrator dwells, for instance, on Gordon, an elderly man who

silently bears the marks of abuse,[518] or another younger woman on whose "otherwise wholesome,

pretty face" there was a "monstrous marring that made you want to cry and get furious at once, and

somehow, even more monstrously, also direct your feelings at her."[519] This last tension suggests that

the root of this violence onto fellows who were once mutually protected lies in the inability to

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[518] Lee, 191.
[519] Ibid., 189.

187

articulate the precarity and harms that are befalling B-Mor. The narrator demands, "Will there be one honest, substantive remark about what is happening?"[520] This desire for recognition, in conjunction with the paradoxical, seemingly irrepressible urge to enact this same violence, suggests that the demand for acknowledgement betrays a broader, inarticulable rage at the precarity and foundational violence of resource extraction and experimentality that are only made visible through forms of direct harm. This foundational violence is more easily elided under stable conditions, when B-Mor's version of the good life remains unthreatened, but in fact underlies B-Mor's very "constitution." In relation to their "existential threat," the narrator asks: "How could we assure our communal well-being?" and acknowledges that "[t]he truth is that we could not. As conceived, as constituted, we may in fact be of a design unsustainable."[521] The immediate circumstances of their heightened precarity thus starkly call out the structural conditions of their precarity and some recognition that their own care structures perpetuate their subjection to the directorate's demands. These intimate instances of harm give some outward sign to and make explicit the violence always and already being done to B-Mor's bodies, even as they also demonstrate a clear constraint: within a totalized biocapitalistic world, this critique cannot be voiced and given verbal form from a position outside these structures and must instead take shape through the very bodies and conditions that these structures shape.

These instances of intimate, interpersonal violence make visceral and imaginable the constraints and costs of recognizing and grappling with the ways in which intimate care is imbricated in biocapital. They ask if the only mode of contestation lies in destroying these intimate bonds, or alternatively, if some possibility exists for contesting and perhaps even disavowing care's seamless reproduction of capital while accounting for and attempting to avoid the individual bodily harm this

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[520] Ibid.
[521] Ibid., 104.

contestation might entail. Herein lies the narrators' investment in Fan, as a rare individual who voluntarily leaves B-Mor without guarantee of protection and relinquishes the safety that is experimentation's complement and compensation. B-Mor's existential threat is the same reason why B-Mor needs Fan, "in both idea and person. For within her was the one promise that could deliver us, the seed of all our futures, Charters' and B-Mors' and even of the shunned souls out in the counties."[522] This "seed" is a literal one, in the form of the child that Fan carries, whose biological being can speak to the genetic basis for Reg's C-immunity as rooted in B-Mor and potentially assure B-Mor's continued relevance and usefulness to the Charters. In relation to B-Mor's own embodied struggle over caretaking, the "seed" of Fan's promise also lies in the imaginative potential to interrogate and posit alternative modes of caring through Fan's narrative that emerge from within the very conditions of B-Mor's intertwined biological and affective reproduction, an imbricatedness contained in the dual meaning of "seed." In conjunction with B-Mor's social unrest, Fan's voluntary subjection to complete precarity and her encounters throughout her journey with non-kin others suggest her as an exemplary figure through which this collective B-Mor voice reflects on and imagines other possibilities for caretaking and the risks and harms these alternative considerations might also entail. Just as B-Mor's own articulation of foundational violence takes shape through the bodies that are biocapital's resources, Fan crucially formulates these possibilities for caring otherwise through her material body in relation to the other bodies with which she comes in contact.

As the B-Mor narrators' sustained meditation on Fan's physicality, in explicit contrast with abstract intellectual convictions suggest, these possibilities take shape through contingently evolving embodied configurations rather than calculations or principles that can be determined before the fact. In the narrators' telling, Fan is "an essentially *physical* being, rather than some ornate bundle of

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[522] Ibid., 19.

notions, wishes, dreams."[523] Indeed, Fan is "not quite the champion we would normally sing; she is

not the heroine who wields the great sword; she is not the bearer of wisdom and light; she does not

head the growing column, leading a new march," characterizations marked by the insistence that Fan

does not exemplify the qualities that would typically distinguish a heroic, revolutionary protagonist.

Fan therefore does not launch a revolutionary critique or overthrow that those in B-Mor cannot

themselves enact. Although Fan leaves B-Mor, as the spatial site of clearest overlap between the

affective and cultural economizing of the factory-laboratory, her embodied state continues to be

subject to the desires of the pharmacorps that structure not just B-Mor but the entire world of the

novel, as the pharmacorps pursue her ostensibly to study her and her unborn child. As a figure

through which the B-Mor narrators posit imbricated, non-revolutionary possibilities, Fan is instead

characterized as embodying a curious tension between ordinariness and a difference that cannot

clearly be articulated and yet is nevertheless recognized and serves as the catalyst for others to help

her throughout her journey; the narrator insists that Fan is "one of the ranks" and "perfectly

ordinary,"[524] even as figures throughout her encounters recognize that she is somehow inarticulably

different. As the narrators' elaboration on what she is "not" suggests, Fan embodies an inarticulable

negativity that makes a difference, even as her ordinariness suggests her narrators' investment in

noting her imbrication in the same structures to which B-Mor is subject and, by extension, their own

imbricated potentials for difference.

Fan therefore does not present possibilities that can only emerge outside the laboring and

reproductive extraction that structures B-Mor's entire world. Instead, Fan's capacity for "difference"

emerges directly from the capacities that she has cultivated in her own body and how she enacts

them in relation to the other bodies she encounters. While Fan's pregnancy renders her a maternal

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[523] Ibid., 243.
[524] Ibid., 198.

figure whose embodied sensing, as I will further elaborate below, intersects with Chai's, Fan departs from the unquestioning care that must be apportioned to those designated as kin, which I broadly consider as the relational bodies that are marked out in distinction from others as those for whom one should care. In B-Mor, kin include the entire community, who are imagined as cousins and, for Fan, the fish for which she cares that will be harvested for food and that, to the shock of the B-Mor narrators, she kills before departing B-Mor. In relation to how naturalized femininity and familial gender roles in China and Asian women in the US have been domesticated and enlisted to reproduce both the nation-state as well as masculinist cultural politics, Fan presents a female Asiatic body who refuses the imperative to unquestioningly reproduce these affective forms. Against exclusive reproductive investment in kinship, Fan maintains ambivalence towards her pregnancy; she is not wholly uncaring towards it and is yet curiously detached from her growing fetus's status as a human person and her own biological offspring, an ambivalence that registers reproduction's entanglement in biocapital. Her annihilation of "only her own fish, the ones she so carefully raised,"[525] heightens and makes apparent this ambivalence and its relation to the instrumentality of caring, reproductive labor. These fish will be killed regardless of her actions when they are harvested, and the shocking subversiveness of Fan's act lies in the fact that she kills them before the harvest, without clear reason, and thus betrays a constructed kinship structure that obligates her care for a directed purpose even in full knowledge of the reasons for her labor and their fate. Alongside the acts of harm that B-Mors are increasingly experiencing and perpetuating, the degree of indeterminacy that Fan opens in her orientations towards those for whom she is explicitly entrusted to care pointedly suggest that possibilities for caring otherwise and contestation take shape in degrees rather than categories of difference and through the risks, calculations, and trade-offs these degrees of difference entail.

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[525] Ibid., 11.

While Chai is bound by maternal responsibility to care above all for her child's physical wellbeing, Fan, as an imaginative figure, is not circumscribed by the same clear physical constraints and is thus enabled to take risks that endanger herself and her unborn child, though she also does not take direct action to harm it. This lack of direct harm marks a crucial distinction; unlike the fish, whose fate is already determined, her own and her future child's fates remain open-ended, and it is this open-endedness, for herself and others, that Fan enables throughout her journey. Throughout her encounters with others in the open counties and Charters, Fan engages in improvisational extensions of care that necessarily also involve risk and potential harm both to herself and the fetus that her body protects. She does so in order to facilitate the open-endedness that necessarily accompanies the ongoing continuation of situations and bodies in the world, through, for instance, enabling others' survival even when doing so does not immediately serve her. Rather than instrumentalized and clear reasons for caring, Fan thus might be said to contingently formulate a form of care that does not make judgements about the value of caretaking's forms or objects but is invested only in provisionally enabling the open-ended continuation from which future unknown potentials might emerge, however this ongoingness might manifest within a given situation. Taking her own body and the bodies who are dependent on her as the ground of her challenge and formulation, Fan embodies an ongoing questioning of the designated limits of apportioning care, even as such refusal is accompanied by the risk of harm to those who are already in her care, and the possibilities for caring otherwise that might tenuously emerge from these precarious trade-offs.

The B-Mor narrators begin to grapple with the forms of care that are made possible as Fan exercises and expands her capacity to engage in embodied risks and trade-offs. Although her motivation for leaving B-Mor might align easily with a search for Reg, as the father of her child, the narrator muses that Fan might also be more fundamentally motivated by the challenge to silence the immediacy of her bodily needs and urges. This pursuit entails pushing her bodily limits beyond what

192

seems safe or reasonable and expanding her capacity to surrender to her body's vulnerability to the conditions of its material world. As the narrator articulates, Fan's motivation for her journey, her "longing," "wasn't, surprisingly, about the tiny thing growing within her, which by now was perhaps just endowed with a real human shape, if not so in her consciousness."[526] Instead, "the enigma of her longing, it might be said, was of no longing."[527] Rather than a quest focused solely on reinstantiating the normative heterosexual family structure or on an overriding affective and biological investment in nourishing and protecting her growing fetus, Fan instead practices pushing her physical boundaries throughout her journey, to

> quell her hunger and thirst the same way she'd push back the need to breathe when she was underwater in the tanks, with the force of pure will, but applying it now like a balm to the jabs in her belly, the dry spots in her throat. She wanted not to need anything, at least as long as she could bear it.[528]

In insistently pushing on the immediacy of the demand to answer bodily needs to eat and breathe, Fan seeks to expand the space between the urge to protect one's own safety and bodily integrity and the directed actions that would fulfill this urge. She finds the feeling of needing nothing "strangely liberating, for the wanting of nothing, not even air,"[529] even as the total fulfillment of this liberation would entail suffocation and death and also enact her body's subjection to these same forces. Instead, Fan pursues these degrees of liberation in dynamic tension with her own and her fetus's biological demands to be nourished and remain alive, stretching her capacity to maintain her own and her fetus's survival while also attaining a degree of lag and tension. Rather than complete surrender, it is the space and lag of this tension that Fan seeks to expand and that through which she is steadily able to embrace the bodily contingency, precarity, and risk that are precisely the threats

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[526] Ibid., 65.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Ibid., 55.
[529] Ibid., 124.

the directorate leverages to compel ongoing submission. The narrator muses that throughout her

journey, Fan feels most acutely that

> having trailed down those unmarked and twisted roads, and been subjected to the warped
> designs (and hopes) of sundry citizenries, when it must have seemed each time that all was
> lost again, the tethers were now released, the moorings finally dismantled, and she was
> floated out, alone. Which was strangely fine.[530]

In a world in which survival is predicated on the reproduction of safety and subjugation found in B-

Mor and the directorate structure, Fan's physical endurance exercises reflect a recognition that

physical need and the imperative to immediately answer its demand generate the conditions that

structure her world's subjugation to the directorate. The smooth reproduction of the status quo,

which fully enfolds affective structures within its reach, thus occurs through the unquestioning and

immediate fulfillment of this imperative for self-preservation and the preservation of one's own kin

without regard for consequences or pausing to consider possible trade-offs that might entail physical

risk and harm, calculations that are necessarily and open-endedly relational beyond the boundaries of

those for whom one is already compelled to care.

Fan's feeling of liberation is thus not total individual autonomy aimed at removing the self

from or immunizing it against the conditions of the world, which cannot be fully realized. Indeed,

the narrator is careful to specify that Fan's pursuit is "not one born of selfishness or egoism,"[531] not

a valorization of individualism as such. Instead, she cultivates spaces of embodied tension and lag

that seek to make room for heightened awareness of her body's ongoing imbricatedness in relations

with other bodies and the capacity to respond to these relations. As a female figure engaged in

affective and biological reproductive labor, Fan feels this relationality and engages with it through

the very conditions of her material body. Rather than an independently generated capacity that only

takes shape beyond the directorate's reach, Fan's relational experiences with caretaking labor

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[530] Ibid.
[531] Ibid., 262.

through care for her fish and the biological care work of gestating her fetus present sites for cultivating the embodied capacities that she continues to expand. These capacities first begin to emerge in the fish tanks of B-Mor, where Fan spends more time in the tanks than is necessary to complete her tasks. Fan regularly stays and stretches the time she is able to hold her breath underwater long after the other divers have left to

> pull her knees to her chest and drift to the bottom and stay there in that crouch until her lungs screamed for forgiveness. She wasn't inviting oblivion or even testing herself but rather summoning a different kind of force that would transform not her but the composition of the realm, make it so the water could not harm her.[532]

Fan is willing to push herself far beyond comfortable limits not to become stronger or more skillful herself, as a separate entity, but to "transform [...] the composition of the realm." Her stretching of herself thus contains the potential to transform both herself and her surrounds in the dynamic process of their relating, and as such is fundamentally world-altering, rather than merely generating discrete and linear outcomes that are limited by considering each independent entity on its own. In her body's submersion in the water, Fan's embodied evocation of a force that would against all reason "make it so the water could not harm her" is not merely an abstract theoretical, utopian imagination of relatedness that has no grounding in material conditions. Instead, it takes shape in direct relation to her own urgently felt bodily limits and needs. It is not difficult, for instance, to remember how our own hunger or need for air alters how we relate to others and the situations in which we find ourselves. Rather than demand self-preservation above all else, however, Fan senses possibility in stretching out these bodily demands that nevertheless remain felt to her. Fan thus recognizes through her body the ways in which bodies, human and nonhuman, are already continuously generating indeterminate possibilities through their dynamic interrelations. Her decision to hold her breath longer or to stretch her hunger pangs, by way of altering herself, will

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[532] Ibid., 6.

195

necessarily change her relation to the world and thus its entire composition in indeterminate ways. This potential for difference contained in the incremental and attained in conversation with bodily limits suggests how actively seeking to relinquish total and seamless investment in the self and in the guarantee of safety might generate a degree of lag and tension that opens some time and space to make different calculations or act on different impulses, enabling the possibility of being and relating otherwise that also necessarily entail risk. In doing so, Fan cultivates her embodied abilities to attune and respond to her environment, generating the possibility to be and relate otherwise.

Affective care affiliations

The possibility to be and relate otherwise that emerges through the extension and acute perception of bodily limits is thus felt in the body as a form of negativity. This negativity contains two senses: firstly, in the challenge to rote embodied responses and, secondly, in the perception of the potential to be and relate differently that, within conditions of biocapital that shape all aspects of bodies and lives, can only be perceived as an inarticulable difference and divergence rather than clearly articulable positive attributes. Her difference is not fundamentally about particular definable attributes, per se, but a sense of her inarticulable divergence from an otherwise smooth, unquestioned status quo that emerges from her embodied being. While Fan cultivates her embodied capacities to attune closely and respond to the bodies and situations around her, her encounters outside of B-Mor elaborate on how this capacity is in fact present and can be cultivated in all bodies.

When Fan leaves B-Mor, she encounters other iterations of the Asiatic body's deployment as technology that reproduces capital through feminized caretaking work. In linking the intimate kinship contexts of B-Mor and their evocation of model Asian/American care structures with these forms of exploitation that transform other forms of orientalism and Asian racism, the novel makes explicit that Asian/American care structures are themselves imbricated in and linked with an

196

orientalism that would realize the dream of full Asiatic docility in the service of hegemonic capital.

Fan's encounters, however, suggest a distinction between these pervasive deployments of Asiatic

bodies as technologies through which to pursue affective desires and the potential to affectively

respond to particular others that would depart from these exploitative scripts, a potential that is in

fact latent in all bodies even as they are shaped by biocapital's all-encompassing circumstances.

Throughout her encounters on her journey, Fan responds to individuals based not on

recognizable similarity to her and her designated kin but on the particular affective resonances that

arise between her and the other bodies she encounters. Rather than unquestioningly choose her own

security through reproduction of the same, which would necessarily also reproduce the status quo,

Fan's willingness to respond to the particular individuals and situations in which she finds herself

register disruptions in the otherwise smooth and intimate reproduction of power in economized

affective care work. This seamless reproduction dovetails with affective labor's own reproduction of

feelings of smoothness and reassurance: a lack of worry, a feeling of having one's needs anticipated

and met, a sense of security that one's life can flourish, prosper, and be provided for. These affective

states are also central to the imagination of the "good life" under neoliberalism and as such, uphold

the ongoing exploitation of laboring populations.[533] They do so both by fueling demand for diverse

forms of affective caretaking work whom these feelings can be generated for those able to pay for

them,[534] as well as by extending promised life circumstances that may never be realized for those

who are nevertheless willing to labor for them.[535]

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[533] Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, 244.

[534] Vora, *Life Support*; *Intimate Labor*, ed. Boris and Salazar Parreñas; Eileen M. Otis, *Markets and Bodies: Women, Service Work, and the Making of Inequality in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012); Marnie Ritchie, "Feeling for the State: Affective Labor and Anti-Terrorism Training in US Hotels," in *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* vol. 12, issue 2 (2015): 179-197.

[535] Berlant's consideration of "cruel optimism" as a "sustaining inclination" that compels diverse forms of adaptation in order to render exploitative and structurally unequal circumstances livable in the U.S. (Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 14) converges with Jason McGrath's assessment of China's promise of postsocialist modernity as an "illusion" by which many exploited laborers feel compelled and moved even as they themselves will likely never reap its benefits (McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity*, 224).

Rather than the affective sense of seamlessness that is effective caretaking work's hallmark and that unquestioningly reproduces this status quo, others sense and respond to Fan's own heightened attunement and responsivity, and in the process, expand these same potentials in themselves. This responsivity channels the body's non-cognitive sensing, dynamic responsivity, and potential to alter situations and other bodies through the processes of ongoing relation. Jane Bennett broadly considers affectivity as the capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies, broadly conceived as material entities, human and nonhuman,[536] while Theresa Brennan and Sara Ahmed consider the resonances between bodies that can spread across collectivities.[537] These senses of affect resonate with the embodied, non-cognitive and non-intentional ways in which Fan facilitates openness and continues to make possible without investment in clearly formulated outcomes. Meanwhile, Ahmed elsewhere theorizes a conception of the will that diverges from masculine, Enlightenment, and Eurocentric conceptions of selfhood and individualistic self-possession. Rather than a concept of the will predicated on the possession of a coherent, fully unified interior subjectivity and full cognitive intentionality, Ahmed's consideration of willing something reflects a "sense of the will as *energetic*, as getting the body 'behind' an action,"[538] and, in so doing, bringing something into a horizon of possibility.[539] Bringing together these theories of embodied affect and will, Fan embodies a willing affectivity. She does so not only through the capacities for resonance that are contained in the dynamic relations between all bodies but in her incremental and dedicated pursuit to stretch these capacities in order to repeatedly bring open-endedness back within the horizon of possibility, exemplifying Eve Sedgwick's notion that to affect is to risk oneself in the

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[536] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 61.
[537] Theresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
[538] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 37; italics in original.
[539] Ibid.

world.[540] She is not alone, however, in exemplifying this capacity. As Fan encounters others throughout her journey, these others recognize and respond to a sense of her affective attunement and responsivity and, in the process, expand their own affective capacities. The relational matrix in which these capacities meet and build on each other then expands and shapes both Fan and these others to generate possibilities for being and relating differently.

Sustaining open-endedness as the horizon of possibility itself is therefore a fully relational endeavor that takes shape through heightened mutual attunement to individual particularities and situations. These affective potentials do not seek to overthrow a situation, a stance that is not available in light of biocapital's all-pervasive reach. Rather than categorically different outcomes and radical breaks, affective potentiality enables different, previously unimagined orientations to bodies and situations from within these very conditions. This responsivity through limit enables forms of what I would call "affective care affiliation" that take shape through felt affective affinities rather than legible similarities in bodily form. As such, they exceed shared racial histories and bodily forms that, while remaining salient to exploitative structures, are also not determinatively and necessarily continuous or inherently indicative of affinities and alliances. Instead, they recognize the affective potential latent within all bodies that can be cultivated. The forms of care affiliation across differences that take shape around Fan are not stable, indissoluble identificatory groups that compel continued loyalty or devotion and are also not overwhelmingly determined by rational self-interest or even clearly articulable reasons. They are momentary, fleeting forms of responsiveness that shift a situation by degrees from within, rather than seeking to overthrow and enact categorical change.

As Fan comes to recognize the Asiatic body's deployment as a means of reproducing the status quo beyond B-Mor, she also begins to develop this model of particular affective resonance and responsivity to difference. Soon after she embarks, Fan is struck and injured by a truck driven

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[540] Eve Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 114.

by Quig, a former veterinarian who was expelled from his Charter with his wife and daughter, who died violently soon after, when his income declined. Though he does not need to care for Fan, Quig takes her back to the compound he has organized that now also shelters others, where she recovers from a broken leg. Though Quig is a reticent and sometimes harshly authoritarian figure, he also uses his veterinary skills to treat people in the counties, and as Fan comes to spend more time there, she also gradually learns more of his past and comes to perceive that he is haunted by his family's tragic deaths. When the compound needs a new drill and medicine for a teenage boy, Quig decides that he must trade Fan for these necessities at the home of a Charter connection, and on the road to the Charter village, Fan cryptically articulates her recognition and presence to him. Without explanation or further elaboration, she offers to help Quig find "[w]hatever [he's] looking for,"[541] and when they stop to relieve themselves on the side of the road, she remains with the group though Quig wonders if she had run away.[542] Though these actions are small-scale, Quig begins to trust Fan, and when she demonstrates for him the prolonged ability to hold her breath that she developed in the tanks, Quig finds his own body responding. In a clear instance of embodied, affective responsiveness, he begins "breathing fast himself, like he was running and running"[543]; when Fan accidentally jerks her arms, he involuntarily mirrors her, and only then shares his story with Fan.[544] When Fan is faced with a decision to choose between Quig and Loreen, the woman whose son needs the medicine, and a seemingly clear path of liberation, this affinity based in difference and negativity shapes Fan's choice. On the road, Fan, Quig, and Loreen encounter a family acrobatic troupe who welcome and feed them before revealing that, although they themselves are vegetarian, they intend to feed Quig and Loreen to their dogs while inviting Fan to join their troupe because of

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[541] Lee, 109.
[542] Ibid., 110.
[543] Ibid.
[544] Ibid., 112.

her physical abilities and small size, through which they mistake her as a child. Fan, however, inexplicably rejects their offer and instead places herself and the fetus her body protects at the risk of physical harm to rescue Quig and Loreen, even when she knows that they intend to trade her. In her choice, Fan rejects sameness, which reproduces the status quo, in favor of indeterminate difference.

As Fan's encounters elaborate, she does not privilege affinity with formal bodily similarity, which would constitute the same self-reproduction that characterizes B-Mor. Fan's similarity with the Nickelmans and their desire to include and possess her emerge in their shared control over their bodies' flexible, malleable form. When Fan joins the children in an impromptu acrobatic performance, she quickly learns the movements, and "[a]side from her bloodlines, she could have been one of them, her control over her body total and natural."[545] As with B-Mor, the Nickelmans' nuclear family is a continuation of the previous generation's survival scheme; the current family patriarch was himself taken in as a child by this previous generation because he displayed acrobatic talent, and he eventually married one of their daughters to produce the current iteration of the family. Fan's addition to their troupe as an ostensible child member who would grow to present a potential mate for one of the Nickelmans' biological children would therefore replay a script of self-reproduction for survival that fundamentally shares in B-Mor's script of affective, biological reproduction of the same through the family. The Nickelmans' own articulation of their motivations suggest their choice to care for and reproduce their own kin above all else. They declare themselves to be fully self-sufficient and, much like Fan, "feel liberated" in the open counties but "not afraid because of our liberty, as most people out here are compelled to be."[546] These words, articulated by the family patriarch as they are advancing on Quig and Loreen, suggest their diverging approach to

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[545] Ibid., 148.
[546] Ibid., 153.

201

liberation from Fan's; while Fan's feeling of liberation lies in delaying her fulfillment of her own bodily needs and urge for self-preservation, the Nickelmans are clearly willing to sacrifice others to protect and feed the animals that are their own kin.

Even within the third-person frame narration, Fan's similarities to the Nickelmans are thus narrated from the perspective of an outside observer that might ventriloquize the Nickelmans' recognition of this opportunity for self-reproduction in her, rather than presented as something that Fan feels: "you could easily imagine her integration into the group, an unlikely addition that would give their show a most memorable punctuation of shape and color."[547] Fan rejects the opportunity to facilitate the complacent self-reproduction of sameness and is instead willing to take on great risk to register and respond to negativity, building a mutual responsivity that emerges across seemingly vast differences and uneven power relations. Rather than join a collectivity that wishes to possess her for its own ends, even as this situation would bring her a measure of security, Fan rejects their offer and embraces the contingency and risk that attends difference over the reproduction of sameness.

In doing so, Fan exemplifies an embodied recognition of the fundamental affective modes that uphold the status quo not just in B-Mor but across diverse situations in the conjoined territories of this world. These linked forms of exploitation become more apparent when Fan finds herself at the site of the trafficking of Asian girls to a wealthy Charter household. When Quig, Loreen, and Fan arrive at Mr. Leo and Miss Cathy's home, Quig and Miss Cathy rescue Fan from Mr. Leo's sexual predation, which he has perpetrated on the other Asian girls who have similarly been traded, and, though Mr. Leo becomes injured and incapacitated in the altercation, Miss Cathy offers to uphold their original bargain in exchange for Fan. Unbeknownst to Fan at the moment of her "rescue," Miss Cathy has already repeated this formula seven times previously, rescuing young Asian

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[547] Ibid.

girls from Mr. Leo's assaults only to lock them in with her as companions who are never permitted access to the outside world from that point on.

Miss Cathy's practice of keeping Asian girls presents yet another iteration of feminized Asiatic caretaking that, while appearing markedly different, is continuous with the forms of reproductive caretaking labor in which Fan herself has already been engaged in B-Mor and through her pregnancy. Through Fan's affiliation with the Girls, the novel makes clear the linked gendered and racialized dimensions of affective reproductive labor in this biocapitalist world that connect B-Mor's labor with diverse situations outside the facility walls. The other seven girls, who are known simply as One through Seven and collectively as the Girls, are now in fact of varying ages but were all similarly rescued as young girls and have all chosen to undergo cosmetic surgery to alter their eyes in the style of anime characters to render them looking perpetually young and similar; their eyes were "huge and shaped in the same way, half-moons set on the straight side," and each wears a "simple white cotton nightshirt with an embroidered collar, rustic and old-fashioned."[548] When Fan first sees them, they "were all giggling now, shoulders scrunched, their high pitch cutesy and saccharine."[549] They do not perform household chores or other forms of intensive physical labor. Instead, they tend to Miss Cathy's emotional needs through their physical presence by keeping her company and taking turns to sleep on a pallet by her bed because, Fan comes to suspect, Miss Cathy needs an unthreatening female presence by her to feel safe as she herself was the victim of sexual abuse. Their appearances and "saccharine" mannerisms thus make apparent and palpably felt their nonhuman status; like Fan and others in B-Mor, though they are human organisms, they serve a clear purpose that is at once different from but continuous with the labor and affective reproduction of their experimentally laboring counterparts. In their cross between animated doll, daughter figure, and pet,

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[548] Ibid., 209.
[549] Ibid.

203

Miss Cathy's domestication of the Girls presents a grotesque iteration of Asiatic feminine docility, model filiality, and affective malleability as fetishized, objectified affective labor that is fully normalized under the conditions of Lee's world; known as "keeping," it is an "uncommon but growing Charter practice" that renders immediately and uncannily recognizable the nonhuman status that Fan's otherwise normative human organismal form does not in itself betray.[550]

In their uncanny kinship with objects and positionalities not usually endowed with subjectivity, the Girls' affective disturbance makes explicit the linked forms of simultaneously gendered and racialized labor across the world of Lee's novel. Speaking to Miss Cathy's desire for emotional comfort, the narrators observe that the "primary dream of keeping is consolation,"[551] an affective sense of comfort in the face of loss that converges with their assessment of B-Mor's own fundamental role to reproduce a sense of "stability" to undergird the structure of their world. Even the Nickelmans' desire to possess Fan as a means of survival and self-reproduction draws on Fan's capacity to biologically reproduce future generations and her Asiatic origins that would easily and unthreateningly assimilate as "an unlikely addition that would give their show a most memorable punctuation of shape and color,"[552] evoking historical gendered forms of Asian assimilation through marriage. The affective drive of keeping thus extends to practices beyond the Girls's captivity, which presents one iteration of a broader dream of "consolation" that extends throughout this world's fundamental need to mitigate and obscure violence and precarity, a dream that is pursued through gendered and racialized domestication of an imagined docile feminine, Asiatic body. Affect is thus deployed to compensate for and cover over precarity, and across the territories of this world the embodied, affective deployment of Asiatic bodies and gendered care structures becomes the

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[550] Ibid., 231.
[551] Ibid., 246.
[552] Ibid.

privileged technology through which the broader dream of consolation, as an affective sense of safety and reassurance that upholds biocapital's status quo, is reproduced.

Race thus remains salient to this future post-national world even as it is not completely determinative of either exploitation or the possibility for affinity. Based in their common manifestations of Vora's conception of biocapital as historically continuous, gendered, and racialized forms of embodied resource extraction,[553] the Girls' affinity with Fan is clear, and indeed, they immediately take to Fan and bring her into their fold. Affinity, however, is not limited to those who embody the historical continuities of Fan's Asiatic, feminine subjugation. Fan's privileging of affective affinities rather than formal similarities suggests how, in the novel's fully non-humanist world, categorizable bodily form is not a straightforwardly meaningful marker of power or subjugation. Fan shares, for instance, an iteration of formal bodily similarity with the Nickelmans even as these characteristics do not meaningfully suggest shared histories or experiences. Meanwhile, although the laboring classes of Lee's world are raced and "generally darker skinned and squatter," Fan also notes "tallish, attractive people of various races and ethnicities going about" the Charter village.[554] As in our contemporary world, their differences are perceptible based not on racial characteristics of bodily form alone but an ineffable sense of wellbeing and prosperity that also shapes their embodiment and others' embodied senses of them.

Fan's own consideration of her race is indicative of the novel's attempt to create space between bodily form and inherent racialized meaning. When Loreen, believing that Fan will allow the Nickelmans to kill them, calls Fan a "little New China bitch," Fan later reflects on the racial epithet and realizes that she feels somewhat detached from and unreactive to the slur. Rather than consider a reference to "New China" as a broadly racializing category that inherently implies and

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[553] Vora, *Life Support*, 3.
[554] Lee, 163.

encompasses the Asiatic bodies of B-Mor, Fan decouples her New China ancestry from B-Mor and her body's perceptible Asiatic form. She reflects that B-Mors themselves do not identify with New China: Fan had "known only B-Mor and so had all the preceding generations of her clan, New China a most distant notion that was hardly ever mentioned."[555] Indeed, they too reference New China "somewhat disparagingly."[556] Just as Asianness and Asian bodies are objectified by others to uphold their own ends, B-Mors and Fan herself also objectify New China as a racial category. Fan views her ancestry as an "object" that she "kept solely on a shelf" and "that might indeed be powerful but only if she brought it down and pressed it to her brow and asked something significant of it. But what was that? And how would she ever come to know?"[557] In considering her ancestry separately from her own biological and cultural being as something that bears no inherent meaning or relevance, Fan explicitly evacuates bodily form of inherent significance that resides in historical and biological racial continuity.

Though Fan is subject to exploitative racialized desires because of her feminine Asiatic form, this dual objectification suggests that Asian ancestry is not the primary site of concern, as it is in historical and contemporary forms of orientalism and Asian racism that continue to dwell on Asia and Asianness's threat made manifest in their corresponding bodies. Instead, in Lee's dystopic future imagination, Asiatic bodily form and its associated culture have become a vehicle for pursuing diverse affective desires, both in those who share and do not share in its embodiment; the B-Mor narrators, for instance, consciously acknowledge leveraging a form of racialized culture to serve their own ends even as doing so simultaneously reproduces the conditions of their subjugation. The novel thus distinguishes between the affective desires displaced onto Asianness and the physical bodies that are objectified to pursue these desires. Bodies that are identified as Asian are objectified

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[555] Ibid., 162.
[556] Ibid.
[557] Ibid.

technologies that can be used ambivalently from both sides for pursuing the affects that Asianness's domestication historically promises, which in the world of the novel produce senses of stability, safety, and consolation in the midst of biocapital's totalizing exploitation and precarity.

In objectifying race and divorcing it from bodily form, however, the novel also suggests that the potential to be and relate otherwise is contained within the same bodies onto which these affective displacements occur. Race's objectification and the evacuation of inherent meaning from bodily form acknowledge ongoing exploitation that continues to find expression in racial form but also do not assume its generalized relevance or necessary continuity. This distinction imagines the possibility for the body to exist as such, albeit in liminal and highly threatened ways, and for the affective potential that it contains in itself to depart from scripts of racialized and gendered exploitation. Bodily form as such does not hold a fully determined, given relation to power and also already contains the possibility to generate new meanings and affinities as bodies encounter other bodies and situations, extending beyond historically exploited bodily forms to include others who also hold these affective potentials within their own bodies. The novel thus distinguishes between affective desires that seek an object for their realization and affects that emerge from within bodies themselves, as the felt affinities between bodies that arise in specific contexts. Insofar as feminized caretaking is deployed to reproduce feelings of unchallenging smoothness that attend the unquestioned reproduction of the status quo, Fan's privileging of difference also catalyzes disruptions to the domesticated affective consolation to which feminized care work has historically been enlisted. Fan's experiences with the Girls, Miss Cathy, and the other individuals who help her to leave Miss Cathy's confinement elaborate how care affiliations can be enacted through these affective potentials and take shape across and in response to differences rather than reproducing more of the same. They therefore exceed shared racial or ethnic histories and bodily markers that, while remaining notable and salient to recognizing current power formations, are also not wholly

determinative. Instead, they more fundamentally recognize the affective, embodied capacity within all bodies to be and relate otherwise from within the subjugating, exploitative conditions that cannot be divorced from their own embodiment.

Fan's situation with the Girls and Miss Cathy exemplifies this broader recognition and enactment of affective potential to relate otherwise from within the bodies that are already being shaped by exploitative circumstances in which, as with this broader situation of biocapital, no clearly identifiable antagonist emerges. Fan recognizes that for the Girls, "Miss Cathy was not their antagonist. There was no antagonist per se, not even Mister Leo,"[558] an assessment that more broadly senses the diffuse and all-pervasive nature of biocapital enacted through the faceless and unlocatable directorate that cannot be clearly separated from the bodies that are its resources. On an individual level, though Miss Cathy perpetrates racialized and gendered exploitation, Fan also quickly realizes that the Girls are aware of Miss Cathy's own history of abuse and regard her as a "wounded and vulnerable big sister" who is "stuck in an ugly misery herself" rather than as an evil jailor.[559] Indeed, Miss Cathy's girlish styling of herself as "miss" subtly suggests a shared affinity with the Girls' trauma even as she perpetrates related forms of abuse. Fan comes to recognize the inseparable intricacies of these affective alliances and exploitations and understands the extent to which Miss Cathy relies on the Girls for her own emotional stability and how much she "loved" them, which Fan recognizes as, "if unnaturally skewed," "arguably the most intense of all" those in the Charter household who care for them, including Fan herself.[560] In these acknowledgements, Fan exemplifies a contingently open and actively sensing attunement to the others she encounters and the relational dynamics that already pre-exist her rather than making cognitively determined ethical and moral judgments that seek to overthrow the actively unfolding relations already around her. Forms of care

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[558] Ibid., 224.
[559] Ibid., 221.
[560] Ibid., 243.

affiliation thus also do not preclude inclusion of those individuals who perpetrate acts of abuse and are not predicated on innocence. They instead recognize that relations are not categorically absolute and exclusive and that difference might emerge in degrees from within these already existing and continuously unfolding dynamics.

This latent potential to be and relate otherwise contained within bodies is affectively felt by others even as they cannot clearly articulate its contours because this potential is not tied to concrete, positively attributable characteristics. Instead, others affectively recognize and respond to an inarticulable "difference" in Fan and, in doing so, similarly extend care beyond those for whom they are designated to care. Fan's situation with the Girls suggests how, in a context in which there exists no clear enemy towards whom to launch revolutionary overthrow from the outside, affectively embodied senses of potential are perceived as a negativity and disturbance in the status quo rather than a clear positive attribute. Whereas "[a]nother sort of person might have thoughtlessly disrupted [the] corpus" of the Girls,[561] Fan is careful from the beginning not to change the rhythm and equilibrium of their group dynamic, and she "joined their grouping without resistance" and "let herself be appended on their line."[562] Despite Fan's lack of any outward attempts to change the Girls' social dynamics and assert herself as different from them, "they all knew that Fan was the difference" without spoken acknowledgment,[563] and, though Fan is ready to accept being called Eight, "each Girl had already begun calling her Fan" and thus marks her out in distinction.[564] Two of the girls, Four and Five, finally take the situation into their own hands. They purposefully consume a can of beans contaminated with botulism to become ill and create an opportunity for Fan's escape. While Miss Cathy calls a doctor to see them, she refuses his urgent recommendation that they must

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[561] Ibid., 222.
[562] Ibid., 213.
[563] Ibid., 222.
[564] Ibid., 219.

be moved to the hospital immediately. As he is leaving, the doctor, Vik, singles Fan out from the others without explanation and tells her that "[y]ou don't have to stay here if you aren't hers to keep."[565]

Fan's marked difference, even as it cannot be positively articulated, enables a shift in orientation towards a given situation. Eventually, Mala, the household helper in Mr. Leo and Ms. Cathy's home, similarly chides herself for doing nothing earlier when she could "see [that Fan was] different,"[566] and calls emergency responders to treat the girls against Miss Cathy's wishes because she can no longer stand by and watch Four and Five in fatal danger and do nothing. Fan's difference thus makes explicitly apparent and actionable exploitation that is otherwise smoothly and unquestioningly reproduced; she is a difference that makes a difference, as a kind of negativity, in relation to other bodies and through specific embodied contexts. The others who respond to and help Fan without clear reasons for doing so, even across temporal and spatial lags, also exemplify the heightened potential for affectivity that initially distinguishes Fan. As the narrator observes, "[t]he funny thing about the tale of Fan is that much of what happened to her happened to her."[567] While "[s]he showed plenty of her own volition […] her tale demonstrates how those who met her often took it upon themselves to help her, without really any hesitation. Without always a ready self-interest."[568] Through their initial responsiveness to the sense of difference they perceive in Fan, Fan is also part of a relational dynamic through which indeterminate possibilities unfold, rather than revolutionarily and autonomously overthrowing a situation from the outside as the "heroine who wields the great sword" might.[569]

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[565] Ibid., 238.
[566] Ibid., 242.
[567] Ibid., 227.
[568] Ibid.
[569] Ibid., 243.

Rather than an autonomously formulated and inherent capacity, Fan's heightened responsivity is directly connected with her B-Mor background, which shapes others' affective perceptions of her. Vik observes that Fan does not "move like the others": "They go around like they're following something. Little heeding steps." Fan, however, is also notably not a Charter, which is "obvious" to Vik, as someone who has spent his life there, but neither is she from the counties;[570] to Vik, she is marked out not by any clearly categorizable formal characteristics but by an embodied sense. Rather than racial bodily form alone, Vik deduces that Fan is from the facilities because she carries herself differently from those from either the counties or Charters. Fan's orientations in the situations in which she finds herself on her journey cannot be divorced from the ways in which she has been trained to be part of a group in B-Mor, which informs the fundamentally relational ways in which her difference emerges. Indeed, Fan's difference that does not disrupt the grouping but rather is carefully attuned to dynamic interrelations is a cultivated caretaking quality that Fan first develops in the diving tanks of B-Mor. In the tanks, Fan was able to hold her breath for prolonged periods of time and enter a state in which she was clearly different from the fish but also accepted as one of their group; as with all divers, Fan "is not 'one of them' but is part of the waterscape from the time they are hatchlings."[571]

This dynamic embeddedness and responsivity, however, are not exclusive to or uniquely inherent in Fan. While Fan's distinction initially emerges from her extra willingness to stretch her response time to her bodily urges, this capacity to be a distinctive entity within a dynamic and mutually responsive grouping is in fact exemplified by all divers, and the fish themselves play a meaningful part in their mutual communication and engagement. The diver's presence is one body within a dynamic grouping with its own cadences, forms of communication, and mutual perceptions

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[570] Ibid., 236.
[571] Ibid., 4.

and understanding. Those in the school of fish also communicate with and respond to the diver, who is included as one of them even as she is clearly also different, and, as with the Girls, the diver must recognize the relations that pre-exist her and to which she must be accountable. With the fish, the diver becomes "accustomed to the buoying lift of their numbers" within their dynamic collectivity that includes her difference as one of them, such that "sometimes the fish seem to gird her and bear her along the tank walls like a living scaffold, or perhaps lead her to one of their dead by swarming about its upended corpse, or even playfully school themselves into just her shape and become her mirror in the water."[572] These possibilities to recognize and respond to affective potential, initially sensed as difference, can thus be cultivated in all bodies and draws on the embodied experiences one already has, extending to the fish themselves as a relational dynamic rather than privileging the role of the diver.

Further blurring the distinction between the fish and the divers, the Girls themselves suggest their similar capacities to recognize and respond to the embodied, affective dynamics of a situation and how willingness to act on these sensed dynamics can be cultivated. Much like the fish, the "corpus" of the Girls and their dynamic relations with one another and with Miss Cathy are characterized by a dynamic equilibrium that, as a result of Fan's presence, is currently undergoing a shift but that already contains ongoing relations and forms of sensing. Although Miss Cathy remains disproportionately determinative of the Girls' equilibrium, the Girls are also not merely helpless victims or passive recipients of others' care and rescue. In their increasing distress over Four and Five, the Girls "instantly rose and schooled" around Miss Cathy when she enters the room,[573] and when Miss Cathy refuses the emergency doctor and suggests that she and the Girls give each other manicure-pedicures to calm themselves, the Girls assent seemingly eagerly and without question;

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[572] Ibid., 4-5.
[573] Ibid., 236.

"shaken as they'd never been before with real confusion and fright," they "could only assent" to Miss Cathy's initial wishes.[574] Fan is torn at this moment in the narrative: although she feels compelled to act, she also "didn't want to incite anything like a rebellion" because she knows that "any direct push against Miss Cathy would be futile, given their utter acclimation to their lot and devotion to her."[575] Indeed, Fan recognizes that Miss Cathy's refusal, though clearly physically harmful and dangerous for the Girls, is rooted in her own and the Girls' extreme emotional dependence on one another. When in the past one of the Girls was sick and needed to stay in the hospital for a week, "they couldn't sleep. They couldn't eat. Even the wall work went badly. Nothing was right,"[576] and Fan recognizes "not just Miss Cathy's mania but how much the Girls meant to the woman."[577] Fan hesitates over her actions in light of this awareness and settles on joining the group for the time being:

> Had they been different souls, Fan might have tried to rally them with some sign, had them ring their keeper and bind her up with the belts of their terry robes, ensuring that whatever Mala could arrange would go unimpeded. Perhaps someday they would thus act, but for now, Fan could see that there was no chance for such an uprising. And so she did what she must have thought was best, which was to sit herself down among them and select a bottle of polish from one of the baskets and ask Two if she liked the color she'd chosen, a milky, opalescent silver.[578]

Fan is therefore not incapable of directed, revolutionary action; indeed, she demonstrates this form of direct action when she rescues Quig and Loreen from the Nickelmans. Instead, she chooses to attune closely to the particularities of a situation to respond to it from within. Indeed, even the colors associated with Fan are suggestive of this embodied capacity to embed and sense while manifesting perceptible difference; here she chooses an "opalescent silver," while she is most recognizably and comfortably dressed all in the black in her diver's uniform, both shades that are

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[574] Ibid.
[575] Ibid., 224.
[576] Ibid., 237.
[577] Ibid., 246.
[578] Ibid., 244-5.

comprised of negativity and reflect and absorb their contexts. With the Girls and Miss Cathy, Fan's decision to go along with the mani-pedis eventually achieves an affective balance in which the "feeling was right" and she "had found the necessary position" within their configuration,[579] in a refrain from action that Sharon Tran characterizes as "desisting."[580] While Fan modifies her actions, however, she is not the sole protagonist capable of sensing, acting, or desisting in this group. While Fan is achieving this feeling of rightness, beneath the surface of the narrative, the Girls similarly sense and affectively respond to the situation. When Miss Cathy has finally grown calmer and is ready to look in on Four and Five again, the Girls "leap up" to put the supplies away "as if the whole time they had been awaiting this word, whereas Fan was just beginning to think how mistaken her strategy had been."[581] The Girls thus demonstrate an adaptive and attuned awareness of Miss Cathy's moods that senses patiently and responds obliquely, waiting beyond even what Fan considers reasonable. Though in these immediate circumstances they are too late for Four and Five, who die, this mutual relational attunement and unfolding also bear unexpected consequences. Fan leaves Miss Cathy and later learns that the Girls are no longer confined to their quarters but are free to move around the house as they wish. Though they still seek the familiarity of their original quarters and have chosen to return, Mala assures Fan that they will "try again soon," gesturing to a difference of degree rather than kind that nevertheless fundamentally alters the nature of their situation.

Back in B-Mor, Fan persists as a difference that makes a difference. The narrator recounts the small acts of irregularity that crop up in B-Mor in connection with Fan, though the explicit connection is often unclear. Images of Fan and Reg in B-Mor regularly appear in B-Mor graffiti,

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[579] Ibid., 246.
[580] Sharon Tran, "Between Asian Girls: Minor Feminisms and Sideways Critique" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2017), 132.
[581] Lee, 247.

while certain B-Mor residents, following no discernable pattern, also explicably begin to shave their heads. They do not acknowledge this act but nevertheless, again, "something is different."[582] The novel closes without these disturbances overthrowing the directorate or, ultimately, apparently changing much of anything. Indeed, once the immediate cancer scare is over, B-Mor returns to much as it once was, its upheaval receding into a distant memory. However, the slight shifts in "orientation," "position," and "notation" that these disturbances marked, as persistent differences of degree that remain fully embedded in their circumstances, linger as ongoing embodied memory and latent affective potential: "if the individual expressions won't permanently linger in our minds, the ready regeneration of them does, this irrepressible urge,"[583] and sometimes, "some of us, like spies in a perilous land, will meet a certain gaze; and once we do, that recognition can soften the most wary eye and make us want to exchange all kinds of notations again."[584] These differences thus do not immediately dissipate as forgotten acts but carry on into the future as indeterminate potential that can unexpectedly and contingently arise again and prompt yet other different orientations to one another and their large-scale circumstances. Imagined as a dark star, a "black-clad girl, the brightest shape we know" who, "we will have to dream, traveled swift and wide and far,"[585] Fan embodies the affective potential felt as negativity and a reference point for this otherwise inarticulable potential that contingently persists within and between bodies, perhaps one day rendering differences of degree and notation that nevertheless change everything.

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[582] Ibid., 228.
[583] Ibid., 215.
[584] Ibid., 338.
[585] Ibid., 351-2.

Coda

Postsocialist Affects: Emerging Afro-Asian Legacies in the Twenty-First Century

In the previous chapters, I demonstrate how conceptions of non-revolutionary agencies are

taking shape in twentieth- and twenty-first-century narratives that grapple with the changing world

conditions and world-altering consequences of China's economic growth. Chapter One investigates

flattened affects as a means to apprehend and navigate emerging transnational circuits of migration and capital between China and the U.S. through Ha Jin's *The Crazed* and Yiyun Li's *Kinder Than Solitude*; in particular, this chapter traces the gendered dimensions of flatness, which become affective means for women to traverse these circuits by performing affective care labor while simultaneously also refusing full embodiment of sentimentalized affects of care. Chapter Two turns to ethnographic narratives I collected in Beijing, China to consider how literature and ethnography similarly construct stances towards the world through affect. These emergent acts of world-making seek to conceptualize and posit ways of navigating still-changing world conditions. In the ethnography, the flatness of detachment and ambivalence become healthful and actively cultivated stances that allow for continued attunement to the unpredictable and at times unassimilable conditions of China's economic reform as ways of caring for both the self and others. Finally, Chapter Three turns to speculative visions of the present and future to trace how gendered affective caretaking that emerges from but extends beyond the family simultaneously illuminates the ways in which this care has been leveraged as resource for the nation and capital while also presenting nascent possibilities for relating otherwise that do not recapitulate these logics.

These narratives participate in a broader shift in the kinds of political futures that ways of relating otherwise might engender in the wake of communist China's adoption of (a version of) market capitalism and the increasingly pervasive influence of market demands and culture in everyday life. Ambivalence and detachment are two related affective registers that can attend negotiations of still-emerging conditions in a broader constellation of interconnected postsocialist situations. In this conclusion, I suggest that the landscape of postsocialism is portrayed not just in works set in geopolitical states formerly under communism but also includes (sub- and supra-state) contexts in which the promise of communist revolution shaped imaginations of possible future worlds and in which Asian/American circuits of labor and affect play a distinctive role.

Along these lines, I draw inspiration from scholarship in Asian American studies focused on

the legacies and potentialities of Third World and Afro-Asian solidarities of the 1950s and 1960s. As

Colleen Lye glosses in a special issue of *PMLA* on "Comparative Racialization," these recent

considerations are part of a broader turn in the field to analyses of comparative racialization and take

as a starting point "the Asian as a racial concept."[586] Lye argues that studies able to "elaborate the

must foreground the complexities of racial formation in the U.S. beyond analogies that

straightforwardly align Asian American minoritization with black experience.[587] Within this

comparative project, scholars have turned to Afro-Asian and Bandung connections and solidarities

to uncover "evidence of a class-based internationalism."[588] China has historically played a central role

in these political movements through its self-positioning as a leader of the Third World. As Robin

D.G. Kelley, Vijay Prashad, Yuichiro Onishi, and others have shown, black radical thinkers derived

inspiration from communist revolutions in China and Cuba, as "colored" examples of Marxist

revolution that was otherwise white and Eurocentric. Meanwhile, communist leaders expressed their

solidarity with U.S.-based black radical movements for a period of time in the 1950s and 60s. These

transnational affiliations formed part of a vision of a colored Third World that was not aligned with

U.S. or Soviet Union Cold War ambitions for global hegemony. The visions for desirable futures

that emerged from these political movements were radically different and highly contested, yet they

shared in a collective desire to overthrow the global white supremacist, imperialist, and capitalist

status quo.

As an emerging body of work argues, however, these studies have so far focused on male

and heteronormative homosocial connections. In a special issue of *The Scholar the Feminist Online* on

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[586] Colleen Lye, "The Afro-Asian Analogy," *PMLA* vol. 123, no. 5 (2008): 1732.
[587] Ibid., 1733.
[588] Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar, "Introduction: Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations," in *The Scholar and Feminist Online* issue 14, no. 3 (2018).

"Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations," Vanita Reddy and Anantha Sudhakar "identify some epistemological limitations" in this inquiry's "critical genealogy."[589] Reddy and Sudhakar observe that "[b]ecause scholars rely so heavily on evidence gleaned from public records and institutional archives, the solidarities we find within Afro-Asian scholarship are overwhelmingly among male intellectuals, activists, and artists who benefited from the freedom of international mobility and whose ideas and actions have been esteemed as historically relevant." While recent studies of Afro-Asian and Third World connections might acknowledge singular examples of women in Afro-Asian history or by critiquing the masculinism of U.S. imperialism and capitalism," Reddy and Sudhakar assert that the "affective rhetoric that comprises the "manifesto poetics" of Afro-Asian studies nevertheless privileges militant, heteromasculine revolutionary language and representational forms."

Their response to these heteronormative and masculine tendencies is not to call for straightforwardly "identifying a negligent way of thinking about alliance, or of issuing a demand for recognition or inclusivity." Rather than read the historical archive as a "transparent repository of a radical past" in which queer and female voices can be readily recuperated, Reddy, Sudhakar, and the other authors of the special issue call for "queer and feminist interventions and methods" that draw on "overlapping genealogies of women of color feminism and queer of color critique." An intersectional analysis that emerges from these genealogies "require that our models of solidarity not only rewrite racial and national divisions, but also challenge the gendered and heteronormative structures of power upon which these divisions rest." Some of the questions that emerge include:

> How can we imagine a counterdiscourse that challenges not only racism, imperialism, and class disparities, but also heteropatriarchy and sexism? How might this counterdiscourse make for a more politically robust conceptualization of Afro-Asian alliance as a model of collective organizing and consciousness? What discursive forms of political agency can we envision besides – and as what Eve Sedgwick calls "beside"–race-based oppositional practices like direct action, armed militancy, and public intellectualism?

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[589] Ibid.

219

One approach that Reddy and Sudhakar suggest is a turn to affect and intimacy in cultural studies, in which "intimacy not only names state management of racial difference and affiliation, but also provides new ways to read cultural forms in relation to the archive": "Intimacy can allow us to access, however contingently and ephemerally, forms of relationality that remain 'inaccessible and unseen' within historical registers of colonial and postcolonial state governance."[590] As Reddy and Sudhakar assert, "[i]ntimacy, in this sense, gives expression to tacit, minor, or ephemeral affective relations that remain difficult to locate within state or official archives and that may surface more readily within the domains of the aesthetic and the representational."

Reddy and Sudhakar's attention to affect and intimacy as a means to approach alternative forms of political agency beyond what can be readily found in state archives resonates with Lisa Lowe's earlier critique of dominant frameworks for understanding political sovereignty. Lowe argues that feminist methods can critique intersecting and transforming forms of power and sovereignty beyond state governance in an era of accelerating globalization.[591] Calling for greater attention to the histories of Bandung a decade before Reddy and Sudhakar, in 2008, Lowe calls for a pluralization of the meanings of the political and how "the practice and the terrain of the *political* must be redefined and imagined differently in relation to different histories of uneven material conditions."[592] Lowe argues that a broader consideration of sovereignty beyond the nation-state can account for "other modes of rule" as well as "other modes of politics that specifically counter that rule." In particular, Lowe identifies "transnational 'gender'" as a "significant index in which we may 'read' [the] incommensurability" of globalized practices of the state and private entities, such as the apparent

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[590] Ann Laura Stoler, *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 4, in Reddy and Sudhakar.

[591] Lisa Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty," in *The Scholar and Feminist Online* issue 6, no. 3 "Borders on Belonging: Gender and Immigration" (2008).
[592] Ibid.; Italics in original.

contradiction between "political isolationism and economic globalism." Lowe cites the factories that sprang up in areas near the U.S.-Mexico border in the wake of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1986 and the North American Fair Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. These factories predominantly employ women in dangerous and toxic conditions, and Lowe articulates how feminist analysis articulates a broader logic in which women and children become not just "instruments of labor" but "*disposable life*" subject to "specifically gendered violence" under biopolitical governance.[593] Feminist politics and "organizing at the U.S.-Mexican border necessarily link[] processes and relationships that are transnational and not exclusively managed by citizenship in the nation-state." Lowe asserts that these critiques, which are able to extend beyond the nation-state, can in turn "be understood as an international *counter-politics* that contests mainstream definitions of political sovereignty," both in their attention to emerging formations of state and capitalist power and in their attempts to organize and assert resistance beyond the avenues articulated through claims to rights and citizenship.

The affective resonances that Reddy and Sudhakar identify as a key method for reaching beyond the state archive elaborate on Lowe's attention to alternative forms of agency and resistance. In Lowe's consideration of the U.S.-Mexico border, these forms of agency are focused on the legibly political acts of organizing and visibility, but Lowe's examination of a documentary film on the factories in the region that focuses on toxicity and environmental justice (*Maquilapolis: City of Factories* (2006), directed by Vicki Funari and Sergio De La Torre) also lends itself to a consideration of intimacy and affect. The documentary articulates the ways in which exposure to toxicity in the factories infiltrates the everyday lives and caretaking relations of the women who work there. Lowe highlights one woman's narrative, which depicts the toxic river polluted with carcinogens that runs through her community, her attempts to keep her lead-contaminated work clothing from contact

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[593] Ibid.; Italics in original.

with her children, and the lesions on her own body.[594] The intimate and affective interchange between bodies—human and nonhuman—here demonstrates a counter-narrative to dominant narratives of free trade and economic progress.

As frameworks that reach beyond acts that can already be legibly read as political, these feminist and queer critiques share in recent considerations of the speculative as a broader genre that gives voice to alternative conceptions of the real. In an entry on speculative fiction in the 2017 edition of the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, Marek Oziewicz writes that speculative fiction is not a single generic category with set conventions but a "field of cultural production" that "connected several established and emerging traditions."[595] Oziewicz links the rise of these genres to the multiculturalism of the 1970s and "resistance to the specifically Western, post-Enlightenment, androcentric, and colonialist mindset that had long excluded from 'Literature' stories that failed to imitate reality or embraced a different version of the real."[596] Some factors contributing to the proliferation of speculative genres include:

> the expansion of the global literary landscape brought about by mainstream culture's increasing acceptance of fantasy, science fiction, and horror; the proliferation of indigenous, minority, and postcolonial narrative forms that subvert dominant Western notions of reality or employ non-mimetic elements in different configurations than traditional Western genres; and finally the need for new conceptual categories to accommodate diverse and hybrid types of modern storytelling that oppose a stifling vision of reality—with its correlates of "truth," "facts," "power," and others—imposed by exploitative global capitalism. *An inherently plural category, speculative fiction is a mode of thought-experimenting that embraces an open-ended vision of the real.*[597]

I seek to draw out the ways in which Afro-Asian and Third World "indigenous, minority, and postcolonial narrative forms" had in an earlier twentieth-century historical moment, before the fact of speculative fiction's rise as "fantasy, science fiction, and horror," constructed a lineage of

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[594] Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty."
[595] Marek Oziewicz, "Speculative Fiction," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* (2017).
[596] Ibid.
[597] Ibid.; italics added

speculation through which we can consider contemporary speculative imaginations of alternative presents and futures. In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin D.G. Kelley articulates how the black radical imagination of freedom in the 1950s and 1960s diverged from dominant U.S. conceptions of freedom and no longer held any "particular tie to U.S. nationality," in contrast with the ways in which "most Americans associated freedom with Western democracies at war against communism, free-market capitalism, or U.S. intervention in countries such as Vietnam or the Dominican Republic."[598] Similarly, Yuichiro Onishi notes in *Transpacific Antiracism* that prior to World War II, Black and Japanese radicals shared a struggle to articulate alternative terms of political and social struggle and goals. Onishi traces convergences between black radical thinkers and activists and those in Japan and Okinawa in the early- to mid-twentieth century. He argues that

> [w]hat made this culture of liberation productive for political alliances in Black America, Japan, and Okinawa in the twentieth century were anti-imperialist, anticolonial, and antiracist currents within each community of solidarity that consistently challenged and rejected the dominant political idioms and conceptions, such as freedom and democracy, that purported to be universalistic.[599]

In doing so, black radical intellectuals "made connections across multiple efforts to revise the blueprint of Black radicalism to present a meaning of human liberation that exceeded the boundaries of nations and modern political thought."[600] Onishi's characterization of these challenges to "idioms and conceptions" and attempts to "revise the blueprint" of available thought speaks to the speculative nature of these historical formulations. These attempts to conceive of ways to live through an uncertain present and possible alternative futures also entailed articulating new meanings, terms, and paradigms for social struggle.

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[598] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 14.

[599] Yuichiro Onishi, *Transpacific Antiracism: Afro-Asian Solidarity in 20th-Century Black America, Japan, and Okinawa* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 9.

[600] Ibid., 10.

China's entry into the global economy also shifts contemporary imaginations of alternative futures that call up black radical, communist, and Third World solidarities. As a starting point for considering imaginative speculation in relation to the economic in the contemporary moment, Aimee Bahng elaborates on speculative fiction in direct relation to the rise of financialization. Writing on the relationship between speculative fiction and speculative finance in the contemporary moment, Bahng considers "speculation as praxis" and a "wider culture of future-telling," encompassing profiteering practices such as financial speculation and colonization,[601] on the one hand, and, on the other, ways in which "literary imagination [can] call forth new political economies, ways of living, and alternative relational structures" that contest capitalist and imperialist speculation.[602] Bahng argues that these imaginative pursuits "release speculation from capitalism's persistent instrumentalization of futurity."[603] They constitute "affecting experiments that, in the process of imagining another way of being in time, point to the limitations of the new world order's ongoing drive toward modes of privatization and securitization."[604] As "affecting experiments" that "transform the waiting room of history into a horizon,"[605] these speculations resonate with the ways in which scholars have articulated the multi-faceted project of generating new terms for the alternative futures imagined through Afro-Asian connections. Bahng specifically considers the economic conditions of the twenty-first century and highlights the need for contemporary speculation to grapple with these large-scale changes as they articulate their visions of the present and future.

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[601] Aimee Bahng, *Migrant Futures: Decolonizing Speculation in Financial Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), xi.

[602] Ibid., 2.

[603] Ibid., 3.

[604] Ibid.

[605] Ibid., 6.

Taking up recent scholarly inquiry into Afro-Asian and Third World solidarities in a feminist and queer vein, I seek to trace overlooked connections that emerge from within contemporary imaginations that put forth alternative histories of the present. As scholarly interest in these connections suggests, there remains in the contemporary moment an investment in possibilities for racial and economic justice that can be mined from the connections and solidarities of the 1950s and 60s.[606] The imaginations of these possibilities in the present, however, must grapple with a radically changed world, which has been shaped by the decline of the Non-Aligned Movement in the face of trade agreements such as GATT and the rise of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).[607] As my previous chapters have elaborated in the context of China-U.S. circuits, contemporary narratives must grapple with vast and ongoing changes that are continuing to unfold in the present. Rather than clear rubrics for alternative futures, they must first articulate still-changing presents in a speculative vein to posit ways of living on amidst these changes and the reach of neoliberalism. As the world has changed after the failure of communist projects around the world, narratives emerging in the present that seek to imagine alternative futures must also contend with these changes. Building on my previous chapters, I am interested in further considering the speculative potential of affect to offer open-ended, provisional means of orienting to events and occurrences without necessarily ending in coherent narratives or precluding the co-existence of other, sometimes conflicting orientations. As such, they are "affecting experiments" that make palpable overlooked, tenuous, "minor," and "ephemeral" connections that do not always make themselves readily known, whether in the official archive or in aesthetic forms, but that may hold potential for emerging gendered and transnational affinities.

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[606] Christopher Connery, "The End of the Sixties," in *boundary 2* vol. 36, no .1 (2009): 183-210; Colleen Lye, "US ethnic studies and Third Worldism, 40 years later," in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* vol. 11, no .2 (2010): 188-93.
[607] Vijay Prashad, *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (New York: Verso, 2014).

I turn now to the forms of migrant labor, and in particular female migrant labor, to which Lowe pointed in her 2008 discussion of overlooked Bandung histories in the political and social sciences. Lowe asserts that "[n]either neorealist nor neoliberal approaches make visible indigenous peoples, minority groups, women and children, and poor migrant workers beneath the level of the state, or more to the point, in neither approach are their deteriorating conditions within globalization made a priority as objects of research."[608] While these areas of scholarly research have certainly increased in the past decade, scholars working with feminist and queer approaches to Afro-Asian and Bandung histories continue to assert the elision of non-masculine, non-heteronormative connections even within work that examines politically radical thought, including the gendered specificities of the "dependence of U.S. middle class consumer society on male migrant labor and female manufacturing labor in the export processing zones," as Lowe earlier articulated.[609] Here I would like to consider how the feminist and queer frameworks that Lowe and the scholars of the special issue on "Feminist and Queer Afro-Asian Formations" put forth in relation to Bandung, as forms of speculation themselves, can illuminate not immediately visible gendered transnational connections within a contemporary speculative film that emerges in conversation with the Afro-Asian and Third World legacies of the 1950s and 60s.

Boots Riley's 2018 feature film *Sorry to Bother You* is set in an urban, dystopian, neoliberal, near-future U.S. The film's protagonist, Cassius Green, has become a telemarketer who, after adopting a "white voice" on the phone with customers, becomes increasingly successful. Cassius, known in the film as "Cash," stays focused on rising in the company ranks while his friends and colleagues start to organize around labor demands and go on strike. Cash breaks the strike and becomes increasingly successful until he finally attracts the attention of one of the telemarketing

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[608] Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty."
[609] Ibid.

company's most important clients, the white male CEO of a "live-work center," or a center with a factory and dormitory, called WorryFree. WorryFree increasingly appeals to ordinary citizens who have no other recourse to maintain a viable livelihood and promises to take care of all their daily needs, including meals and board in dormitory housing, in exchange for working in its associated factories.

Though *Sorry to Bother You* does not make these transnational connections immediately explicit, Riley himself has been a long-time member of the Oakland-based communist hip-hop group The Coup. Many reviews of the film have noted its Marxist, anti-capitalist overtones, including ones published in socialist venues such as Jacobin Magazine and the Socialist Review.[610] These reviews have pointed to the intertwined class and racial struggles to which earlier generations of black radical and third world activists were concerned.[611] As one review states, the film constitutes an "honest attempt to suggest the kind of crude madness we live in every day,"[612] suggesting an engagement with the definition of speculative genres I cited earlier as an "open-ended vision of the real." Furthermore, in interviews, Riley has referenced China in relation to his anti-capitalist critique (or, as one article writes, Riley "went so far as to cite China as an example"): "For all the mistakes China made along the way under communism, without the Cultural Revolution China would be one big Haiti right now."[613] In citing these Marxist affinities, Riley places the film in a black radical tradition that drew on inspiration from China in the mid-twentieth century. Robin D.G. Kelley has written that "China offered black radicals a 'colored' or Third World Marxist model that enabled

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[610] Eileen Jones, "'Crazy' Anticapitalism," Jacobin (July 21, 2018). https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/07/sorry-to-bother-you-boots-riley-review; Tom Kay, "Sorry to Bother You," Socialist Review (December 2018). http://socialistreview.org.uk/441/sorry-bother-you.
[611] Briahna Gray, "You Say You Want a Revolution? The Anti-Capitalist Film 'Sorry to Bother You' Shows the Way," *The Intercept* (July 25, 2018). https://theintercept.com/2018/07/25/sorry-to-bother-you-review-boots-riley/.
[612] Jones, "'Crazy' Anticapitalism."
[613] Ben Young, "Sundance award winner Boots Riley says his film 'Sorry to Bother You' is a critique of capitalism," youngpost (October 1, 2018). https://yp.scmp.com/entertainment/movies/article/110633/sundance-award-winner-boots-riley-says-his-film-'sorry-bother

them to challenge a white and Western vision of class struggle," which they "shaped and reshaped to suit their own cultural and political realities."[614] The complexities of China's global position in Cold War politics aside, "the fact that Chinese peasants, as opposed to the European proletariat, had made a socialist revolution and carved out a position in world politics distinct from the Soviet and U.S. camps endowed black radicals with a deeper sense of revolutionary importance and power."[615] Riley's comments clearly suggest his extension of this sense of promise. Addressing the failure of the communist project in China, Riley asserts that "socialism and communism just need to be done right"; "It's hard to get it right, and it will take time, but just because one country said 'we're sharing' but it turns out they weren't, does that mean we should just give up on sharing?"[616]

In addition to these historical communist resonances, however, the film's vision must also contend with the particularities of transformations in China's postsocialist development and in the world economy writ large. As Lowe and others have elucidated, women's manufacturing labor has been central to export economies and constitutes a key aspect of the global economy.[617] In particular, WorryFree's factory-dormitory structure is commonly deployed by both domestic and international corporations in China and predominantly employs young, female migrant workers from rural areas.[618] The contemporary iteration of this structure recalls similarly structured Maoist-era work units (*danwei*), which encompassed factory and dormitory and were situated in urban areas. Within contemporary China's transnational economic conditions, however, they constitute a "new production space re-institutionalized between transnational capital and the local state in China for re-fusing the sphere of production and reproduction of labour into one regime."[619]

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[614] Kelley, *Freedom Dreams*, 68.
[615] Ibid., 69.
[616] Young "Sundance award winner."
[617] Lowe, "The Gender of Sovereignty"; Leslie Salzinger, *Genders in Production: Making Workers in Mexico's Global Factories* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).
[618] Pun Ngai and Chris Smith, "Putting transnational labour process in its place: the dormitory labour regime in post-socialist China," *Work, Employment and Society* 21.1 (2007): 33.
[619] Ibid., 42.

Furthermore, Cash's job as a telemarketer has also been widely discussed in scholarship on gender and transnational affective labor. These scholars point to the gendered nature of technology-mediated service sector jobs, such as outsourced call center work, in countries such as India, the Philippines, and Malaysia.[620] Kiran Mirchandani frames call center work as one iteration of the "'racialized gendering of jobs,' whereby often highly educated men and women of color in the geographic South are engaged in the type of employment that is conventionally associated with deskilled and feminized work in the North."[621] Call center work also relies on the cultivation of affects associated with feminized care work. Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta highlight the affect and intimacy that call center workers experience and deploy, even as they are not in the physical presence of their clients,[622] which Mirchandani frames in explicitly gendered terms of "mothering and servitude."[623] Like Cash's "white voice," these workers are often enjoined to speak in American accents or adopt popular speech patterns from the countries of their callers in order to facilitate interpersonal connections.[624]

In the film, these transnational and gendered connections remain obscured. Depictions of WorryFree do not reference China or transnational gendered labor more broadly. Instead, they predominantly center on black male labor, with Cash as protagonist and depictions of the factory floor filled primarily with male workers. The film's speculative dystopian imagination is thus routed through Asia without naming these Asian contexts. In situating these denigrated forms of

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[620] Emmanuel David, "Purple-Collar Labor: Transgender Workers and Queer Value at Global Call Centers in the Philippines," in *Gender and Society* vol. 29, issue 2 (2014): 169-194; Cecilia Ng and Swasti Mitter, "Valuing Women's Voices: Call Center Workers in Malaysia and India," in *Gender, Technology and Development* vol. 9, no. 2 (2005): 209-233; Rekha Pande, "Looking at Information Technology from a Gender Perspective: The Call Centers in India," in *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* vol. 11, no. 1 (2005): 58-82.

[621] Ibid., 114.

[622] Purnima Mankekar and Akhil Gupta, "Intimate Encounters: Affective Labor in Call Centers," in *positions* vol. 24, no. 1 (2016): 17.

[623] Kiran Mirchandani, "Gender Eclipsed? Racial Hierarchies in Transnational Call Center Work," in *Social Justice* vol. 32, no. 4 (2005): 112.

[624] Ibid., 113.

outsourced manufacturing, service, and affective labor within the U.S., *Sorry to Bother You* restages the

first world as the third. Indeed, this vision reflects what Bandung, black radical, and women of color

feminists throughout the twentieth century have long articulated: an intersectional class- and race-

based definition of a "colored" third world within the first world, connecting the U.S. with struggles

in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.[625] This imagination of the third world, however, takes on new

meaning in the wake of changes in the global economy and increasingly transnational formations of

capital that do not align neatly with the state, as Lowe articulates. In the film, the difficulties of

grappling with these global capitalist formations takes the form of a speculative imagination that

asserts U.S. black male subjugation through the feminized labor already being performed in both the

U.S. and other geographical locales as a result of global economic changes. The film, however, does

not make these connections immediately accessible, and even the possibility for masculine interracial

alliances is troubled. While the film features an Asian labor organizer, Squeeze, whose presence

suggests the intersectional third world movements of the 1960s, the possibility for lasting interracial

solidarity is fraught with the heterosexual rivalry between Cash and Squeeze over the romantic

attachment of Detroit, Cash's longtime girlfriend.

The film thus cites and builds on intersectional third world histories but prioritizes the

experiences of black men. In doing so, it resonates with the difficulties of what Bill Mullen terms

"Afro-Orientalism," in which certain black radical imaginations were historically articulated through

the possibilities that Asia, and China specifically, held to offer a "third way" out of U.S. racial

binaries.[626] Mullen terms Afro-Orientalist discourse a "strategic antiessentialism" and

"counterdiscourse that at times shares with its dominant namesake certain features but primarily

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[625] Bill V. Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, Fourth Edition, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).
[626] Mullen, *Afro-Orientalism*, xii.

constitutes an independent critical trajectory of thought." [627] Afro-Orientalism is rooted in a recognition of the "relationality, derived from intellectual linkages between racial (or national) and class-based theories of analysis that necessarily bridged the hemispheres of struggle" across "Africa, Latin America, and Asia."[628] Noting the disciplinary and political divides that resulted from the failure of Third World struggles to realize their demands, such as the formation of ethnic studies in the academy rather than Third World studies, Mullen intends for the "hyphen in Afro-Orientalism" to "function as a speculative bridge over and across" these divides.[629] As its reference to the dangers of Orientalism suggests, however, it must continue to grapple with the central question of whether "Orientalism can do the work of both colonizing and decolonizing the mind."[630]

In relation to the promises and dangers of Orientalism, *Sorry to Bother You* evokes historic forms of Afro-Asian identification while largely obscuring the contemporary transnational connections that form the imaginative contours through which the film articulates racial and class-based subjugation in the present into the near future. It suggests that associations of affective and manufacturing labor with Asia might suggest emerging possibilities for affinity across transnational contexts and contour a form of Afro-Orientalism in the present. The film thus raises a number of questions for scholars invested in Afro-Asian connections as a means for conceptualizing contemporary global shifts through intersecting racial and classed histories beyond the category of the nation. What place in Afro-Orientalism as a counter-discourse does an Orientalism that is not named occupy? What openings and demands do these connections create to consider emerging, unexpected affinities across seemingly unrelated contexts? Do these connections constitute opportunities for intersectional considerations if they are not explicit, and if so, how do we make

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[627] Ibid.; Ibid., xv.
[628] Ibid. xxv.
[629] Ibid., xli.
[630] Ibid., xiv.

them accessible (and here it is perhaps particularly useful to consider the scholar's or critic's role)? As an attempt to grapple with raced and classed understandings of changes in the global economy, the film illustrates the necessity for any project that seeks to do so to become familiar with transnational gendered labor forms that shape these global dynamics. In what follows, I would like to interrogate the possibilities, or foreclosures, the film renders for transnational gendered affinities alongside the work it does to imagine racial continuities and shifts in relation to changes in the global economy.

Tracing the bodily intimacies that the film depicts begins to weave together gendered transnational connections in forms of labor across the U.S. and these other geographies that build on a twentieth-century understanding of a raced and classed international "third world." In his role as a telemarketer, Cash must enact the intimacies that scholars of outsourced labor have articulated as both gendered and raced in relation to constructions of Asia. Indeed, Asian Americanist scholars have also long noted the historic conjunction of feminization with Asian racialization from early nineteenth-century contexts, in which Asian, specifically Chinese, men in the U.S. performed traditional forms of women's work such as laundry and cooking so as not to pose a threat to white men's social and economic roles.[631] The film depicts these intimacies by dropping Cash into the immediate vicinity of his callers when the call is connected, a portrayal that literalizes reconfigurations of intimacy and proximity in call center work. Mankekar and Gupta argue that workers' success is "contingent on their construction of a relationship of proximity with their clients, eliciting and producing affects that generated intimate encounters" despite their geographical distance; these mandates to produce intimacy with clients also restructure their own understandings of themselves and their social worlds.[632] *Sorry to Bother You* portrays these intimacies as false or

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[631] David Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).
[632] Mankekar and Gupta, 36.

foreclosed forms of connection. Cash's callers cannot see him, but he earnestly tries to build rapport with them, at first completely unsuccessfully either because they hang up on him or because he must "stick to the script." The early scenes of Cash's failed calls neatly sketch the neoliberal present, in which state welfare is not available and individuals must "care for themselves."[633] In one call, a woman begins quietly sobbing in her kitchen while telling him that she and her husband have no money; her husband is in the hospital and they cannot pay their medical bills. The same forces that circumscribe this woman's and her husband's life also prevent Cash from responding to her suffering; Cash's face is filled with sympathy and concern while she cries, but he looks at the sign reminding them to "stick to the script!" hanging on the wall of their cubicled office and says nothing.

Through these moments of embodied intimacies, the film begins to reconfigure racial associations within the context of changing global economics. Cash only achieves both instrumentalized and intimate connections with his callers and starts to make successful sales when, at the advice of an older colleague, he adopts a "white voice." He eventually becomes so successful that he is promoted to a "power caller," an elite contingent of callers who sell services and products on behalf of RegalView's most important clients: U.S. arms manufacturers and WorryFree, which contracts with other companies to produce their goods. In his first call as a power caller to a Japanese cell phone company executive, Cash notes that the company's phones are currently being manufactured in China. WorryFree, Cash promises, can make "twice as many phones at half the cost," a proposal the executive cannot turn down. The call transports Cash into the executive's bathroom, where the executive is taking the call, and the scene portrays them face to face while the

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[633] Wendy Larner, "Neo-liberalism: Policy, Ideology, Governmetality," in *Studies in Political Economy* 63.1 (2000): 5-25; Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," in *Rethinking Marxism* vol. 14, no .3 (2002): 49-64; Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

executive is sitting on the toilet. As Cash makes his sales pitch, he flushes the toilet for the executive and winks jauntily at him while the sound of sprays and jets from the toilet goes off. The powerful Japanese business executive with whom the U.S. must now do business suggests longstanding U.S.-based anxieties about growing Asian economies. While these anxieties have most often been narrated from the point of view of hegemonic U.S. interests, the forms of labor that are being transacted in this moment also point to the film's imagination of a global racial and economic order in which black men are at the bottom. Cash's subservience and caretaking labor must be directed not only towards white Americans but, because of their economic ascendancy, to Asians as well.

The affective labor that Cash performs is just one component part of what the film articulates as a shift in global racial configurations through labor and the economic. This brief moment in the film suggests an emerging global order, in which cheap U.S. manufacturing labor takes China's place as the "the world's factory."[634] In a total reversal of third world and first, WorryFree has become so successful that one protester notes that "even sweatshops have been replaced by WorryFree live-work centers."[635] Workers sign a "lifetime contract," which protesters liken to modern-day slavery. In a television interview, WorryFree's CEO, Steve Lift, declares all such comparisons ridiculous, even "offensive." Instead, he says, "We're *transforming* life itself. We're saving the economy. We're saving lives." Lift's assertion that WorryFree is "transforming life itself" directly paraphrases theorists of Foucauldian biopolitical governmentality, particularly those who consider the biopolitical transformations in understandings of self, sociality, and morality in relation to new biomedical technologies.[636] While some ads for WorryFree feature white families, the film's explication of WorryFree and its covert biopolitical practices centers on black men as victims of its practices. Just as theorists of biopolitics in relation to these new biotechnologies attend to

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[634] Pun Ngai, *Migrant Labor in China: Postsocialist Transformations* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016).
[635] *Sorry to Bother You*, dir. Boots Riley (Annapurna Films, 2018).
[636] Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself.*

changes in the biological body itself, Lift also means his words literally: unbeknownst to the public, he is using biotechnical means to alter his workers' DNA to produce half-human, half-horse "equisapiens" to make better workers. The technology of this transformation is a white powder that looks exactly like cocaine, which Lift reveals to Cash when he invites Cash to one of his exclusive parties at his mansion to make Cash an offer of employment.

During their one-on-one meeting in Lift's study, Cash excuses himself and stumbles upon the equisapiens, whom Lift is keeping captive. Lift hurries to explain the situation to Cash, who is understandably freaking out, with a stop-motion video made with clay figures as part of his employment pitch. After an opening scene that shows two Neanderthal-like figures realizing that rocks can be tools, the video explains that "humans have modified ourselves throughout history: We train ourselves to fight. We work out. We study. WorryFree is carrying forward this lineage of natural developments that began in prehistoric times." The video then cuts to an animated factory floor populated with male workers. As an animated man in the factory struggles and fails to lift two boxes stacked on top of one another, the video explains that "Human labor has its limitations." WorryFree's scientists "have discovered a way—a chemical change—to make humans stronger, more obedient, more durable, and therefore more efficient and profitable." A petri dish with pipettes inserted into pink, wriggling cells fills the screen and is then replaced by the same factory floor filled with equisapiens working the line, all of whom, regardless of their skin color in their human forms, have dark horse or mule upper-bodies and wear identical blue work pants and black shoes.

The equisapien form fuses the exploited labor animals and animalistically-rendered black bodies who have long constituted a working underclass. Building on the intertwined racial and class critique at the foundation of Marxist black radical thought, this dystopian imagination of exploitation speculatively encompasses the devastation on black communities wrought by the "war

on drugs."[637] In the film's imagination, a population—black men—formerly constructed as unproductive in these discourses is compelled to become paragons of productivity. The film thus calls into stark relief the oppressive coercion contained within the demand to be productive members of a capitalist society and its particular racialized history in the U.S. Just as theorists of biopolitics widely assert, the demand for productivity is shown here to be an instrument of neoliberal governmentality in the contemporary moment.[638] At the same time, the film also asserts a racialized history in which constructions of unproductivity were leveraged as justification for destructive carceral and welfare policies that, the film imagines, is shifting within a changing global order.

In the film, as the U.S. takes the place of other nations as the world's factory due to the rise of Asian economies, these U.S. subjects formerly labeled unproductive and thus neglected, exploited, and incarcerated renew their value as "third world" workers in a new biopolitical order. In the film's references to modern-day slavery and incarceration, this new order is continuous with a U.S. racial and economic history. I would like to ask, however, whether this continuity in the film comes at the expense of recognizing affiliations with the lived situations that transnational workers in non-U.S. industrial and other outsourced settings already face. The forms of affective, care, and manufacturing labor the film depicts are already most commonly performed by Asian women and other women of color,[639] in addition to the feminized labor historically performed by Asian laborers,

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[637] Mona Lynch, "Theorizing the role of the 'war on drugs' in US punishment," in *Theoretical Criminology* vol. 16, no. 2 (2012): 175-199.

[638] *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life*, ed. Susan Braedley and Meg Luxton (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010); David T. Mitchell with Sharon Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 217; Anna Hartnell, *After Katrina: Race, Neoliberalism, and the End of the American Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2017), 117.

[639] *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care*, ed. Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Ann Shola Orloff, "Explaining US welfare reform: power, gender, race, and the US policy legacy," in *Critical Social Policy* vol. 22, no .1 (2002): 102.

236

such as call center workers. Indeed, the film's depictions of workers on the factory floor are

strikingly similar to photographs of Chinese factories in the Western media.

Figure 1.[640]

Figure 2.[641]

What's more, the women who work in these factories are often engaged not just in

manufacturing labor but in affective labor that has been widely constructed as biopolitical in

scholarship on China. They are enjoined to remake themselves in the image of middle-class

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[640] Edward Burtynsky, Photograph, in *China*, by Edward Burtynsky (Göttingen: Steidl, 2005).
[641] Gethin Chamberlain, "The grim truth of Chinese factories producing the West's Christmas toys," *The Guardian*, December 3, 2016. https://www.theguardian.com/business/2016/dec/04/the-grim-truth-of-chinese-factories-producing-the-wests-christmas-toys.

consumers who will further the "quality" of the nation through embodied aspects of themselves such as their desires and bodily comportment.[642] In transplanting black male workers into a common, already-existing labor and living structure outside the U.S. without acknowledging their existence, do these non-U.S. situations become merely figurative means through which to highlight one identificatory group's oppression? And what, if any, openings exist within the film for articulating the transnational and intersectional affinities to which the film gestures while still dwelling with and closely considering the histories that shape each particular context? I ask these questions not to straightforwardly condemn the film but rather to try and consider the difficulties of constructing a raced and classed understanding of contemporary world conditions and how an intersectional critique of these conditions might emerge.

One affective trace that emerges obliquely and tenuously suggests the gendered consequences of "welfare reform" in the 1980s and 1990s, which was intimately interconnected with the war on drugs.[643] While the film centers on the male figures who evoke the disproportionately black and male population of the U.S. carceral system, the intertwined phenomena of the war on drugs and welfare restructuring also held far-reaching consequences for constructions of black

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[642] U.S. journalist Leslie T. Chang discusses how young Chinese women are also motivated to work in factories in order to aspire to the middle class (*Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2008). Chang elaborates on these desires as a way to counter popular U.S. discourses that present these women as completely lacking in agency. At the same time, scholars of China also discuss how these middle-class aspirations form a contemporary iteration of the nation's demand for model citizens, people of "quality" who can also further the quality of the nation. *Suzhi* is roughly translated as "quality" and is a heavily class-based discourse in which the individual, embodied cultivation of quality through a range of practices such as education, manners and comportment, and dress is directly connected to the strength of the nation. *Suzhi* was central to discourses promoting China's one child policy as a means of investing limited resources to produce higher quality children as the privileged vehicles of national modernity (Susan Greenhalgh, *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008). Ann Anagnost usefully connects the middle-class family's investment in the child as the privileged site of *suzhi* and the social disenfranchisement of migrant workers as paradigmatic bodies that are lacking in *suzhi* in the contemporary moment. Anagnost's analysis points directly to how forms of social care and its lack are connected through visions for how the dream of China as a prosperous and powerful postsocialist state will be realized through individual bodies (Ann Anagnost, "The Corporeal Politics of Quality (Suzhi)," *Public Culture* 16, no. 2 (2004): 189-208). See also Andrew Kipnis, "*Suzhi*: A Keyword Approach," *The China Quarterly* (2006): 295-313; Wanning Sun, "*Suzhi* on the Move: Body, Place, and Power," *positions: east asia critique* 17, no. 3 (2009): 617-42.

[643] Lynch, 176.

women and of caretaking labor more broadly in the U.S. U.S. welfare reform was signed into law when the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed in 1996 during the Clinton administration,[644] in part due to constructions of public assistance as a form of dependency and non-productivity for which the state should not be responsible. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon examine a genealogy of the term "dependency" in relation to the fears of "welfare dependency" that vilified those needing public assistance, which over the decades increasingly meant single black mothers. Fraser and Gordon argue that the New Deal created a "two-track" system that separated entitlements such as "old age insurance or unemployment," which were administered "without stigma or supervision and hence without dependency" and are "not called welfare even today," from a second track of public assistance that "attempted to find the "deserving among many undeserving poor" and "created the appearance that claimants were getting something for nothing."[645] Fraser and Gordon argue that these New Deal tracks sought to protect the ideal of the family wage, imagined as a single income earned by a male head of household that is enough to provide for an entire family while the woman remains a "dependent" housewife.[646] Indeed, welfare was not distributed to families with an "able-bodied male,"[647] even though in reality, this family wage was rarely enough to sustain an entire family and continued to necessitate the financial contributions of wives and children.[648] Eventually, the "poor solo mother was enshrined as the quintessential *welfare dependent*,"[649] and by the 1970s, with the transfer of many white women to "first-track programs as social-insurance coverage expanded," the "black solo mother had come to epitomize welfare dependency" and brought together wide-ranging gendered and racialized historical

[644] Ibid., 315.
[645] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of *Dependency*: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State." *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 19, issue 2. (1994): 321-2.
[646] Ibid., 318-9.
[647] Robert Moffitt, "The effect of the U.S. welfare system on marital status," *Journal of Public Economics* vol. 41, issue 1 (1990): 101.
[648] Fraser and Gordon, 319.
[649] Fraser and Gordon, 323; italics in original.

figurations of dependency: "Black, female, a pauper, not a worker, a housewife and mother, yet practically a child herself—the new stereotype partakes of virtually every quality that has been coded historically as antithetical to independence."[650] Public debate about public assistance programs in the 1980s was framed "around the need to eliminate the socially unproductive 'dependency' of welfare mothers," which was supported by both liberals and conservatives in the 1990s.[651]

While the film does not dwell on the gendered dimensions of these social and political developments, these gendered dynamics make themselves felt in brief moments that are affectively disturbing if not fully explicated or integrated into the plot line. The video that Lift plays to explain the equisapiens to Cash is inexplicably narrated by a sexualized female Neanderthal figure with a smooth British accent, bright lipstick, and large breasts. The embodied and affective labor this figure performs to both soothe and titillate speaks to representations of women of color as highly sexualized, animalistic, or maternal.[652] However, while this figure is ostensibly meant to soothingly and rationally present WorryFree's biotechnical manipulations as a natural extension of human evolution, her appearance is at the same time slightly off-putting; her hair is thinning and askew, and her lipstick is smudged, giving her a visceral suggestion of poverty or abuse. The film thus constructs a disjunct between Lift's intention, which we can glean from the image's racist and misogynist overtones, and its execution. As an affective disturbance, this disjunctive figure suggests one moment that sutures Lift's racism, which is overtly leveled at black men in the film, to the treatment of black women as well.

Cash's girlfriend Detroit provides another point of entry into interracial histories in an affectively disturbing scene. Detroit is a visual and performance artist and as such, alludes to the

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[650] Ibid., 327.

[651] Sandra Morgen and Jeff Maskovsky, "The Anthropology of Welfare 'Reform': Perspectives on U.S. Urban Poverty in the Welfare Era," *Annual Review of Anthropology* vol. 32 (2003): 316.

[652] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 154.

centrality of Detroit, Michigan in the Black Arts Movement and its importance to labor organizing, notably by James and Grace Lee Boggs. In a performance art piece in the film, Detroit stands on a stage barely clad in black leather bikini shaped like hands gripping her body and declares that "cell phones can only work with a mineral called coltan, which is found in Africa's Congo." The mining of coltan, she asserts, has resulted in "hardship. And wars." Without explaining the connection, she then invites the audience to throw cell phones and balloons filled with sheep's blood at her while she recites lines from the "timeless Motown-produced movie entitled *The Last Dragon*." She thus also references the appeal of kung fu movies not only for U.S. black popular culture but also, as Prashad articulates, for working class people across the world as an example of a defiant figure combating oppression with his bare fists.[653] Detroit's outfit gestures to the sexualized, affective labor of women of color, while she explicitly calls attention to the destructive consequences of neocolonial mining practices in Africa that fuel the same cell phones once produced by Chinese factories and now, thanks to Cash, produced by WorryFree. These connections across diverse contexts are not explicated in the film; the characters do not discuss it, and Detroit's aesthetic decisions are never explained. While its minor role in the film might ambivalently consider non-commercialized performance art's relationship to politics, her piece also presents another affectively disturbing moment that obliquely brings together an interracial black radical history, questions of political art, and black and Asian cultural interchange to begin to gesture to a critique of contemporary global structural conditions.

As a film that prioritizes the experiences of black men, *Sorry to Bother You* largely does not make explicit the gendered and transnational connections on which its imagination of a near-future

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[653] Crystal S. Anderson, *Beyond 'The Chinese Connection': Contemporary Afro-Asian Cultural Production* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013); Amy Abugo Ongiri, "'He Wanted to be just like Bruce Lee': African Americans, Kung Fu Theater and Cultural Exchange at the Margins," in *Journal of Asian American Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2002): 31-40; Vijay Prashad, "Bruce Lee and the Anti-Imperialism of Kung Fu: A Polycultural Adventure," in *positions: east asia cultures critique* vol. 11, no. 1 (2003): 71.

neoliberal dystopia rests. While moments like the ones I discuss above are certainly "minor" and

"ephemeral" traces that scholars working in feminist and queer traditions examine, we might ask

whether we find these affective traces adequate acknowledgements of gendered histories and labor

configurations. At the same time, we might also consider the starting points the film does offer us

and the foundational necessities for an intersectional critique of the present to which it speaks. The

speculative nature of affect—which, as Kathleen Stewart articulates, are "[r]ooted not in fixed

conditions of possibility but in the actual lines of potential that a *something* coming together calls to

mind and sets in motion"—opens different possibilities in relation to an aesthetic work that is itself

speculative.[654] The disturbing affects the above moments generate are not easily assimilated or

forgotten and persist, unexplained, after the film is over, even as, in the same moment, they may also

be easily put aside. Should we take them up, however, our speculation about these moments

constitute an "open-ended vision of the real" and "affecting experiments." These forms of

speculation allow us to connect the embodied, affective labor of diverse bodies whose labor is

overlooked and denigrated even as it forms the basis for the world economy and the thriving of the

first world—that of black men, black mothers, outsourced call center workers, and female factory

workers in Asia and Latin America. Extending further, these networked affective avenues also reach

those engaged in devalued affective caretaking labor of all kinds, both within and outside the family,

including service workers, domestic workers, and predominantly female family caregivers.[655] Riley's

biotechnically-rendered equisapiens might extend these affiliations beyond even the waged and

indentured labor of the human organism to include the exploited subjects, human and nonhuman,

of biomedical experimentation and innovation.[656] These routes allow us to weave together emerging

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[654] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1.
[655] Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, "Introduction," in *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care.*
[656] See Kalindi Vora's broad definition of "biocapital" in *Life Support: Biocapital and the New History of Outsourced Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

affinities that resonate with a concept of the Third World in the twenty-first century and to connect diverse understandings of agency still in formation.

After seeing the equisapiens, Cash experiences a change of heart. He sides with his striking friends and colleagues and eventually exposes Lift with footage of the equisapiens that he accidentally recorded on his phone. At the party in Lift's mansion, however, Lift had offered Cash some of the white powder, and Cash, assuming that it was cocaine, accepted. While Cash keeps his human form long enough for the film to resolve the strike, which successfully results in a labor union for the telemarketers, the penultimate scene of the film sees Cash turning into an equisapien himself. In the film's last scene, Cash and the other equisapiens break into Lift's mansion to confront a shocked and waiting Lift, and the film ends at this point without a clear resolution. The moment is one of revolutionary possibility informed by a class consciousness—the equisapiens had earlier helped the strikers overcome armed guards hired by RegalView. At the strike, when the altercation is over, one of the equisapiens, "Demarius" from East Oakland, exchanges greetings with Cash and Squeeze, who tells him, "Same struggle. Same fight," before Demarius shouts "Equisapiens! Out!" The equisapiens have thus become a kind of revolutionary guerilla force going where needed. While their imminent confrontation with Lift—the final scene of the film portrays them starting to storm into the front door—channels a revolutionary energy, the nature and content of their confrontation is left ambiguous, and the film offers no clear resolution as to how the world system is has begun to sketch might be overthrown.

In contrast to the Chinese and Chinese diasporic contexts I have examined, a feeling of revolution is still salient and meaningful in this U.S. postsocialist context that continues to draw on Third World legacies to imagine responses to the conditions of the present. Where this revolutionary impulse can lead, however, is highly unclear and uncertain. In this uncertainty, the persistence of this revolutionary desire shares kinship with the flattened affects I have examined in their mutual

attempts to contingently negotiate a still-changing world. Their mutual yet differentiated

negotiations of interconnected and still emerging world conditions suggests possibilities to connect

these postsocialist situations and others that were once interconnected in their struggles to imagine

and enact different worlds. These circuits are shaped not only by the migration of Asian people but

also linkages and shared challenges in responding to lived conditions and articulating different

futures through the promises and failures of revolutionary communist visions. Within these circuits,

the imagination of different affective registers that take shape through the body present

opportunities to consider contextual particularities as well as intersecting modes of grappling with

world conditions. In doing so, we may find speculations that still share emergent contexts and can

inform one another as the twenty-first century progresses.

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