Chapter Ten

Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai: Notes on (Re)Cosmopolitanism in a Chinese Metropolis

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In thinking about the history of the Roman Empire, Marshall McLuhan noted that writing and paved roads brought about "the alteration of social groupings, and the formation of new communities" (McLuhan 1994, 90). They enabled the formation of an empire that broke down the old Greek city-states and feudal realms in favor of centralized control at a distance. A similar process can be seen in the history of the Chinese empire, where writing enabled the bureaucracy to hold together diverse ethnic and linguistic groupings. However, it is with modernity and its new mass media that local and kinship identities come to be radically dissolved by a more powerful national space of identity. Anthony Giddens has noted that an important feature of modernity is the "dissembedding of social systems," or the "lifting out" of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across infinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990, 21). In twentieth-century China, the mass media's disembedding operations have constituted first a new national community and then a powerful state subjectivity. This essay is an initial inquiry into a third disembedding process: the reemergence of a transnational Chinese global media public and its effects on the modernist project of the nation-state.

Benedict Anderson's (1991) thesis that a nation, a unit of identification larger than a village, local community, or region, could be conceptualized only through the medium of mass print such as newspapers and novels is borne out by China's early-twentieth-century experience, in which print culture was intricately tied in with May fourth, republican, and Communist nationalism. However, the point I would like to make is
that the mass media are vehicles for imagining not only the nation but also the larger space beyond the national borders—that is, the wider world. This transnational aspect of media must not be neglected, because it harbors potentials for liberation from hegemonic nationalism and statism. Although both nationalism and internationalism composed the narratives of modernity, nationalism exerted a much more powerful influence, as it became implicated in nation-state territorial imperatives. However, with postmodernity, increasing transnational electronic linkages “all presage a delocalized, potentially nomadic future” (Friedland 1994, 15) which can offer post-modern challenges to state modernity. In post-Mao China, what can be discerned is a process in which the modern mass media, which had been (and continues to be) a central constitutive force for state projects of modernity and nation-state, has now also begun to construct a Chinese transnational imaginary world order.

Since media provide ways for audiences to traverse great distances without physically moving from local sites, they are crucial components of transnationalism. In China in the 1980s and 1990s, the media increasingly enable national subjects to inhabit trans-spatial and trans-temporal imaginaries that dissolve the fixity and boundedness of historical nationhood and state territorial imperatives. What is occurring via the mass media in China today is no longer the simple picture of a third-world culture “locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism” (Jameson 1987, 68) but a more complex variegated process of eager accommodation, appropriation, and resistance to foreign cultures. What can be detected is a culture now more confidently and creatively constructing a “third space” (Bhabha 1994) of transnational Chinese identity through interaction with Hong Kong and Taiwanese mass culture. From a nationalist anticolonial culture, what is now starting to get created is a Chinese “traveling culture” (Clifford 1992) reaching out around the globe.

In recent scholarly literature, writings on diaspora comprise a body of work that deals with the traversing of vast distances of space (Clifford 1994; Chow 1993; Rouse 1991, 1995b). They chart an important phenomenon of modernity: the global movements of populations, especially from postcolonial places to the West. However, most of this writing is about how postcolonials become minorities in the West and the multicultural changes and challenges they introduce to Western hegemony, national identity, and academic curricula. While challenging the West, there is still a focus on the West as the central place of concern, the primary actor, and the key place of action. There is another important spatial transformation taking place among those who have stayed within their homelands, because a similar displacement is taking place there—
people in imaginary travel increasingly look outward and participate via
mass media in what is going on with their fellow nationals in other parts
of the world. This essay will document another reaction to colonialism
besides nationalism: the increasing cosmopolitanism of the homeland.

The experiences of modernity and mass-media-induced conscious-
ness in China challenge at least three common conflations dominant in
Western critical theory. These conflations are those of nation and state,
state and capitalism, capitalism and the West. In China we find that in
each pair, the two processes have not always been the same, nor are they
necessarily parallel; rather they have often been in conflict with each
other. Understanding twentieth-century China requires the deconstruc-
tion of these ahistorical conflations, whose origins stem from the West-
ern experience, for an approach emphasizing the historical fluidity of
different forces that wax and wane, combine, diverge, counteract, and
overpower each other (Deleuze 1980).

Shanghai’s History as Media Capital

As a treaty port opened up for trade and shipping with the West in 1842,
Shanghai’s history was inextricably tied up with the history of Western
(and Japanese) colonialism as well as the development of native and
Western capitalism in China. Its Western influence meant that Shanghai
always maintained a certain distance from the political centers of an
agrarian bureaucratic state order, first the Qing imperial government and
then the republican Kuomintang (Ding 1994). In the 1920s and 1930s,
before the devastating dual processes of Japanese imperialist invasion in
1937 and the Chinese civil war, the city was the most urban, industrial,
and cosmopolitan city in all of Asia.

In this bustling metropolis, there emerged what one historian has
called “a new tradition, that of Chinese modernism” (Bergere 1981, 2). Shanghai saw the birth of a new modern, urban, commercial, and popular
culture that, despite its foreign influences, was nevertheless Chinese.
Shanghai was home to China’s main publishing companies and printing
presses, and to the greatest number of newspapers and magazines in the
country. The city was also the cradle of a dynamic Chinese film industry
in the 1920s and 1930s and had China’s largest movie-going audiences
(Leyda 1972). Virtually all of the major film companies in the country
were established in this city, and Shanghai films were distributed not
only to all other regions of the country but also in Southeast Asia.

After the Communist victory, even an open port such as Shanghai be-
came like the rest of China: closed to most foreign and overseas contact.

289
While Shanghai continued to be the major industrial center creating wealth for the whole nation, urban cosmopolitan cultural life saw a radical curtailment when, in the new ethos of revolutionary asceticism, it came to be labeled a decadent "bourgeois culture." With tight fiscal and political control by the center, the city focused on heavy industry rather than cultural production.

The Spatialization of National and State Subjects

Too often in Western academic discourse, nation and state are used interchangeably. Two exceptions are Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1993), who argues that diaspora populations around the world comprise emerging "post-nations" that deterritorialize states, and Katherine Verdery (1994), who has shown how, after the collapse of a super-state such as the Soviet Union, (re)emergent ethnic nationalist imaginaries (whose subjects are spread out across different East European states) seek to define and bolster themselves territorially with new and separate state apparatuses. My own concern to distinguish between nation and state stems from a different historical situation as well as from as a different set of political and theoretical concerns. Rather than a nation in search of a state, I think that the Chinese situation in the 20th century requires that we examine how a powerful state apparatus came to overcode itself onto the nation, and how a reemergent nation or alternative community has now begun to decode or elude the state.

In China’s transition from a traditional dynastic order to a modern nation-state, there was a "flattening" of a centripetal and hierarchical social realm, whose borders were hazy and indistinct, into a novel social space defined by horizontal linkages of comradeship inside and by distinct outer borders (Anderson 1991, 15; Foster 1991, 253; Chun 1994b). In the first three decades of the twentieth century, through the print medium, the urban reading public was exposed to the literature and culture of the West and Japan (Chow 1960) and came to share a growing alarm at the desperate poverty, "ignorance," and "backwardness" of China as compared to these foreign lands. At the same time, print also fanned the growing nationalist outrage at the imperialism of these same countries. The task of "saving the nation" (jiuguo) in the Darwinian struggle for existence between nations became a rallying cry that interpellated (Althusser 1971) patriotic subjects into the project of making the Chinese nation "prosperous and strong" (fuqiang)."
equal terms. China's encounter with global forces was disastrous for cultural self-esteem, and out of this was born nationalism. The violations of the empire's territorial space, first by Western powers in the Opium Wars and Treaty Port systems of the mid-nineteenth century, and then in the Japanese seizure of Shandong in 1914, annexation of Manchuria, and invasion of East China in 1937, propelled this traumatized new nation-state to close its doors for the first three decades after the Communist revolution of 1949. There followed the tight sealing of state borders. Outside contact was limited to government exchanges with the Soviet bloc and the nonaligned third world. Foreign visitors and returning overseas Chinese were relatively rare, as were emigrants leaving China. Few foreign films were shown; reading foreign literature was also frowned upon as submitting oneself to bourgeois culture; even letter-writing to people in foreign countries was severely curtailed. During the Cultural Revolution, it was politically dangerous to have "overseas connections" (haiwai guanxi) in one's family or personal past, and those who tried to flee across the borders in south China were often executed as "traitors" (pantu).

The first half of the twentieth century in China saw the emergence of nationalist consciousness and a concern for cultural survival in a colonial context. At the same time, the new nation sought to disengage itself from an older imperial state order and dynastic system. With the strengthening of the Kuomintang, a new state organization captured and harnessed nationalism to the project of the state. With the Communist revolution in the second half of the century, nation and state became fully coterminous, and the state took charge of all aspects of life. Beginning with Mao's historic talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art in 1942, all cultural and artistic production was harnessed to the task of state indoctrination and the upholding of party policies. Henceforth, nationalism as a critical discourse became a state discourse (A 1994). The Maoist period can be seen as the full appropriation of nationalism by the state, in which nation and state came to be fully integrated into a single entity.

By the mid-1950s, all private publishing firms, newspaper companies, radio stations, and film companies had come under centralized state administration, so that all the paths and networks of print and electronic media led to Beijing. The Central People's Broadcasting Station was established in Beijing in December 1949. All provincial, municipal, and local radio stations were required to transmit its news, commentary, and political programs (Chang 1989, 55) in Mandarin, the national language. Film in the Maoist era can be described in Walter Benjamin's (1969, 242) terms as both the politicization of art and the aestheticization of politics, but the former was more dominant than the latter, since aesthetic standards were often deemphasized (Clark 1984). The audience was con-
structured as an undifferentiated monolithic whole of “the masses” or “the people,” so that gone were the variety and diversity of styles and tastes in the arts. During the Cultural Revolution, audiences across the country were restricted to a repertoire of nine “revolutionary model operas” (yangbanxi). In Maoist China, the mass media helped create a homogeneity of culture that played down regional identities, promoted the voice of the central government in Beijing in Mandarin, and reiterated the same state messages in all media, whether radio, newspapers, or film.

In almost all films of the Maoist era, family ties and personal sentiments were played down in favor of national and class commitments. The elevation of class also erased gender and gender discourse, as shown by Meng Yue’s (1993) analysis of how White Haired Woman transformed the rape of a peasant woman Xi-er from a gender issue into a class issue. Film scholar Dai Jinhua (1995) has also noted the strange paradox whereby the Chinese film industry boasts many women film directors, but virtually none of their films have a female perspective. Although the state championed women’s liberation, it did so by substituting for women’s discourse a state discourse that was no longer as patriarchal but was part of a new masculinist national project (Yang 1995).

Running through many media messages was an “us vs. them” construction in which the sacred national space is constantly being threatened (as in the United States in the 1950s) and encroached upon by foreign interests and internal enemies who serve them. A binary classificatory system was set up of pure/impure and inside/outside forces of peasant and landlord, native and foreigner, in which the class opposition was made parallel with the native/foreign opposition as both struggle over the space of the state. Thus, along with the centralization of all media in the Maoist era, the national identity that was first constructed by print capitalism in the early twentieth century came to coincide with the contours and logic of the state.

Mass Media Development in Post-Mao Shanghai

It can be said without exaggeration that in the post-Mao era there has been an explosion in the development of mass media. If the Maoist period can be described as a period in which the mass media sought to level, uniformitize, and homogenize the Chinese public, the post-Mao period can be said to have brought about the pluralization, differentiation, and stratification of media publics according to class, educational level, region, locality, gender, occupation, and leisure interests, fragmenting the state’s mass public.
In Shanghai, radio culture was transformed with the establishment of the new Eastern Broadcast Station (Dongfang Guangbotai or DFBS) in January 1993, which quickly drew listeners away from the more "official" (guanfang) Shanghai Broadcast Station. When I first listened to this station in June 1993, I could not believe that I was in China. The Chinese media culture I was familiar with elsewhere in the country still featured broadcasters with solemn voices speaking in the standard Mandarin dialect about portentous affairs of the state. On DFBS, the serious voice and style had changed into a soft, fast-paced chatty style resembling that of Taiwan media culture. Programming content had switched to more market news, international news, and Shanghai local news (as opposed to Beijing news); there were interviews with Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and domestic stars of the film and popular music scene, and several times a day the stock market quotes would be read. What was different about DFBS was that all of its programming was live and it constantly solicited call-in comments and opinions from its listeners, so that all day long the voices of ordinary people talking about their everyday problems and dreams, in Shanghaiese accents, filled the air (Bao 1993). I would walk into someone’s home or get into a taxi, and eight times out of ten, this station would be playing in the background. A further novelty was that several late-night programs brought issues of the private sphere, such as marriage, romance, and the hitherto unmentionable topic of sexual life, to the public arena of radio.

At Shanghai Film Studio, the career of Xie Jin, its most well-known and successful director, spans the entire period from 1949 to the present. His films have always followed the changing Party policies and political vicissitudes of the country; however, in The Last Aristocracy (Zuihou de guizu), a 1987 film, Xie for the first time departs from politics and takes on the new theme of personal identity and cultural displacement in a foreign land. The Last Aristocracy embodies the very transformation of media addressed in this essay: a movement away from affairs of state toward personal issues and transnational wanderings of the imagination. The film expresses both the territorial restlessness and the longing for home experienced by a cosmopolitan Chinese woman whose identity is unmoored from her homeland. She flees war-torn Shanghai to study abroad. Prevented from returning home because of the Communist victory, she is cast adrift in a foreign land (the United States) to lead a lonely and alienated life. The nostalgia for old Shanghai is evident not only in the 1940s setting but also in the fact that the story is based on a novel of the same title by the Taiwanese ex-mainlander Kenneth Pai (Bai Xianyong), who now resides in Santa Barbara. The fact that the film was also shot on location in the United States and Venice, Italy, also exem-
plifies the growing transnational forays of Chinese media production. This combination of reconnecting with Old Shanghai, with Taiwan, and with the overseas world encapsulates the transformation of the imaginary taking place in Shanghai today.

New Technological Media and Publics

At least four important new media technologies have now become widely available: the cassette recorder, the telephone, the television, and the VCR. Two significant changes have accompanied the widespread adoption of these new media forms. First, in their contexts of use or reception, they have greatly expanded the private, personal and familial spheres. Take the telephone. In the Maoist era, telephones were very few and found mainly in work units, to be used in a public context for public business. Nowadays, of the 39 million telephones found in China in 1995 (up from 6.26 million in 1985), 70 percent are residential phones (China News Daily, May 17, 1995). For those who lived in China in the early 1980s, it is astounding to find that in some prosperous coastal cities today, 25 percent of the population now owns a phone. Urban neighborhood phone stands and booths have also multiplied, making it increasingly easy to transact personal business and weave countless guanxi or personal networks independent of state administrative organizations.

Whereas in the Maoist era information usually came from a centralized source, such as official newspapers and editorials, state documents (wenjian), or the radio, new media such as the telephone, cassette recorder, and VCR tend to decentralize information sources, making information flow more along the lines created by personal relationships (cassettes and videotapes are often circulated via personal and guanxi networks). In the Maoist era, state directives and didactic art were usually received in collective contexts: state directives were transmitted and newspaper editorials were often read in political study group sessions at the work unit; filmgoing was often organized as a work unit collective outing; revolutionary operas were viewed by the whole community in local theaters. Television viewing now, however, takes place in the private sphere among family, neighbors, and friends. Whereas in the public state-monitored context, one had to show one’s acceptance of what was received from the state, in a private context of reception, one could also debate, mock, or reject the messages with one’s family and friends, thus reducing the capacity for state media to sustain state subjects.

Another significance of these new media is that they have brought about increasing transnational connections for ordinary people. In the
late 1970s and early 1980s, when cassette recorders and tapes first became widespread, they were primarily used to listen to music and to practice a foreign language such as English. Anyone wishing to listen to the sweet crooning voice and love songs of Taiwan’s popular female singer Deng Lijun (Gold 1993, 909) had to have access to a cassette recorder because her songs were not played on the official radio stations. At that time most tapes were smuggled in from offshore, very similar to what is done today with videotapes. Now that telephone service has been established with Hong Kong, Taiwan, and virtually all countries of the world, those with relatives abroad can be constantly connected with life overseas. Via telephone, cassette, and videotape, they can be transported across the borders to be with their kin.

The television documentary *Their Home is Shanghai* (*Jia zai Shang-hai*) illustrates well the role of the media in keeping people connected to their kin or fellow Chinese nationals in foreign lands. Its gripping portrayal of the lives and thoughts of Shanghainese studying and laboring in Tokyo emptied the streets in Shanghai as viewers crammed in front of televisions when it first aired in early 1994 (Guo 1994, 48). Shot on location in Tokyo by a Shanghai Television Station crew led by woman filmmaker Wang Xiaoping, with most of the interviews conducted in Shanghainese dialect, it made documentary more vivid and fascinating than fiction. In part 3 there is a poignant interview of a Shanghainese man who lives by himself in a cramped apartment and works three jobs a day to send money to his family back in Shanghai. He sits on the floor watching his daughter, whom he has not seen for four years, on a videotape the camera crew has brought from Shanghai, and tells the interviewer that he calls home once a week. Meanwhile, the Shanghai audience watching him being interviewed on their own screens collectively and vicariously experience not only his separation from and longing for home but also the foregrounding of his Shanghainese identity over his national identity in a foreign land, since he speaks in Shanghainese. Furthermore, in a more subtle way, they also experience his displacement from the confines and strictures of the Chinese state and the habitus of state subjects.

The Post-Mao Transnational Disembedding of Culture

The post-Mao era can be seen as a period in which a decoupling of nation from state takes place, so that Chinese identity becomes more culturally defined instead of defined only in terms of the state. While capitalism has brought back many disturbing tendencies to a state socialist society, such as increasing income disparities, the return of prostitution and child labor,
Fig. 1. The “Pearl of the Orient” television tower in Pu Dong New Area, across the Huang Pu River from downtown Shanghai. (Photo by Kathleen Erwin.)

and government corruption, it has also started the transnationalization of Chinese identity out of the confines of the state. What is developing in urban China, and especially in cities along the eastern seaboard such as Shanghai, is a fascination with and a hunger to learn about the world outside of the state borders. The new mass media both caters to and creates this interest and longing for the outside world, through linking up with the market economy and its global forays. The new Oriental Television Sta-
tion (*Dongfang dianshi tai*), which started broadcasting in Shanghai, is an example of this change in that its revenues come mainly from advertising, and its caters more to popular taste than the more official station. No longer relying on state subsidies, the media become increasingly independent of the state and dependent on the market.

Critiques of capitalism often assume that the logic and interests of *state* and *capital* are the same, or that they are coextensive. For advanced capitalist systems such as those in the United States and Japan, I would agree with Roger Rouse that "by and large, corporations and the state, as differently mediated forms of bourgeois practice, have worked together" (Rouse 1995a, 368) to serve as crucial media for a ruling bloc. The current situation in China of a transition from a state redistributive power to a new social form is different from this in that the moments of antagonism between state and capital are more evident and structurally deeper than they are in the United States and Japan. There is a major difference between theorizing a welfare state such as the United States and theorizing the state in socialist systems. The Maoist state was not a welfare state in a capitalist mode of production, where the state regulates competition, assuages class tensions, and cleans up the environment. It was a system in which the state itself was the form that mode of production took, controlling not only production and distribution but also the determination of needs. Therefore in the current period, when market forces are being introduced, the encounter between capital and state in socialist systems will be marked by more conflict than that between capital and the welfare state.

What we find in post-Mao China is a new, complex political economy in which state and capital both converge and diverge at different moments. On the one hand, it is the state that initiates and sustains the new market-oriented policies and which eagerly lays out the welcome mat to overseas capital. On the other hand, the state also finds that the new forces it has unleashed often have a logic quite threatening to its own desire of fixing culture within territorial borders. The state redistributive economy of the Maoist period was a process whereby the state made the economy operate according to the logic of the state—just the reverse of what is going on in the United States on Capitol Hill, where the Republicans are engineering a deeper capitalist penetration of the state. It seems to me that since state logic classifies the population to enable it to measure, account for, and control it, therefore it would favor stability and a certain rigidity. This would be at odds with the nature of capitalism, which is restless and fluid in its class conflicts, constant overturning of productive forces, search for profit and new markets, and breaking up of established social relations. Marx himself pointed out the corrosive power of capitalism toward all traditional societies and values. What
makes capitalism a deterritorializing culture is “the encounter between flows of convertible wealth owned by capitalists and a flow of workers possessing nothing more than their labor capacity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 140) and the flows of desire which consumer capitalism unleashes. Just as “capitalism has haunted all forms of society [and] haunts them as their terrifying nightmare, [because of] the dread they feel of a flow that would elude their codes” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 140), so capitalism is often threatening to state-centered systems and the logic of state order and regulation over a delimited space.

There are countless examples of this tension between state and capital in the cultural realm (Yang 1993). Until 1995, the state limited the number of foreign (including Hong Kong and Taiwanese) films imported into the country to sixty films per year, chosen by the state film distribution bureaucracy. In the early 1990s there developed a widespread craving for American Oscar-winning films, which were seldom shown in Chinese theaters. Video technology solved the problem through the illegal private circulation of videotapes, most of which were smuggled in from Hong Kong or by Chinese returning from overseas. Although it was illegal to bring in videotaped programs from abroad, airport customs inspections were often lax. Often these videos were barely viewable, being second- and third-generation copies already viewed countless times before. College students were perhaps the biggest audience for such videos, and student entrepreneurs acquired videos and laser discs through various means and showed them in campus theaters on large video screens for four yuan a person. Sometimes there were no subtitles, but only a translator at the front of the cinema. At times it seemed that the films had been recorded on video directly in a Hong Kong cinema, because the sound quality was bad, and once in a while one could even see the heads of the Hong Kong audience on the screen or hear their laughter. Lady Chatterley’s Lover was shown on one campus, but since it was considered a pornographic or “yellow film” (huangse pian), the police raided the crowded theater and stopped the showing halfway through the film. As a result of allowing Hollywood films to be shown in theaters, China’s cinema attendance in 1995, especially in Shanghai, increased for the first time since its steady decline from the mid-1980s, almost doubling 1994 attendance (China News Daily, January 23, 1996).9

With television came the greatest exposure to the outside world and to the “culture industries” of Asia, the West, and other places. The Chinese urban television audience was only formed in the first half of the 1980s, and the rural audience in the second half (Zhang 1992). However, the growth of the television industry is quite astounding in this short period,
contributing to the decline in the film audience. Already in 1986, 95 percent of all urban families owned at least one television set (Lull 1991, 23). Imported television programs from Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States, and Japan (in that order), broadcasts of transnational sports and competitions, and TV guided tours of foreign cities all respond to a keen appetite on the part of the Chinese audience. Many people have told me that when a domestically produced show (guochan pian) comes on screen, they or their children immediately change channels or turn off the television without bothering to check what it is about. Zhou Yigong, a division head at one of the two Shanghai TV stations, informed me that they often receive directives from the Municipal Party Propaganda Department to decrease their advertising for Hong Kong and Taiwan songs and TV shows, and to avoid showing them during prime time (huangjin shijian).

The Chinese audience's interest in the world outside China finds an economic expression and ally in the growing advertising industry and the business interests, both domestic and foreign, that it represents. Besides pressures from the government, Zhou's station must also respond to those who buy commercial time on their shows. Businesses refuse to buy ad time if there is a domestically produced show: "They don't even bother to check out the show to see if it's any good; they just don't want to have anything to with it," he said. The reason domestic films are not welcome by most viewers is perhaps because people no longer wish to plug themselves into the state imaginary; rather, they wish to cast their imagination outward. Another reason is the poor quality of the technical production, the plot and narrative structure, and the stilted acting.

The pursuit of advertising patrons is why the station ignored a longstanding state regulation requiring stations to limit their imported TV series to two per year. Instead, they actually show about twenty per year, Zhou said. The authorities usually chose not to make an issue of this. Therefore, advertising has exerted a powerful influence on television programming, decreasing officially sanctioned, domestically produced didactic and political drama in favor of foreign and overseas Chinese products, as well as a new generation of innovative domestic dramas and soap operas.

Another point of contention between the public and the state is the issue of personal satellite television dishes, which receive programs from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan and (on more powerful receivers) from the United States, Russia, and Europe. In the early 1990s, many private Shanghai homes were equipped with satellite dishes, most of them made in China by rural factories hoping to profit from this highly valued product. State regulations forbid the setting up of personal satellite dishes, permitting only those work units dealing with international business to
set up dishes (Anonymous 1993). The Public Security Bureau mounted periodic raids in Shanghai to confiscate private dishes, but the dishes always went back up after a while and the police chose to ignore it.

Thus the usual theory that conflates state and capital must be modified to one that can account for the changing moments or historical phases of convergence and divergence between state and capital and for the structural and discursive tensions that erupt in different situations. The case of China is especially illustrative of this tension, as it has experienced a shift from a state economy with territorially sealed activity and identity to a mobile capitalist transnational consumer economy without abandoning many features of state centralized control.

"The advent of modernity," writes Anthony Giddens, "increasingly tears space away from place by fostering relations between ‘absent’ others, locationally distant from any given situation of face-to-face interaction" (Giddens 1990, 18). Through the mass media of a growing consumer culture, the space of the state is becoming disembedded by transnational spaces of orientation. In the Maoist era, the “absent others” were the voice of the state and its symbolic leaders in Beijing. In the current commercialized period, Party leaders are being replaced in popular culture by new icons: pop singers and film stars located outside the national borders in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and beyond.

At least two mechanisms of spatial mobility of subjectivity can be discerned operating in the mass media and constructing a transnational Chinese imaginary. First, there is the mainland identification with roles played by Taiwanese and Hong Kong stars in films, TV shows, and popular songs. Second, there is the transnational Chinese imaginary at play, in the identification of the audience with a mainland character who goes to foreign lands.

**Identifying with overseas Chinese others**

Although American film and television have made some headway in China, they cannot compare with the influence of Hong Kong and Taiwan popular culture. One most vivid indication of this cultural invasion can be found in the pop songs that young people listen to and the popularity of karaoke singing. There is something mesmerizing about the repetition of endless stories of love and disappointment. Hong Kong and Taiwan popular culture has gained a firm foothold in the mainland (Zhen 1992; Gold 1993), with visiting singers giving concerts to packed halls filled with adoring fans paying high prices for tickets. Sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls want to embrace and kneel in the footsteps of such male idols as Tong Ange and Tang Yongling. The longing to be a star oneself can be temporarily satisfied using the imported karaoke audiovisual systems
now found in karaoke bars and in many work units, schools, and restaurants. Music stores have sprung up to sell this music on cassettes. Hong Kong songs are sung in Cantonese by young Shanghainese whose point of comparison these days is not Beijing but Hong Kong.  

A radio program host in his thirties who introduces Anglo-American rock music explained to me the appeal of Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop music in Shanghai: “It represents the modern for young people, and that is why it has replaced folk music [minge],” which used to dominate the airwaves during most of the 1980s. Chinese folk music is also about love between men and women, and the lyrics also depict scenes of nature, but “there is something old-fashioned about it; it’s for middle-aged and old people, it feels rural and quaint now. In contrast, Hong Kong and Taiwanese pop feels new, advanced, and urban.” It represents what young people aspire to, a faster-paced, prosperous life outside of the borders of the mainland. This life is thought to possess the cachet of sophistication.  

In watching Hong Kong and Taiwanese shows, and in listening and singing its songs, the mainland mass media audience can be said to be undergoing four processes simultaneously: (1) identification with Hong Kong and Taiwanese people; (2) internalization of another kind of Chinese culture not so tied in with a statist imaginary; (3) differentiation of gender in identification and performance; and (4) insertion into a discourse of love and sexuality. In these four processes, karaoke singing has a deeper impact, because it involves the active performance and enactment of a different way to be Chinese, where state identity diminishes in importance and female and male genders become salient categories.  

Here A. L. Austin’s speech act theory and Judith Butler’s performance theory on the staging of gender and sexuality (Butler 1991) are relevant in thinking about the construction of the subject in karaoke.  

If the “I” is the effect of a certain repetition, one which produces the semblance of a continuity or coherence, then there is no “I” that precedes the gender [or national identity] that it is said to perform; the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produce a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of that “I.” (Butler 1991, 18)  

It is through repeated performances that gender and national identity are constructed and reconstructed and that subjects sometimes come to realize that no essence lies beneath or outside of performance. To be sure, karaoke singing in China is putting into place a new regime of normalized heterosexual male and female objects of imitation, but it is also instituting different ways of being Chinese. The subjectivities produced by karaoke singing and those produced by the Maoist loyalty dance are
vastly different. Whereas Maoist subjectivity sought to merge the self with the body of the state and its embodiment, Mao’s body (Yang 1994c), karaoke places the subject in a narcissistic dynamic between self and the love object through which it learns to desire, and whose desire it needs, to fulfill and strengthen the fragile self. This Other through which the self yearns to be completed is no longer the larger and powerful collective “I” of the nation, but a Chinese cultural Other of Taiwan or Hong Kong who has a gender.

The longing to be reunited with or merged with the Chinese Other outside the borders of the Chinese state is given full expression in a popular song of the nineties, “My 1997 Hong Kong,” written and sung by Ai Jing, a young mainland female singer who is also popular in Taiwan and Hong Kong. I translate some excerpts:

The year I was seventeen, I left my hometown, Shenyang,
Because I felt that the place didn’t fulfill my dreams. . . .
I sang from Beijing to Shanghai,
And from Shanghai I sang to the South that I had dreamed of.
My stay in Guangzhou was rather long,
Because my Other, he is in Hong Kong.
When will we have Hong Kong?
When will we know what Hong Kong people are like?
My boyfriend can come to visit Shenyang,
But I can’t go to Hong Kong.
Hong Kong, oh, that Hong Kong!
I should have gone out into the world to broaden myself when I was young. . . .
Let me go to that dazzling world,
Give me that big red official seal of approval to go abroad.
1997! May that year arrive quickly! . . .
Then I can go with him to the night markets.
1997! May that year arrive quickly! . . .
Then I can go to Hong Kong!
(Ai 1993)

This song sends shivers of anxiety through the hearts of Hong Kong Chinese because it reminds them of 1997, when China will become Hong Kong’s new master. However, mainland Chinese are impatient for the day when Hong Kong’s dazzle, wealth, and cosmopolitanism will become accessible to them. In contrast to mainland official discourse about 1997, which stresses Hong Kong’s “return to the embrace of the motherland” (huida ozone de huaibao), the song expresses a yearning to break out of the motherland and to cross the state borders that forbid an-
other way of being Chinese, although this alternative involves becoming a consuming Chinese. Along with the strengthening of the desiring “I,” what comes into being is not only a culture of individualism but also a culture of desiring, consuming individuals yearning to be fulfilled.

The incursions of Hong Kong and Taiwanese popular culture, called gangtai wenhua (Gold 1993), into mainland state culture also show that it is no longer adequate for critical theory to identify capitalism only as a Western force. What post-Mao China is encountering is the regional or transnational ethnic capitalism of overseas Chinese in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia. In the past two decades, overseas Chinese economic investment has dramatically increased on the mainland (Harding 1993; Ong’s essay in this volume; Ash and Kueh 1993). In 1990 Hong Kong surpassed Japan and the United States as the number-one investor in China, and Taiwan became the second-largest investor (Hsião and So 1994, 2). As a Chinese scholar friend said to me, “For Chinese people today, cultural imperialism no longer means Western imperialism, because it’s now also coming from Taiwan and Hong Kong.”

Increasingly the West is no longer the only, or even the primary, outside influence in local cultures, as Leo Ching’s (1994) work on the importance of Japanese mass culture in Taiwan shows. Rather than a center-periphery framework of the West versus the rest, or capitalism versus the third world, it now looks as if the West is just another node in a system of other nodes (Appadurai 1990). The outside capital moving in is not Western but of the same ethnicity as the labor force it is appropriating. Furthermore, while Hong Kong and Taiwan are the capitalists exploiting mainland labor, they must also answer to a powerful mainland state that has military superiority over them, as evidenced in the mainland’s readiness for military action against Taiwan. Thus previous simple models of Western cultural imperialism overrunning the third world through capitalist expansion cannot capture the complex situation in China today, where critique must be directed at a Chinese state as well as Chinese capital.

Recent critiques of multinational capitalism (Wallerstein 1974, 1984; Jameson 1987; Miyoshi 1993) often suffer from the very same problem they are against. That is, in seeing the world engulfed by multinational capitalism, they do so from a very Western-centric perspective. They fail to take an on-the-ground perspective of the particular cultural formations that undergo this complex process. Their models fail to take into account how at the same time transnational capitalism introduces a new regime of power into China, it also serves to dislodge an entrenched and deeply rooted state power.¹⁴ The binary constructions of center versus periphery and West versus the rest prove inadequate, as the outside “cen-
ter” that is having the most impact on China today is not the West but the modernized and commercialized Chinese societies of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese. In this second spurt of capitalist culture, China is not being ground underfoot by Western cultural or economic imperialism, but is being drawn into a regional or ethnic Chinese capitalist mode of power in which China is both the victim as well as a host that benefits, manipulates, and calls the shots.

**Following mobile Chinese subjects in other lands**

The second mechanism for constructing a new transnational identity is the imagining of a mobile Chinese identity moving through foreign lands. This is a process in which the media audience identify with main characters who are mainland Chinese experiencing life in an alien culture. In recent years bookstores in Chinese cities have been selling a new genre of semiautobiographical and semifictional writing: accounts or stories by people who have lived in the United States or Japan of their
experiences and fortunes. Theater, film, and television productions have also taken up these themes.15

The “leave-the-country fever” (chuguore) reached a peak after the Tiananmen tragedy of 1989. The phenomenon of urban Chinese going abroad to live, whether as students and scholars, émigrés, laborers, or entrepreneurs, has been satirically called “joining a brigade overseas” (yang chadui). This expression conjures up the image of city people in the Cultural Revolution going down to the harsh life of physical labor in the countryside. Like their predecessors in the Cultural Revolution, today’s Chinese are going to alien lands where they must struggle to survive through their own labor and wits.

The most famous book in this genre is A Beijing Native in New York, written by Cao Guilin, which was made into the first television drama series shot entirely on location in New York City.16 This popular show aired in China in October 1993 and was made by Beijing Television Production Center. The story is about Wang Qiming, a cello player in the Beijing Symphony, who goes with his wife, Guo Yan, to New York City. There they do not receive the help of their relatives and have to start life at the bottom of American society, he as dishwasher in a Chinese restaurant, she as a seamstress in a sweatshop owned by an ambitious American named McCarthy. In his uphill climb to become a wealthy sweatshop owner himself, Wang Qiming employs some ruthless tactics, loses his wife to McCarthy, and joins up with his employer, A Chun, an astute, independent single businesswoman from Taiwan.

By listening to the discussion of this series by twenty members of a workers’ film criticism group in Shanghai, we can get an idea of how this show has engendered multiple effects, such as: transnationalizing the audience, tapping into feelings of unease and suspicion about capitalism, giving vent to yearnings for a better life in the United States, disseminating a new model of independent womanhood that is sensual and hard-edged at the same time, and providing a forum in which to critique state policies.

Everyone agreed this was a popular series, and people were very interested in seeing what American streets and building interiors looked like. They were very curious about the life of Chinese abroad, especially since many of them had relatives or friends abroad. Five themes emerged in the discussion. First, a middle-aged man said that a feature of this film is international exchange. America is a place that is not xenophobic (pai-wai) and in which everyone is treated equally; different races and cultures in the United States are engaged in competition. The lives of Chinese in America are not ones of luxury, for they must work hard in order to get anywhere. Just as he was learning about America, he thought
Part 4  The Self-Making and Being-Made of Transnational Subjectivities

Americans could also learn about life in China from watching a hypothetical show called *An American in Beijing* or *An American in Shanghai*. What can be detected in this statement is a subjectivity traversing great distances as well as a change of perspective that follows upon this. Through the medium of television, this man could imagine himself in another land, observing people there, and could even reverse the process and imagine himself as an American coming to China. The latter move of stepping out of his taken-for-granted subjectivity and assuming another would enable him to defamiliarize his native surroundings, to look at them with a fresh and different perspective. Indeed, in a popular-magazine discussion of the program, one reviewer quoted the old Chinese adage “Not knowing the real nature of Mt. Lushan is due to one’s fate of living only in its midst (*bushi Lushan zheng mianmu, zhi yuan shen zai cishan zhong*) to say that the show enabled Chinese to metaphorically leave China to come to a new understanding of their own country from a new vantage point (Yang R. 1993, 12).

A second theme was that of losing one’s status, privileges, and support network, things that give one an identity and social role at home, and being propelled into a different status in America, where everyone starts out equal and only some rise up to the top through their own efforts. Several people commented on how once Wang Qiming entered the United States he could no longer enjoy the “aristocratic” (*guizu*) status that being a musician brought him in China; instead he had to use those refined musician’s hands to wash dishes, because in the United States one is judged not by one’s status (*shenfèn*) but by one’s efforts and talents. One man said that it doesn’t matter whether one is a professor or worker in China, for in the United States none of this is recognized. It was also an eye-opener for them to see how Wang’s relatives treated the couple in such a distant impersonal fashion. In the show the relatives were late to pick up Wang and Guo Yan at the airport and did not take the new arrivals to their homes but unceremoniously dumped them in a wretched basement apartment for which they expected the rent to be repaid. One man said that the show not only smashed the Chinese fantasy that one could pick up gold on the streets in America but also the fantasy that one could rely on one’s relatives abroad. What seems to be operating in this line of thinking is that viewers of the show see the stripping away of familiar ways of being Chinese, such as relying on prescribed social status and on relatives. Through imagining these different ways of being Chinese abroad, the possibility is opened up for a reconstructing of both subject and society at home. So, for example, one man said that Chinese should learn to be more self-sufficient, and he called for a different way to raise children so that they will not rely on their parents.
A third theme was the ferociousness of capitalism and its ruthless cut-throat competition of “big fish eat little fish.” A middle-aged man repeated a refrain of the theme song: “America is neither heaven nor hell, it is a battleground.” Several people commented on the intense competitiveness of American society. They said that a newspaper had started a lively discussion soliciting letters debating the question of whether Wang Qiming is a good or bad man and whether he deserves sympathy or not. Sun, a factory office worker in his thirties, identified two issues in the show: the conflict between a planned economy and a market economy, and the conflict between Chinese and Western culture. Sun thought that Wang Qiming had to compete in order to survive, and he resorted to some ruthless methods, such as using his wife to destroy a competitor. Sun could sympathize with Wang: Wang won the economic battle but lost his personal integrity. He became dehumanized in the struggle; his “human nature became twisted [niuqi].” This showed how deeply Western culture has penetrated Chinese culture, he thought. Why did Wang, a person from a culture over two thousand years old, lose himself to a culture only three hundred years old? Because he was shocked at finding out about the West’s economic might. Sun consoled himself that the Chinese market economy will not be as twisted and dehumanizing as that in the United States. What was perhaps being worked out through this show and through the discussions it generated was the anxiety and ambivalence of plunging into capitalism and into the global society it represents. There was the fear of being corrupted by alien outside forces, of losing one’s self and identity. At the same time there was the feeling that this was the only way to go, that it was necessary to overcome one’s scruples and hesitations and make the leap.

There was also a fourth discussion of the female characters in the show. A Chun, the Taiwanese lover, and Guo Yan, the mainland wife, were compared. A Chun won the admiration of both men and women for her economic astuteness and her knowledge of the market and Western culture. As a soft-spoken traditional woman who could endure hardships, Guo Yan won the approbation of the male film discussants, who thought she represented “Eastern beauty and virtue” (dongfang meide). A Chun was considered very Americanized, and there was the belief that she too had once been like Guo Yan when she first went to the United States. The men thought women like A Chun, who are astute businesswomen, are good to have in a market economy, but they would not like to have her for a wife. Sun said that in China it is not common to find a woman like A Chun, who is so successful in the market. He confessed that his “world view” had still not completely turned around to fully accept her, although he admired her. “It’s as though we have to tear off a layer of skin before we can completely turn around,” he said. It would
seem that the disturbing thing about capitalism is not only the cutthroat competition but also the new kind of independent women, like A Chun.

In separate discussions with women, I found that women generally liked the A Chun character. They admired her independence, her no-nonsense toughness, and the way she managed to separate the economic relationship from her romantic relationship with Wang. However, one of the women said that she did not want to challenge the men openly about their preference for Guo Yan at a public forum, and that even though men and women are now equal, it was still not easy for women to speak out in public. Perhaps it was easier for Chinese audiences to accept A Chun’s novel combination of toughness, feminine sexual allure, and caringness when it was presented in the character of a Taiwan Chinese.18

Finally, this television series also provided an opportunity for these film discussants to question the wisdom of past state policies, such as political campaigns, that have caused so many people to want so desperately to leave China in the hope of finding a better future. Referring to a well-known phenomenon, one man declared, “There is something deeply wrong when some Shanghai women want to flee abroad so much that they are even willing to become prostitutes in someone else’s country in order to survive.” Since this was a public discussion, criticizing the government for past mistakes, which have made material and spiritual life so harsh in China, was a delicate and still potentially risky undertaking. This theme was expressed in so roundabout a fashion that I almost missed it until I sought clarification in separate private discussions.

This discussion of *A Beijing Native in New York* may seem to many in the West who have seen the show to be discrepant with the pervasive allegory of big-state rivalry and capitalist competition between China and the United States, personified by the characters Wang Qiming and David McCarthy. However, as Stuart Hall has shown, the process of audience decoding of media messages often “does not constitute an ‘immediate identity’” with the process of authorial encoding of the messages, for there is a “relative autonomy” in decoding due to “the structural differences of relation and position between broadcasters and audiences” (Hall 1980, 131). As the recent flood of audience reception studies show (de Certeau 1984; Radway 1988; Ang 1990; Yang 1994a), a sole reliance on textual criticism by academics of media products cannot get at the full range of their social effects, because audiences selectively misread or read past the intentions of the producers. What I discerned in doing fieldwork on this film discussion group in 1993 was not a tendency to identify with the Chinese state against the United States, but rather an interest in exploring the possibilities of transnational mobility and displacement.
Chapter 10  Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai

A deterritorialized Chinese subjectivity

In these two examples of a pop song and a television series can be detected a deterritorialized Chinese subjectivity that cannot be contained by the state apparatuses of either mainland China or Taiwan. What Homi Bhabha (1994) calls a “third space” of cultural hybridity has begun to spill over the constrictive molds of a fixed, state-spatialized Chinese identity and homogeneous national culture. This “third space” is the “intervention of the ‘beyond’ . . . . [which] captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness—that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations” (Bhabha 1994, 9). Whereas only a tiny proportion of people in Shanghai have been able to physically cross state boundaries and venture into the outside world, it is through the proliferating media that the mass of the people now also occupy a “third space” of transnational encounters. In this space, the lines between home and world, one’s own nation-state and another country, Chinese and foreign, socialism and capitalism get blurred through traveling identities.

The song “My 1997 Hong Kong” is heard on the airwaves of cities in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, so that we may begin to speak of the emergence of a set of Chinese audiences who are viewing an increasingly common set of programs, although they are separated by state boundaries. This sharing of a common set of media products is developing across a broad space of the globe and creating a linked Chinese community of media audience stretching from China to overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia and the United States. So although it is still not fully or directly connected by satellite, transnational subjectivity in Shanghai has already entered into a shared space of a common nexus of Chinese popular culture programming around the globe. Don Nonini describes two new Chinese-Malaysian public spheres that look outward from Malaysia for news and entertainment: cosmopolitans who have traveled and worked abroad (including in China) and whose children attend universities in the West, and the Sino-internationalists who are involved in Chinese-language new media of videotapes, cassettes, films, and karaoke (Nonini 1995, 16). Here in the United States there are now three Chinese-language satellite television stations: North American TV, a station airing Taiwanese but also some mainland programs; Jade Channel/TVB, a Hong Kong channel; and the new Eastern Satellite TV, founded by mainland Chinese in Chicago and airing mainland shows (Qiu 1993; Sheng 1995; Hamilton 1995). Thus in Shanghai, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and the United States, there are increasing overlaps and commonalities in the programming that Chinese in these various places are viewing, making for the emergence of a transnational

Since the media is caught up with the commercial promotion and celebration of material consumption, its detaching of subjects from the state is often at the price of what Benjamin (1969, 240) called the “distraction” of these liberated subjects from serious social reflection and critique. However, in the present historical moment, despite the commercialism, there is something implicitly oppositional about the new media. Most intellectuals I spoke with had a pained expression when asked about the influx of overseas popular culture. They were disturbed by this sudden shift to the vulgar, the shallow, and the commercial. Lan Tian, a college professor, had his own explanation: “Mainland Chinese are like children who have been shut up at home for years. When finally you let them out, everything outside is good in their eyes.” However, he also saw the potential in this imported culture for a challenge to state culture. This wave of another type of Chinese culture is a relief from the “linguistic violence” or “rape” (yuyan qiangbao) that people were subjected to before, he thought. Popular culture threatens both “official discursive power” (guanfang huayu quanli) and “central core culture” (zhongxin wenhua). “Money knows no center,” he said, with some sarcasm.

Zhang Daoming, a writer in his late thirties, was even more affirming of Hong Kong and Taiwanese popular culture. He wanted higher dosages of it: “Let’s have more of this cultural garbage [wenhua laji], so that it becomes a flood and disaster, then people will get sick of it. It will make people feel isolated and displaced so that they can throw off this great monolithic unity [of the nation] (da yi tong).” Zhang is much more willing for people to be trodden down by economics rather than by politics. “At least in karaoke pop songs, people are singing their individual hearts, not that of the state.”

**Conclusion**

The historical specificities of modern China have led me to challenge several assumptions in critical theory on the question of the spread of capitalism, modern mass media, and globalism. I have pointed out that three common conflations must be challenged when we look at the particular situation of China today. What I have outlined is a case of a newly created nation, or nationalist imaginary of print, first throwing off an old state (the imperial dynastic order), then adopting, or being adopted by, a new socialist state, which sealed the national borders and homogenized the interior with print, radio and film. More recently, new forms of mass
media and popular culture have generated sentiments toward eluding and transcending this new state once again with the creation of a transnational cultural subjectivity in the exposure to an ethnic overseas Chinese capitalism. The recosmopolitizing of Shanghai is part of this counter movement of a transnational Chinese cultural identity that shuts off state messages to wander imaginatively across the globe.

The focus here has been to show how transnational media have enabled the detaching of Chinese subjectivity from the state and its mobilization across imaginary space to link up with alternative Chinese subjectivities far away. Through the new mass media, those who have stayed in the country have started to undergo a change in subjectivity that is perhaps just as dramatic as that of those who have traveled abroad, so that returning Chinese often find themselves strangers upon their return. While the nation and state continue to be imagined, now they must contend with the splintering of subjectivities into pluralized media audiences of gender, class, and rural-urban differences, as well as the emergence of a regional overseas Chinese imaginary. However, even while liberated transnational Chinese subjects have begun to displace state subjects, they immediately face the danger of getting trapped in new and different tentacles of power.

It seems to me that today China is poised between two dangers, neither of which is Western, although both are shaped by forces of modernity that the West first launched. First, there is the state centralization power of the Maoist era, which was largely indifferent to the high toll in human lives and psychic misery produced by its various political campaigns to strengthen the state and ensure that state subjectivity was the only form of consciousness. This danger has not fully retreated, although there have been recent cultural departures from its grip. Second, the new danger is that this same state will adopt the model of Asian state capitalism in the rest of Asia, which Aiwha Ong has suggested is an emerging counter-West Asia-Pacific hegemony of the twenty-first century (see Ong’s essay in this volume). In this second mode of power, there is a smoother alliance of state and capital, a novel appropriation of cultural tradition such as state Confucianism (Ong 1996; Chun 1994a; Heng and Devan 1992) as legitimizing device, a state management of labor through the deployment of consumerism, and the dominance of a male business culture that tolerates women as business partners but more often casts them in roles servicing men in a commercialized culture of male sexuality. In this period of transition, the second mode challenges and offers relief from the first; however, this should not prevent us from seeing what Foucault (1980) realized with the early-twentieth-century discourse of sexual liberation: that liberation is always a prelude to a new insertion into another mode of power.
Notes

1 I wish to thank Aihwa Ong and Roger Rouse for providing me with insightful and helpful suggestions on my paper. Thanks also to Don Nonini for his incisive comments and for the idea of the title, and to Lydia Liu and Zhang Yuehong for their careful reading of the manuscript. This paper was also presented at the Chicago Humanities Institute, University of Chicago, in January 1996, and I would like to thank the many scholars there who provided stimulating comments.

2 Anderson’s work has also had an impact on studies of electronic media and national identity, such as recent works by feminist anthropologists who show how television is an important means of constituting national identity through gender, albeit through a contestatory process (Mankekar 1993; Rofel 1994; Abu-Lughod 1993; Brownell 1995). These works point to an important effect of print and television: the knitting together of a readership and audience scattered across vast regions into a national identity, sharing the same language, emotions, narrative structures, and political messages.

3 Fieldwork and interviews on recent developments in mass media and media publics in the post-Mao market economy era were conducted over five months in the city of Shanghai between 1991 and 1993 among mass media professionals and intellectuals and among working-class film and television criticism groups (see Yang 1994a).

4 In the 1920s, Shanghai’s international settlement zones housed 23,307 foreign residents (out of a Chinese population of 2.5 million) (Bergere 1981, 6), the largest collection in any Chinese city. Shanghai was also the city with the largest Chinese migrant population from other parts of China (Ding 1994), and perhaps the city with the largest number of Chinese to go abroad and return from abroad. Shanghai factories in 1934 accounted for half of China’s modern industrial production, and in 1935 the city received 46.4 percent of all foreign investments in China (Bergere 1981, 21–22).

5 It was in the Shanghai film industry that the figure of the “modern woman” emerged as a new site of culture production. Zhang Yingjin has shown how it provided critiques of tradition and expressions of sexuality for male desire as well as new objects for modern male disciplinary knowledge (Zhang 1994:605). See also Pickowicz 1991 for a discussion of themes of urban and foreign decadence vs. native rural purity in 1930s Shanghai films.

6 In its iconoclastic attacks against the traditional Chinese family, kinship, and religion and in its promotion of the individual and the nation, May fourth discourse laid the foundation for what later became “the masses,” atomised individual state subjects (Wu 1992) who were more equal, and at the same distance from the political center (Yang 1994c; 1996).

7 The category of “third world brothers” softens this dichotomy but retains the sense of state border separations.
Chapter 10  Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai

See Feher, Heller, and Markus 1983 for a Marxist critique of Soviet-type state-centralized economic systems.

Shanghai film ticket sales in 1995 were 230 million yuan, up from 140 million in 1994 (China News Daily, January 23, 1996). One Chinese intellectual I spoke with said that many people are concerned about the damage done to the domestic film industry by foreign films, but others argue that what Hollywood films will do is to draw the Chinese audience back into the theaters, so that Chinese films will in the future find a more conducive climate among domestic, as opposed to foreign, financiers for their films.

Here is a sampling of some international programs on the four television channels in Shanghai in the week of November 1–7, 1993: World Heavyweight Boxing Championship live from Las Vegas; tours of Hong Kong, Japan, and Hollywood with various Shanghai TV hosts; a history of the world trade agreement; Japanese and English language classes; the American program Matlock (Bianhu lushi), dubbed into Mandarin; a Taiwan television serial The Capital City and Four Youths (Jingchen sishao); an American documentary about the KGB and CIA; a Japanese children’s cartoon, Hero of the Universe: Jack Automan, dubbed into Mandarin; and The News in English every night at 1 A.M.

One exception to advertisers’ reluctance to buy commercial time on domestic programs are those shows made by Wang Shuo and crew at the Beijing Television Production Center, which produced the very popular Yearning (Ke wang, 1990) (Zha 1995; Rofel 1994), Stories from the Editing Department (Bianjibu de gushi, 1992), and A Beijing Native in New York (Beijingren zai niuyue, 1993).

Of course, the cultural impact is not just one-way; Mainland media and popular culture have also influenced Taiwan and Hong Kong (see Shih 1995 on the impact of the Mainland on Taiwanese TV and popular music).


The assumption that the center (which is always figured as the West) always dominates the periphery means that “we get the history of the impact of the center on the periphery, rather than the history of the periphery itself” (Hannerz 1989, 207). The actual interactive process of cross-cultural negotiation, interpretation, and specific strategies of appropriation are not examined at all.

The books of this genre come with titles such as Chinese Educated Youth Abroad; Manhattan’s China Lady; The Moon Back Home is Brighter; A Beijing Woman in Tokyo; The Bright Moon of Another Land; and A Shanghainese in Tokyo. There are also two successful plays, one called “The Wife Who Came Back from America” (Meiguolai de qizi), by Zhang Xian, and “The Woman Left Behind” (Liu shou nushi), by Yue Meiqing, both of which I saw in a small theater in Shanghai. The latter was made into a film of the same title by Shanghai Film Studio in 1992. Another play titled “Tokyo’s Moon” (Dongjing de yueliang) was written by Sha Yexin, and a TV documentary shot by Wang Xi-
aoping on location in Tokyo called “Their Home is Shanghai” (Jia zai shang-
hai), depicting the everyday life of Shanghainese working in Japan, was aired to
great acclaim on STV.

16 For a critique of how this show promotes the consumerism of transnational
corporate products and becomes implicated in the movements of transnational
(Western) capital, see Liu 1995.

17 In an analysis highly critical of the show and of his compatriots who accept it, a
Chinese expatriate living in the United States wrote that the picture the show paints
of an immoral dog-eat-dog society in America merely serves as an excuse for Chi-
inese to practice a ruthless kind of capitalism, which they conveniently imagine
exists in the United States (Ye 1994). I think the fact that Wang Qiming’s moral
character is the subject of debate shows that many people cannot accept him.

18 In the imaginary of travel and transnational crossings taking hold in the
coastal Chinese cities, there is a gender differential whereby women are imag-
ined to be more mobile and successful in adapting to foreign cultures and
places, whereas men are seen as more rooted to the culture and national space.
Space limits require a separate treatment of this theme in another publication
(Yang 1995).

19 Mike Featherstone also has a similar notion of “third cultures,” or transna-
tional cultures that are oriented beyond national boundaries; however, his appli-
cation of this concept is narrower than what I am trying to conceive. By “third
culture” he means the world of transnational professionals in architecture, ad-
vertising, film, global financial markets, international law, and other interna-
tional agencies (Featherstone 1990, 6–8; 1992, 146). I would like to include the
transnational mass cultures created by mass media.

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Part 4 The Self-Making and Being-Made of Transnational Subjectivities


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316
Chapter 10  Mass Media and Transnational Subjectivity in Shanghai


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317
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