

Subsumption or Consumption? The Phantom of Consumer Revolution in "Globalizing" China

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The Subaltern Can Work and Consume

If subalterns cannot speak, they can still work and consume.¹ Or to put it more accurately, they have no choice but to produce and consume as if they were driven to do so, as if production and consumption were the two necessary sides of their fate, as if these dual imperatives could guarantee their survival in the age of global capital. There are risks of attributing *telos* to capital as if, for subaltern subjects, the drive toward production and consumption was their destiny. Nevertheless, subalternity is never underestimated of its value nor is it seen as possessing no value. Its worth need not be transvaluated, because it lies exactly in its presence or willingness to keep silent and surrender its gains and prestige to those who consume its labor power (cf. Anagnost in press; Yan H. 2003). Its predication, with or without voice, multifaceted and transfiguring, highlights the intriguing relationship between production and consumption in the circuit of global capitalism. The subsumption of production allows consumption to appear as if it were a "democratic show"—a consumer "revolution" in which all could participate. By subsumption, I refer to the process whereby the extraction of the surplus value of labor is hidden and suppressed by the overvaluation of consumption and its neoliberal ideologies of self-transformation. The significance of production is displaced by consumption as representing the motive force in the drive to modernity. Developmentalism has been thereby colonized by consumerism in China as both the motive force and the measure of development. Thus the subaltern subject is not to be pitied but is to be instead dressed with a chimeric cloth, gorgeous enough to render her articulation as sweated labor invisible. In this article I contrast the experience of *dagongmei* (women migrant laborers from the countryside) with that of urban residents in the consumption showbiz that has emerged in China since the mid-1990s.² The *dagongmei*, whose body is the site of both production and consumption in the circuit of global capital, offers a means through which to engage with the recent—yet already not-so-new—debates on global capital *sans* production.

As a liminal subject newly constituted in the contemporary period, the formation of dagongmei inscribes a genealogy of the *forces* of production and consumption that urgently deserves further study.³ In this article, I use insights derived from Foucault's writing (Rabinow 1994) on the technologies of the self and Deleuze and Guattari's (1984) figure of the desiring machine to elucidate how the dagongmei figures not only as a desired producer but also as a desiring consumer in China's new economy. By attending to the complex relationship between these twin processes of subjectification, I wish to address recent debates on the question of whether the consumer revolution in China and in other postsocialist countries helps to "democratize" the social space or further contributes to socioeconomic inequality (Chen et al. 2001; Davis 2000; J. Wang 2001).⁴ The subjectivity of the dagongmei and how she lives out the fissures produced between capitalism's twin imperatives to ceaselessly produce and consume is the focus of my inquiry.

Breaking the Mirror of Production?

The global triumph of capitalism is now said to lie in an epochal shift in the constitutive relationship of production and consumption (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). Consumption is now the moving spirit of millennial capitalism and has become a "hallmark of modernity." It not only indexes wealth, health, and vitality, but it also constitutes a privileged site for the "fabrication of self and society, of culture and identity" (2000:294). If we are right to think that the global capitalist project is intended not only to further magnify social differences but also to undercut class collectivity and class consciousness, then it seems reasonable to assume that the "ruse of capital" in regulating social life relies rather more on consumption than production. However, the conditions of my study compel me to return to a Marxist perspective committed to keeping production at the center of analysis. In a world where sweatshop production is rapidly expanding, we cannot blind ourselves to this fact by suggesting that consumption is delinked from production or immersed in an increasingly abstract and decontextualized form of "postmodern play."

We do not have to break the "mirror of production" in order to talk about consumption.⁵ This is not because consumption is itself a force of production, as believed by neoliberal global organizations such as the IMF and the World Bank. Nor is consumption a subversive force against the productivist logic of capitalism (Yang 2000). Nor is it merely a pseudo form of self-actualization as noted by the Frankfurt School (Arato and Gebhardt 1978). Before I enter the debate, I would like to make some disclaimers regarding two forms of epistemic violence inherent in attempts to see consumption as the core of social life. First, Jean Baudrillard's (1975) structuralist rereading of Marx leads to the fatalistic conclusion that consumption is a system of codes functioning in a play of difference without reference to materiality. Baudrillard is certainly right to argue that the political system is not concerned simply with the reproduction of labor power but with the continuous reproduction of code, wherein the "ruse of capital" detaches the signifier from the signified, making the signifier

itself signified. He works to debunk the “phantom of production” that haunts critical theory and hopes to save the “laborer” from being reduced to mere “labor power” (1975:22–25).

This argument is helpful for understanding how, with the advanced development of capitalism, the reproduction of codes and signs seems to overshadow the reproduction of labor. The detachment of surplus value from labor power rings even truer when industrial capitalism turns to financial capitalism or an information-based economy. Yet the paradox remains: Even with the advance of millennial capital when the phantom of production is increasingly supplanted by the phantom of consumption, the survival of capitalism rests increasingly on the *globalization*, not only of its codes, signs, and communication, but also of labor, raw materials, and ecological resources in formations that are not yet or are less capitalized. The proliferation of factories across the globe in the last two decades speaks for itself: Production has not disappeared but is being subsumed by consumption. This possibility compels us to rethink the relation of production and consumption under conditions of global capitalism.

Second, a nostalgic search for symbolic exchange or a “general economy of expenditure,” inspired by the work of Marcel Mauss, Marshall Sahlins, and George Bataille, may appear to be an intriguing theoretical question, but it may not be all that illuminating when applied to an “overdeveloped economy” such as China or elsewhere. Mayfair Yang’s (2000) desire to “put global capitalism in its place” in her study of ritual expenditure in a Chinese town falls prey to this nostalgic desire so common among anthropologists. When the life of the average Chinese peasant still suffers from an economy of “lack,” an economy of “excess” seems an inappropriate codification for mapping existing everyday life.⁶ Although we definitely need a critical epistemology to reconsider the economy of “lack,” a reverse discourse of an economy of abundance, devoid of historicity and spatiality, is no antidote. Well-intended efforts to look for an alternative economic logic may end up producing a “consumerist *nativus*” complicit with the hegemonic construct of the state, a prospect I examine in more detail below.

Subsumption or Consumption?

The intriguing relationship between production and consumption began to disclose itself when the central government took measures to encourage its population to cease production for an officially extended holiday break so they could travel, shop, and enjoy a restaurant meal. On May 1, 1995, a 40-hour workweek was launched in order to create a two-day weekend (*da zhounuo*) for all workers.⁷ In 1997, two national holidays, National Day (October 1) and International Labor Day (May 1), were extended to last an entire week.⁸ Headlines in all major newspapers promoted these weeklong breaks as “golden consumer days” or “golden travel holidays.” Cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen competed with one another to claim the highest rates of consumption and the greatest power to attract and host tourists during these golden periods. The “imagineering” power of each municipal

government for creating value lies in its strategies to transform the laboring body into a consumerist one.⁹ According to the State Tourism Administration, in the year 2000, 40 million people traveled during the weeklong Labor Day holiday in May, and the revenue gained from tourism reached 18.1 billion yuan (US\$2.18 billion).¹⁰ Although the celebration of International Labor Day as a holiday instituted by the Chinese state rather than arising from a grassroots labor movement may appear strange to those from the capitalist West, what is even more ironic is that the marketing of this new weeklong holiday overlays a past in which socialist China represented itself as a workers' paradise where workers were entitled not only to work but also to leisure time. The significance of the movement has changed from the glorification of productive labor to an incitement for all to indulge in a "high tide" (*gao chao*) of ostentatious consumerism. The neoliberal "imagineering" of a new consumer-subject in postsocialist China reflects the political imaginary of state policy-makers in setting up new rationalities for individual subjects in a restructuring of state power that governs from a distance.

The dagongmei of my study are rural women migrants who come to Shenzhen, one of the first export processing zones to be established in China, in search of industrial employment.¹¹ My object is to explore what seems to be a conspicuous movement—a consumer revolution—from the positionality of the rural woman migrant worker within reform-era China. There is no doubt that the "consumer revolution" is a deliberate state policy pursued since the mid-1990s as a strategy for linking the national with the global economy. What is at stake is not only the engineering of new political technologies by the postsocialist state.¹² It also concerns the process of the subsumption of production by consumption and how and for what reasons the discourse of values has become inverted overnight.¹³ The displacement/misplacement of production for consumption as the "motor of profit making" reveals a new discourse of value prevailing in Chinese society at the end of the 20th century. This metamorphosis of values signals an entirely new ruse of capital—a new *cultural economy* loudly trumpeted as a sign that China has entered into a new stage (J. Wang 2001). The subsumption of the political economy under the new label of cultural economy does not mean that the production–consumption dyad has been delinked, but that it is recoded in a new (in)visibility in which the desiring-machine of production has to be condensed and subsumed. When the subject of production strives to reemerge in the chain of the symbolic world, it is a process of negative hallucination, the "I" of production has to enter a process of identification or subjectification with the "other" of consumption. This substitution is effected when dagongmei decks herself out to go on holiday, only to discover that she fails to be recognized as the ideal consumer-citizen. She is "only" dagongmei aping a position of apparent mastery. This drama of failed self-transformation eloquently reveals the unequal relations of the dagongmei's articulation as a consuming subject and it is elucidating this inequality that produces the desire of my writing. By looking at the technologies of power and desire over the subjectivity of the dagongmei in her daily struggles, I am

forced to look for a genealogy of consumption *sans* production. These micro-techniques of power/desire and the fissures of transgression provide grounds in which to excavate the “unknown” or “veiled” realities of globalizing capitalism.

Restated in Marx’s terms, these unknown facts will not be unfamiliar. The privilege of global capital and global consumption over labor and place-based production is always ideological and works to mask social distinctions, class inequalities, and class grievances, though it is not powerful enough to shatter class formation. So strong has been the myth of “democratizing” the public sphere via equal access to the consumption of goods that even more recent studies of the consumption phenomena in China have been inclined to reproduce it (Davis 2000).¹⁴ This myth is fed by a mass media keen on “discovering” (and, thereby, exaggerating) the consuming power of those few Chinese peasants who, flush with money, act like big spenders (*da kuan*) on their adventures to the cities.

Everybody Is Becoming a Tourist

In August 2000, the national news reported a new state policy for local governments to encourage holiday travel:

Vice-Premier Qian Qichen today asked all government departments and localities to increase cooperation in a bid to push holiday tourism to a new high.

At the first ministerial coordination meeting for national holiday tourism, Qian said the coordination meeting system, authorized by the State Council, will announce tourism information and deal with major transportation, security and emergency rescue work during the tourism peak season.

The vice-premier asked all departments and localities to take immediate steps to make tourism play a bigger role in boosting domestic demand, stimulating consumption, and restructuring the economy. [“Ministerial Cooperation Calls for Holiday Tourism,” *Xinhua News*, August 26, 2000]

This incitement to consume has been heard often enough in the past few years. During the period before and after each long holiday, the media provides extensive promotion of new opportunities to consume. The urgency invested in this endeavor is based on the premise that increased consumption is crucial for economic recovery in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis and in the face of massive overproduction. The Chinese economy has suffered from a problem of overproduction beginning with the second half of the 1990s. Due to rapid inflow of foreign capital and massive increases in domestic production capability, the expansion of new product generation is greater than that of markets. Therefore, overproduction, especially in traditional industries, became a serious problem by the late 1990s.¹⁵ Consumption has suddenly become the target for national mobilizations at the close of the century in a curious inversion of the mass mobilizations launched under Mao in the 1950s and 1960s when calls to raise production targets set all of society on the move. This new call is no less a political mobilization (*yundong*) to stimulate economic growth through consumer spending.

The Southern China Airline planned to add 1,400 flights during the National Day Holiday. Most of the increased flights are added on routes to major scenic spots, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Yellow Mountain, Guilin and Haikou. The famous tourist city of Guilin, in southwest China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, earned 2.5 billion yuan (US\$301 million) in tourism revenue during the seven-day International Labor Day holiday in May this year, when some 310,000 tourists visited the city. [*Xinhua News*, October 3, 2000]

Consumption is the motor needed to drive the economy, requiring a deliberate mobilization to turn everyone into a tourist. The highest value of the citizen-subject, in the eyes of the state, no longer lies in his or her capacity for production but as consumers. The mass media, especially television programming and newspaper headlines, all target their audiences as consumers. The intention is to stimulate the desiring machine of consumption and simultaneously provide a process of identification for members of the newly emerging middle class to position themselves as "modern" and "sophisticated" citizen-consumers. The movement, which conjured up the desires of individuals, capital, and the state, is however "mass mobilized," if not "democratically accessible" to all. The hallucinatory image of massive numbers of people unleashed on the tourist trail is carefully staged by the release of statistical data with figures that test credulity—for example, Shanghai reportedly received 3.32 million visitors from across the country during the seven-day Labor Day holiday in 2001, an increase of 3.75 percent over the same period in 2000. The Special Economic Zone of Shenzhen also achieved an influx of as high as 2.54 million visitors for the Labor Day holiday, with a gain in income from tourism amounting to 16.42 billion yuan (about US\$2 billion), an increase of 10.4 percent from the previous year (*People's Daily* [Chinese version] May 8, 2001).

Fifty years ago, the predominant anxiety was the lack of development of the productive forces that marked China with the stigma of national backwardness. Under Maoism, consumption was suppressed in favor of socialist construction and building up the nation's industrial infrastructure. Desire for commodities was seen as part of a bourgeois lifestyle. Now the logic is reversed. Overproduction and insufficient consumer demand might prove to be an impediment to China's incorporation into the global economy. Consumption, then, becomes the antidote to the stagnant national economy and generates hope for further globalization. The widely circulated slogan "getting on track with the world" (*yu quanqiu jiegui*) is a vivid image of this desire for the global. The majority of the urban middle class are already "on track" in their efforts to position themselves in the space of the global. The hegemonic project of "globalizing the economy" is conditioned on the personal investment of the urban middle class and a small portion of the rich peasantry in "refashioning" themselves according to new standards of social distinction. The few who are not "on track" are perhaps a small group of leftist intellectuals and state sector workers seriously affected by massive layoffs. The desire to set China "on track" with the global is invested with an urgency about national survival in the new century. It is a project invested with an urgency not unlike the desire 50 years

ago to set China “on the road of socialist modernization.” For Chinese urbanites, the dream of a middle-class lifestyle already fills their imaginations. The only problem is to determine when and how these dreams will be fulfilled. With the state economic policies inciting them toward increased consumption, the dream spurs them onward.

Thus, the consumer revolution in reform China, although having the appearance of affording the citizen the freedom of “consumer choice” (Davis 2000), is in effect a new mode of governmentality of the Chinese state. The new consumer-subject can pursue his or her “happiness” within this new rationality for living up to the global project in which consumption can offer the answer to their every wish.

The Structure of Abundance

Consumption is certainly more than “a live information system” or coded communication (Douglas and Isherwood 1996:6–10). Consumption, as a desiring machine, is itself not the signified, but a signifier that registers a structure of abundance in a society of mere fantasy. The creation of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984) is only part of the story. Underlying the drive for consumption in China today are anxieties about China’s competitiveness in the global economy and a desire for First World status. This can be seen when the media machine guides the “imagineering” of a nationwide consumerist movement in which every citizen is said to participate enthusiastically (Fraser 2000; G. Wang 2000). This is well illustrated in the following newspaper report:

At least 400,000 residents in Guangzhou City in South China’s Guangdong Province spent the first day of the seven-day Labor Day holiday touring apartment buildings in over 100 newly built residential quarters in the city. Touring and purchasing new apartments has become a new fashion of observing holidays now in Guangzhou, the capital of Guangdong, where per capita living space reached 13 square meters, ranking at the top of all major Chinese cities. . . . So far, 80 percent of Guangdong residents have bought their own apartments and the purchase of a second apartment as a form of investment is the top choice of quite a number of Guangzhou residents. The city has published maps especially designed for potential purchasers and the real estate companies have arranged “sightseeing tours” along the Zhujiang River where over a dozen new residential quarters have been built. [*People’s Daily*, May 2, 2001]

Cultural entrepreneurship is definitely a new hegemonic project, writes Jing Wang (2001:85), in which three players are complicit: the state, the market, and the media. The structure of abundance is amplified further when tourist consumption is linked to “holiday credit consumption.” Extensive media coverage was given to the record numbers of credit card (*shua ka*) applications just prior to the new weeklong holidays. For instance, in anticipation of one of these “long” holidays, a bank in Shanghai issued a credit card that extended credit in a number of participating shopping arcades in the city, for which thousands of applications were received. The cards enabled consumers to live the dream of carefree spending during their holidays (“No Holiday for Finance

Service; Credit Card Offers Worry-Free Spending,” *Wenhui Bao*, May 4, 2001). The Shenzhen media widely reported that its citizens had spent over 90 million yuan on credit during the Labor Day holiday. “An explosion of credit card use brings a sparkle to the holiday economy,” boasted the Shenzhen Radio Broadcast Station (as reported on Renmin Wang [People’s Web] on May 5, 2001).¹⁶

In addition to this media celebration of increasing consumption of luxury items such as cars and apartments, the sophisticated cultural taste (*wenhua wei*) of urban consumers is also becoming a story of interest.

A reporter originally thought of going to the Guangzhou Book Center to seek moments of silence because of the hubbub caused by shoppers and consumers in the city center. However, the Center is full of thousands and thousands of people. Every book counter is crammed with parents and their children, and schoolchildren with bags. In addition to consuming books, Guangzhou citizens are engaging in the leisure-time activities of going to the cinema, visiting exhibitions, and attending seminars. Some researchers have pointed out that cultural consumption has become a major trend of this year’s Labor Day. [“Guangzhou Holidays Show an Increase in Cultural Taste,” *Guangzhou Xinhua News*, May 5, 2001]

Major cities now compete with each other in representing themselves not only as a place of material wealth but of cultural sophistication.¹⁷ Zhuhai, another booming export-processing city in Southern Guangdong, set up theme parks and gardens containing over a thousand species of plants and flowers and a litchi grove as special attractions for the Labor Day holiday, giving city residents an opportunity to “return to nature” and raise their cultural level (“Bubble-Bubble of Zhuhai Tourists Come from Every Direction,” *Zhuhai Xinhua*, May 3, 2001). Parks and green spaces in a city where 70 percent of the workers come from rural villages are “heterotopias” (Foucault 1986) in the sense that they offer a paradoxical imaginary—a “return to the country” in which the rural migrant has no place. In this urban fantasy of the rustic in which the real relations between the country and the city are obscured, we see how an emergent middle-class universalizes “their individual consumerist play” as a general “urban experience” and how this is complicit with the state project by working to subsume what should be invisible—the subject of production.

The Production of Desire

However, not everyone can be a consumer. Not everyone can afford to be a tourist when a leisure trip may cost between a few hundred and several thousand yuan. Although official statistics boast that Guangdong province contains the largest group of high-income households in China, with an average disposable income reaching 18,000 yuan by the end of 1999,¹⁸ over six million migrant workers in developing industrial cities in Guangdong, such as Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and Zhongshan, still earn as little as 500–600 yuan a month. These income levels can barely support a minimal standard of living, not to mention luxurious expenditure. Consumption mobilized as a movement projects the image of the consuming subject who can afford to spend (Schein 2001). The subject

has to be awakened to the lure of consumption so as to envision a life around urban luxurious lifestyles. Yet this imaginary is still far from a reality, which is why it needs a deliberate strategy to boost consumption, encouraging consumers to enter the adventurous but risky world of credit spending as a way to stimulate the economy. Imaginary lifestyles produce a “reality” in the form of movement, a desired reality about to be gratified. The gratification process at the same time has to displace what is the real: the subject of production who still contributes to the wealth of the cities. As a consumption movement, this exposes a basic fact: a structure of abundance and a structure of want *coexist* in China. Instead of a hybrid mutation, these two structures stand side by side, mirroring each other. This mirroring reflects an increasing social divide between newly wealthy urbanites, on one side, and the urban proletariat and the rural poor, on the other. The movement to consume never reduces the divide, though it is often imagined that consumption has a magical effect of homogenizing difference. Instead it further deepens the historical urban–rural chasm and gives it its contemporary form in the emergence of new social strata. The means of production is no longer the only way to produce social difference; modes of consumption also produce new forms of social distinction that fashion new identities. And these new identities, registered within the structure of want, are in fact necessary for the enablement of the other, making social distinction inescapable.

An entry into the world of the dagongmei offers an opportunity to observe the “lure of consumption” and how it produces irresistible consuming desires, even for those who cannot afford them. Their not being able to consume is not a problem; what is important is the power of the desiring machine to incite them to dream and to produce further desire. As Deleuze and Guattari (1984) suggested, the desiring machine is never built on “lack.” Instead, it produces desire that plugs into an unfailing desire of desires. Tides of movement, no matter how illusory their promise, arouses a desire in the rural migrant to get herself to the city and the workplace:

Mingong [a general term for rural migrant workers] from Sichuan Province are now ready to set off in search of work. Beginning with the second day of the Spring Festival, a great mass of migrants have been pouring through the doors of the railway station. The Sichuan Railway Station sold 50,000 tickets in a single day. On January 31, over 80,000 travelers embarked from the Railway Station. The number reached a record high of 100,000 each day from February 1 and will last until February 7. [“Migrants Come from All Directions: East, West, South, North, and Central,” *People’s Daily* (Chinese version), February 4, 2001]

This description of a massive rural to urban exodus right after the Lunar New Year has become familiar over the last ten years or more. However, increasingly apparent is a double movement, each with their own rhythm that separates the crest of tourist travel from the ebb and flow of migrant movement. The difference between these two movements is only a few days, but subjects move not only in a rhythm that reflects their class character but also in the

trains that carry them to their destinations. First, there are the tourist trains with comfortable seats, first-class service, and smiling faces, cushioning the experience of travel with a sense of class privilege. Later, come trains crammed with migrant bodies, in which passengers fight for seats and an insufficient supply of water. The destination for these travelers will be the infamous sweatshops of the special processing zones, where they will labor for as long as 12 hours a day. However, both movements of passengers are invested with desire: The tourist is ready to consume, is, indeed, already consuming, whereas the migrant is merely moving toward an alluring promise of consumption. What this promise means to the dagongmei became clear in my field research as I worked alongside them in a Shenzhen factory:

March 28, 1996, evening: We still have to work at night. The radio is on. There is no mood for work, we wait and dream. Tomorrow is payday. The girls on our line are talking about where to go and what to buy. While Fatso (nickname of a heavy-set woman) suggests buying new jeans, Fuhui, a girl sitting in front of me, thinks of buying lipstick. She asks me to suggest some brand names of high quality and reasonable price. I am at sea and wondering.

Here we see dagongmei dreaming of consumption even as they labor, as if the dreaming spurs them on despite their mood. Only by understanding how the desiring machine of consumption works can we get a clue to the perplexing question: Why are the dagongmei willing to toil in sweatshops for global capital? They are not fools, and most of them know exactly what will be the extent, if not the nature, of their exploitation. Most of them are not driven by the need to survive and only a few contribute a significant part of their wage to their family's income. Given that in the past two decades a conspicuous working-class force has been forged, why is it that class consciousness is so unarticulated and fragmentary? When cries against global capitalism have been so loud in recent years, in Seattle and elsewhere, why do we not hear them in China among this stratum of migrant workers who labor day and night to produce consumer goods for the global marketplace?

All these puzzling questions are very much related to each other, as we shall see in the following stories.

Jin: "I knew I had to go."

Jin was one of my best friends in the factory. Aged 18, she was an assembly operator on Line A. This was her first job since she had left her hometown in Sichuan in southwestern China five months previously. Jin was the only daughter in her family in the village, but she had two elder brothers. One stayed to work the family farm and the other was working in Zhuhai.

"There is so little land that it does not need many hands to till it. My father and my eldest brother are enough," Jin told me one night. When the state launched its agricultural reform policies in 1981, it overturned the collective system and redistributed land on a family basis. Jin's family received two acres of arable land and three acres of mountainous land. For merely "feeding

mouths," this was not a problem, Jin said, because her family invested in poultry rearing as well.

After I finished school, I stayed at home and helped my mother feed the pigs. Other than that, I had nothing to do and was so bored . . . But my father wouldn't allow me to leave with the other girls. They all left to seek work in Guangdong . . . I stayed home for a whole year, seeing all my friends in the village leaving to find jobs elsewhere. They would all earn their own money and brought back rice cookers, electric fans, boom boxes, and even television sets . . . I was so envious and angry with my father for keeping me at home. There was no reason, I thought.

The cash her friends could earn and the many commodities they bought to improve their living conditions attracted Jin. For the youth in the village, cash signified not only their capacity for labor but also independence from their families. For rural women, the prospect of transforming themselves from farm girls to factory workers wearing fashionable T-shirts and jeans was even more appealing. Jeans, in this context, signify as a cultural product of industrial life. The changing youth culture in the village and the possibility of a new lifestyle in the city all helped to lure Jin from her home in the village. Jin began planning to run away from home as soon as she realized there was no way to persuade her father.

When my best friend, Ping, came back home in midsummer, I asked her to take me away. I was very afraid, actually. I had never left home before. And I didn't know where Guangdong was. Ping told me we had to take a bus to Chengdu first, then catch a train to Guangzhou and then take another train to Shenzhen.

The whole trip took three days and two nights and it cost about 200 yuan, her whole life savings. Jin eagerly continued her story:

I don't know where I got the guts. At that time I so terribly wanted to leave the village—just for the sake of leaving the village . . . I met Ping at the bus station . . . She told me the bus would leave at five and we decided to have breakfast near the station . . . Just as I sat down, I saw a woman running from the field towards the station. As she came nearer, I saw it was my mother. I was terribly frightened and stunned . . . My mother saw me and shouted my name . . . At that moment, I thought my dream was dashed.

But her mother did not try to dissuade her; instead she gave her 100 yuan, which was her *si fang qian* (the private savings a married woman reserves for her own use), and an umbrella.

My mother promised to keep my secret. She asked me to write letters once I arrived in Shenzhen and to promise that I would return home for the Spring Festival . . . The bus was leaving; my mother handed me the umbrella. It was raining slightly but I didn't realize it until I saw my mother standing by the station from the coach. She was weeping, but I knew I had to go.

In the constitution of alienated labor in a capitalist society, according to Marx, labor is external to the worker, not part of her or his essential being. Paraphrasing Marx, when the worker is at home, he or she is not working, and when the worker is working, he or she is not at home.¹⁹ Of course, for Marx, “at home” means more than a geographical location. It is an existential mode of being by which a man or woman actualizes his or her being in the world. What arrests us in this story is that Chinese migrant workers do not feel “at home” as long as they remain at home. Rather, they desire to leave “home” to become wage-workers. This, according to Marx, leads to a fatal process of self-estrangement and the self-objectification of themselves through their participation in wage labor.

It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. [Marx 1964:110–111]

However, in the case of Jin who was so determined to escape her home and alienate herself through industrial labor, there is no visible violence. She was not being coerced. Moreover, there was no misrecognition of the “I” as suggested by Althusser (1990), who argued that the domain of ideology was paramount in interpellating individuals so that they are fooled into following the interests of the dominant class. Most of the factory girls knew quite well before they left their village that they were going to be imprisoned in a sweatshop for twelve hours each day, earning about 500 yuan per month. They knew the factory boss would not be lenient or treat them as equal human beings. They knew there was a huge gap between industrial life and rustic life. They knew they were going to sell their bodies. They knew almost everything.

Why then were these young Chinese girls so eager to leave their parents and their homes so that they might enter the world of consumer capitalism? How was it possible that their individual desires were actually in harmony with social demands? More specifically, why did Jin's desire coincide so happily with the demands of global capitalism? Could the desiring machine of consumption provide us an answer to all these questions?

Ying: “I had to go before it was too late.”

Ying was a married woman working in the packing department. She was another runaway, despite her being both a wife and a mother. Ying, in her early thirties, was talkative, energetic, and easygoing. Whenever I met her during our break, she would make humorous observations about her fellow workers. “This woman abandoned her husband and sons and is always making fun of people,” was the common remark about her in the factory.

Ying was from a village in Jiangxi, a much poorer province adjacent to Guangdong and its geographical proximity helped to make more visible the wealth gap between them. Ying was a mother of two sons, both of whom were in primary school. Her husband was a village schoolteacher. He stayed at home and did all the farm and domestic work. I found I had many questions to ask her: “How could you leave your husband? Who takes care of your children? Do they live with their grandparents?” Ying answered, “We live on our own, but we are quite near to our grandma’s house, a few minutes walk. My sons can eat there.” “But,” I continued, “who tills the land? Your husband has a job in the school, doesn’t he?” Ying responded at more length:

We don’t have much land. We have four *hukou* [registered residents], but got only three persons’ share because there was no more land to distribute when I gave birth to my second son. My husband doesn’t need to be at school all the time. Actually he is only a *minban* teacher [hired by the village-level government and not by the township]. His earnings are so meager—only 50 yuan a month. He is one of the few educated persons in the village, but I often tease him. I ask him, “What is the use of your knowledge? What can 50 yuan buy? [Her voice begins to rise.] A *dagongmei* can earn ten times more than you!”

I began to feel some sympathy for her husband. “Was your husband angry with you?” I asked. “Oh, he never shows his temper and always keeps calm. He is really a boring person,” she said with a laugh. “Isn’t he a good person to allow you to be so liberated?” I asked, once again finding myself on the side of her husband. “Hah! Who said so? I told my husband that I have given ten years to his family, helping them to farm, doing all the household chores, and giving birth to two sons. What did they give me? A poor family.”

Ying married into her husband’s village in 1985 when she was 21 years old. In the time since her marriage, the trend for young girls moving out of the village to the city began to take off. Ying instead found herself bound by her marriage; she gave birth to her first son only one year later. Then her second son was born two years later and for the following years she was completely tied down by family burdens. She had no chance to leave the village but saw most of the other young women coming and going, refashioning themselves with new images and identities.

I was fed up with village life. I told myself I would wait until my sons went to school. I waited for ten years, and on the day my second son finally went to the school with his father, I was so happy to find myself free. It’s my turn, I told myself. I had to go before it was too late and I was too old. When my husband came back home, I told him I was going to the city to find a job. He was too shocked to believe my decision. I told him I would write letters back home and that I would probably return in a few months . . . I told him that if he found he had his hands too full to till the land, then he should just give up the vegetable field and I would make it up with the money I would earn from the factory.

Indeed, at the time of our talk, Ying was struggling to find a way to return home. She had been in the workplace for more than five months. She missed her sons—

if not her husband—so much that she no longer wanted to work in the factory. “I’ve earned 1,500 yuan within five months, and I can save about 1,000 yuan from that. I would like to buy two sets of new clothes for my sons, a rice cooker, and possibly a washing machine.” Ying smiled with pride.

The stories of both Jin and Ying carry a message: The worker’s physical body has to be liberated before her labor power can be inserted into the world of production and consumption. Here we see how capitalism seeks what lies outside itself to continue its ability to generate a profit. The rural migrant is de-territorialized through the arousal of her desires and thereby inserted into capitalist regimes of production and consumption as a necessary condition for capital accumulation. In rural China, the desire for the commodity is what drives these women to leave their homes to become exploited labor. The desiring machine of consumption rolls along so smoothly because a social lack produced by an unfathomable rural–urban divide has already provided a rail for it to run on. In fact, this machine runs on a double rail with the great disparity between the city and countryside on one side and the lure of luxury goods on the other. Rural migrants firmly resolve to leave their home villages clearly understanding the choice they have made and anticipating the conditions they will encounter as sweated labor. Thereby, a “rational” working class is thus formed, but it is one in which class consciousness is not well articulated, because the subject-formation conjured up by the social imaginary of “modernity” is to be not only a “producer” to produce but even more importantly a “consumer” to consume. The consuming desires of the reform period are in themselves productive; they fill in a structural void that is a product of China’s socialist history.

Perhaps a rethinking of desire would be helpful here. Desire is not a fantasy that comes to be repressed in its encounter with “reality.” Nor is desire derived from lack. Lack is only an alibi for the desire to consume. Desire is, on the contrary, the source of all reality and truth; it is what produces the real, the subject, and the social:

If desire produces, its product is real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. Desire is the set of *passive syntheses* that engineer partial objects, flows, and bodies, and that function as units of production. The real is the end product, the result of the passive syntheses of desire as autoproduction of the unconscious. Desire does not lack anything; it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject; there is no fixed subject unless there is repression. [Deleuze and Guattari 1984:26]

In their critique of Lacan, Deleuze and Guattari stated that desire is never born from lack. As a machine, desire is the spring of production, the production of production. It never lacks anything. One of the greatest contributions of their theory of desire is the shattering of all dualisms that posit the false opposition of the psychic and the social, of the individual and the social, and of personal desire and social unconscious. For them, both the individual and the social

are products of desiring-machines. The division between them should not be essentialized but viewed as a two-sided coin. There is no such thing as the social production of reality on the one hand and a desiring-production that is mere fantasy on the other:

The truth of the matter is that *social production is purely and simply desiring-production itself under determinate conditions*. We maintain that the social field is immediately invested by desire, that it is the historically determined product of desire, and that libido has no need of any mediation or sublimation, any psychic operation, any transformation, in order to invade and invest the productive forces and the relations of production. *There is only desire and the social, and nothing else.* [Deleuze and Guattari 1984:29]

Desiring production is first and foremost social in nature. The social provides the repressive potential, the signifying structure, the organ-machine that waits for the psychic, the desiring-machine, and the body without organs to plug in. When Jin said: "I knew I had to go," she was echoing a whole generation of rural youth in Chinese society. When she finally made her escape, many more were thinking of following her. These desiring voices and actions that set the society on the move capture the dynamic of the reform era. The power of this mobilization, especially the rural to urban exodus, discloses at least two processes: the desire of global capital to enter China and the desire of Chinese peasants to be freed so they might consume.

Structural Want: To Be Dagongmei

The state imagineering of consumption is eager to show that consuming practices are changing in China. Surveys, made by government, academic, or corporate sources, all tend to chart out an already existing structure of abundance in China with a standard of living equal to most advanced countries. Discussions of consuming behavior in Chinese society are no longer limited to merely food and necessities. In 1999, the China Business Climate Monitoring Center under the National Bureau of Statistics conducted a survey of 50,000 urban Chinese in 20 cities that showed monthly spending on food and articles of daily use by urban residents had decreased considerably compared to several years ago. More than 90 percent of urban residents now own televisions, washing machines, and refrigerators. Many other consumer durables such as air conditioners, CD players, and computers were also common among urban households ("Diversity of Consumption among Urban Chinese," *Xinhua News*, November 12, 1999).

A study of consumer practices in the Shenzhen Special Economic Zone shows that household electric appliances, considered luxury items ten years ago, such as televisions, air conditioners, refrigerators, and washing machines, no longer set the standard. Education, expensive consumer goods, and leisure services had become the most popular commodities in the city. According to the municipal statistics bureau, Shenzhen's annual per-capita spending on education and consumer durables reached 445 yuan (US\$53) and 1,040 yuan

(US\$125) respectively (“China’s Economic Zone Boasts Stronger Consumer Power,” *Xinhua News*, July 28, 2000). Automobiles and personal computers have now become new household necessities. More than 21,000 cars were sold in Shenzhen in the first half of the year 2000. Shenzhen people are spending more on houses, international travel, advanced telecommunications gadgets, and household services. The upholstering industry in Shenzhen is expected to turnover 3 billion yuan (US\$361 million) this year, up from 2 billion yuan (US\$240 million) last year” (*Xinhua News*, July 28, 2000). As stated above, the structure of abundance mirrors the structure of want in the signification of consumption. What Baudrillard told us is that consumers do not only consume a profusion of goods but a system of signs that codify social differences and human relationships. In the recent tide of consumption, the gap between wealth and poverty only grows larger and becomes increasingly complex.

Returning once again to China’s migrant workers, it is clear that urban residents are not the only true consumers. In their search for “modernity” and in their hopes to improve their lives, migrant workers perhaps possess an even greater consuming passion. They too go shopping as well as engaging in leisure travel (Mills 1999). Shopping in downtown Shenzhen is one of their favorite pastimes. Each month they have a day off on the Sunday following payday. Quite often, they go to Dong Fang Market, where a wide array of clothing, handbags, accessories, and beauty products are available. Dong Fang Market is a shopping paradise for them, a place where they can look for suitable, alluring, and inexpensive products. Fashion shops, department stores, supermarkets, fast-food stores, and cafes, all owned by local people, are clustered on both sides of the street. These shops, which exemplify the “western wind” (*xi feng*), offers to the dagongmei a “taste” of a cosmopolitan lifestyle and, more importantly, their self-affirmation as modern subjects (Yan Y. 2000).

Although there is no question that social distinction is a project for the urban middle class, however, what must be recognized is that rural migrants too display an eager desire to elevate their social status through the process of consumption (Schein 2001; Yan Y. 2000). Their desire to consume is driven by their urgent desire to reduce the disparity between themselves and city dwellers, even if only as a matter of appearance. A touch of fashion to highlight their appearance is the most common strategy for the dagongmei as consuming subjects. If they have one rest day among many others of interminable drudgery in the factory, they too will go in search of pleasure at famous tourist destinations. Moreover, this sort of leisure consumption is also viewed as an effective means to enhance their cultural capital and broaden their horizons in the city.

Going out for Fun . . .

Splendid China and Window of the World are definitely the major attractions for dagongmei in Shenzhen. Although Splendid China is a theme park containing a series of miniatures of China’s historical sites and scenic wonders, such as the Great Wall, the Imperial Palace, and the Giant Buddha of Leshan, Window of the World is for them of even greater interest, with its

scaled-down replicas of the wonders of the world, including historical sites and natural landscapes, such as the Eiffel Tower, London Bridge, and the Egyptian Pyramids. Window of the World is a heterotopic space; it enables the dreams of the dagongmei to connect their immediate social location in Shenzhen to a cosmopolitan imaginary. A gated enclave surrounded by thick walls, this tourist spectacle is open only to the "gaze" of those who can afford an expensive entry ticket. The ability to enter this space of "world wonders" renders visible yet another divide between insiders and outsiders to the commodified spaces of Splendid China and Window of the World. The greater the sacrifice the dagongmei must endure to ensure their entrée, the more evident the class boundary and the chasm that has deepened between the urban rich and the rural poor.

Migrant workers who visit these places are mesmerized by this enigmatic dream world, only their absorption brings with it a certain compensation in their self-completion as "cultured" subjects. One day in November 1999, I went on holiday with three women workers. They were enthralled by the dazzling nature of a Disneylike imaginary world. Embodying the persona of the tourist as much as possible, they took endless snapshots, bouncing along in a jovial mood.

Their excitement did not last long. It was Sunday and the park was packed with thronging crowds. From their dress and appearance, one could easily discern the class difference among the tourists. Most of them came from major cities and looked affluent, whereas the three dagongmei, despite wearing their best jeans and T-shirts, appeared rustic by comparison. Absorbed by their photo-taking along their route through the park, they momentarily forgot there were people lining up to take photos, until suddenly a man in his mid-forties called out. "Would you please step aside [*rang kai yidian*]? Dagongmei! Why don't you get some work done at the factory instead of loafing around!" They were stunned by this "misrecognition." The man's words "hailed" them as nothing other than dagongmei, as abject subjects who should remain in their factories and not wander into places where they clearly did not belong. This incident disclosed a class boundary that cannot easily be crossed. Commodified spectacle, despite its apparent offer of access to all "for a price," does not, in fact, give dagongmei the same purchase but, instead, would appear to inscribe their different social location even more forcibly!

This small episode suggests that the achievement of a "democratic" society through the agency of consumption is pure hallucination. One's social location determines who is qualified to consume and who is not. Although the dagongmei are ready and eager to consume, they nonetheless encounter exclusion and humiliation in a myriad of little dramas occurring daily at newspaper stands, hair salons, and on public buses. In China, the social discriminations faced by the dagongmei are further institutionalized by the state apparatus through the household registration system (*hukou zhidu*).²⁰ Although this system of fixing household residence is anticipated to wither away with the expansion of the market reforms, it retains its present usefulness for controlling the flow of migrants into Shenzhen. Due to the fact that their household registration continues to be fixed in their home villages, migrant workers are not only

deprived of social benefits, but they must also pay extra fees for services such as education and health care. For instance, when a dagongmei seeks treatment at a Shenzhen hospital, she is charged two or three times the fees charged to urban residents whose household registration in the city provides them with medical benefits. The cost of a hospital visit may equal one-third of her monthly salary. Dagongmei have a saying that when you are sick it is easy to “cough” your salary away.²¹

With the acceleration of economic development in Shenzhen, privately run training centers have begun to offer courses on business management and other practical skills. Because most of the migrant workers possess a relatively low level of education, they find that after working for two or three years they would like to improve themselves by learning typing, bookkeeping, and computer skills. These courses cost around 1,000 yuan, the equivalent of a year’s savings, for a three-month course. Yet the desire to improve oneself is so strong that the popularity of these courses remains unabated. The desire for educational attainments comes from their bleak assessment of their avenues of mobility. “Let’s face it, we are merely dagongmei.” They have a clear recognition that their rural background keeps them in a disadvantageous position in the labor market. Educating themselves is one of the few means they have to escape rural status.

In their letters to relatives, the dagongmei are able to state their position clearly: Shenzhen is a spectacular city, full of high-rise buildings, theme parks, expensive name-brand boutiques, luxurious hotels, and coffee shops, but it is a place not for them. And no matter how many years they spend here, in the drudgery of sweated labor, they will always be recognized as outsiders.

Individualizing Project or Collective Displacement?

Dagongmei consuming practices contest the assumption that consumption is an “individualizing project” invested in, by, and for capital. In the workplace, the dagongmei share with equal enthusiasm the satisfaction and frustration of shopping as well as work. Instead of keeping them separated, consumption binds them into a *collectivity* through their shared dreams and desires to become a new kind of subject. “Dressing up” is perhaps the most common of these practices. Returning to their workplaces after a day of shopping, they cannot wait to display their transformed selves wearing newly purchased T-shirts and jeans. For those who have worked in the city for a year or two, the urban environment with its many shops is attractive. They spend their leisure time shopping for cosmetics—lipstick, nail polish, face cream, and so on. In the evenings, they return to their dormitories where they talk excitedly about fashion and makeup and where they can find the best buys. The desire to transform themselves and have a new look is what draws them together (Brownell 2001).

Their change in appearance is pivotal to them in the workplace. The managerial class mocks the dagongmei “with coarse hand and feet,” an abject subject bearing the stigma of rural backwardness (Pun 1999). One cannot help

but notice how much time they spend on their fingernails, painting them with shiny colors to make them look more glamorous. Another obsession is with products that promise to whiten their skin, darkened from long exposure to the sun while laboring in the fields back home. One has to be light-skinned to be a city dweller, and therefore, whitening lotions and creams were among their favorite purchases. A new look and a fresh identity is not only desired but can be realized actively by working on themselves. A rebirth can be achieved through a consumption that functions as a technology of the self. Through this means, they can realize in themselves "a great leap forward" out of rurality!²²

This project of eradicating themselves of the mark of the rural must be put into the context of how the rural world has come to be imagined as a deficient reality that cannot give birth to complete human beings or modern subjects. First the capitalist machine represents rural people as incomplete, as "lacking," and they begin to see themselves as such. Gutman (1988:112) points out a double displacement: "A deficient reality is transformed into the imaginary and the imaginary is superimposed on the real in such fashion that the imaginary transforms, takes over, becomes, the real." Deleuze and Guattari further illustrate this point, "Capitalism institutes or restores all sorts of residual and artificial, imaginary, or symbolic territorialities, thereby attempting, as best it can, to recode, to rechannel persons who have been defined in terms of abstract quantities . . . The real is not impossible; it is simply more and more artificial" (1984:34).

(Un)concluding Remarks

If it is too violent to say that capitalist globalism in postsocialist China is a *collective passion* of almost the whole society, we nevertheless observe that no desire and no power is repressed. The productivist logic of Maoist China has now been replaced by a consuming desire, construing a yearning for setting China on the rail of global modernity. As a world factory and global market, China's fate is to turn the Chinese migrant workers into efficient industrial producers who themselves also desire to become fetish subjects. As Marx said, the production process is an alienating process, in which women and men turn themselves into objects and confront themselves as something hostile and alien. In the process of consumption, then, women and men strive to redeem their alienation and achieve a sense of satisfaction through consumption. The harder they work, the more they want to spend. The more they desire to spend, the harder they need to work, mirroring the dyadic relationship between production and consumption. The desire to be rid of poverty articulates with the desire to consume commodities. Young female workers in the factory are seduced by their shared passion to purchase boom boxes, CD players, color TV sets, as well as modern fashions and cosmetics. These objects conjure up new desiring subjects.

Global capital, with its need for an ever cheaper supply of labor, has stepped into a void opened by Chinese socialist history and gives birth to a new desiring subject, one who is willing to harness herself to conditions of sweated labor so that she might ecstatically embrace the project of transforming herself through an all-consuming desire.

Notes

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1. I use *subaltern* here to refer to nonelite or subordinated social groups as introduced by Antonio Gramsci (see Forgas 1988:210, 351). The problem of representing subaltern voices is in reference to Spivak (1988) who suggests the "impossibility" of retrieving subaltern speech from the historical archive independently of the structures of power and domination. I use this opening gambit to suggest the primacy of production and consumption in the social articulation of the migrant laborer in China today.

2. My initial research was conducted in Shenzhen between 1995 and 1996, when I spent six months working for a global subcontracting company producing electronic products such as mobile phones and route-finders for a famous European brand name. I have returned to the field on a number of visits to help set up a center for women workers, which has allowed me to maintain contact with the migrant workers in my study. This article is based primarily on ethnographic material collected over the past three years.

3. Anagnost (in press) and Yan Hairong (2003) both look at a genealogy of *suzhi* (quality) in their discussion of the subject-formation of migrant workers.

4. Clearly the answer does not lie on one side or the other, but the problem lies in how to fully appreciate the complexity and ambiguity in the articulations between the production of dagongmei labor and her consuming desire.

5. Baudrillard (1975) puts forward a serious critique of the productivist logic inherited from Karl Marx and then extended to nearly all social thinkers including Gilles Deleuze.

6. Shaoguang Wang (2000) provides a good account of how China's accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO) will affect its rural farmers. He argues that there was already rapid polarization and a serious urban-rural gap by the end of the 1990s, and by 1999, the urban-rural divide was as deep as it had been in 1978. What had been gained for rural households in the early years of reform has now been lost. Compared to other countries, China's rural-urban gap is extremely large. In China, urban incomes are four times higher than rural incomes, whereas in other countries, the ratio is usually below 1.5 and rarely above 2.0. Against this background, the entry into the WTO will result in further deterioration of the livelihood of Chinese farmers who were already suffering. This suggests to me a general economy of "lack" for the Chinese peasantry, which is exacerbated by the huge gap between urban and rural income. This does not mean that there is no economy of "excess" in China. The Wenzhou model (*Wenzhou moshi*), the context for Yang's research, is one of many models for local development but it lies on an extreme end of a continuum in allowing for the most untrammelled entrepreneurialism and hence inevitable socioeconomic polarization.

7. It is important to recognize, however, that the 40-hour workweek is rarely implemented in subcontracting factories set up by foreign capital or in privately owned enterprises. Therefore this legislated leisure-time is unequally allocated across the population and contributes further to socioeconomic inequality.

8. In some cases, people had to work through the following weekend or put in overtime to make up for the extra time off. In this sense, the worker's "free time" (the longer weekend) was reassembled to allow for a longer window of opportunity in this "mobilization" of consumption.

9. The word *imagineering* is coined from two terms: *imagination* and *engineering*, which draws attention to this process as an active technocratic fantasy.

10. The number of travelers for the same period of 2001 was expected to be even higher. See *People's Daily*, January 5, 2001.

11. In May 1980, Shenzhen was set up as China's first Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to attract foreign capital for global manufacturing. Prior to the establishment of the SEZ, Shenzhen was a small town with only 310,000 residents and less than 30,000 workers. In 1995, the total population was 3.45 million with a total labor force of 2.45 million. Five years later, at the end of 2000, the total population had grown to 4.33 million with a labor force of 3.09 million. About 30 percent of its population is categorized as permanent residents who have come from major cities as state officials, entrepreneurs, technicians, and skilled workers. About 70 percent are temporary residents whose household registration (*hukou*) is located elsewhere. In 2000, the total number of temporary residents was 3.08 million, which is equal to the total number of the labor force in Shenzhen. This workforce is made up of rural migrant workers (*dagongmei*, lit. "working sisters" for women, and *dagongzai*, lit. "working guys" for men). Rural migrants do not enjoy full citizenship in the SEZ; and are allowed only temporary residence while employed by factories in Shenzhen. For the temporary worker, to be dismissed or to leave one's employment means that one is not granted the right to stay in Shenzhen.

12. Jing Wang (2001) contributes a powerful analysis of the new state technologies for crafting a cultural economy.

13. See Anagnost in press for a discussion of value as a concept-metaphor in the context of the corporeal politics of *suzhi* in China. Insights are drawn from Spivak's speculations on the question of value (1987).

14. For a critique of this tendency, see J. Wang 2001.

15. For example, the production capability of the auto industry in 1996 was 68 million vehicles but only 50 million vehicles were actually produced. By 2000, global auto production capability was expected to reach 80 million vehicles, but the actual demand is likely to be less than 60 million vehicles.

Not only the auto industry . . . [but] leading industries in the first industrial revolutions such as textiles, . . . [and] signal industries in the second and third industrial revolutions such as steel, chemicals, and television manufacturers are confronting the same problem. Large-scale over-capacity results in fierce market competition. . . . These measures sacrifice employment for market share in the face of weakened global consumption, resulting in global market deflation. [Cao 2001:28–32]

16. See "Shenzhen Residents are Increasing their Credit Card Use during Holidays; About One Billion Yuan is being Spent on Credit Daily," *Renmin Wang* (People's Web), (<http://www.people.com.cn/GB/news/index.html>), accessed May 5, 2001.

17. See also the study of Louisa Schein on urbanity and consumption in China, in which she argues:

That the city, however conceived, has become an object of increasingly intense desire in the era of reform is closely linked to a burgeoning consumerism. Cities, especially megalopolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong/Shenzhen, are widely viewed as glittering markets for a world of goods imported from the catalogs and store shelves of global modernity. [2001:225]

18. For this figure, see "Credit Consumption Heating up in Guangdong," *Xinhua News*, April 13, 2000.

19. The passage below situates this citation of Marx at more length:

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor? First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. [1964:110]

20. One's household registration (*hukou*) regulates rights of residence among rural and urban population. Those with a rural hukou have no legal right to stay in the city. Rural migrants are granted a temporary hukou in the city if they can confirm they are employed by an urban enterprise as contract or temporary workers. Once they lose their job, they are required to leave the city or they will be expelled if they are discovered during a police check.

21. In 2000, most of the migrant workers in Shenzhen were earning 600–800 yuan a month. After paying rent and food, only 300 yuan remain for all other expenses. This explains why they have to be so careful with their spending.

22. I cannot resist using this phrase recalling The Great Leap Forward (*da yue jin*) of 1958, when Maoist policies of collectivization and mass mobilization reached a high point with catastrophic results in the famines that followed.

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