

Burnout Market Feminism: Urban Chinese Businesswomen in the Internet Age

by

Ling Tang
St Antony's College

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Oxford
Michaelmas 2020*

The Faculty of Oriental Studies
Pusey Ln
Oxford OX1 2LE

Abstract

Based on a one-year multi-sited ethnography with businesswomen in Shenzhen and Hefei and three-years' working experiences in an online educational platform economy, this thesis makes two main contributions. Theoretically, by using my concept of burnout market feminism, it unravels the puzzle of why women in China thrive in business in the Internet age during a state crackdown on feminism. Burnout market feminism is a critical theoretical combination of Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang's market feminism and Korean-German cultural theorist Han Byung-Chul's Burnout Society. While Li's market feminism contributes the Chinese local perspective with empowerment and contexts at its centre to allow gendered subjectivities and solidarity to burgeon from the market, Han warns us that the Internet age has made us voluntarily self-exploit and burn out. In short, women burn out for market feminism. Empirically, it demonstrates the multiplicities and nuances of businesswomen's lived experiences and negotiations with patriarchy in different social-culture locations. Businesswomen's negotiation with patriarchy in the Internet age is shaped by the intersectionality of place, gender, age, class and migration trajectory. I compare business ideas, business practices and especially in terms of the well-researched male-centred *guanxi* practices, and intimacy as well as family practices in three different groups of women. In doing so, I avoid a yes or no monolithic answer to questions such as "are women empowered by the Internet?" and show instead nuanced diversified presences of my interlocutors empowered by their materialistic advancements.

Acknowledgement

What a journey! A ten-year journey as a student in tertiary education, from Hong Kong (2010-2016) to Oxford (2016-2020), has come to an end. How have I changed? What have I become?

In 2010, a friend asked me what the most precious thing to me is. Something that would make me feel that life is worth living. I pondered over this and answered: "to be able to be touched." I won't forget the moments when I found salvation in sociology in my confined space as an undesired mainland-Chinese person in Hong Kong. I felt slightly less confused, less lonely, and less powerless. These feelings were as strong as being in a passionate romantic relationship. I feel touched. I feel alive in politics and poetics, sociology and art, and in love and hope. I wish to thank sociology first, for being my "life, promise and practice".

However, I almost forgot how to love sociology in Oxford, being a DPhil researcher of contemporary China in the Oriental Studies department.

In the first year, I did not have any scholarship, which was the first time in my entire tertiary education experience to be without funding. My parents back in China were thrilled about me going to Oxford, although they almost had no clue what I was researching. I came out to my mother, a heart-breaking process to both of us. But before funding me with her savings and donated money from their social network, she should know that I was not very likely to find a husband in Oxford and that I might not be this "perfect" daughter in the eyes of other people. They chose to support me. I am grateful. But with every penny I spent, I felt guilty and ashamed.

Financial constraints drained my passion for knowledge. All I thought of was how to earn more money in part-time jobs, how to "defeat" other applicants in scholarship applications, and how to achieve more. How could I be metaphysically critical with little material stability? How do I find joy in knowledge, per se, with lots of self-doubt? Therefore, in chronological order, I must thank the following funding that helped me regain self-worth and make this

research possible: IJURR Foundation studentship, St Catherine's College Graduate Scholarship, Wai Seng Senior Research Scholarship at St Antony's College and Chinese Student Awards by the Great Britain-China Educational Trust.

During my darkest period in Oxford, I thought of quitting. I remember in Hilary term 2017, I was in my supervisor Maria Jaschok's office, surrounded by her spider plants and paper cut artwork, sobbing like a child. As I told her how I find it meaningless to continue the research back then, I came up with the idea of researching female E-commerce entrepreneurs instead. "This sounds so much more exciting! All these tears and struggles are not in vain, " she said. That was the first transformative moment of my DPhil; a moment when I could feel the passion and curiosity coming from within again, and the first time when I felt connected to my supervisors in Oxford.

In the subsequent four years, Maria has shown me what feminism is, academically, politically and personally. She is a truly transnational, reflexive and creative feminist who cares deeply about the people she researches and collaborates with. Throughout the COVID pandemic, she called me to provide greatly needed emotional support: " Please don't hesitate to contact me whenever you need. We are foremost feminist sisters and then supervisor and supervisee. " Maria will always be my feminist role model.

How fortunate I am to have my other supervisor Rachel Murphy for equal supervision. Rachel had been a distant and high-up name in the field of sociology for years before I met her in person in Oxford. She is a great scholar and beyond. She is able to see potential in my most chaotic and messy drafts. In words that I could not even bear to finish, she always provided me with clues about how to organise thoughts and ideas. Rachel has the magic wand for writing and teaching. I shall also not forget the hot chocolate she got me during the few times when I broke down in front of them.

Both supervisors read my drafts with utmost care and support. Every time I opened documents with line by line comments and copy-editing revisions and suggestions (especially from Rachel), I felt overwhelmed. I have the utmost appreciation and gratitude, with a slight embarrassment and regretfulness. Would I ever write as well and be as patient and encouraging as them? I could not ask for more.

You must think that I am made of tears by now. Jack Barbalet argues that tears very often contribute to the transformation of self. Jack is my MPhil thesis supervisor and my mentor for life. If it weren't for him, I would not be an academic. He was also most supportive when I drifted away from academia for other interests including music and film during my DPhil. Perhaps he had known that I would come back and combine sociology with art and vice versa. Yes, he would always understand and be there for me. The same gratitude goes to my other life mentor at Hong Kong Baptist University, Eva Kit Wah Man.

I must also thank Biao Xiang, Xiaolan Fu and Kyle Jaros, who were my examiners for transfer and confirmation exams at Oxford, and Harriet Evans, Susanne Choi and Gina Lai, for giving me comments in academic conferences for preliminary findings of this research. I am grateful to other senior academics including Hongwei Bao, Bingchun Meng, Xiaoying Qi, Petula Sik Ying Ho, Day Wong, Katrien Jacobs, Lu Pan, Lulu Zhou and Ka Ming Wu for their guidance and advice. Friends are precious. We enrich, console and transform each other. Thank you, Parker Hongzheng Pan, Emily Gong, Chong Liu, Wei Chen, Xiaochu Wu, Minhui Yeo, Linqing Zhu, Zhuozhang Li, Ling Lin, Jasphy Zheng, Kailing Xie, Zhen Liang, Yichen Li, Linda Qian, Elizabeth Smith Rosser, Shengyu Wang, Qi Li, Juan Chen, Flair Longlai Shi, Veronica Wang, Yee Man Ng, Jodie Yuzhou Sun, Muting Hao, Xiaoyu Chen, Yunyun Zhou, Kan Li, Gabriele Juskaite and Tara Lee. Thank you band members, Alex Xuechun Mao, Lucia Xu Luo and Yunlong Zhang. Thank you senior friends, Cecilia Dongling Young, Shenyu G.

Belsky, Sylvia Vetta and Jennifer Holdaway. Thank you, netizens on my public academic social media accounts.

I wish that I have done justice to my research respondents. If only I could include more mundane everyday moments of the fieldwork. Times when participants took me to their favourite restaurants privately just to enjoy food without business obligations; when they were in their cars listening to podcasts about medieval history; when they shared passion for their beloved musicians with me and talked about them with childlike enthusiasm. These moments are poetics that take my interlocutors out from the box of research subjects to living breathing human beings, just like you and me. However, I have to take a difficult balance and firm stance as a queer feminist Chinese researcher using the medium of academic writing. Inevitably, in my representation, some parts were magnified, others were omitted. I am indebted to them.

Writing is a lonely process, one which COVID only exacerbated. For three months, I didn't talk to anyone I knew in person. Every day, I would sit by my window facing the west. As I wrote, a senior couple would cultivate crops in the allotments outside. I spent long hours observing them and their vegetables as a way to contemplate, calm down and clear my thoughts. A year brought them a round of harvest. The year brought me to a closing of my decade as a student in sociology.

I defended my doctorate in Hong Kong on the 25th of January 2021 via video call, free from subfusc and all other rituals that make Oxford Oxford. I have already started working with Ngai Pun whose work inspired me greatly since my Bachelor's. What a yuanfen, roughly meaning fate or destiny. Another beautiful yuanfen that I have is with Stevi Jackson, my external examiner and "might have been supervisor". She examined my MPhil thesis in 2016. I would have been in York if not Oxford. That gives me more pressure for the viva. If anyone could make a clear judgement of how much I have improved, or not, during the DPhil journey,

it would be Stevi. Her validation and support mean the world to me. I also thank my internal examiner Henrietta Harrison for her comments and suggestions.

Lastly, thank you Mateja Kovacic. There are no words for what I wish to express. Only feelings.

Notes on Translation, Transliteration and Names

Hanyu pinyin system is used for all the transliteration from Chinese as the fieldwork was conducted in mainland China.

All translations from Chinese to English are mine unless otherwise stated.

In the rest of the thesis, all East Asian names follow the conventional form of family name followed by given names. This also applies to scholars who were born in East Asia and emigrated to other parts of the world (e.g. Han Byung-Chul).

List of Figures

Figure 1 Annual GDP growth rate per country (chart generated by google with statistics from world bank (WorldBank, n.d.)73

Figure 2 Screen capture of a Taobao online screening marketing event90

Figure 3 Screen capture of reviews on the platform X103

Figure 4 Wuji, Yin-Yang diagram and black and white dualism187

Table of Contents

Abstract	<i>i</i>
Acknowledgement.....	<i>ii</i>
Notes on Translation, Transliteration and Names.....	<i>vii</i>
List of Figures	<i>viii</i>
Chapter 1: Introduction: The Beguiling Paradox	1
Yvonne and Jing	1
Defining businesswomen in the Internet age	4
An overview of the modern economy and women in China.....	9
Phase one: anti-imperialist and anti-federal.....	9
Phase two: the Mao era	12
Phase Three: the economic reform.....	13
Paradox: crackdown on feminism and the prominent businesswomen in the Internet age.....	18
Gaps in the research and research questions	23
Chapter outline.....	25
Chapter 2: Methodology – Doing Off/Online Ethnography as a Chinese Feminist.....	31
Doing Online and Onground Ethnography in Shenzhen and Hefei.....	31
Access and Power Relations	37
Access to the field	37
Power relations with research participants and reciprocity	38
From the standpoint of a Chinese feminist.....	40
Feminist ethnography	40
Digital ethnography.....	44
Local perspective.....	47
Chapter 3- Burnout Market Feminism and Empowerment	52
Burnout Society: auto-exploitation.....	53
Market feminism	57
Empowerment.....	65
“Accidental” success at the centre of a whirlwind.....	65
The feminisation of labour	67
The confluence of the feminisation of labour and economic boom.....	69
Leverages to negotiate, subjectivities to be formed.....	74
Group consciousness	78
Conclusion	83
Chapter 4: Burning out in Emotional Capitalism	84
Emotional capitalism.....	84
E-commerce.....	87
Aesthetic display	90
Emotional labour.....	95
Platform economy	99
Two vignettes	101

Precarity and care	106
Social commerce	114
Conclusion	121
<i>Chapter 5: Shenzhen: Two Tales of a City</i>	<i>123</i>
Introducing Shenzhen	125
Shenzhen middle-Aged businesswomen: caught in transition.....	129
Female leadership: the first shift	129
The second and third shift: retaining femininity.....	133
The new generation: embracing cosmopolitan desires	139
Broaden – new generation’s chamber of commerce.....	141
Encounters with elite men as the desired prey	144
Transforming to queer: seeking for/justified by cosmopolitanism.....	147
No achievements, No queerness	149
Conclusion	153
<i>Chapter 6 Hefei: Reticence and Resistance</i>	<i>155</i>
Introducing Hefei	155
Scenes behind the model businesswoman	157
Guanxi and yingchou.....	159
Reticence in relation to patriarchy.....	161
Individual advancement, collective retrogression	165
Resistance	169
The discrepancy between words and deeds.....	169
A small step for feminism	170
Sexual harassment and rape in the field: my burning out	173
Three groups of businesswomen in comparison.....	176
<i>Chapter 7 Conclusion: Paradoxical Integration and the Chinese Dream</i>	<i>185</i>
Paradoxical integration	185
The Chinese dream	192
Wishes for daughters, hope for future	201
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>204</i>

Chapter 1: Introduction: The Beguiling Paradox

Yvonne and Jing

Born in 1991 and raised in Shenzhen, Yvonne (pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis) published her first fiction novel at the age of fifteen, following a rise in popularity of her online campus romantic novels. However, she stopped writing under her then-pen name after high school because of online bullying and difficulties coping with the new fame. In 2013, when she broke up with her then-boyfriend, she asked Lily, a friend she knew from high school, for consolation. Conversations filled with cigarettes, alcohol and horoscope knowledge helped mend Yvonne's broken heart, so they both thought it would be a brilliant idea to share such solace with other heart-broken people. As a result, they registered a shop on *Taobao*, a C2C E-commerce platform. This was the beginning of their successful business story.

Their customers were able to choose virtual lovers among types inspired by romantic novels such as Bossy CEO, Dominant Queen or Same-sex lovers, and pay according to the time they wanted to spend with their virtual lovers. Alternatively, customers could pay for separate services ranging from a morning call, midnight chat, a love confession on the customers' behalf, and divination based on astrology and horoscope. As they explain on their online page, their shop for virtual lovers sells love and companionship, not sex. Despite that, Taobao would periodically suspend their shop, or move it to an almost unreachable web location due to suspicion of prostitution. With the waves of start-ups and the heated venture capital investment occurring after 2014, Yvonne and Lily started pitching their business ideas to numerous potential investors in hope of building their own platform and leaving Taobao, but without success. In 2016, Yvonne revealed in an interview with an influential local media

that she thought their failure could be attributed to discrimination against women and that she experienced both sexual harassment and gender discrimination from, predominantly male, angel investors.

In 2017, they gave their business a boost by migrating to WeChat, a multifunctional app mainly for instant communication that dominates the Mainland Chinese market. As they needed a designer for their new platform, they reached out to a designer of similar age whom they met through her cooperation on an E-commerce project with Lily's ex-husband. As I sat with them in a café during their business meeting that lasted for around three hours, they spent at least an hour analysing intimate relationships because the designer shared that she was having problems with her boyfriend. After another hour of Yvonne and Lily narrating their intimate stories to the designer, they finally discussed the design. Delighted after a long discussion, Yvonne and Lily phone-called their partners to join them for a karaoke session. While waiting, we had dinner in a restaurant with a *Line* theme, an instant communication app dominating the Japanese market with its default character-stickers named *Line Friends*. The restaurant was filled with *Line Friends* and people queued up to take photos with the two-meter bear named *Brown*. As Yvonne owns a smartphone renowned for its automated beautification of photos, we took at least 100 selfies and photos during the dinner. The karaoke we went to afterwards was a "self-service" chain (量贩式). In contrast to traditional karaoke, the "self-service" karaoke is usually free from minimum charge, compulsory food and drink consumption and on-site services that are usually sexualised. As Yvonne and Lily's partner arrived, I learned that Yvonne was in a relationship with a tomboyish businesswoman selling electronic components.

In contrast to Yvonne and Lily, Jing was born in 1979 in the capital city of an in-land province and moved to Hefei, the capital of Anhui province, for a Bachelor's degree and then a double Master's degree in a first-tier university. After graduation, she stayed in the university

as a lecturer, which was a stable job. In a Tae Kwon Do leisure class, she met her husband Zhao, who was of similar age but from an entirely different background. He had barely finished junior middle school before joining the military. When his senior line-manager left the military to start his own business in the early 2000s, he also joined as a member of the crew. After a few years, he left his senior line-manager's company to start his own. He tried his luck with a hot pot restaurant and an elderly care home, but both failed. Meanwhile, since Jing enjoyed a lot of free time while employed at the university, surfing the internet became her hobby. In 2008, after she had been shopping on Taobao for a while, she decided to sell a few items of her own. She put some of her rarely worn items and unwanted gifts online, only to be sold out within a blink. She then started to sell different kinds of accessories that she found in the market. As her taste was enjoyed by many similar-minded people online, managing the shop started to consume all of her free time.

A year later, when she was deciding whether to pursue an academic career or develop her online business, Jing decided to quit the stable university job for her Taobao shop. Her colleagues did not understand her decision. "At that time people thought all E-commerce sellers were tricksters! My supervisor in college even told me not to go around fooling people". The story of how she started was seen as a joke in a lunch meeting with one of her product suppliers. "Now they are all so proud of me". Indeed, she now owns one of the largest E-commerce accessory businesses in Anhui with an annual turnover of more than 300 million RMB in 2017, making her one of the best known businesswomen in her province. Hailed as a model "have it all" woman who is a highly educated beauty, successful businesswoman and a breastfeeding mother, she was often invited to share her story in various media platforms. In a talk show she was once asked "Who do you think is more successful? You or your husband?" She answered without hesitation: "Of course my husband. Even though we manage the business together, I always listen to him! Therefore, he is more successful".

Indeed, even though Jing is the public face of the company, Zhao has been part of the business from the very beginning. As his elderly care home started to lose money and her shop began generating profits, he decided to join her and advance her company together. Other than travelling to different places in China searching for products as a couple, they also sold their first apartment to be able to get just barely enough money for their first front-page advertisement in Taobao. In 2015, when she started her doctorate outside the province, he became the manager of their company back in Hefei.

Jing's photos, including award-receiving moments with Jack Ma (the founder of Taobao) are hung all over the office walls in an exhibition area in their company block in one of Hefei's E-commerce Industrial Parks. Gradually, Zhao's office has grown to twice the size of Jing's and is the actual space for business meetings and management decisions. As he introduced me to other E-commerce traders in Hefei for my research interviews, I was also taken to banquets almost every night for leisure-business. In those banquets of more than 10 people at any given time, there were usually fewer than four women. In rounds of toasting and flattering, the boundaries and the right to my own body were constantly challenged as my mind was overcome by alcohol. Different parts of my body were touched in such a subtle and swift manner that I could not even react in time. "Drink more on my behalf, sister in law! [While I call Jing my fictive sister, Zhao calls me sister in law.] I want to get better deals!" Zhao would always encourage me before toasting. The next day when I came to their company, the photos of the products provided by the businessmen I drank with the previous night were already being fixed by their design team, ready to be consumed on their E-commerce platform.

Defining businesswomen in the Internet age

In hope of contributing to the knowledge of feminism, digital society and Chinese studies, the thesis takes the reader on a journey to understand Chinese businesswomen's lives in the

Internet age, virtually and physically, in Shenzhen and Hefei. By “Internet age” I mean a historical juncture when the Internet has become inseparable from the everyday life of urban Chinese people. There is much complex material to be covered in the ensuing chapters. I will introduce the concept of burnout market feminism to explain the heterogeneity, complexity and paradoxes of women’s lived experiences in China. I will discuss how businesswomen are empowered by their businesses (chapter 3) but also confined and shaped by their social contexts (chapter 5 and 6), and how people voluntarily burnout to achieve what they deem as success (a theme throughout the thesis) in a digital economy that is morphing into emotional capitalism (chapter 4). However, in this introductory chapter, I first review critical definitions before briefly reviewing the characteristics of China’s modern economy as a context for considering the transformation of women’s status. Thereafter, I introduce the internet age paradox of a strong presence of successful businesswomen on the one hand and the crackdown on feminism on the other, and highlight the research questions that this raises. Lastly, I provide a synopsis of each chapter in this thesis.

First and foremost, it is useful to explain why I have defined my interlocutors as **businesswomen in the Internet age**.

I have chosen the term “Internet age” over the more commonly used term “digital age”. The digital age, also known as the information age, refers to the era after the onset of the digital revolution in the 1970s, marked by the wide usage of information and communications technologies (ICT) enabled by the Internet (Castells, 2010,pp.5-6; Perez, 2007,pp.18-19). While terms “information age” and “digital age” are sometimes used interchangeably (Head, 2003; Lentz, 2012), Chinese business and academic sectors make a distinction between IT (information technology) and DT (data technology) explaining that the big data is not merely a technological upgrade of the data sum processing and analysis, but an ideological revolution that enables a more transparent, customised and altruistic model of interactions (AliResearch,

2015). In 2014, China Central Television (CCTV) produced a 10-episode documentary named the Internet Age. While 539 pages of results pop out when I input the “Internet Age (互联网时代)” as a keyword in the government’s official website’s search engine, typing in the “digital age (数字时代)” produces only 11 pages of results(Gov.cn, n.d.). It is because the Internet is considered the major impetus and platform for the *Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, which the Premier of the State Council Li and the General Office of State Council appealed for in 2014 in order to rejuvenate the economy. The “Internet Plus” model, a term coined by Premier Li referring to the use of the Internet in all sectors of the society, was initiated to provide employment and to revitalise the economic growth that had slowed down since 2010 (AliResearch, 2015,pp.15-19; Lin, 2016; Xinhuanet, 2014). In the light of localisation of terminology to the Chinese context, the thesis adopts the term “Internet Age”.

The Internet was introduced in China in 1994. According to China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), by June 2018, there were 788 million netizens in China or 57.7% of the population. The netizens are mostly urban (73.7%), young (70.8% are under the age of 40) and medium-educated (with only 10% having received tertiary education) (CNNIC, 2018). Although the consumer-oriented E-commerce was initiated by Amazon and eBay in the US in the mid-90s, it blossomed in China after 2004 and rocketed especially after 2008 when the global economic crisis triggered a boost for the domestic sale of surplus goods previously intended for export. The contribution of E-commerce to GDP growth in China surpasses the contribution in any of the other G8 countries (AliResearch, 2015, pp.16-17). According to the Chinese Academy of Social Science, the neo-economy sector (defined as the innovation-based economy consisting of the sharing economy, platform economy and digital economy) contributed 14.6% to the total economy in 2016 (Ckxx.net, 2017).

I see my research participants as businesswomen rather than as female E-commerce entrepreneurs. E-commerce can be broadly defined as “the use of the Internet, the World Wide Web (Web), and mobile apps and browsers running on mobile devices to transact business” (Laudon & Traver, 2016, p.50). In other words, as long as transactions are conducted via a digital platform, a business could be considered E-commerce. Using such a broad definition, all businesses in China that adopt a mobile payment system can be considered E-commerce. Considering that the mobile payment has a 79.9% coverage (People.com.cn, 2018b), the boundaries between traditional business and E-commerce are blurred. In a narrow and more general sense, E-commerce is understood as selling products and services on Internet platforms. This would include business to business (B2B) platforms such as alibaba.com, business to customer (B2C) platforms such as JD, Tmall or Amazon, and customer to customer (C2C) platforms such as Taobao and Ebay.

In 2016, I originally entered the field with a strong focus on E-commerce businesswomen. However, as I was in the field, snowball sampling lead me to people whose businesses did not seem to fit within the narrow definition of E-commerce. Some made profits by pitching advertisements in their blogs; some owned education or construction companies that only used the Internet for advertisement and transactions. In 2018, when I returned for follow-up research, Yvonne had suspended her online shop and opened a restaurant with her girlfriend. “All businesses in China today rely on the Internet”, she declared, urging me to leave a five-star review of her new restaurant on *dianping* and *meituan-dianping*, both crowd-sourced review platforms for businesses, especially restaurants. Meanwhile, Jing also started her own business to customer (B2C) trading platform which operates in both online and offline forms. “In the real internet age, there are no E-commerce entrepreneurs but just entrepreneurs. The Internet is everywhere anyway, it doesn’t even need to be mentioned”. Jing approached the Internet as inherently embedded in all her businesses, not a factor that could influence businesses

externally. In a broad sense, since all my interlocutors' brick-and-mortar businesses accept mobile payment (E-transaction) and conduct promotions on the Internet, they could all be considered E-commerce businesses. Therefore, to insist on focusing on E-commerce in its narrow sense risks neglecting many other facets of my interlocutors' businesses. More importantly, since the Internet is so entrenched in the everyday life of urban Chinese people – even beggars and street vendors accept mobile payment via QR codes (Gupta, 2019; Parsons, 2017) – it is crucial not to have a research focus that is fixed solely on their online businesses. Their entire economic and social lives now revolve around digital and social media. Even for the brick-and-mortar businesses that they own, they manage them with an “Internet Ethos (互联网思维)”, caring deeply about interior decoration and services in order to gain positive online reviews or to be shared in social media platforms.

I have adopted the term “businesswomen” rather than “entrepreneurs”. The word “entrepreneur” originates from French and means “taking on risks” between buyer or seller, or to undertake a task such as starting a new business (Barringer, 2013). Entrepreneurship is defined by innovation and endurance, a creative destructive process that puts forth the development of a society (Schumpeter 1934, cited in Barringer 2013). In contrast, “businesswoman”, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a woman who works in commerce, especially at an executive level” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.), does not necessarily have to be “innovative” in terms of ideas. While an entrepreneur is included in the ensemble of business people, a business person is not necessarily an entrepreneur.

In the field, my interlocutors used three terms intermittently to describe themselves: 创业者 (*chuangyezhe*), 企业家 (*qiyejia*), and 生意人 (*shengyiren*). The former two words are both commonly translated as “entrepreneur”. The first term 创业者 (*chuangyezhe*), meaning “one who manages a start-up”, does carry an innovative dimension but is also used when one feels

the need to be modest since it indicates that the company is at its initial stage. The second term 企业家 (*qiyejia*), a more formal term referring to one who manages an enterprise, is used when one needs to assert oneself. The third term 生意人 (*shengyiren*) refers to a businessperson. Admittedly, some of my interlocutors attach higher purpose to their business and consider themselves innovative while others do not (I will elaborate on this in the following chapters). I also take into consideration that some of my interlocutors' online businesses are too small and informal to be called an enterprise, but are very profitable (for instance selling products on her own with some non-contracted retailers on a social media platform with a monthly income of 100,000 CNY [11,700 GBP]). Hence, "businesswomen" is the term that best describes all my interlocutors.

An overview of the modern economy and women in China

Phase one: anti-imperialist and anti-federal

Entrepreneurship and feminism sprouted from anti-imperialist and anti-federal soil with the modernisation of China.¹ Although there are some counter-opinions,² it is commonly agreed that China's modernisation process started in the late Qing dynasty (1840-1911) and the Republican era (1912-1949). After China's losses in a series of wars including the First Opium War (1840-1842), the Second Opium War (1856-1860) and the first Sino-Japanese wars (1894-1895), the unequal treaties forcefully incorporated the country into global capitalism. Private entrepreneurs flourished in coastal treaty ports and a class of "gentry and merchants" started to accumulate power. Haunted by the fear of becoming a colony, a highly nationalistic entrepreneurial ethos emerged, putting faith in rejuvenating the country by developing

¹ Modern reformists considered the foreign invaders imperialist and the Qing government who was unable to defend the country federal.

² Historian Ge Zhaoguang (2011; 2015), for instance, argues that the modern Chinese state originates from the Song Dynasty (960-1296).

agriculture, industry and commerce (see e.g. Bergère, 1983; J. K. Fairbank, 1983; Liu, 1994; Zhong, 2004). These entrepreneurs provided the financial support that fuelled different reforms which formed part of the platform of the Xinhai revolution which overthrew the Qing Dynasty and marked the beginning of the Republican era (Bergère, 1983). Those entrepreneurs were later categorised as nationalistic capitalists by some Chinese scholars who write history according to a rigid Hegel-Marxist linear framework which assumes a linear historical development from feudalism to capitalism and then socialism and communism (see e.g. Quan, 1982; Zhang, 2011).

Feminism was introduced to China systematically in a centralized and top to bottom approach predominantly by elite gentry class male reformers (S. Song, 2013; Y. Zheng & Lu, 2010). Using social Darwinism to describe the international order where China was subjugated to Euro-America and Japan, reformist Liang Qichao argued that “a country with the best women’s education is also the strongest. Such a nation can ‘win a war without a fight’, much as America has done... Women suffer in plain sight from the bitterness of this terrible poison, but in truth it is our entire race that is left with the greatest injury” (Liang, 1987, translation found in L. Liu, Karl, & Ko, 2013, pp.202-203). He-Yin Zhen, a less-known anarchist feminist, strongly criticised this approach to feminism as “men’s pursuit of self-distinction in the name of women’s liberation” (He, cited in L. Liu et al., 2013, p.2), and the incorporation of feminism under modernisation and nationalism. She also objected to the prominent and patronising role of elite men as patrons of female empowerment, especially with respect to access to education and work (X. Li, 2005b; Y. Zheng & Lu, 2010).³ In the public sphere, women started to receive formal education and became politicians, workers and soldiers; and in the private sphere, modern monogamous marriage based on romantic love became popularised while tradition such as foot-binding were criticised and abandoned (Pan, 2015; Y. Zheng & Lu, 2010).

³ Modernisation also brings the pathologization of same-sex desire in China (Chou, 1997; Hee, 2015).

Dorothy Ko (1994) criticises the liberated/oppressed binary narrative of women being liberated after the modernisation and argues that women in Jiangnan areas in imperial times were not completely oppressed under “Three Obediences and Four Virtues” – obedient to father, husband and son; and the virtues in ethics, speech, manners and chastity. Rather, Ko demonstrates that they had versatile and meaningful experiences as writers, readers, editors and teachers. Even though, as argued by Ko (1994), it is important to see nuances in the history that are neglected in the dominant narrative, national scale institutional changes in liberating women to participate in the public sphere were only enabled by modernisation (Gilmartin, 1994; Y. Meng & Dai, 2004; Y. Zheng & Lu, 2010). Only then did women start to participate in politics collectively, demanding suffrage and democratic participation (L. Edwards, 2008). The Republican era also witnessed the burgeoning of the coupling of femininity and consumerism, exemplified in calendar advertisements showing young independent female figures with exaggerated feminine features (Y. Cai, 2013).

Women’s role as businesswomen is seldom recorded during this period, except for self-dressing women in Lingnan areas (Qiao, 2015; Siu, 2010). Self-dressing women, also known as comb sisters, refer to the women who refuse to enter the marriage system and set up a sisterhood of celibacy through work typically in light industry (Stockard, 1989; Watson, 1994). The most renowned female entrepreneur born in this era is Dong Zhujun, even though she remained neglected in historiography until the publication of her memoir *My One Century* (Dong, 2008). She started as a high-end escort in the late Qing dynasty and entered a then-nascent monogamous marriage with a man who redeemed her.⁴ Later, she had a tough divorce and founded the Jinjiang Hotel in 1935, which later became one of the most famous luxurious hotels in Shanghai.

⁴ For a thorough overview of the relations between sex work and modernisation in China, see Gail Hershatter’s *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Hershatter, 1997).

Phase two: the Mao era

In 1949, as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took control of mainland China, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established. Public ownership over the means of production was a defining characteristic of a socialist state. Private sector business activity and entrepreneurship were considered to be features of capitalism that were incompatible with socialism and were therefore substantially suppressed. To efficiently transition to socialism, the central government put forward land reform (1950-1953) and the de-privatisation of ownership in agriculture, handicraft and industry sectors, known as the three large-transformations (三大改造 1953-1956). In rural China, the central government introduced collective-owned cooperatives in the agriculture and handicraft sector; in urban China, private industries were gradually transformed into state-owned enterprises (SOE) (Y. Cao, 1990). By the end of 1956, 96.3% of agricultural households ran as cooperatives (Ibid., p.20), 91.7% of craftspeople were cooperative-managed (Ibid., p.28) and 99% of industries and 82.2% of commercial shops were owned by the state (Ibid., p.46). Later, cooperatives were transformed into communes and a *danwei* (work unit) system was established as the all-in-one system of managing the production and reproduction of the urban population through the workplace.

Equality between men and women (男女平等) as the founding principle of CCP was enshrined in article 48 of the Constitution.⁵ Even though early pioneers of CCP, such as Xiang Jingyu,⁶ assumed a bottom-up approach of Marxist feminism in the Republican era (Gilmartin, 1994; S. Song, 2013), the approach was reversed after the CCP came to power after 1949. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) was established as the only legitimate mass

⁵ Article 48: "Women of the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all sphere of life, including political, economic, cultural, social family life, and in all other respects".

⁶ Among the three founders of the CPC in France around 1920, one was Xiang Jingyu, a pioneer of Marxist feminism in China. Returning to China in 1922, Xiang became one of the Central Committee members and the Party's first director of the Women's Bureau (妇女部). She criticised the liberal feminists who called for legal equality with men in the existing system as bourgeois and without a solid support from the general public. On the other hand, she actively participated in and led the protests and strikes of women factory workers. Xiang was executed in late 1920s by KMT, leaving a hollow of female leadership in 1949 when CCP raised to power.

association for women and children's issues, sandwiched between the mass and authority, a de-facto Party's institution where women's advancement could be manoeuvred only under the Party's leadership (Z. Wang, 2017; Yunyun Zhou, 2019). Under the direct and memorable slogan "women holding up half the sky," women enjoyed comparatively more commensurable payment as men, a high rate of labour force participation, and were partially freed from household chores thanks to welfare provided by commune and *danwei* (Croll, 1978; Hooper, 1984; Y. Jiang, 2004; Tao, Zheng, & Mow, n.d.; Z. Wang, 2017). The newly promulgated marriage law in 1950 promoted principles such as freedom of marriage, monogamy and equality between men and women that greatly transformed people's family mentality and practices, even though policies experienced setbacks (Mingxia Chen, 2004; Diamant, 2000). However, trickle-down state feminism or, what Stacey (1983) terms "patriarchy-socialism", was criticised for the exclusively centralised management under ACWF and the desexualisation governance in producing non-sexed productive socialist subjects like the "iron lady" (Barlow, 2004; Croll, 1978; Evans, 2008b; Honig, 2003; Stacey, 1983). Femininity and sexuality were considered as individualistic and capitalistic. Women's role in reproduction in the private sphere and the idea of essentialised gender difference remained intact (Andors, 1983; Evans, 1997; Hershatter, 2014; Jieyu Liu, 2007). The pursuit of gender equality was only possible in a collective manner when it was compatible with the state apparatus' view of modernisation and an ideology which regarded female entrepreneurship as politically suspect and dangerously bourgeois (Barlow, 2004; Z. Wang, 2017).

Phase Three: the economic reform

In 1978, Deng Xiaoping denounced China's political focus on class struggle and instead placed the development of the forces of production at the centre of state policy-making. This shift marked the commencement of the economic reform era in China, allowing for diversified ownership and foreign investment. In contrast to Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin, Deng

did not spend too much time and effort condemning Mao Zedong's leadership and instead urged the whole nation to "unite as one in looking to the future" – a future of political and economic pragmatism that Deng summarised with his now famous quotation "no matter white cats or black cats, the cat that catches rats is the best cat". China's leaders' re-definition of what constituted socialism permitted a shift in the country's mode of ownership (public versus private) and the mode of economic regulation (planning versus market) in order to "liberate and develop productive forces". Inspired by Yugoslavia's economic reform, the central government first started some "experimental units" by giving autonomy in enterprise management to over 100 state-owned enterprises in Sichuan province between 1978 and 1979 only to quickly hit a standstill. Subsequently, the focus shifted to rural areas and thereby to rural non-state-owned sectors. Meanwhile, after a serious drought in 1978, in Xiaogang village in Fengyang county of Anhui province, 18 farmers, risked their lives by deciding to contract the land themselves and assume responsibility for all profits and losses only to result in a prosperous harvest, 6 times more than what they had produced the previous year. Within three years, their method, described as the household responsibility system, was promoted all over China leading to a surge in agricultural output. Moreover, the increase in productivity also freed the hands of the farmers so that they were able to put more effort into developing township-village enterprises (TVEs) as a replacement for the commune and brigade enterprises. While TVEs comprised 9% of China's industrial output in 1978, they comprised 42% of China's industrial output in 1994 (Lin et al., 2003, cited in Vogel, 2011, p.447). In urban China, private owned enterprises, including private firms (私营企业) and individual household enterprises (个体户), and foreign joint ventures also started to burgeon. In 1980, four special economic zones (SEZs) were set up in Guangzhou province (Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou) and Fujian province (Xiamen), allowing a more market-oriented system and a different set of business and trade regulations that were more attractive to foreign investment and foreign

market-oriented businesses. With the proximity to the four Asian tigers, especially Hong Kong and Taiwan, the economy of the SEZs, especially Shenzhen, grew exponentially within a few decades. While the import and export industries consisted of only 9.9% of the GNP in 1978, it rose to 31.9% by 1990 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, cited in Wu, 2004, p.62). In the following years, the central government opened more coastal areas to foreign investment.

This flourishing of business creation was categorised as *the self-employment boom* (Chiculture.org, 2018). The typical entrepreneurs in this wave were not necessarily the most privileged ones in the system, but those who had “little to lose” if under attack as a bourgeois. An example of an entrepreneur of this first wave of private business people was Nian Guangjiu, the founder of Fool melon seeds (傻瓜瓜子).⁷ As the son of a street vendor who hailed from rural Anhui and had barely any education, he was detained for the first time for one year in 1963 for vending roasted chestnuts and a second time in 1966 for selling roasted melon seeds. This was considered the crime of speculation.⁸ However, as he continued vending roasted melon seeds, he earned a million RMB even during the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution and was later lauded officially by Deng Xiaoping on numerous occasions as the pioneer of economic reform. In urban China, companies such as Haier, Wanke and Lenovo were formed.⁹

The reforms also triggered problems and obstacles: inflation, social inequality and uncertainties about the socialist system within and beyond the government had reached a climax in the Tiananmen movement in 1989.¹⁰ The crackdown of the protest on June 4 signalled a conservative return to authoritarianism and put the liberal economic reforms in

⁷ For a detailed review of Nian Guangjiu's story, see *The Sad Stories of Ten Controversial Entrepreneurs* (S. Liu, 2009)

⁸ The crime of speculation, known as 投机倒把, was designed for people who sell commodities through “backdoor” for a profit, a juridical legacy of planned economy that was abolished in 1997.

⁹ Haier started as a state-owned enterprise turned into cooperative limited company between China and Germany. Vanke and Lenovo were started by university-educated men in Shenzhen.

¹⁰ For a thorough review of the 1989 student movement, see *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement* by Zhao Dingxin (2001).

suspension, with embargoes further thwarting the economic development of China. With the revolution of 1989 announcing the end of Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the leadership in Beijing was on a track to get back to a planned economy. In 1992, Deng Xiaoping took the Southern Tour from Beijing to Shenzhen to reassert the legitimacy of individual economic success as one of the Chinese characteristics of socialism. As another Deng slogan “to get rich is glorious” went viral, it also marked the further integration of China into global neoliberal capitalism, albeit under Leninist authoritarian management (Harvey, 2005; Horesh & Lim, 2017; Rofel, 2007; F. Wu, 2010).

Along with the privatisation of education, housing and medical systems and the SOE reform that rendered 40 million state workers redundant (Lee, 2007; A. X. Wu & Dong, 2019,p.7; F. Wu, 2010), a flock of cadres and state-owned enterprise (SOE) workers began “going down to the sea” (下海) (Ji, 1993), marking a wave of entrepreneurship characterised by close cooperation between business and government. This generated a group described as China’s new rich (Bian, 2002; T Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002; Guthrie, 1998; Osburg, 2013; Wank, 2000). According to the Ministry of Human Resources, more than 10 million people had suspended or resigned their post in the government or SOE to start their own business and more than 120,000 people had resigned in order to do so (Chiculture.org, 2018).

While in public discourse men’s entrepreneurship denoted managing companies, women’s entrepreneurship was popularly associated with marketing their bodies. The Chinese name for the award-winning co-produced film *Bitter Flower* is also about “going down to the sea (下海)”. The film depicts a female worker in northeast China who was made redundant in her 30s during the SOE reforms of the 1990s. She went to Paris to earn money and ended up as a sex worker. Addressing similar subjects using the method of ethnography, Chin (Chin, 2014) also called his book about 18 Chinese sex workers who worked overseas *Going Down to the Sea*.

A patriarchal gendered dichotomy between the public and private is marked in this discourse: men achieve individual success in the public realm by building a career and women gain material advancement via intimacy. Scholars hold that the Chinese economic boom is a sexonomy whereby men's business and career is highly intertwined with the sexual services provided by women (P. S. Y. Ho, Jackson, Cao, & Kwok, 2018; T. Zheng, 2009).

Three decades after the launch of China's 'socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics', the private sector contributes to more than 60% of its GDP, 80% of its urban jobs and 50% of its taxes (China Minsheng Bank Think Tank, 2017).

In rectifying the de-sexualisation and "asceticism" of the Mao era, scholars note that a re-sexualisation process through commercialisation was underway (Evans, 2008a; Rofel, 2007). While individuality and gendered subjectivities are liberated from the collective masculinised past through this re-sexualisation process (X. Li, 2005b), a systematic alliance between the social state and global capitalism have also channelled women back into essentialised passive supportive reproductive roles (Evans, 2008a; Rofel, 2007). In urban China, the female employment rate dropped with the erosion of permanent employment and state welfare (Y. Jiang, 2004; Jieyu Liu, 2007); the gender gap in wage payment widened from 94.2% in 1989 to 77.5% in 1997 (Zhang, cited in B. Liu, Li, & Yang, 2014, p.17);¹¹ the female virtues of being a flower vase (accepting the constructed feminine beauty standard) or virtuous wife (internalising women's "natural" role as a mother) once again became celebrated in the media (Evans, 2008a; Hooper, 1998). For female migrant workers, the essentialised gendered discourse was on the one hand utilised by the managers to create docile bodies to increase

¹¹ The statistics is retrieved from Zhang Dandan's (2004) analysis of China Health and Nutrition Survey data in Urban China. In comparison, Margeret et al. (1997) indicate that the hourly wage of women's payment against men's in 1990 was 55% using the Urban Survey from 1988 to 1994. Both numbers are cited in the UN Women's report about gender equality in China's economic transformation (B. Liu, Li, & Yang, 2014). Although they both show a clear expanding of wage gap, the inconsistency of the data demonstrates the implausibility of statistics collected then.

productivity, and on the other hand, the modern fashionable urban female image has voluntarily engendered a Foucauldian “technology of self” whereby migrant women try to erase their rural roots via consumption (Pun, 2005). The family planning policy, known as the one-child policy, was also implemented in 1978, creating a dual effect of unexpectedly leading to equal educational investment for girls in cities while also intensifying incentives for daughter discrimination through sex selective abortion and the selective neglect of baby girls, largely in rural China (M. Fong, 2016; V. L. Fong, 2004; Greenhalgh, 2008).

With the integration of China into global capitalism there was also a rise in non-government organisations (NGO) and bottom-up gender-oriented activism (Bao, 2018; Evans, 2008b). Notably, after the fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, state-recognised NGOs dealing with gender and sexuality issues including women’s education and the HIV epidemic mushroomed (Hsiung, Jaschok, Milwertz, & Chan, 2001; Tao et al., n.d.; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017). Female entrepreneurs also assumed increased public prominence, most notably with Dong Mingzhu’s leadership in Gree Electric.

Paradox: crackdown on feminism and the prominent businesswomen in the Internet age

Soon after the Internet was introduced in China in 1994, the first generation of Chinese tech companies, including the now tech-giants known as BAT (Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent), boomed rapidly copying the business model of the US-based tech-companies (Fannin, 2008). As tech-pioneers were developing basic platforms for the Chinese language Internet, the Chinese state also gradually tightened foreign tech-companies’ access to operate in the China market in the name of protecting national security while massively subsidising the building of ICT infrastructure (Hong, 2019).

The Internet facilitated the post-98 civil rights movement. The cooperation between the media, internet and legal systems led to successful cases such as the abolishment of custody and repatriation (C&R) system in 2003, due to the police's beating to death of the university student Sun Zhigang whom they mistook for a rural migrant worker (S. Zhao, 2017; Y. Zhao, 2008).

This triangle of cooperation has also paved ways for civil society feminism. Many academic journal articles and books discuss the topic of feminists activists who participate in online and offline political campaign through creative means in order to tackle restrictions and censorship (Hong Fincher, 2014, 2018; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017). Let me take Ye Haiyan and Ai Xiaoming as examples. Though one worked as a sex worker and the other was a professor, both actively participated in creating feminist communities and responding to social issues via the Internet. Ye Haiyan appealed for legalisation of sex work by providing consultation to sex workers and writing about her sex experiences online under the name of "hooligan sparrow". Ai Xiaoming is known for her documentaries that reveal human rights and political problems in China. Teaching women's studies at Sun Yat-sen University, she localised the plot of the Vagina Monologues and arranged its first showing in Chinese in the Guangzhou Museum of Art in 2003. Ai Xiaoming's and Ye Haiyan's activism converged in one event in 2013 when a primary school principal was accused of raping six female students. Ye first uploaded a photo on her social media with the slogan "Principal, call me if you want to get a room. Leave the pupils alone". As Ye was soon sent to detention, Ai uploaded a naked photo of herself with words written on her body "Call me if you want to get a room. Leave Ye Haiyan alone". Ye's deeds also inspired many others who posted self-portraits with similar information online, including young feminists such as Li Maizi and Xiao Meili. Li Maizi and Xiao Meili represent the one-child generation university-educated civil society approach of young feminists who call themselves feminists in action (女权行动派). They are active members of

the Chinese Vagina Monologues, organising campaigns in forms such as performance art, flash mobs, online portraits and feminist walks to combat discrimination and violence against women and LGBT people.

Since President Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, we see at least two intertwined perplexing paradoxes. Firstly, China has become more powerful in the global arena with an official narrative that privileges the Internet, while it has simultaneously been tightening control on civil society. Meanwhile, how do we explain the strong presence of businesswomen in China during the internet age at the same time that China is ranked at only 90th place in the UN 2015 gender equality index behind Iran (Hird, 2017)?

On the one hand, the state crackdown on civil society feminists is clear and brutal. *Feminist Five*, members of *feminists in action*, were detained around International Women's Day in 2015, generating international condemnation of the CCP. In 2016, *nüquan*, one vernacular term for feminism, was marked as a sensitive word on Weibo.¹² In 2018, the leading Chinese feminist social media account *Chinese Feminist* (女权之声) was censored, suspended and finally closed on both Weibo and WeChat.

On the other hand, Chinese women are dominating female entrepreneurship in terms of numbers and assets. Women entrepreneurs receive recognisable support from organisations including the ACWF, UN and Goldman Sachs (Hernandez, Nunn, & Warnecke, 2012; Warnecke, 2014). According to the State Council Information Office, the state has provided 383.77 billion RMB in the form of subsidised loans and 40.86 billion RMB as subsidies for female entrepreneurs, which benefited almost 7 million businesswomen between 2009 and 2018. Even though women in China by no means enjoy equal opportunities with men (just like anywhere else in the world), in a 2019 survey conducted by HSBC, women in mainland China

¹² Weibo, a micro-blogging social media platform, is the Chinese equivalent of twitter.

were reported to experience the lowest level of gender bias - of only 17% compared to 54 % in UK, 46% in US, 31% in Singapore, and 22% in France (Taylor, 2019).¹³

In Jack Ma's keynote speech in the Global Conference on Women and Entrepreneurship in 2015, he proclaimed that

Why shall we host an entrepreneurship Conference just for women? It is because Alibaba wants to express its deepest gratefulness to women... There are three reasons [why the Alibaba group grows so rapidly] – women, youth and the focus on small enterprises. The primary reason shall be women... the world is a better place because of women's important creations and contributions. We know that women will lead us to a better and brighter future, and we are honoured to host so many inspirational women as we work to empower the next generation of female leaders and entrepreneurs in China.¹⁴ (Zhu, 2015)

Jack Ma's she-era claim is not ungrounded. According to Forbes, China is home to the largest number of self-made female billionaires in the world (Ahmadov, 2017). Similarly, Hurun Richest Women in China 2018 report states that four out of the five most successful female entrepreneurs in the world are Chinese (Songwanich, 2018). According to Alibaba's *Internet Plus She Era: The Report of Females Doing Start-ups*, while there are only 3.6% of entrepreneurs in traditional sectors are female, more than half of the E-commerce shops on *Taobao* are managed by women (Alibaba, 2015).

Civil society supporters lament the resurgence of gender inequalities in China and presume that there is an incompatibility between feminism and authoritarianism (Hong Fincher, 2014, 2018; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017) or capitalism (B. Meng & Huang, 2017). For instance, Meng and Huang (2017) argue that the Alibaba-initiated Double-Eleven online shopping spree in

¹³ The figures show how female entrepreneurs perceive their condition subjectively, rather than objectively. The low figure in China might be due to a neoliberal mentality that discourages people to reflect on structure inequality and a lack of feminist awareness.

¹⁴ The quotations are translated by the press Business Wire and modified by the author.

China is a collusion between patriarchal capitalism and the socialist state desperate to boost development.

The misogynist discourse of the Double Eleven shopping festival has emerged at a low point in the history of Chinese feminism. Contemporary urban youth's refusal of Maoist gender sameness has been hijacked by consumer capitalism with the aid of a patriarchal state, before it had the chance to evolve into a politics of recognition in the Western liberal democratic sense. (Meng & Huang, 2017, p.680)

Their argument resonates with those scholars who consider feminism in China as stagnant, sabotaged and unfinished (Croll, 1978; Gerson, 2009; M. Wolf, 1985). However, other scholars have more recently begun to acknowledge the enterprising-individualistic success of women as a local version of feminism (A. X. Wu & Dong, 2019), or at least as a glimpse of neoliberal hope for the disadvantaged (Yu, 2019). In their attempts to provide a local theorisation of feminism, Wu and Dong (2019) borrow from Kumari Jayawardena's advocacy for third-world feminists by arguing that contemporary feminism in China can be understood as a combination of three frameworks: *Made-in-China feminism (C-fem)*, bottom-up grassroots feminism (*Feminist Five*), and trickle-down feminism (ACWF). They categorise two strands within C-fem. *Entrepreneurial C-fem* refers to women who manipulate their erotic capital for economic and social capital, exemplified by women who strategically manipulate heteronormative hypergamous marriage to their instrumental ends. *Non-cooperative C-fem* refers to women who use their achievements to be liberated from heteronormative marriage. I agree with Wu and Dong (2019) that neither a neoliberal critique nor the new leftist fantasising of the socialist past is adequate to grasp the complexity of present-day Chinese feminism. However, they focus too narrowly on heteronormative marriage where work and economic status were merely a leverage to negotiate private life.

Gaps in the research and research questions

Women are all too rarely observed, studied and debated as businesspeople in scholarly work. In Imperial China, women's subordination and, to a lesser extent, resistance to family and the state are studied via the lens of kinship, family and Confucianism (Ebrey, 2003; Z. Li, 2014; Zurndorfer, 1999), with foot-binding as an epitome case study (Ko, 2005). While Susan Mann (Mann, 1997) recognises women's contribution to the farm household in the late Qing dynasty, the phenomenon of women in Southern China during Ming-Qing dynasty forming single sisterhoods of *zishunü* 自梳女 (self-dressing women) and *buluojia* 不落家 (not living with the husband's family) has been well researched in relation to their relative economic independence and resistance to Confucianism in the Lingnan area (Qiao, 2015; Siu, 2010; Stockard, 1989; Watson, 1994). In contemporary China, women have been studied as wives, concubines and sex workers (Davis & Friedman, 2014; Ding, 2016; Ding & Ho, 2013; S. Xiao, 2014); mothers and daughters (Evans, 2008b, 2010; Jackson & Ho, 2020); blue and white collar workers (Jieyu Liu, 2007, 2017; Otis, 2012; Pun, 2005); and activists (Hong Fincher, 2018; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017) as well as leftover women (Hong Fincher, 2014; To, 2015). Women's contribution to the economy after the economic reforms has been recognised in terms of manual labour (Pun, 2005) and sexualised labour (P. S. Y. Ho et al., 2018).

However, women's role as power wielders – politicians and business owners—remains under-researched. It is beyond the scope and intention of this thesis to discuss the All China Women's Federation and female politicians and cadres (on this topic see Hsiung, Jaschok, Milwertz, & Chan, 2001; Z. Wang, 2016; Zhou, 2019). In her paper *State of the Field: Women in China's Long Twentieth Century*, Gail Hershatter meticulously reviews publications produced since the 1970s about Chinese women in sociology, history, politics and anthropology (Hershatter, 2014). In a short section on the re-emergence of female entrepreneurship in the reform era, she summarises a quandary woman face in business:

Women in the market have been seen as “too brazen” (Rofel 1999b, 103) or have worried that the social requirements of doing business—traveling alone, smoking, and talking to nonkin men—might damage their reputations (Honig and Hershatter 1988; Judd 1990; F. Xu 2000). At the same time, however, Mayfair Yang (1994) finds that women are very active in the “domestic” cultivation of connections among relatives, friends, and neighbors. And in Fujian and Zhejiang, women have been the central actors in rotating savings and credit associations (hui) that are used to fund small-scale enterprises (Tsai 2000). (Hershatter, 2014, p.1028)

Based on 26 in-depth interviews and multiple rounds of fieldwork trips in order to research rural E-commerce entrepreneurs, Yu and Cui (2019) argue that E-commerce has helped women economically and, to an extent, within the family. But the enhancement does not consequentially transfer to the political and cultural realm, partially due to the persistent public/private gendered boundary that prohibits women from contacting external partners such as suppliers (Ibid.). Burt (2019) attests that even though it may not have a direct correlation with the success of the business, there exist differences in businessmen’s and businesswomen’s network as men tend to have more homosocial networks and are the preferred representatives of a company. Chen (2007) systematically studies female entrepreneurs in companies of different sizes in Jiaocheng County, Qiangshan district and Mianyang City in Shanxi, Hainan and Sichuan provinces respectively. She demonstrates how women in different provinces have played an important yet neglected role in China’s economic development by discussing how women cooperate with their family, especially their husbands, to attain business advancement and political connections.

Hitherto, there is very little research dedicated to urban businesswomen in the Internet age or Chinese businesswomen in general. Many publications discuss the crackdown on feminism and civil society in Xi’s era. However, the other side of the coin – the story of the success and

achievements of a rising group of businesswomen – is neglected. I argue that by looking at both sides of the coin, we can produce new theorisations of feminism to understand the paradox of women in China.

This dissertation probes the following research questions:

1. Why is there a strong presence of Chinese businesswomen and even a national discourse on the *She-Era* while China only ranked the 90th in the UN 2015 gender equality index behind Iran (Hird, 2017)?

2. What are the online and on-ground empirical lived experiences of Chinese businesswomen in the Internet age? How are they shaped by the Internet and the digital economy? How are they shaped by the on-ground environment?

3. What framework permits us to understand feminism in China under such a paradox? What are the relationships among the paradoxical feminism, and Chinese businesswomen's lived experiences of the Chinese dream in the internet age?

Chapter outline

After this introductory chapter, subsequent chapters of this thesis are as follows: Chapter Two discusses methods, and my use of both online and on-ground ethnography. I follow Jenifer Cool's (2011) word choice of “on-ground” instead of “offline” or “physical”, since the Internet is an integral part of our lives in the Internet age but not an external factor. There is not a single moment that we are not online thanks to portable smart devices and the online world being dependent on physical operators and hardware and therefore never entirely virtual. My on-ground fieldwork is multi-sited, conducted in Shenzhen and Hefei with an accumulative duration of one year. While my connections to the field were built prior to the research year, I conducted a pilot ethnography in March 2017 in Shenzhen and a formal ethnography from July to December 2017 primarily in Shenzhen and Hefei, with supplementary information retrieved

from other areas in China. I conducted 43 formal interviews in total. For my online fieldwork, besides observing my interlocutor's online businesses and social networking presentations, I also combined my work experience at an educational platform economy company from 2016 to 2019, with their permission. The information I retrieved was influenced by my positionality in the field: a 20-ish Chinese salaried-class female queer DPhil student from Oxford. Underpinning my methodology is the integration of feminist ethnography, digital ethnography and local perspectives.

Chapter three introduces the concept of *burnout market feminism* and elaborates how women are empowered in the market. I introduce Korean-German cultural theorist Han Byung-Chul's analysis of the burnout society and Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang's concept of market feminism to pave a foundation for my critical theoretical integration. Three keywords constitute burnout market feminism: burnout, empowerment and contexts. Han considers the Internet age as an achievement society, where one self-exploits for achievements. Li's market feminism paves a way to see feminism as compatible with the socialist state and capitalism. Instead of fixating on a civil society approach to feminism, which for Li risks using experiences from liberal democratic capitalist society as the basis for universalised extrapolations, market feminism values the empowerment that arises from the market and the contexts that shape and constrain individuals' actions. I dedicate the second part of this second chapter to empowerment. I show how gendered subjectivities arise from the booming economy, and especially with the use of the Internet, and how women gain leverage to negotiate with patriarchy and heteronormativity thanks to their economic advancement. I also demonstrate how group consciousness, or rather feminist solidarity, burgeons from business and commerce. Even though the Internet has enabled women to conduct business, it coincides with the feminisation of labour in the digital economy which creates structural disadvantages that push women into a more precarious industry in the first place.

Chapter four describes how people burn out, especially since the digital economy in China has increasingly drawn on emotions. Emotional capitalism is a concept proposed by Eva Illouz (2007) and developed by Han Byung-Chul (2017, pp.41-49). An increasing number of scholars question the limitations of seeing capitalism in the current era as a mere hyper exploitative and precarious neoliberal hegemony (see for instances Fisher, 2009; Standing, 2011) and explore the values, emotions and affect that have meaning for individuals (Chow, 2019; Lu, Koo, & Pun, 2019; Skeggs, 2014). On the one hand, emotions have tied one tighter to capitalism; on the other hand, through emotions, one finds meanings beyond capitalism. In other words, the emotions have created values and meanings beyond cold economic transactions as well as a vicious cycle of self-exploitation. I address the dual characteristics of emotional capitalism in three sectors of the digital economy: E-commerce, platform economy and social networking economy. I define E-commerce as selling products in a digital marketplace where customers acquire the ownership of products after transactions (e.g. eBay and Amazon); platform economy as the exchange of services where there is no shift of ownership (for instance Uber and Airbnb); and the social network marketing economy as the development of a direct marketing model (most renowned is the one used by the company Anyway) into digital space, where people use their social networks (for instance Facebook and WeChat) for marketing. By comparing E-commerce platforms Amazon and Taobao, I show how sellers in China are required to engage more in aesthetic labour and emotional labour, and especially in constructing emotional closeness with customers in order to make the consuming experience fun and enjoyable. I worked for three years for an online platform-based educational company X. I use my experience to examine how the boundary between friend and customer/seller are blurred in the platform economy. The porous boundary pushes both the seller and customer to do more “free” labour for each other, not only for the capitalist review system, but also for shared value and possibly affect that the seller and customer develop for each other. I suggest

that insights into what the customer and seller develop can be derived from concepts in *guanxi* studies that include *renqing* (norms of interpersonal behaviours) and *ganqing* (affect). I end this chapter by looking at the social network marketing platforms that engender all social relations as potentially monetizable *guanxi*, which I understand as enduring interpersonal relations consisting of both instrumental and expressive aspects.

The next two chapters, chapter five and six, explore the “emplaced” contexts that in which the heterogeneity of businesswomen’s on-ground lived experiences unfold. Inspired by Mahler and Pessar’s (2001) “gendered geographies of power”, I look at how businesswomen’s negotiation with patriarchy in the Internet age are shaped by the intersectionality of place, gender, age, class and migration trajectory. Women burnout for their different self-perceived achievements shaped by their social contexts. To be specific, I compare the business practices as well as the intimacy and family practices of three groups of women. I use three phrases to summarise their differences: caught in transition, embracing cosmopolitan desires and trapped in tradition. While chapter five depicts the first two groups of women in Shenzhen, chapter six illustrates the third group of women in Hefei.

Chapters five and six permit a comparison of the three different groups of women. The caught in transition group embodies Shenzhen’s transition from world factory to innovation hub. The lifestyles of the women in this “caught in transition group” also sits in between those of “embracing cosmopolitan desires” group and “trapped in tradition” group. I explain how these ‘caught in transition’ women burn out to retain their female leadership in the first shift of work to earn money, the second shift of work to maintain a monogynous heteronormative relationship, and the third shift of work to enhance their feminine beauty. The women of the second group, those who embrace cosmopolitan desires, are characterised by their cosmopolitan ideas about their businesses and intimacy. They have innovative business ideas, and they craft a lifestyle that is most liberated from traditional gender norms and

heteronormativity. Queerness and feminism are openly embraced by these young cosmopolitan entrepreneurs. However, their capacity to openly follow queer lives and subvert patriarchy is highly dependent on their economic achievements. For example, some masculine-identified T (Tomboy) entrepreneurs believe that they have to burn out to excel over their male counterparts in achieving cosmopolitan masculinity to “win” their same-sex partner. The third group of women is trapped in tradition. As the male-centred business *guanxi* practice of *yingchou* lingers in the inland city of Hefei, these businesswomen remain acquiescent about their husband’s infidelity that has become an important component of elite masculinity in the market economy era. Some of these women also actively perpetuate patriarchy and promote the domesticity of women verbally. These are strategies that they perceive to be beneficial for their business. A faint resistance to the gendered social order could be discerned in among some of these women in the discrepancies between their words and deeds. Their pragmatism is revealed in the paradox of some of them making independent decisions while preaching that women should be docile. Some of them also questioned elite masculinity with the idea of “not making compromises to true love”. In chapter six, I also include my own burning out in encountering sexual harassment in the course of this research in Hefei.

In the concluding chapter, chapter seven, I bookend the thesis by moving back to more abstract discussions. I revisit the paradoxical integrations that include feminism and anti-feminism in burnout market feminism and emotion and economy in emotional capitalism. Then I link burnout market feminism with the notions of the Chinese dream and she-era. While Derek Hird claims that women are excluded from the Chinese dream for its masculine and nationalistic nature (Hird, 2017), I contend that women are subsumed into the Chinese dream for reasons that are dictated by pragmatism. My interlocutors have always been tied to a collective goal of the rejuvenation of the country, known as the Chinese dream (Wang, 2014). She-era could be seen as Alibaba’s resonance with the Chinese dream, utilising an essentialised

gender language to imply Chinese leadership in the global arena. The businesswomen, as embodiments of the she-era, may be considered to negotiate with patriarchy in both confrontational and subversive ways with and for their self-perceived achievements. However, the patriarchal logic of hierarchy and domination remains intact.

Chapter 2: Methodology – Doing Off/Online

Ethnography as a Chinese Feminist

Doing Online and Onground Ethnography in Shenzhen and Hefei

I have conducted multi-sited online and onground ethnography for this research, combining formal in-depth interviews, informal interviews and participant observations. I agree with Cool (Cool, 2011) that ethnographers of the digital society should be cautious about the dichotomy implied in the wording of online and offline, as they imply a separation between the two realms. However, online communities also consist of humans living in physical spaces and with the popularisation of portable and even implanted devices connected to the Internet at all times, the two realms are becoming increasingly inseparable. In the digital era, it would be limiting for an ethnographer to study one without recognising the other's omnipresence. I, therefore, take Cool's(2011) wording of the onground, instead of online.

In this chapter, I will first delineate the methods I use for this research, which include my onground fieldwork in Shenzhen and Hefei and my online fieldwork working as a consultant for an educational company. Then, I explain how my methodology ontologically combines feminist ethnography, digital ethnography and the endeavour to produce local theories. In the following chapters, except for Chapter 3 which is based mostly on data collected from in-depth interviews, I will provide more substantial descriptions of the field sites.

Hefei and Shenzhen are selected as fieldwork sites primarily because around 60% of the E-commerce companies are concentrated in the eastern coastal area of China (Aliresearch, 2015),

which includes both cities, one of which is situated in the Pearl River Delta economic zone and the other in Yangtze river delta economic zone. While the economic scale and sector structure of the two deltas are similar, the two cities have significant differences. Whereas Shenzhen is a sub-provincial city comprising inter-provincial immigrants and situated in the Cantonese cultural region where the economic reform enabled urbanization four decades ago, Hefei is a prefecture-level city in central China with half the population of Shenzhen but boasting a history as an important socio-political centre traceable back to the Han dynasty in the 2nd century.

The formal ethnography took place at intervals mainly between March 2017 and January 2019. I first went to Shenzhen to conduct a pilot ethnography in March 2017. I then spent time in Shenzhen and Hefei from July to December 2017. Finally, I spent December 2018 to January 2019 in Shenzhen. In August 2017, I travelled to Beijing for a week to gain official affiliation with Peking University as a visiting scholar. As most ethnographers do, I combined participant observation with the semi-structured in-depth interview as my research method. While participant observations allowed me to participate in my respondents' daily life and experience the mundane and "embarrassing" details that one cannot, or does not want to, narrate in interviews, in-depth interviews allowed me to understand their business model and career story more systematically. As they narrated their stories, I was also able to get a sense of how they wanted me to perceive them. In-depth interviews also provide an opportunity for me to explain my research and standpoint as a researcher.

I conducted 18 formal interviews in Shenzhen, 21 interviews in Hefei, 3 in Beijing, 1 in Shanghai, and 1 in Chengdu. Since many of the businesspeople live a mobile life and have properties all over the country, the localities indicate where their companies are based. Research questions included why and how they started their business, how they operate the

business and how they manage business-related [ca. investors, business partner(s), employees, clients, customers] and non-business related relationships [family and intimate partner(s)].

Of the 44 formal interviews, 6 were carried out with businessmen and the rest were with businesswomen. 26 research participants had narrowly defined their companies as E-commerce companies and sell their products or services in E-commerce platforms such as *Taobao* and *TMall*. 1 sold products on her social media platform. 9 operated *WeChat* blogs and made profits by advertisement as well as by providing services or products to their subscribers. The rest operated companies of various types including advertising, animation and real estate but did advertising or transactions online. 9 owned small enterprises, 12 owned medium-sized enterprises, 1 owned large enterprise and the rest owned mini enterprises.¹⁵ The turnover of their businesses ranges from 1 million CYN per year to 500 million CYN per year. Many of them were interviewed by domestic and international media about their businesses. I did not manage to gather information about their assets. However, most of them regularly discussed investments and properties they owned all over China. As Miao argues, since the middle class in urban China is a highly flexible category which people with large income discrepancy would identify with, it is more sensible to distinguish salary class from the business class with the latter having more assets but less stability (Miao, 2018). My interlocutors then belong to the group of business class.

4 participants were single and 4 participants were divorced. The rest were in stable relationships or married. 3 of the research participants were in a same-sex relationship and there were another 4 research participants who indicated same-sex desire. 18 research

¹⁵ The National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China defines four types of enterprise size with respect to staff/employees numbers and revenue according to business sectors. For the retail sector, large enterprises have more than 300 staff/employees and a revenue of more than 200 million RMB ; medium enterprises have 100 – 300 staff/employees and a revenue between 5 and 200 million RMB; small enterprises employ 10 – 50 people with the revenue from 1 to 5 million RMB; finally, mini companies have less than 10 employees and 1 million RMB revenue. I would use this criterion to define their business size.

participants had children. 2 participants chose not to reveal their marital status. 11 participants had a college degree, 3 had secondary education degree, 3 were still bachelor students at the time of the interview and the rest had at least a bachelor's degree or above. I also interviewed 2 incubator managers.

In order to ensure the anonymity of the research participants, their names, company names, and in some cases, even their product types are altered. I purposely avoid an information chart that summarizes all the research participants so as to make a keyword search in search engines more difficult. Many of them were interviewed by domestic and international press and TV programmes. This applies to all research participants other than Sanmu in Beijing, who insisted on using her real name as a way to promote the feminist activism she fought for via her business. I have referred to my research participants in Shenzhen by English pseudonyms and my research participants in Hefei by Chinese pseudonyms. This is because most of the Shenzhen research participants did not use their Chinese given names in daily communication. They were referred to by their friends, business partners and even employees by their English names, their Chinese nicknames (like Sanmu, literally means “three pieces of wood”) or the initial English letters of their Chinese names in pinyin (for instance YC for Yuanchao). In contrast, the research participants in Hefei were usually addressed by their family names and their title (for instance, Boss Guo) by their business partners and employees, and their full names by their close friends and family (for instance, Guo Yuanchao).

When making comparisons between the two cities, I also take into consideration that the concept of localities has to be contextualised in the internet age (Pink et al., 2016). My research participants could easily reach out to people (e.g. customers and business partners) beyond the boundary of their physical location by using social media. Moreover, many of them lived a highly mobile life of engaging in leisure and business trips outside a place that they call home. For instance, I met with some of my Shenzhen research participants in Hong Kong and the UK,

and some of my Hefei research participants in Shenzhen and the UK. But at the same time, the urban/regional layers and complexities of the cities where their family and companies are based significantly contribute to the sociocultural shaping of what they perceive as achievements and their strategies and tactics in negotiating with patriarchy.

At the beginning of the in-depth interviews, I read the translated participant information sheet word by word to the research participants. As my research participants were not necessarily familiar with the method of ethnography, this enabled me to explain my method clearly to them.

If you are happy to take part in the study, you will be asked to give me permission to conduct multiple participant observations and formal and informal interviews with you and the people around you at work. I will also invite you to participate in a formal interview. The study will take place in your company and any other place that you are comfortable with me around, which will include your post-work socialization and your interactions with business connections. The formal interviews will be recorded but the record and transcript will only be accessible to the researcher.

Upon finishing this line, I added that with their permission I would observe their social media and they could block me on social media anytime they wanted. While the digital, including social media, online community and the mediated communication, has deeply influenced our lived experiences, emotions and practices, it just seems natural, if not mandatory, for an ethnographer to conduct ethnography both online and onground (Horst, Miller, & Horst, 2012; Pink et al., 2016; Whitehead & Wesch, 2012). As my research participants conduct their businesses online, I have followed their blogs, E-commerce shops and became a user of their application and online-platforms. I also observed their social media.

My research participants on most occasions only spent time with me when they were not working. And it felt too awkward and inappropriate to observe their work interactions with customers and business partners by staring at their mobile phone screens. I quickly realised that the crucial part of the research picture was missing: the first-hand experience of doing business on an online platform.

Serendipitously, by the time of fieldwork preparation, I had already been working for a while as a freelance consultant for an online platform-based educational company based in Chengdu. I subsequently gained permission from the company to use my experience in my thesis and I conducted formal interviews via internet phone call with the marketing director who recruited me and with the female co-founder of the company. My online business work experience lasted from July 2016 to January 2019. I created a personal profile on a platform that provided services including overseas studies consultation, personal statement modification, CV modification and research proposal modification. The usual procedure is that a student first sends an online request for one of my services through the platform. After I have approved it, the student transfers money to the platform, which allows the student to contact me freely. All consultations and modifications are conducted online. After the service is completed, the student and I give each other reviews (star 1-5) and a few lines of public comment. So far, I have 106 reviews on the E-platform with only one not-5 star review. It is only after completing the mutual review process that I can retrieve money that the student has paid through the platform. While I set the price myself, the price a student pays includes a platform fee which is 30% on top of my service fee. I also took notes after communicating with my online students. I will mainly use this source of work experience in chapter four where I analyse buyer-seller relationship on the platform economy and social network marketing economy.

Access and Power Relations

Access to the field

In the context of China, it is agreed that the access to upper-middle class, and especially the urban elites, is more difficult to obtain for a researcher not only because of their limited time available for researchers but also because reciprocity is harder to achieve (Heimer & Thogersen, 2012, p.14). My access to the field was made possible by my *guanxi* (enduring interpersonal relationship) with my research participants prior to my DPhil journey.

In December 2016, as I was reading a Chinese media article about women's difficulties in securing investment, I realised that I had known the author, Yvonne, for more than a decade! Yvonne was my primary school classmate. I immediately sent her a message on *weibo* [microblogging website] and *QQ* [instant messenger] to meet up. I soon received a "yes" to my request. Recalling moments from our shared past and contacts soon led to a rapport between Yvonne and I, resulting in a warm invitation into her life – meeting her business partner, collaborators, friends, intimate partner and family. I also made contacts with other businesswomen using my local contacts. One group of research participants dwelled in Nanshan district, home to high-tech industrial parks and local universities. I spent some time in a university-based business association named Broaden mainly consisting of young university students and graduates (including overseas returnees), who are entrepreneurs, investors and finance managers. The other group of research participants lived in Longgang district where light industrial factories are clustered. Most of the research participants there had factories and used the internet to sell their products. They were all members of the district's E-commerce business association. For both groups, I regularly went to business association gatherings with them, visited their companies, had meals with their close friends and business partners, and went on short trips with them.

The access to businesswomen in Hefei was also established beforehand. In 2015, I met Jing in an academic gathering in Hong Kong. She had just commenced her second graduate degree outside mainland China and was ready to make some friends outside the business realm. She initiated a conversation with me about her triple role as academic, entrepreneur and mother. As I probed into the kind of company she owned with great curiosity, she answered with a slightly provocative humour that “if you *baidu* [Chinese search engine equivalent to google] me, you would know”. As we laughed together upon her answer, my friendship with one of the most prominent E-commerce sellers in Anhui province started. She travelled between her overseas university and her company in Hefei on a regular basis, living a high-end mobile life (Elliott & Urry, 2014). As our relationship deepened, she invited me to visit her company and family in Hefei in January 2016. Later, when I came back for my DPhil research, even though she was based overseas for her studies, she generously let me stay in her company every day and asked her husband Zhao to introduce me to different business people in the city. Their company occupies a block in an industrial park in Hefei where many of their neighbours are also business people engaged in E-commerce. During my fieldwork in Hefei, I had a routine of doing interviews during the daytime and attending social activities with Zhao during the night time. When I was not conducting interviews, I stayed in Jing’s company and observed the daily routines of the four departments of an E-commerce company: operation, logistics, design and customer services. I accompanied Zhao when he spent time with business partners, friends and family in his office.

Power relations with research participants and reciprocity

To engage with reflexive ethnography requires an ethnographer to think in terms of her own positionality compared with the research participants’, and the effect on the knowledge that the ethnographer would produce (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Commonly, ethnographers

occupy a higher status compared to their research participants after taking intersectionality (race, class, gender, geo-locality) into consideration. However, doing elite studies could put an ethnographer into a situation where research participants are of similar or higher status (Dána-Ain & Christa, 2011; Nader, 1972). This holds even more true for me as I entered the field as a queer Chinese DPhil student from a salary-classed family, while most of my research participants were cis-gendered women of the business class. Many of them had as much international experience as I did (more so in Shenzhen than Hefei), and a few of them also held a Master or a PhD degree. This is not a group that is deprived of voice, in need of someone to represent them. On the contrary, many of them have been interviewed by local or national, and even international media, and they also wrote their stories online as a way to promote their businesses and enhance their brands. It is in English academic writings on women in China that their voices are relatively absent, compared to the attention given to Chinese feminist activism.

Reciprocity is harder to achieve with a group of affluent research participants, since material rewards of a meagre amount might even risk breaking rapport, especially at the very beginning. After a while in the field, I realised that it was because of my Oxford institutional affiliation that people were willing to spare time with me and take me to different social gatherings. Very often, I was introduced to the children of my research participants and their friends for overseas studies consultations and taken to different social gatherings to share my educational trajectory. Some of them also uploaded photos of me, my name card or even the informant consent form with Oxford logo to their social media to display their global cultural capital and gain face by knowing an “Oxford PhD student”.

They also told me explicitly that “I want people in the world to know that Chinese companies can also be very creative”. I am very aware that my research participants want me to produce a diligent and glamorous image of them as representatives of businesswomen in

China, as they imagine that China still constantly needs to prove itself and defend its image in the global arena. By no means would I reduce my research participants, and to a lesser extent myself, to more “misery porn” (Ortner, 2016, p.65) just to demonstrate to English-reading academic audiences that Chinese women still suffer from patriarchy. Ortner (2016) criticises the body of “dark anthropological” research that puts too much emphasis on the harsh dimensions of social life (power, domination, inequality, and oppression) while the anthropologies of the good (“good life”, “happiness” and morality) are neglected. Therefore, I see fair, well-balanced and multi-layered representation(s) of Chinese businesswomen the most crucial part of reciprocity.

From the standpoint of a Chinese feminist

The underpinning epistemology of the methodology that I have adopted in this research sits at the crossroads of feminist ethnography, digital ethnography and an endeavour to use local theories. In line with the post-structuralist and feminist understanding to knowledge production, the underlining ontology of the thesis is that situatedness underpins the process throughout pre-fieldwork, fieldwork and post-fieldwork (Neumann & Neumann, 2015). Knowledge is produced in negotiation with the researcher’s own autobiographical experiences in terms of the research topic and theory decisions as well as the researcher’s interactions with subjects in the field sites (Ibid.). Therefore, I have considered my research participants interlocutors and friends instead of informants who have provided me with data for “objective” scientific research in a positivist sense.

Feminist ethnography

“Research methods themselves are neither feminist nor non-feminist. They offer us tools through which to collect data and are used in a variety of scholarly projects. Rather, it is

our methodology—the rationale we create for the links we make among feminist theory, our research strategies and ethical decisions, the data we collect, and its relevance to the world—that is what marks our research as feminist ethnography.” (Dána-Ain & Christa, 2011, p.84)

Feminist ethnography, and feminist research in general, is concerned about materialistic and symbolic power inequalities that stem from gender and sexuality, and scrutinises what constructs gender and sexuality in a society in the first place (Dána-Ain & Christa, 2011; Jackson & Jones, 1998). Feminist theorists not only take back the position of knowledge production from men, but provide alternative theories that are different from universal, binary or linear evolutionary modern theories (Jackson & Jones, 1998). Feminist ethnography is defined not by the gender of an ethnographer but by the underlining epistemology. To be concerned with “which groups of people own more social resources” and “have women earned more money via E-commerce” is inadequate because such questions do not touch on the doing and undoing, construction and re-construction, negotiations and negations of gender that are integral to the everyday mundane lives of research participants.

West and Zimmerman popularized the social constructionist approach to gender and debunked the biological essentialist gender notion by famously proclaiming that gender is what we do during daily interactions (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, the model of doing gender is criticized for gender accountability that perpetuates gender norms. It is by doing a society’s gender ideals that a gendered subject gains recognition, a process that also reinforced the gender binary (Deutsch, 2007; Risman, 2009). The constructionist approach on gender, after all, has also enabled scholars to understand ways people undo gender, moving away from the binary gender distinction (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007), or redo gender, doing alternative gender on the premise that gender cannot be abandoned as suggested by undoing gender (West & Zimmerman, 2009).

Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith develops the method of institutional ethnography that looks into the institutionalised ordinary daily interactions in different social contexts and urges a researcher to unveil how gender hierarchies and inequalities are produced and reproduced in mundane interactions (Smith, 1987). For Dorothy Smith (1987), it is equally important that feminist research methods object to an ontological and epistemological transposition of knowledge onto the life of the research subjects. Jackson and Jones (1998) similarly noted that,

“Feminist theory, cannot, therefore, be totalising; it cannot explain the world for all women, at all times, in all places. It has moved away from universalising statements towards the local and particular. It might now be better characterised as a process of theorising rather than as a privileged body of knowledge. The term 'theorising' implies that the thinking is fluid and provisional, and continually being modified, whereas 'theory' implies something static, a fixed point of reference.” (pp.8-9).

Feminist research questions the binary between theory and practice. It also challenges an objective take on knowledge. Similar to a post-structural critique in anthropology, feminist ethnography takes the stance of producing multiple truths and recognises that the knowledge produced is an artefact deeply influenced by one's positionality (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Dána-Ain & Christa, 2011). As Okely and Callaway advocated in their effort to legitimise auto-ethnography, “some feminist anthropologists... have already registered this shift by adopting a dialogical methodology which rejects the division between subject and object, places the self within the field of investigation, evaluates positionality and power relations, and creates an intersubjective matrix for knowledge” (Okely & Callaway, 1992, pp. 43-44).

While post-structural knowledge does not necessarily lead to an emancipatory end, feminist researchers actively think of ways to participate in the production of knowledge in a communal and emancipatory sense. This includes citing other feminist thinkers in order to recognise thoughts that have been structurally pushed to the margin, and producing knowledge in

collaborative forms with research participants and presenting the knowledge in forms beyond academic writings. Shui Jingjun and Maria Jaschok, for instance, have been working closely with female *Ahong* (religious leaders) in Henan province China and co-produced a songbook with their research participants (Jaschok, 2018).

Taking intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) into consideration, especially after the third-wave post-colonial critique, feminists from the first world do not see local women as uneducated objects awaiting for emancipation but as subjects with their own tactics and strategies for navigating patriarchy. In analysing Egyptian urban women's mosque movement, for example, Mahmood (2001) argues that we should not take a left-liberal secular stance and assume an inherent antithesis between Islam and feminism; rather we should "take into consideration the desire, motivations, commitment and aspirations of the people to whom these practices are important" (p.225). She examines shyness and veiling as "agential capacity... entailed not only in those acts that result in (progressive) change but also those that aim toward continuity, stasis and stability" (Ibid., p.212).

Similarly, Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang, the founder of the first gender studies programme and women's museum in mainland China, also points out that feminism in China ought not to be put under the western paradigm of civil society against the state but with and within China's development (X. Li, 2005b). In this light, books such as *Revolution Postponed* (M. Wolf, 1985), *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China* (Stacey, 1983) and especially *Betraying the Big Brother* (Hong Fincher, 2018), while pointing out important patriarchal-heteronormative suppression that women face in China, seem too quick to conclude that feminism cannot coincide with authoritarianism. Even though the now internationally renowned young Chinese activists *feminist five* have meaningfully embraced the resistance associated with a civil society approach (see for example Hong Fincher, 2018 and Jacobs, 2015), there are also other more nuanced ways of participating in feminism while not colluding with state power. I will

demonstrate in my later chapters how businesswomen in urban China combat, subvert and navigate patriarchy, and do and redo gender under circumstances that allow them to thrive economically but shackle them via a resurgence of traditional gender discourse.

Digital ethnography

The guiding mentality underpinning feminism ethnography and digital ethnography intersect as both a requirement for a researcher to take the fundamental cruxes of gender and the digital not as external variables but integral factors deeply entrenched in people's lives as well as their surroundings. In their guideline book *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, the authors (Pink et al., 2016) propose not thinking of digital technology as separate from human beings but in terms of how our everyday life has already been digitalised. In other words, the goal of a digital ethnography is no longer to take technology, especially the Internet, as an external factor to our life as demonstrated in psychologist Sherry Turkle's continuous work (Turkle, 1997, 2011) about the negative impact of the digital world on physical wellbeing, but to understand that the digital has already been embedded ubiquitously in and dispersed throughout our everyday lives. The physical and the virtual world are not parallel but intertwined. Whitehead and Wesch similarly proposed to take a paradigm shift in anthropology to do post-human research on digital subjects (Whitehead & Wesch, 2012). The methodology alludes to actor-network theory (Latour, 2005) or the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010) where human and non-human actors fluidize and inter-mesh in one non-hierarchical flow. An ethnographer, following this methodology, shall look at human-human interactions and how humans interact with mushrooms (Tsing, 2015) as well as cyborgs and dogs (Haraway, 1991, 2008), and the infrastructure of the city as well as sensory experiences that elude a human narration as explored in sensory ethnography (Pink, 2009). Based on her ten-year ethnography, Cool (2011) demonstrates how the online and onground

(as she believes that no one in her field can be entirely offline) interactions of the geek community in San Francisco have strengthened physical embodiments such as same university affiliation, negating the transhumanist notion that proclaims technologies could assist human beings to elude embodiment.

In my case of studying the businesswomen in the Internet age, I, on the one hand, take into consideration how the Internet has enabled women to do business and how business ideas and practices transform with the Internet; and on the other hand, I remain very cautious that the Internet is just as entrenched as other factors, such as physical geographical locations, in shaping their perceptions of achievements and negotiations with patriarchy. While my interlocutors explored business possibilities online, they often claimed that they brought the “internet ethos” offline to the brick-and-mortar shops, restaurants and bars which they managed and in which they invested.

The Internet ethos is the keyword of doing business in the Internet era. Internet ethos, means taking the Internet not as a tool but as a methodology in approaching business (W. Zhou, 2016). In a macro perspective, it indicates the transformation from the labour-intensive manufactory industries to innovation-driven industries, from “made in China” to “designed in China”. In other words, the Internet ethos is not only about using the Internet as a marketplace but also about creative and innovative business ideas and models. In a micro perspective for my interlocutors, it means targeting a niche market with memorable branding strategies. In 2009, Jack Ma published an article titled *Small is Beautiful* in New York Times.

“Look at the example of big-box retailers who took control of the system and forced manufacturers, not just here in China but around the world, into mass runs of identical merchandise with only the narrowest of margins...In the coming decade, the Internet will make the long-awaited transition from a marketing channel into a virtual infrastructure that

will allow smaller companies, which are really the major engines of innovation, to compete effectively with major corporations.” (Ma, 2009)

On the last day of 2018, I went to Luo Zhenyu’s new year talk show *Friend of Time* with an interlocutor in the Shenzhen Bay Sports Centre. He is an entrepreneur known for his open lectures and educational platform. Besides more than ten thousand of audiences in the stadium, his talk was also aired in Shenzhen satellite TV and iQiyi online video platform. The theme of the new year concert lecture was *microtrends*, a term coined by Mark Penn and Kinney Zalesne in recognising how 1% of the population could trigger a butterfly effect in the business and social ecology (He, 2019, Chap. 1). Chinese economist He Fan (2019) modified the calibration of the microtrends to 0.1% of the population, adjusting to the large number of the Chinese population, and enumerated a variety of successful business cases ranging from drones to auto-tuning and bubble tea. The embodiments of the Internet ethos are not limited to high-tech practices, but also social-media-savvy marketing strategies and aesthetics.

Between 2016 and 2018, I witnessed the rising of these *microtrend* enterprises during my fieldwork: the healthy living and fitness promoting restaurant chain *Sexy Salad* (Startupgrind, 2016), staffless *Supermonkey Gym* that usually appeared in refurbished shipping containers in shopping malls (Millward, 2017), and the app-based coffeehouse *luckin coffee* which recently sank in fiasco because of an appalling accounting scandal (X. Shen, Qu, Yuan, & Han, 2020). My interlocutors looked up to these enterprises and would compare their business with them, claiming that their businesses had also embodied the Internet ethos. Nevertheless, while women are mainly users of the Internet platforms who might start *microtrends*, men usually managed the Internet infrastructure.

Local perspective

The quandary of using western academic theories to explain Asian practices has already been noted by many (K.-H. Chen, 2010; Hillenbrand, 2010; Qi, 2014; Sun, 2011). In particular, scholars observe that doing so perpetuates the western-centric production of knowledge. The problems of combining local practice and Euro-American theory are not only that of perpetuating an imperialistic epistemological stance but of producing a distorted lens through which to see the world. Earlier scholarship in the late 20th century had already reflected on creating Asian theory and local perspectives. In 1989, Mizoguchi Kozo famously proposed to use *China as Method*, contextualising Chinese classics in the Chinese contexts (rather than as a part of Japanese classics) in order to have a better conversation with Japanese and Korean scholarships (Mizoguchi, 2010); In the 1960s, Takeuchi Yoshimi alerted a post-Second World War America-following Japanese academia to look at neighbouring countries, and especially China, and to think of *Asia as Method* (Cited in Sun, 2019), rather than just using western theories. As the Cold war still lingers in Asia with unsolved geo-political disputes in the Korean peninsula and between China-Taiwan (to a lesser extent Hong Kong), a post-Cold war knowledge communication has burgeoned but is yet to fully thrive.

Hong Kong-based cultural critic Daniel Vukovich has criticised the contemporary scholarship produced in the west about China as Sinological-Orientalist, haunted by the Cold war mentality sharing a common ground that “China is becoming-the-same as the liberal and modern West (howsoever haltingly), or it must and should and will do so; this is the chief statement of the new orientalism ” (Vukovich, 2012, p.9) . Even though such a statement risks essentialising and reducing scholarship to the ideology of its production place, the accusation alerts us to always contextualise the process of knowledge production, especially when Asia is home not only to shared cultural origin of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, but also a co-presence of the most divergent social institutions that are authoritarian and democratic, socialist

and capitalist. It also ushers us to pay more attention to the scholarship produced in Asia about Asia. The school of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, established by Chen Kuan-Hsing, Chua Teng-Hui and Naoki Sakai, has eloquently proposed an academic politics of inter-referencing within Asia to strategically de-imperialize the knowledge production process, which is elucidated in Chen's landmark publication *Asia as Method* (K.-H. Chen, 2010). Japan-based scholar Wang Ke, for instance, has explained how nationalism and the concept of nation-state in China was deeply influenced by Chinese writers' and politicians' experiences in Japan in the late 19th and early 20th century (K. Wang, 2015). Mainland Chinese scholars such as Sun Ge (Sun, 2011), Wang Hui (H. Wang, 2010) and Ge Zhaoguang (Ge, 2011) have also approached Chinese history from an Asian perspective. As Sun Ge and Wang Hui demonstrate respectively in their articles about how thoughts and practices from South Korea and Okinawa could inspire other Asian countries in terms of de-imperialism against the US, Ge Zhaoguang has redefined modernity through a reinterpretation of history in East Asia and argued that East Asian modernity was palpably initiated in Song Dynasty [960-1279]. However, as clarified by all aforementioned scholars, the epistemological strategy of Inter-referencing does not mean a clear break from the knowledge produced in the west, since such a static "western-eastern" binary in itself is a western cultural-political legacy (Sun, 2019). Oxford-based scholar Margaret Hillenbrand proposed that in seeking to build East Asian theory one could

"[c]oin new terms and devise new paradigms for the study of the East Asian creative humanities... or (in her case as a western academic based in the west) seek to be interdisciplinary and international in rather more prosaic and humdrum ways: by peering over the disciplinary wall, by trying to identify when 'East Asia' is as illuminating a site of enquiry as are its discrete nation-states, and by using translations when a lack of training across the broad spectrum of East Asian languages makes them necessary"(Hillenbrand, 2010, p.332).

In other words, taking an Asia-local perspective entails an international thinking that is not western.

Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang (X. Li, 2010) also elaborates in the book *Wolf Totem and the Post-Mao Utopian: A Chinese Perspective on Contemporary Western Scholarship* that a local theory from within China should be neither post-colonial nor post-modern as China did not go through colonialism and that the deconstruction approach entrenched in postmodernism prevents developing countries from forming a solid cultural ground.

A local methodology, for Li Xiaojiang, should be post-utopian (X. Li, 2010). Li juxtaposed post-utopianism with post-modernism and post-colonialism: “Post-modernism responds to material supremacy; post-colonialism responds to invasion and occupation; and post-utopianism responds to lessons one learnt on the way towards utopia” (Ibid., p.503). “It [post-utopianism] exfoliates ‘self’ from post-modernism; it exfoliates ‘us’ from post-colonialism; and lastly, in the face of its own lesson, it exfoliates experience from failure” (Ibid. p.499). Li identifies many cultural products including rock song from Cui Jian and the novel *Wolf Totem* because post-utopian as they provide allegories that could induce pain and reflections on post-socialism (Mao in Chinese context), post-modernism and post-colonialism (the nomadic against Han ethnic in *Wolf Totem*); and argues that post-utopianism shall on the one hand “expose the hoax in the practice of utopia” and on the other hand “pay unremitting efforts to repair and reconstruct utopian ideals”(p.498). The concept of post-utopia denies a monolithic heavenly ideal as utopia (such as socialism), yet seeks idealism in secular mundane everyday life. In a constant negation of a static theory, a pursuit of a local theory is underway – ongoing eternal dynamics of post-utopianism. Therefore, Li ends her book by appealing to scholars to

return to the **presence**, without presumed knowledge, and revive anthropology as the local methodology¹⁶.

The **presence**, as a researcher should be aware of, is also highly comprehensive and sometimes contradictory. To conduct multi-sited fieldwork in China is to constantly review the contradictions and heterogeneity of China, in order to purposively avoid falling into either an orientalist approach or an ahistorical universalistic approach that reduces China to a static homogenous essentialised “other” or “us”.

From a materialistic perspective, the economic gap within China is so large that it is argued that there exist “four worlds within one China”: the first world consists of Chinese global cities (first-tier cities) Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen; the second world comprises major provincial capital cities and the coastal areas; the third world is made up of major rural areas and the fourth world consists of remote poor rural areas mostly inhabited by ethnic minorities (A. Hu, 2001). My research traverses between the first world of Shenzhen and second world of Hefei, equivalent to travelling between a developed country and a developing country with the distance similar to that between Brussels and Budapest (ca 1300 km). In 2017, the GDP of Shenzhen reached 2243839 million RMB (ca 338000 million USD), surpassing that of Singapore and Denmark which ranked between 30 and 40 in the world according to the World Bank while the GDP of Hefei was approximately 721300 million RMB (ca 108700 million USD), between Ukraine and Morocco (Hefei.gov.cn, 2018; Sz.gov.cn, 2018; Worldbank.org, 2018). In her canonical study *the Global Cities*, Saskia Sassen (1991) alerted us that global cities around the world are more similar to each other than they are to other cities in their respective countries- ie. New York is more similar to Tokyo than to Palo Alto. Moreover, the divergence within China goes beyond economics because each place carries its

¹⁶ Quotations translated by the author.

own history, food culture, social-cultural diversity, dialects and political and developmental agendas.

The thesis does not intend to provide any clear-cut answer to yes or no questions such as “whether the Internet has empowered businesswomen in China” but to build a mosaic through sometimes oxymoronic pictures to let the readers immerse themselves in the **presence** of my research participants. In the next chapter, I introduce my theoretical framework of the burnout market feminism and elucidate how businesswomen are empowered to negotiate with patriarchy by their business. However, in the subsequent chapters after the next, I put the spotlight on burning out and the multiple social contexts that shape, enable but also constrain women’s decisions and actions.

Chapter 3- Burnout Market Feminism and Empowerment

I ended Chapter 1 with a paradox in China. While the crackdown on the civil society feminists is undisputable and brutal, businesswomen shone in the global economic arena in terms of number and assets. Hitherto, the discussions of contemporary Chinese feminism have not gone beyond a dual storyline of either resisting capitalist patriarchy by taking the civil society approach or recognising women's dependence and appropriation of men for resources and capital (B. Meng & Huang, 2017; A. X. Wu & Dong, 2019)..

To fill the gap, this chapter introduces the concept of burnout market feminism, my theoretical coupling of Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang's (X. Li, 2005b, 2005a) market feminism with Korean-German cultural theorist Han Byung-Chul's (2015) work *The Burnout Society*. I will first discuss their work to provide a theoretical foundation for the thesis. Han considers the Internet age as an achievement society, where one self-exploits for work achievement. Li's market feminism can be summarised in two keywords: empowerment and context. She denounces Marxist feminist thought as obsolete and the post-structuralist feminist approach as west-centric, as she situates Chinese feminism in and with development (X. Li, 2005a). Following her arguments, I will show that market feminism values the spawning of bottom-up subjectivities and solidarity among women in the market. The second half of the chapter centres on empowerment. I show how the wide usage of the Internet has empowered women and their gendered subjectivities as users to start online businesses, facilitated by the flourishing economy of China. I will also evaluate the critique that this coincides with the feminization of labour in the digital economy and becomes a structural disadvantage that pushes women into a more precarious industry in the first place.

Burnout Society: auto-exploitation

“Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society [leistungsgesellschaft]. Also its inhabitants are no longer ‘obedience subjects’ but ‘achievement-subjects.’ They are entrepreneurs of themselves...Disciplinary society is a society of negativity...Achievement society, more and more, is in the process of discarding negativity... Unlimited *Can* is the positive modal verb of achievement society...Excess work and performance escalate into auto-exploitation... The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited.... Such self-referentiality produces a paradoxical freedom that abruptly switches over into violence because of the compulsive structures dwelling within it.” (Han, 2015,Chapter 2)

Burnout society is a society where neoliberalism is exacerbated by the Internet. Neoliberalism, in general, refers to laissez-faire reforms that favour free-market economy (Harvey, 2005). It often takes the form of privatisation of different social institutions like schools, public transportation and hospitals. The interrelated ideology promoted by neoliberalism is self-enterprising, which presumes that individuals alone are responsible for their success and failure, rather than social structures. In line with the neoliberal paradigm, they also see the rise of a radicalised individualisation. Giddens, Beck and Lash discuss this under the term reflexive modernity, where individuals constantly face risks of not having an “increase of mastery and consciousness but a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible” (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Latour, cited in Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003, p.3; Beck, Gidden, & Lash, 1994). For Bauman, the keyword is ‘liquid’, which means there is no solid ground for an individual to anchor herself in terms of values, love and institution. This means that the burden of the explosion of chances and uncertainty lies solely on individuals’ shoulders (Bauman, 2000, 2003). Han (2015, 2017a, 2017b) argues that the Internet intensified all these problems because people are fed with explosive information generated by algorithms on social media,

while being trapped in precarious jobs in a digital economy that turns them into auto-exploiters under the illusion of freedom.

Closely linked with Han's concept of auto-exploiter is the concept of prosumer. The term prosumer, a linguistic combination of consumer and producer, coined by futurist Toffler in 1981, is defined as "a consumer who takes part in the production or distribution process, without being paid in wages" (Frayssé & O'Neil, 2015, p.4). It is observed that the US has gone through a transformation from production-driven capitalism to consumer-driven capitalism (after the Second World War and before the Internet age), and prosumer capitalism especially with the establishment of Web 2.0 (user-generating content compared with provider-generating content Web 1.0) in both the online and onground realms (Frayssé & O'Neil, 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).¹⁷ The labour relations in prosumer capitalism have two characteristics. Firstly, capitalists are urged to provide certain services for free in exchange for profit made by advertising (i.e. YouTube), commission (i.e. Airbnb), personal data (i.e. Facebook), or venture capital investment (i.e. Twitter, Mobike). Secondly, prosumers developed an ethics of providing labour for free with affection (e.g. in updating blogs or photo albums) or even a sense of mission (as in cyber-liberationism or Heckerism – both advocating open-source access) while being exploited (i.e. getting little or no share from the profit made by the platform and having no labour welfare protection). For Han (2015), auto-exploitation is a development of Foucault's technologies of the self. It is no longer that the panopticon surveillance system urges the subjects to self-discipline but our own desire for self-improvement and achievement that has pushed us to be exploited incessantly by ourselves. The auto-exploitation is made more obvious with my interlocutors as they are the literal "employer of themselves", managing their own businesses. As prosumers are not alienated from the products they produce anymore, the

¹⁷ Ongoing examples would include customers providing services to themselves trading for a lower price in fast food chains and online example would be users uploading contents voluntarily in social media platforms.

mental status is no longer the longing for leisure (time when one does not need to produce), but being in a constant state of panic because one is **not** working enough, **not** burning out and **not** achieving all possibilities in life.

Maximum work hours seem to have become meaningless in the time of prosumer capitalism. The prevalence of smart mobile phones has extended working hours for everyone as workers are never exempted from receiving emails and voice messages whenever and wherever the Internet reaches (Langley & Leyshon, 2018; Muntaner, 2018). Because of its omnipresence, the Internet facilitates corporates to discipline and exploit their employer. Two types of workers emerge with the digital economy: the precariat class without fixed contracts doing low-end gig economy jobs and the successful entrepreneurs who rise to fame and wealth because of the Internet. However, while the former (e.g. Uber driver) are still alienated from the products of their labour (e.g. working non-stop as an unlicensed taxi driver for Uber), the latter often have full control over the products they produce and *choose* to burnout incessantly. The former is exploited while the latter auto-exploit. Han explained:

“As the entrepreneur of its own self, the neoliberal subject has no capacity for relationships with others that might be free of purpose... A real feeling of freedom occurs only in a fruitful relationship – when being with others brings happiness. But today’s neoliberal regime leads to utter isolation; as such, it does not really free us at all... Neoliberalism represents a highly efficient, indeed an intelligent, system for exploiting freedom... Everything that belongs to practices and expressive forms of liberty – emotion, play and communication – comes to be exploited... Only when freedom is exploited are returns maximized.” (Han, 2017b, Chapter 1)

For Han (Han, 2017b), the auto-exploitation hinges on deceptive freedom, as opposed to “real” freedom. He argues that, because of the Internet and especially social media, individuals are enabled only to capitalise on their social relations without emotional resonance and

meaningful communication (Han, 2017a, 2018b). That is because relationships on social media are reduced to an enhanced beautified presentation of oneself, embodied in selfies, and the flaunting of one's achievements awaiting others to click "like" (Han, 2018a). Individuals become disconnected atoms who can find value only in personal achievements and therefore the exploiter of oneself, that is, individuals become the Sisyphus in the age of auto-exploitation, working tirelessly till eternity (Han, 2015). Auto-exploiters are the atoms of the burnout society.

Like many philosophers, Han provides only a generalising universal critique without specifying the context in the developed capitalist society. Gender is also not a substantial perspective in his work. In my research, in contradistinction to Han's universal approach, the context matters. By contextualising Chinese businesswomen's burnout in post-socialist neoliberal China, I propose that both self-exploitation and the burnout society are gendered experiences.

Another issue with the existing scholarship is that individualisation under hyper/liquid modernity and neoliberalism is mainly theorised with post-1970s Euro-American experiences (Bauman, 2000; Beck et al., 1994). Without essentialising China, it is limiting, if not incorrect, to simply understand China as a neoliberal capitalist society without acknowledging its socialism. Even though the economic reform has introduced the free market and privatisation, the state still owns critical resources and socialist central planning still operates on multiple levels (Harvey, 2005; Horesh & Lim, 2017; Rofel, 2007; F. Wu, 2010). A socialism advocate and political science scholar Lin Chun (2006, 2013) argues that the alternative modernity that is taking place in China is an open-ended process shaped by nationalism, socialism and developmentalism, where the reintroduction of the free market is as much a product of the travelling of global capitalism as it is a developmentalist strategy that reinforces the legitimacy of the socialist state. Focusing on the queer community in mainland China, Bao Hongwei (2018, 2020) argues that queer activism in both forms of community mobilisation activities and

art/culture in China should not be calibrated by the LGBT movements in the west. Instead, it ought to be contextualised under the congruence of post-socialism and neoliberalism. Bao (2020) proposes to analyse queer cultural products and productions with the concept of postsocialist metamorphosis, which allows space for both subjectivation and desubjectivation of the constantly evolving sexual identities including but not limited to queer/tongzhi (comrade)/LGBT/lala (lesbian). Postsocialism is not a cut-off from the socialist past, just as socialism in China following the economic reform is not a subject of the past. It is an ongoing open-ended process of transformation that still permeates and permeates deeply and discursively the entire society. The pun of *Tongzhi* designating both socialist comradeship and homosexuality is an example (Bao, 2018).

This thesis is neither an application nor localisation of Han's theory to Chinese society. On the contrary, guided by both feminist methodology and the intention to produce local knowledge (chapter 2), I situate my interlocutors specifically in a postsocialist neoliberal context instead of a neoliberal capitalist society, that underpins Han's observations. Also, gender is my analytical focus, not some accidental symptom of a larger theory. I therefore critically incorporate Chinese feminist Li Xiaojiang's market feminism in my guiding framework alongside Han Byung-chul's work. While Han's work critically examines the effects of the Internet, Li's work yields insights into understanding feminism in China after the economic reform. By critically combining both authors' theories, I hope to provide a nuanced theoretical framework to untangle the aforementioned paradox in contemporary China and understand the manifold experiences of businesswomen in the Internet age.

Market feminism

Bao's (2020) concept of postsocialist metamorphosis yields great insights into studying feminism in PRC. Methodologically speaking, it not only examines transnational linkages and especially the influence of global capitalism, it also scrutinises the legacies and transformations

of socialism. It seeks an equilibrium between an essentialisation of China that risks overlooking transnational linkages, thus imposing a patronising localisation perspective with orientalist underpinning. Similarly, Li Xiaojiang (2016, Chap.6) insists that a local perspective entails a departure from localisation because any approach of localisation still upholds the idea that feminisms elsewhere are just variants of the feminism emanating from the west, leading to the suffocation of local feminism.

I borrow Tani Barlow's term 'market feminism' to situate Li's thoughts in this thesis. I am aware that Li (X. Li, 2005a, 2016) does not emphasise the concept of the market in her work and consistently argues that Chinese *nüxing* (femininity)-ism differs from western feminism, which she translates as *nüquan* (female-power)-ism. I kept the term market feminism to avoid an overdose of jargon and to keep my core message clear: the market gives rise and provides the space for feminism in China in the Internet age.¹⁸ Before I demonstrate this, I will briefly review feminism in China and its links with the national economy.

Three provincial terminologies are critical to understand the metamorphosis of feminism in China: 1) *Nüquan-ism* (女权主义), female-power-ism, refers to using an activism approach to achieve women's rights and equality. 2) *nüxing-ism* (女性主义), femininity-ism, highlights the women's distinctive subjectivities. 3) *funü liberation* (妇女解放), wife-daughter liberation, is the official term adopted by CCP that signifies a Marxist feminist emancipatory mission accomplished by the socialist state (translation referenced Barlow, 2004; Evans, 2008; X. Li, 2005b; Min, 2007).

Commenting on the women's issue after the establishment of PRC before the economic reform, Li (2005b, p.149) says:

¹⁸ It is not only a problem of how the meanings, especially those related to gender studies, are lost and twisted in translations, but also a post-colonial problem faced by many writers whose field of research uses a different language than the language the write use for output (the meaning is not clear to me). Since I cannot *forget English* (Mufti, 2016) at the stage of writing to avoid (self-)orientalism entirely, I choose to keep the concept as market feminism.

“with the establishment of the socialist state, so-called ‘*funü liberation*’ was achieved. It surpasses the lone battle of *nüquan-ism* and painted all lives with the ‘social’. There was no space for *nüxing* in such a society...male-centric ideology and culture are preserved intact in our society calling for equality between women and women.”

A similar critique of assuming men as normalcy is observed against equality feminism, a strand of feminism which promotes equal rights among genders with an underpinning assumption that all people in liberal capitalist societies share the same psychological core (Massey, 2017). However, the difference is that, as Li (2005b) argues, the trajectory of feminism in the west is bottom-up activism while the equality between men and women is scripted in the law in a trickle-down manner by the socialist state. It, therefore, creates a dilemma whether women are liberated collectively without having an awakened gendered subjectivity. Borrowing Marxist terms, there had not been women “in itself”, let alone women “for itself”.

If trickle-down feminism before the economic reform revolves around the gist of “liberation”, the essence of local feminism in China after the economic reform, then, lies in development, which Li linked with modernisation and the rise of a gendered recognition and subjectivity (X. Li, 2005b, 2005a, 2016):

“Women may complain about the ‘reform’, but none of us would complain about ‘modernisation’...Women face a quandary: no self-improvement, no survival. New problems arise from the reform, but there are also comforting new things... In these 20 years after the onset of economic reform...we develop *nüxing* self-recognition (the legitimacy of being a woman), *nüxing self*-subjectivity (we could be the master of our own lives) and *nüxing* group consciousness (becoming aware that “I” belong to collective womanhood and be mobilised to contribute to the development of all women.)...It is not

merely about plumping into the market and becoming a consumer. It is about self-recognition and self-development.” (X. Li, 2005b, pp.150-152)

Li’s thoughts must be contextualised with the postsocialist neoliberal context following the economic reform, in order to distinguish her theorisation from postfeminism, neoliberal feminism or popular feminism (Banet-weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020). Feminist critics based in liberal democratic capitalist societies use the latter three concepts to capture how, in the 21st century, women’s empowerment is divorced from structural change that would undermine patriarchy and heteronormativity. These theorisations capture the ethos of contemporary women’s issues that focus on individual advancements in both the public and private realms as well as the physical appearance. While postfeminism disavows feminism, and especially the second-wave feminism, with a strong focus on consumption and beauty, the latter two avow feminism especially in terms of gender discrimination in the workplace including the glass ceiling, the wage gap and sexual harassment (Anderson, 2014; Banet-weiser et al., 2020). While popular feminism tries to explain why there has been an increasing identification with feminism among celebrities, neoliberal feminism emphasizes the self-enterprising efforts women put in maintaining a felicitous balance between the private and the public sphere and lean in or, in Han’s words, burn out, for the sake of being the “have it all” woman (Banet-weiser et al., 2020; Rottenberg, 2018).

The three approaches share similarities with market feminism as all three germinated from social mobility and economic advancement achieved by individuals. However, different from liberal democratic capitalist societies in which women’s self-recognition, subjectivity and group consciousness are arguably achieved through previous waves of feminist activist movements, it is the market, as the defining factor of post-socialist reform, that gives rise to these possibilities of subjectivities and solidarities (X. Li, 2005b, 2016; also see Rofel, 2007). This is also the very reason why Li (2005b) unapologetically essentialises the sex gap (性沟)

that reinforces the men/women binary. For her (2005b, 2016), any direct application of western concepts and theories risks colluding with west-centrism which is detrimental to the construction of self-recognition and development of women in China. These include the direct application of the concept of gender to China, the calibration of Chinese feminism based on an activist civil society approach *nüquan-ism* (2005a, 2005b), and various forms of deconstructionist “post-” theories (2016). She believes that the gist of women’s empowerment in China lies foremost in a sturdy foundation of self-recognition to achieve the solidarity of group consciousness. Previously, most deconstructive nuances introduced by “post-” theories as well as the social constructionist concept of gender proved to be merely hindrances to the formation of a sturdy self-recognition. In other words, women’s subjectivities are emerging with the market and it is more important to let these subjectivities settle and mature than to question them with theories.

Interacting with the dominant feminist paradigms made me apologetic throughout my research for seeing the market as the space for potential liberation. My ethnography-based research shows loud and clear that the market is this space. Recognising the liberation brought by the market is different from adulating capitalism. While capitalism signifies a mode of production and exploitation, the market predates and exists beyond capitalism (Lin, 2013). I am aware that Li (Li, 2016, Chap. 5) would rather use *Minjian* than the “market”. Inheriting *Minjian* (民间 in-between people) as a method to produce culture was advocated by scholars from the Republican era (G. Wang, 2013), Li Xiaojiang asserts that local Chinese feminism should be dug out from *minjian* (Li, 2016, Chap. 5). Shanghai-based literary scholar Wang Guangdong (2013, chap. 1) argues that the essence of *minjian* is the freedom of being. It contains the ways ordinary people live their lives guided by folk logic, ethics and aesthetics. Historian Sebastian Veg (Veg, 2019) highlights the activist side of *minjian* and takes the concept beyond folk, its regular translation, to represent the grassroots and an anti-elitist stance

taken by the public intellectuals who stand up for the unofficial, unaffiliated, marginalised and the vulnerable. However, Li (X. Li, 2005b) assumes a cautious distance from activism as it produces an antithesis between the state and the civil society, a binary that she deems inapplicable in the Chinese context and she therefore avoids using *nüquan-ism*.

Recognising the contribution to women's livelihood, Li (2005b, 151-159) notices a risk of local feminism being taken over by western-centric *nüquan-ism* after 1993. On the one hand, after Deng's southern tour, the third plenary meeting of the Central Committee of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) promulgated policies that further promoted marketisation and integration into global capitalism. On the other hand, international bodies started to show more concern and "sympathy" for women's conditions in China, the "One Child Policy" being the most notable example. After the 1995 world women's congress in Beijing, NGOs targeting women and sexual minorities in China mushroomed. Li poignantly pointed out that *nüquan-ism* haunted some of these NGOs and that they were armed with post-colonial sugar coatings which still perpetuated west-centrism in their assumption that feminism in China must learn from the "advanced" concepts and experiences in the west. In contrast, she believed that a *minjian* and local feminism thrived before 1993 exemplified by the burgeoning of women's associations in urban China, women studies in universities and novels by women writers.

For Li, the essence of *minjian* are the spontaneous and voluntary actions from within and from below. These rising subjectivities from below are therefore also heterogeneous and manifold, even though she asserts they must be based on the consensus of being a woman. In her four-volume book series *Let Women Speak for Themselves*, Li (2003) included stories of women who have experienced war including land reform and the Sino-Japanese war, stories from ethnic minority women as well as women educators, workers and artists. Importantly, she expanded discussion to include non-institutional, non-state actors.

There is a growing lamentation over the crackdown on the civil society approach to feminism in China in the Xi era era (P. S. Y. Ho et al., 2018; Hong Fincher, 2018; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017), which coincides with the thriving of digital economy (B. Meng & Huang, 2017). The shared tendency is to bemoan the collaboration between patriarchy and capitalism that would suffocate collective emancipatory feminism. Hong Fincher (2018), in her book *Betraying Big Brother*, studies feminist activists who were detained for activism and declares that there is no space for feminism in an authoritarian socialist regime. Her proposition shrinks the feminists in China into a narrowly defined category of dissidents, fighters and activists against the state. Such a binary framework not only potentially threatens to reduce her informants to the category of “enemy” as opposed to the “people”; it is also untruthful. Factually speaking, a few of her informants own Taobao shops for a living, selling feminism or LGBT related products, such as “this is what a feminist looks like” T-shirts. Unlike many, I am not denouncing her informants’ activism because they are involved in commercial activities. Li’s contribution is in noticing precisely the type of feminism observed in these activities within the realm of *minjian*. Feminism does not have to be always fitted into a framework where it is discussed as oppositional to the state or the capitalist economy. Under Xi’s tightening control on civil societies and especially NGOs, I show that the **market may well be the very realm left for *minjian***. And it is becoming essential in nurturing and shaping feminisms and sexual subjectivities that thrive through market relations.

Therefore, a critical revisiting of Li’s work in the Internet era is necessary, especially since women now play a prominent role in the digital economy in China. Leaving Li’s essentialism out of my own theoretical framing, I take two intertwined key concepts for the market feminism I discuss in this thesis: empowerment and context. According to the SAGE Encyclopaedia of Action Research, “as a process, empowerment fosters capacities in individuals, groups and communities to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired actions

and outcomes.” (Pant, 2014). Empowerment is about neoliberal self-enterprising achievements (Rottenberg, 2018) and discoveries of bottom-up gendered subjectivities to navigate the patriarchal heteronormative structure and, in some cases, collective consciousness (Li, 2005b). In this thesis, I use a lexicon including gender and other concepts which Li would describe as *nüquan-ism*. It is not because I am unaware of the potential risks of perpetuating west-centric feminism, but because these concepts have already greatly shaped feminism in China within and beyond academia. There is no one single authentic Chinese feminism in China. It would also be almost mendacious to depend on heteronormativity for a revelation of woman’s subjectivity as Li (2005b) argues, as the landscape of Chinese feminism today is very much intertwined with the queer and LGBT scenes (Hong Fincher, 2014, 2018; Jacobs, 2015; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017). Many feminists, for example Maizi and Xiao Meili, are open and public about their same-sex relationships (see their stories, Ibid.).

However, the concept of market feminism is not sufficient to explain the businesswomen in the Internet age, as the social-economic context has shifted greatly after the economic reform. As China is in compressed development in which different stages of capitalism overlap, (Whittaker, Zhu, Sturgeon, Tsai, & Okita, 2010) I should make it clear is that my theoretical framework only applies to the most privileged urban businesswomen who manage businesses online and onground, as opposed to rural women without the access to the Internet.

The concept that I coin in this thesis is burnout market feminism. To achieve market feminism, businesswomen voluntarily burn out for achievements. The achievements include those in the public sphere (e.g. managing successful businesses), the private sphere (e.g. being a successful wife and mother) and those in-between in the prosumer context (e.g. having photos with thousands of views and likes). This aspect of the thesis redresses Han Byung-chul’s obliviousness about the achievements in the private sphere. From here on, I will only use the general term feminism with all its cultural baggage that I have just discussed, rather than

specifying the three terms related to Chinese feminism. While I will leave the discussion about the **contexts** that shape the multiplicity of market feminism to Chapter 5 and 6, the remaining part of this chapter discusses **empowerment**. I will explain how the Internet has enabled women to develop their businesses and achieve material advancement. Even though this process coincides with the feminisation of labour in the digital economy, becoming businesspeople has greatly impacted their lives and the ways they participate in and navigate the heteronormative patriarchal society.

Empowerment

“Accidental” success at the centre of a whirlwind

“Initially, I didn’t start doing business using the Internet. I was just obsessed with dancing. My degree was in folk dance and education when I was in university. After graduation, I got a job at a university in Hefei to teach dancing. As it was not an art school but a comprehensive university, I felt that the students just took dance as an exercise and not even a hobby. It was a struggle for me.

I first had my own dancing studio, which I rented in a stadium. I just wanted to teach people who generally have a passion for dance. As you may know, the costumes for dance may not be accessible for everyone so I started getting costumes for my students.

One day, a student suggested me to also put some of the costumes online... The other day, another student suggested the same...

It is not that I could not afford the rent by giving lessons but since it looked fun and did not cost much, I thought: why not give it a try?’

Dance costumes have a very niche market and there weren’t many people selling things online anyway back then. I quickly managed to sell most of my stash and kept a regular restocking.

After a year, the stadium management told me that they could not rent the space to me anymore. I also got married then, so it made sense not to run the studio anymore. The online business became so busy that I had to hire another fulltime girl to help me with customer service and packaging...

Even though the online business was going well, I did not think of quitting the university job until an accident. I knew that the university job was more stable than selling things online. However, once when I twisted my ankle and asked for sick leave, the university insisted that I should still be able to teach. I lived in a building without a lift at the time and I had to hop with one leg up and down six floors. I was aggrieved. I remember a night when I looked at my university salary and the salary that I gave to my customer service girl – they were around the same. ‘What have I been persisting in?’ I thought. The next day I submitted a resignation letter and started to do business fulltime.” [Wudao, aged 38]

As the sounds of packing, sewing and chatting by her staff filled her office, I asked Wudao about her company turnover. She replied: “Not as much as my neighbours’ in the industrial park, only around 25 million RMB last year.”

Wudao’s story is a somewhat typical story of success in the digital economy in China. As the founder of Xiaomi, a smartphone company, famously said: “Entrepreneurship is like being a pig at the centre of a whirlwind. If it stands in the right place, even a pig can fly” (MBAlib.wiki, n.d.). The point here is that, as an individual’s life trajectory intertwines with the society (Johnson, 2008), a business grows and flows with the macroeconomy. Individual businesses have been contributing to and have been influenced by the rapid economic growth since the beginning of the economic reform. Many of my interlocutors, including Wudao and Jing (whom I introduced in Chapter 1), stepped into the digital economy around 2008 almost accidentally, without anticipating success. Many of them intentionally jumped into the

precarious online business from more stable jobs because they expected achievement and opportunities that they could not attain in traditional businesses.

The feminisation of labour

In 2013, the average age for starting a business offline for women was 47.6, while the average age for starting an online business was 32.6 (Alibaba, 2015a). According to statistics in 2015, as it costs on average 5 million RMB to start an offline business, it took only 1/25 of that sum to start a business on TMall¹⁹ with half the online shops starting with less than 50000 RMB of initial funds (Ibid). On Taobao, a person could open a shop without initial funds as long as the person verifies their identity by uploading official documents (see Chen & Wang, 2012 for steps to open a shop on Taobao). The Internet undoubtedly lowered the entry barrier for people to start a business (CNNIC, 2018). Women now compose more than 55% of E-commerce dealers in China (Alibaba, 2015a).

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies, the feminisation of labour

“describes changing gender structures in the labour market, with greater numbers of women being employed, as well as changes in the labour market which emphasize traits commonly associated with the employment of women. These include increased part-time or casual employment, increased emphasis on service-sector employment, and the flexibilization of labour with resultant greater insecurity of employment.” (Griffin, 2017)

Feminisation of labour refers to both women’s strong presence in one occupation and a precarious yet unceasing mode of labour. Before we start celebrating women’s predominance, we should note that most of the Internet infrastructure companies in China are started and

¹⁹ TMall already has a higher entry bar than Taobao, for TMall is a B2C (business to customer platform) while Taobao is a C2C(customer to customer) platform.

managed by men. These include what is now commonly referred to as BAT: the search engine conglomerate Baidu, the E-commerce conglomerate Alibaba and the social media conglomerate Tencent. These companies were established primarily by urban university-educated men around the year 2000. Even though some of the founders' wives played an important role in the business at an initial stage, they returned to the domestic sphere and became less visible as the businesses expanded. Only after 2004 did we witness an influx of feminised labour in the digital economy and the mushrooming of online businesses. In a nutshell, men mainly operate the platforms and women largely operate as users of these platforms.

Alibaba positions itself as a company that helps others, especially small and mini enterprises and claims to embody feminist ethics of collaboration, inclusiveness and mutual support (Alibaba, 2015b). Digital platforms rely on users to generate profits (Srnicsek, 2016). It is therefore in these digital infrastructure companies' interest to make their platforms more accessible and democratic for users. The system allows users to profit from the platform, but it is the platforms that accumulate most capital (Srnicsek, 2016). As platforms grow into conglomerates, gradually gaining monopoly over the market, users commonly experience the feminisation of labour.

One of the reasons that might explain the predominance of women in the digital economy is that women are more familiar with precarious work in the first place. Since the industrial revolution, activities have been divided according to production and consumption as well as public and private binaries. However, the rising prosumer capitalism is bringing a return to the pre-industrial revolution economy of producing and consuming in one space where the distinction between public and private is blurred (Frayssé & O'Neil, 2015; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). These binaries also created a gendered division of labour where men are in charge of

the public sphere and take the producing role, while women are placed in the predicament of a vicious loop of double burden. First, they are exploited in the public sphere as the reserved army of labour suffering gender pay gap and glass ceiling. Second, women are doing the *second shift* in reproductive work, including consuming for the family and working for free in the private sphere (A. R. Hochschild & Machung, 2012; Jackson & Jones, 1998; Walby, 1990). Because of the tedious nature of the reproductive work, women have never been freed from labour and have always struggled to have *A Room of One's Own* – uninterrupted time and space for production as defined by Virginia Woolf (1929). Household chores and children bearing-rearing labour, defined as women's work in patriarchal societies, are repetitive, unending, spontaneous and sporadic. These characteristics of women's work gradually became the norm for more and more types of labour in today's prosumer capitalism. Without essentialising the gendered differences, the female ethics of interdependence, sharing, caring and multitasking stem from women's inferior supportive position in the first place. In her studies on the increasingly popular self-help books about boosting productivity from the 1950s, Melissa Gregg (2018) argues that women in the late-nineteenth century, who had to manage their porous private and public lives, are the unrecognised predecessors and contributors to what we know today as the scientific time management. In her study of freelance workers in a publishing group in Italy, Morini argued that women are considered more suitable for *cognitive capitalism* – a variation of prosumer capitalism – since women are already more accustomed to flexible yet incessant work (Morini, 2007).

The confluence of the feminisation of labour and economic boom

The feminisation of labour overlaps greatly with the burnout society. While feminisation of labour considers women's participation rate in labour, burnout society is about deceptive freedom and achievement. Both discuss how work becomes volatile yet aspirational, flexible yet incessant. It applies to the digital economy, freelance work, and indeed, all forms of labour

which are becoming more and more precarious. Fashion models in global cities burn out believing that they will become the top high fashion model one day (Mears, 2011). Nightclub hosts do ceaseless work in the underground “love business” in Tokyo with an aspirational upward social mobility dream which promises a speedy success (Takeyama, 2016). Gabriella Lukacs (2015) argues that the digital economy in Japan has enticed young women into believing that being a net idol whose job duty is to be cute on the Internet would eventually evolve into a well-paid, fun and meaningful job while the harsh reality is that it only normalises free labour and the feminisation of labour which aggravates the precariousness of the living conditions of these young women.

In her critical examination on Cui Wanzhi’s story as a nationwide famous disabled E-commerce entrepreneur, digital media scholar Yu Haiqing (2019) argued that his success is yet another case of a neoliberal self-enterprising project, pushing the survive and thrive pressure even more onto individuals rather than the structure, despite the accessibility to business having increased through the wide usage of the Internet. As Yu has discerned, Cui’s transformation from an unemployed university graduate to an E-commerce legend was merely a replication of Jack Ma’s personal story about progressing from being rejected by Kentucky Fried Chicken for being too “ugly” to the wealthiest person in China in 2019. Yu (2019) lamented that the underpinning self-enterprising neoliberal ethos has rendered the less privileged in the structure, such as disabled women or disabled people less educated than Cui (as an urban university-educated man), in a more burdened and precarious situation (Yu, 2019) in the digital economy.

If the deregulation-defined neoliberalism generates a race to the bottom for global capitalism to always seek out the less regulated space with cheaper labour for more profit, is it then our research role to produce narratives similarly anchored in a race to the bottom to dig out more misery porn in order to implicitly or explicitly propose an egalitarian utopia free from racism, capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexual hegemony, ableism, colourism, anthropocentrism

and speciesism? Could this race to the bottom as a method of criticising neoliberalism be just another replication of the neoliberal logic – a reductive logic that boils all nuances down to one single problem? The limitation of “race to the bottom” analysis is that it fails to see China, or any other society, beyond neoliberalism, and therefore the argument loses its nuance as it persistently ends by way of criticising the self-enterprising neoliberal ethos. It fails to consider the diversified developmental stages and economic status of where a country, or an area, sits in the global capitalist arena. Moreover, in the case of women in China, it neglects stories of empowerment, as discussed by Li Xiaojiang in the post-socialist era. Most importantly, because it fails in cultural self-reflection, this argument never questions its own nature or, rather, its own culture.

Similarities between models in global cities like New York and London and hosts and net idols in Japan are threefold. It is exactly the “fame overnight” promise that traps individuals to work voluntarily but unendingly for impossibly long hours. The nature of these jobs requires individuals to self-enterprise and to consider themselves as enterprises. This means that we should consider ourselves fully responsible for our achievements and failures and that our body and life become a major part of our enterprise. Lastly and crucial for my thesis, the social-economic macro contexts of the developed liberal capitalist societies like Japan and the US show that the economy of these societies is in stagnation, compared to developing post-socialist China’s rising economy. The Euro-American economic decline and the Asian economic rise reset the macro picture in the post-Cold war era when ideological and diplomatic antagonism lingers and transforms with globalisation and integration (Khanna, 2019).

Global neoliberalism and intensified globalisation have developed simultaneously with the digital economy. Since global capitalism relies on the neoliberal policy of a race to the bottom for cheaper labour, the 90s dotcom boom and the sharing economy craze after the 2008 economic crisis shouldered dual responsibility for stimulating the economy in the west,

especially the US, and providing the infrastructure to facilitate international trade. Robert Gordon uses statistical data to show that the digital economy since the 1990s has not replicated the economic growth between 1870 and 1970 in the US (Gordon, 2016). While the US and other developed capitalist societies had an average GDP growth of only around 3% since the 1990s, in China, the digital economy is in line with a steady economic growth with an annual GDP growth rate above 6%. If we also consider inflation, then Gordon's (2016) point of view that neither techno-optimism nor techno-pessimism can accurately capture how people feel about their living standard becomes even more convincing. For developed capitalist societies, the living standard has not been significantly enhanced with and by the digital economy. On the contrary; the working conditions turned more precarious with high unemployment rates (Gordon, 2016; Lukacs, 2015; Muntaner, 2018; Srnicek, 2016). In China, after the 2008 global economic crisis, E-commerce became a platform to transform the economy from export-oriented to domestic-oriented (AliResearch, 2015). However, the unemployment rate remains low and the economic growth is still steady, even with slight deceleration. Individuals still enjoy visible improvement in living standards despite a shared sense of insecurity. In this sense, I would say that most of my interlocutors believe that their life quality and standard have increased steadily with the development of the country and they continuously keep discovering hope and business possibilities.

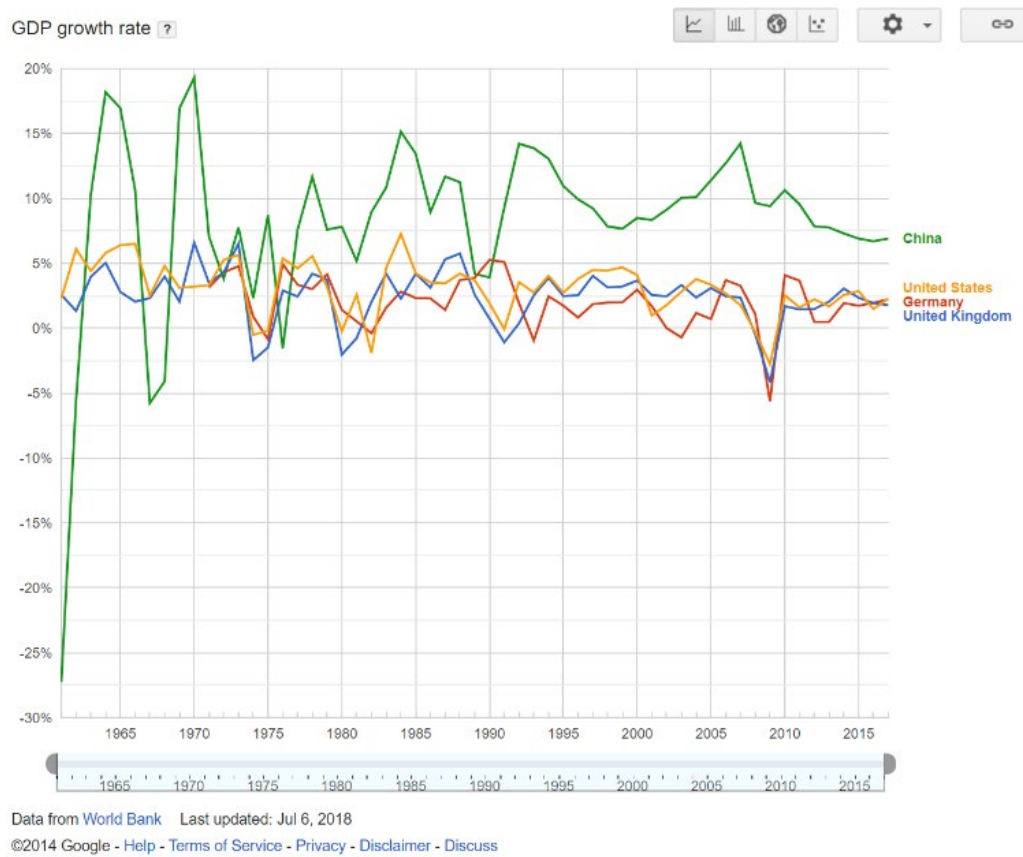


Figure 1 Annual GDP growth rate per country (chart generated by google with statistics from world bank (WorldBank, n.d.)

Even though China enjoys a relatively higher total early-stage entrepreneurial (TEA) rate²⁰ than the high-income countries, the percentage of companies that last for more than 3.5 years is less than 5%, half of that of the high-income countries (GEM, cited in Huang & Zhu, 2018). In other words, the success rate of start-ups is very low. However, entrepreneurs in China are in general not deterred by the fear of failure when they start a business (compared to high-income countries), with women even less deterred than men (Elam et al., 2019). Scholarship that studies female entrepreneurship before 2010 argues that Chinese women start businesses due to necessity rather than opportunity compared to their male counterparts and that they are more likely to remain in informal sectors that are less profitable (Hernandez et al., 2012; Warnecke, 2014). Nevertheless, the feminisation of labour in China coincided with the economic boom, not stagnation. Even though the promise of empowerment remains precarious

²⁰ TEA rate is defined as the percentage of the working population to start an enterprise which lasted for a maximum of 3.5 years.

and volatile as in most societies practising global neoliberalism (Lukacs, 2015; Mears, 2011; Takeyama, 2016), it would be limiting to neglect its heterogeneity. This is not to argue that the Chinese digital economy does not provide a volatile yet aspirational social mobility dream to entice individuals to burn out. To highlight its heterogeneity means to show that the social-economic discrepancies set the contexts that are different for businesspeople in China compared to those in the developed capitalist societies. Yes, the neoliberal economic structure makes social mobility and work stability volatile for individuals. But the intensity of the instability and how individuals feel about their condition vary. It was the achievements, success and empowerment that my interlocutors spent most time narrating to me in in-depth interviews. They talked about success, not failures; about gaining power and agency, not the larger structures that they could not change (including their parents). Burning out is commonly observed in many societies, but it is the development, both on individual and societal levels, that gives rise to empowerment.

Leverages to negotiate, subjectivities to be formed

Because of China's steady economic performance and low unemployment rate, roughly before 2010, most people still believed that staying in traditional businesses and especially with reputable employers was a better career option. This attitude gradually changed with Premier Li's appeal to *Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation* in 2014 in an official statement. Interlocutors who managed incubators told me that most of their applicants had online businesses as their start-ups. However, before the official recognition from the state, when my interlocutors were starting their online business, they were met with mockery, misunderstanding and backlash from people around them. Especially for my well-educated urban interlocutors, their friends, colleagues and families held that they had gone astray from the normative pathway to success when they decided to do online businesses fulltime.

Jing shared that, when she resigned from the university as a lecturer for her E-commerce business, some professors told her earnestly that: “I hope that one day you can return to normal jobs. Selling things online is what frauds do.” Many share a similar story: the decisions that could not be generally comprehended back then turned out to be a lucrative and innovative business idea. All the stories had the same happy ending: people who previously despised them came about and realised their ignorance as they watched my interlocutors rise to fame and success. This story has a dangerous hidden message: if my interlocutors had not achieved economic advancement as they did, they would forever remain socially despised. In other words, it is a clear burnout society logic, one that hinges on neoliberal success. While these interlocutors could share with me their stories with confidence as the winners in the system, other interlocutors rejected my formal in-depth interview invitations reasoning that “My story is not worth listening to. I don’t want to share anything about myself before I am as successful as others.”

Nevertheless, economic advancement has empowered my interlocutors to put in practice decisions against the voices surrounding them, including their parents and senior colleagues (as in the case of Jing and Wudao), and possibly rebel against social structures including patriarchy and heteronormativity. I will tell two stories here of how my interlocutors negotiated these in intergenerational relationships. The stories show that, through these negotiations and especially resistance, their subjectivities came into being. They were empowered.

WX started her business selling leather bags at her university in 2009 triggered by her entrepreneur father’s disapproval of her relationship with a classmate of rural origin. “My father told me that I could achieve nothing without his financial support. He assumed that my boyfriend was only after his money... I was extremely angry... The only thing we could do is to prove ourselves to him...” They then started visiting the wholesale bag market in Guangzhou (the city where they studied) to take pictures of items they liked and posting them online. They

would return to buy only those products that customers purchased from them online, meaning that their business needed very little investment apart from transportation costs. Within the next three years, she told me, they earned over 1 million RMB and could afford down payment for an apartment in Shenzhen, where her family was based. “Was your father then proud of you?” I asked and she giggled: “Not really. He still holds prejudices against E-commerce. He told me that ‘even though your finances are kind of good now, E-commerce is something that everyone can do. You are a university student. It’s better to work for a famous company.’” WX’s friend interrupted, “Don’t think about it anymore. You are the boss with two flats in Shenzhen now.”

VJ first identified herself as a tomboy in middle school in 2006 when she was 14 after researching lesbianism on Baidu. She met her first girlfriend in a QQ group founded by Baidu lesbian forum participants. Her mother found out about her sexuality after being called to her school for misconduct. She was furious and warned VJ: “stop being a pervert, or I will cut off your financial support”. At 14, VJ ended up eloping with her then-girlfriend for three months, during which she worked illegally in low-end service industries like bubble tea shops in a city near Shenzhen. Meanwhile, she kept updating her captivating love stories in the Baidu Lesbian forum, attracting more than 2000 comments. After returning to Shenzhen and reuniting with her family after her aunt leaked her location to her mother, her sexuality became the elephant in the room. As she transferred to another school to complete secondary education, she also started becoming interested in small-scale businesses with her online lesbian community. “At the time, there were already people in Les forum and QQ group selling things like chest binders or T-shirts for T (Tomboy)²¹. Do you remember those days when we still didn’t really dare to

²¹ Lesbians, or queen women in general, are generally referred to *Lala* in China, yet people also use Les, as an abbreviation for lesbian, or simply *La*. While T in general signifies Tomboy or Butch (inclining to masculine side), P for femme (feminine side), and H for in-between in terms of gender performance. (see e.g. Engebretsen, 2014; Kam, 2014)

pay online and went to banks to transfer money?²² I purchased some chest binders online by going to the bank to do the transfers!... The trust among *lalas* is incredible... By the end of high school, I also started selling things online. First some T-shirts I got at a market. Then I switched to leather bags. People would always return T-shirts because of size issues. But bags come in only one size... I shared my Taobao links in all groups (social media groups) that I was in... Then, I started to earn good money.” VJ told me that, ever since she has become economically independent, “my mother has no means to control me (拿我没办法)...but from time to time she still complains... For instance, she believed that I will revert to being straight again if I grew long hair, so, in order to prove her wrong, I am now a long-haired sissy tomboy”. (chuckles) VJ now lives with her girlfriend in a two-bedroom flat purchased by her mother. By 2017, they had been managing the leather bag shop together for 2 years and then turned their flat into a themed photography studio where customers could come and take portraits.

Because of their economic independence and advancement, both interlocutors were able to negotiate their intimacy with their parents. Parents play an important role in the marriage decision for their children across East Asia and for women, hypergamy, or rather marrying up, is commonly expected (Constable, 2009; Davis & Friedman, 2014; Lan, 2006; Santos & Harrell, 2016). Santos and Harell (2016, p.11) remind us that “Chinese classic patriarchal structures contain two major axes of both prestige and power in domestic relations: a generational axis and a gender axis.” Yan Yunxiang (2003, 2016) points out that the individualisation process that took place in China after the economic reform valorised conjugal relationships over consanguine relationships. WX’s and VJ’s gendered subjectivities arise from their resistance to patriarchy and heteronormativity through intergenerational

²² While the third-party payment system was initiated in China in 1999 for B2C E-commerce, the Alipay, the Alibaba third-party payment system, was launched in 2004 for the nascent Taobao C2C platform. Despite its rapid development, the third-party payment system in general was not institutionally recognised by the state by 2010 and have been constantly negotiating trust from customers. (see e.g. Y. Li, 2010; Y. Liu, 2019).

negotiations. Because of the online business, WX stayed in her relationship with her partner whose rural origin was disapproved of by her father. She was able to confront hypergamy in terms of rural/urban divide. When I was interviewing WX, she had already married him. She said: “Even though my father still has some issues against him, it is me in the end who is spending my time with my husband, right?” For WX, the economic independence gained in online business is the prerequisite for her to pursue a conjugal relationship disapproved of by her father. VJ’s story is different from that of WX’s or Jing’s. VJ did not have a university degree and she was a drop-out from school and a queer homeless person for a short while. Doing online business was not an accidental success that came about from many opportunities that she could have chosen from, but it was a product of necessity. Examining the erotica in China, Katrien Jacobs elucidates how the Internet, notwithstanding contestations with censorship, has been a land where alternative and subversive desires could sprout (Jacobs, 2012, 2015). The Internet had provided VJ with the knowledge of lesbianism and homosexuality and an online community where she gained support for sharing her love story against heteronormativity and especially her family. Later, VJ was also able to use the online community as a marketplace for her business, which in turn gave her leverage in defending her sexuality from her mother.

Group consciousness

In addition to individual empowerment, market feminism also values and celebrates collectivity and solidarity within the market (X. Li, 2005b).

Sanmu founded Les +, the pioneer *lala* magazine in China in 2005. However, in 2012, she was facing obstacles in the civil society approach for two reasons. First, she could not reconcile herself to the misogyny of some gay activists and the prevailing attention given to gay activism among the LGBT group. Second, she reflected on the limitation of *lala* identity politics. As she told me,

“Lala. Lala. Then what? ... What good can it do apart from bringing a group of people together, sticking together, sharing... Does it solve any real problems?... Is it sustainable for me?” She then suspended the *Les +* magazine and started a Master’s degree in interactive design at the New York University. For her final project, she designed an online interface to educate women about their orgasm. “I am very influenced by feminists who take female orgasm as a feminist project... I thought this is what I should promote in China... It doesn’t matter if you are straight or *lala*, all women need orgasm.”

Returning to China in 2015, she made her project into a *WeChat* public account and secured angel investment. When I interviewed her in 2017, her company was making profit by reviewing and advertising sex toys and providing online and offline educational courses about female orgasm. Sanmu transformed from an identity politics-based activist to a businesswoman whose business relied on community and shared values. She managed a few *WeChat* chat groups of under 500 people and organised offline sex education courses in three cities.

Three other interlocutors also centred their business on communities for women. One managed an investment company targeting female entrepreneurs. One had an educational platform to teach women coding. One was a writer who wrote about women’s issues, especially romance. She had more than 2 million subscribers on her *WeChat* public account. In comparison, feminist voice, arguably the most successful civil society approach feminist platform in China, had less than 200,000 subscribers before it was banned in 2018 (S. Zhao, 2016).

My interlocutors avowed gender inequality but did not intend to mobilise their community to appeal for a systematic change in the legal-social system, echoing the critique that neoliberal feminism is an eviscerated variation of feminism deprived of activism (Rottenberg, 2018). “It [neoliberal feminism] very clearly avows gender inequality...it simultaneously disavows the socio-economic and cultural structures shaping our lives. This feminism also helps to spawn a

new feminist subject, one who accepts full responsibility for her own well-being and self-care. (Banet-weiser et al., 2020, p7).” However, without a collective history of mobilisation, resistance and activism as shown in the first and second wave of feminism, Chinese feminism should not to be confined to a framework of the civil society versus the government (X. Li, 2005b). While many scholars and journalists have extensively recorded the rise and fall of civil society feminism (Hong Fincher, 2018; Zeng, 2016; S. Zhao, 2017), what I wish to highlight is the promise of the burgeoning pluralistic forms of market feminisms within businesses in the Internet age. Sanmu openly framed her business idea under the influence of pro-sex feminists, especially Betty Dodson. My interlocutors were eloquent and outspoken about women’s underrepresentation in business and technology. They consciously put their gender and sexualities on their business agenda, reclaiming the most trivial and yet the most regulated and contested things such as female orgasm, for example, for everyone.

Using a Marxist feminist paradigm, it could be argued that my interlocutors collude with the capitalist system by appropriating feminist languages without challenging the inherently problematic system. Using a calibration of liberal feminism, my interlocutors also failed to advocate more systematic change, as the feminists who got detained for anti-sexual harassment campaign did (Hong Fincher, 2016). However, market feminism allows my interlocutors to be theoretically situated in the ambiguity between the collusion or resistant binary. My interlocutors believed that they were empowered by their business and that their business community empowers others. Subjectivities spawn from these businesses. Sarah Banet-Weiser (Banet-Weiser, 2018) reveals how popular feminism and popular misogyny are intertwined in social media and commercial activities in the 21st century. The encouragement of women’s self-confidence and individual achievements coexist with revenge porn and toxic geek masculinity, and they both receive great media coverage and commercial attention (Ibid.).

Different from Rottenberg's (2018) critique of neoliberal feminism, Banet-Weiser believes that a different type of activism could rise from the ambivalence of popular feminism:

this is not a zero-sum game; pleasure and intimate attachments are political; there is not one authentic feminism that cancels out an inauthentic one. The refusal of the zero-sum game... is a productive failure, a failure that produces a certain kind of public and popular awareness, an opening in the public's imagination, to imagine a different set of norms for gender and sexual difference. (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p.19)

By commercialising sex education courses and turning female orgasm into marketable courses, Sanmu's platform arguably limits sexual liberation, backed by *western* sex-positive feminism knowledge, to women who can afford to explore pleasure. Her customers, especially those who attend offline courses, were predominantly well-educated middle-class women living in the first-tier cities. However, as Sanmu said: "usually, our articles are shared in private conversations instead of group chats or friend cycle (WeChat's social media). Many of our articles have tens of thousands of views... We cannot control who views them and who doesn't online." Many articles on her platform were erotic monologues outside the paradigm of monogamous heterosexual marriage. Stories of lesbian sex and casual sex were mixed with erotic stories within monogamous heterosexual relationships. "Sex is about consent and pleasure. That's our view. And we wish to share this with as many people as possible on the Internet." These stories were as much advertisement materials for her business as empowerment materials that could sow seeds of feminism and resistance against heteronormativity.

Similarly, on Yvonne's (whom I introduced in Chapter 1) virtual lover business platform, she included services for female customers to order other women as virtual lovers. Neither of them organised any political campaigns. However, the emancipatory ambiguity lies in their inclusive business strategy of inserting stories and options outside heteronormativity. And by

celebrating female sexuality, they provided a platform for other women to explore their emotional and bodily needs in the market via consumption.

In 2018, #metoo in China prevailed on the Internet with millions of netizens sharing their stories. Some of my interlocutors were active participants. Yvonne shared her story with a magazine about being sexually harassed by an investor as a part of the #metoo movement for businesswomen. She was then approached by Lisa, who managed an investment company for women and minority groups.

Lisa was born in Shangdong province and lived in China until her undergraduate study in California. In 2014 during her undergraduate course in the School of Business she started a salon to discuss women and entrepreneurship and noticed that many had the same problem: securing venture capital. With a US-based business partner she turned her student association to a venture capital company in 2017, targeting female entrepreneurs. She was in charge mainly of businesses in the Asia-Pacific region and especially China. In 2019, her platform had more than one million members and offline communities in more than 40 cities all over the world. Lisa openly came out as a lesbian on her social media and in various domestic and international media interviews and promised to allocate more resources to support LGBT businesses in the future.

While the civil society approach feminists and the backlash against them are well-reported and researched (Hong Fincher, 2018; Zeng, 2016; Zhao, 2017), I have brought market feminism into the picture of contemporary Chinese feminism. Market feminism is about the rising female subjectivities enabled by the market in a bottom-up approach. With their businesses, women have more leverage to negotiate with patriarchy and heteronormativity. Collectivity and solidarity among women are also formed in the market with the businesses operated by my interlocutors.

Conclusion

This chapter was divided into two parts. The first part was theoretical. I introduced both Han Byung-chul's theory of the burnout society and Li Xiaojiang's concept of market feminism. The second part focused on empowerment as the key element of market feminism. In the next chapter, the spotlight is on burning out in the Internet age and I will elaborate on how businesswomen burnout in three different types of online businesses. Even with the promise of empowerment, women are still self-exploiters who burn out. Their understandings of achievements are also deeply shaped by their living contexts. In Chapter 5 and 6, I will move to discuss the second element of market feminism: the contexts that shape the heterogeneity of my interlocutors' lived experiences. In a way, this chapter is the most optimistic part of my thesis. The main data for this chapter were derived from in-depth interviews; the next chapter is based on online ethnography, while the subsequent two chapters are based on on-the-ground ethnography. The divergence in terms of findings in each chapter partly reflects the methodological differences.

By allowing ourselves to represent interlocutors' happiness, pride and achievements, on which they would spend most of our interview time, we, as academics, are also able to go beyond merely imposing critical theories on the social reality that we participate in and observe (Ortner, 2016). I wish to end this chapter with Li Xiaojiang's words in an academic conference about Chinese women held in Hong Kong in 1989:

"Do you know how many women there are in mainland China? At least 600 million! You want to conclude that they have a hard life and they cry. But do you know that they laugh too? Like you, they laugh too. If there is no human rights and women's rights, how have they survived? I conduct women's studies. I simply want to know why they cry and why they laugh...I study them as one of them. This is my women's studies." (X. Li, 2019)

Chapter 4: Burning out in Emotional Capitalism

In chapter 3, I link Li Xiaojiang's idea of market feminism (X. Li, 2005b) with Han Byung-Chul's notion of burnout society (Han, 2015) and explain how the Internet has empowered women. While that chapter explored the spawning gendered subjectivities and group consciousness, this chapter explores how emotions play a significant role in leading people to willingly work to the point of burnout in the digital economy.

Emotional capitalism

Since the late 1980s, management and business scholars have noticed a trend of servitization in manufacturing summarised as “the innovation of an organisation's capabilities and processes to shift from selling products to selling integrated products and services that deliver value in use.” (Braine et al., 2009, p.563). Scholars have also noted a coupling between digitalisation and servitization, especially in terms of how the former augments the latter (Parida, Sjödin, & Reim, 2019; Rabetino, Harmsen, Kohtamäki, & Sihvonen, 2018). Sociologists approach emotion in capitalism through the lens of emotional labour, aesthetic labour and sexual labour. In her seminal work *The Managed Heart*, Arlie Hochschild (1983) argues that in almost all occupations, it is expected that one needs to manage a wide range of feeling for better productivity and work relations in an organisation, which she defines as emotional labour. Relatedly, researchers categorise the labour that employees need to do for their appearance and public presentation as aesthetic labour; and the engagement in sexual relations for work known as sexual labour (Chris Warhurst & Nickson, 2009). These three aspects – emotional labour, aesthetic labour and sexual labour - integrate and overlap in reading capitalism from a gendered perspective. Emotional labour has been widely applied and contested in existing later research (see for instance Guy, M.E; Newman, M.A.; Mastracci,

2008; Mardon, Molesworth and Grigore, 2018). Meanwhile, Ashley Mears (2011, 2014, 2015) contributes significantly to the study of aesthetic labour with her longitudinal work on the model industry and VIP club girls. There is also a rich body of literature on sex workers in Asia (see for instance Zheng, 2009; Ding, 2016 on China; Alison, 2016; Takeyama, 2016 on Japan; and Hoang, 2015 on Vietnam).

However, both business scholars and sociologists, in general, research the inclusion of emotional services as commercial add-ons for customers without challenging the boundary between a customer and a friend, the professional and the private. Such logic assumes a dichotomy between capitalism and emotion in the first place and assumes that emotions would decay into skilled performances in serving capitalism. However, as Israel based sociologist Eva Illouz (2007) demonstrates in her influential work *Cold Intimacy: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, emotions have been intrinsic in the development of capitalism and even more so in the Internet age. Illouz (2007) illustrates how communication competence has become a prerequisite for workers and how the inability to endure and the unwillingness to fulfil all possibilities in life are considered psychologically pathological. Han Byung-Chul develops Illouz's idea of emotional capitalism and states that:

“The neoliberal regime deploys emotions as resources in order to bring about heightened productivity and achievement. Starting at a certain level of production, rationality – which is the medium of disciplinary society – hits a limit. Henceforth, it is experienced as a constraint, an inhibition. Suddenly, it seems rigid and inflexible. At this point, emotionality takes its place, which is attended by the feeling of liberty – the free unfolding of personality. After all, being free means giving free rein to emotions. Emotional capitalism banks on freedom. It hails emotion as the expression of unbridled subjectivity. Neoliberal technologies of power exploit this same subjectivity mercilessly.” (Byung-Chul Han, 2017b, pp.45-46)

In this chapter, I will discuss emotions in the digital economy in three different sectors: E-commerce, platform economy and social commerce. In Laudon and Traver's (2016) definition, all three sectors are considered as E-commerce; while in Srnicek's (2016) definition, all three are part of the platform economy. However, based on my fieldwork, I define E-commerce as selling products in the digital market place where the customers assume the ownership of a product after transactions (e.g. eBay, Amazon); platform economy is mainly for services where there is no shift of ownership (e.g. Uber, Airbnb, or my respondent's camera rental shop on Taobao); and social commerce is a direct marketing model (most renownedly used by the company Anyway) into the digital space, where people use their social media (e.g. Facebook and WeChat) for marketing.

I argue that the emotions have, on the one hand, created values and meanings beyond cold economy transactions, but on the other hand, dug a deeper hole for self-exploitation. First, by comparing E-commerce platforms Amazon and Taobao, I show how sellers in China are required to engage more in aesthetic labour and emotional labour, and especially in constructing emotional closeness with customers, in order to make the consumer experience fun and enjoyable. Then, I introduce the online platform-based educational company X which I worked for three years to explain how the boundary between friend and customer/seller gets blurred in the platform economy. The porous boundary is the basis for self-exploitation as it pushes both the seller and customer to do more "free" labour for each other, not only for the capitalistic review system, but also for shared value and possibly emotions that the seller and customer develop for each other. Arguably, what the customer and seller develop could be better understood with concepts derived from *guanxi* studies that include *renqing* (norms of interpersonal behaviours) and *ganqing* (affect). I end this chapter with an overview of social commerce in which all social relations as potentially monetizable.

E-commerce

One assumption of E-commerce is that customers could make purchases more rationally as they can browse different pages to compare prices, product information and reviews, and related to that, they are free from interpersonal interactions. The argument may seem truthful, when one browses the webpage of Amazon – it has bluish-grey as its theme colour with static images of products listed in grid format, usually against the white background. When one clicks on a product page, the page opens one image with rotating options, bullet-point descriptions of the product, and package deal options, and two lines of similar products with one photo per each, average reviews stars and the number of reviewers. Only after the purchase has been made can one contact the seller for additional information. A customer can review both the seller and the product publicly without getting any feedback from the seller. If the customer wants to return/replace the item, the return is usually managed by Amazon's own logistics companies. What a customer needs to do is only print out the return code, paste it onto the carton box and take it to the nearest post office. It is only when the return is not managed by the Amazon warehouse that a customer communicates with the seller, in a non-instant chat page similar to an internet forum where users only type words and characters. When a customer's message is delivered, there is also an automatic email generated from Amazon into a customer's inbox, reminding one that it takes a few working days for the seller to respond. It is indeed a rational and industrial shopping experience, devoid of any personal touch. Customers browse the Internet to get the very product they want. Nothing more, nothing less. The E-commerce platform itself is not a source of joy.

However, if Amazon feels like shopping in Walmart or Cosco, Taobao is like the Online shopping theme park like Bicester village or OCT harbour.²³ The Taobao page starts with an

²³ Bicester village, located in Oxfordshire, is a luxury outlet shopping village with brands in barn cottages lined up in a row. OCT harbour is a large retail and entertainment complex with artificial lake and canals in Shenzhen.

orange theme colour with the anthropomorphosed mascot *dialogue bubble* grinning. The products shown in grids in Taobao are seldom placed against pale white background. They pay great attention to aesthetics: a clear focus on the product with background blurred but providing information such as usage of the product or its origin; a few keywords might be provided including the brand, name of the product and discount opportunities. Short videos are also available to promote products where the seller can display the product in detail or tell a story about the product. There are also online screening rooms where buyers, or in some cases celebrities or micro-celebrities, sell products. If you click on a product page, you can immediately view videos and photos of a product with buying and discount options. Information is provided with the photos or through narrations in short videos, in contrast with Amazon's bullet point style beneath the image of a product. More information is provided if a customer scrolls down the page, which feels like reading a photography magazine. In addition to large photos of products with short descriptions, the seller sometimes provides a story about the shop owner: quitting a banking job for handmade soap, for example. Sometimes, the seller provides information about the designer, such as a rising designer star from Hong Kong. If a customer looks into the left column of the page, a blue mascot *dialogue bubble* bounces up and down with its eyes wide open, welcoming consultations. If the customer clicks on the animated dialogue bubble, a dialogue starts with customer service in a separate instant messaging application. "Hello, *Qin* (亲 dear). How can I help?" is a standard greeting, very often followed by love or smiling emoji. In 2016, Taobao started online screening marketing, in which audiences are often addressed as "*baobao* (宝宝, babies)". No wonder Jack Ma said that Alibaba was the largest entertainment company in China, not only for its acquisition of the film company *Cultural China*, but also for paying great attention to making the shopping experience entertaining (Ifeng.com, 2014).

There has been a global trend in automation, especially in terms of manual labour – cleaning robots, machine delivery, machine (or AI) customer service, automatic cars etc. Certainly, Amazon deliveries are automated and feel like an automated process as it is becoming increasingly difficult for a customer to have human interactions during shopping. The rationalisation of consumption is clearly felt. Taobao, however, creates an opposite consuming experience for a customer: more interactive, fun and engaging. Han Byung-Chul's (2017b) would call it the gamification of the economy.

“Emotional capitalism is gamifying the life and working world. Playing games lends an emotional, indeed a dramatic, charge to working which in turn generates more motivation. Because games rapidly deliver a sense of success and reward, the result is higher performance and a greater yield. A person playing a game, being emotionally invested, is much more engaged than a worker who acts rationally or is simply functioning.” (Han, 2017b)

Aesthetic display

In January 2020, I was invited to watch an online screening promotion on Taobao for a novel. The novelist is branded as a beauty writer and musician. As the novelist starts her offline city tour to promote her newly published novel, she also started the online promotion in different platforms including Dangdang and Taobao.²⁴ In her Taobao screening event, she invited two experienced hosts who moved from traditional TV media to social networking media to help with recording and hosting. While one steered a standard combination of a tripod, smartphone and microphone for online screening, the other hosted the event. As shown in the screen capture photo, the interface of the event



Figure 2 Screen capture of a Taobao online screening marketing event

showed the audience number in the top-left corner with the name of the shop (in this case the Dangdang official shop on Taobao), a quantified closeness index between the viewer (in this case myself) and the hosts right underneath, the ID of the screening room in the top right corner, the comments from viewers were popping up in rows in the middle-lower part, the number of products sold in the left button corner, the comment input column in the middle button part, and the other two options in the right button part to share or like the screening event. The closeness index is set by the shop owner with options provided by Taobao including daily view +2, subscribe to the shop +5, watch for an incessant four-minute +5, post a comment +2 (maximum 10 times), like the screening event +2 (maximum 20 times) and share the event +10. Viewers are stratified according to the closeness index in ascending order from new fans, iron-class fans, diamond-class fans and affectionate fans. After each upgrade, the viewer might get discounted vouchers from the shop, fitting in with Han's

²⁴ Dangdang is the largest E-commerce platform for books in China.

(2017) observation of gamification. It creates an immediate reward system commonly used in games to encourage viewers to become not simply customers of the shop, but more importantly, fans of the host.

Han also poignantly observes that people have been absorbed into an explosion of idealised images in the digital epoch where the unmediated physical reality seems banal (Byung-Chul Han, 2017a, pp.27-31). Online screening marketing requires a seller to put even more effort into the aesthetic display, in order to engage more fans in the game of shopping. At the beginning of the screening event, the host gave a quick introduction of the event as meeting the post-90s generation beauty writer who wrote traditional style novels (古风小说) and reminded viewers that there would be four lucky draw events during the screening.²⁵ The gifts were the printed photos of the novelist, except for one carved stone seal with a verse of classical poetry cited in the novel.²⁶ In the middle of the screening, viewers commented that both the host and novelist have high look index (颜值 *yanzhi*). Look index, taken from Japanese Kanji, means the value of appearances. Similar to closeness index, *yanzhi* is yet another quantification of qualities belonging to the emotional realm, prescribing values and hierarchies to the ways people look in numeric form (Jing, 2016).

Closely related to look index are concepts of erotic capital and aesthetic labour. Erotic capital is a term proposed by Hakim (2010, 2011) to understand how the multifaceted attractiveness of an individual, and especially women because of men's sexual deficit (Hakim, 2015), could be used to exchange for other capitals in Bourdieuan categorizations: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Green criticises Hakim's theorization as ignoring structural inequality, which is the essence of Bourdieu's theory (A. I. Green, 2013a), and puts

²⁵ Post 90s generation refers the generation born between 1990 to 1999. Similar to millennials, aka Generation Y, they experience coming of age with the Internet. In Chinese context, they are the also generation under one-child policy born after Tiananmen Square protest.

²⁶ An equivilent scenario would J.K. Rowling selling Harry Potter series in a TV shopping channel with the host emphasiing on her look.

forth his theorization of sexual fields where individuals engage in Goffmanian presentations of self according to pluralistic sexual fields with distinctive erotic habitus (A. I. Green, 2008, 2013b). Nevertheless, it is still useful to understand the cultivation of physical appearance as investing in erotic capital. While erotic capital casts analytical light on individual relationships, aesthetic labour, then, has a strong focus on organisations. Aesthetic labour “is the practice of screening, managing, and controlling workers on the basis of their physical appearance ...(while) individuals are compensated, indirectly or directly, for their own body’s looks and affect” (Mears, 2014, pp.1330-1332). Aesthetic labour is a useful concept to understand the tripartite structure of 1) social forces (e.g. class, race, gender, sexuality and place) that calibrate who “looks good and sounds right”, 2) the control from organisations to maximise profit and 3) the individual incentives for material advancement as well as affective aspirations and belongings (Mears, 2011, 2014; Christopher Warhurst & Nickson, 2001; Williams & Connell, 2010). The process of cultivating erotic capital can be understood as aesthetic labour.

According to Mears (2014), aesthetic labour is more prevalent among two types of workers - interactive service workers (e.g. retail and tourism) and freelance workers (e.g. fashion models) which entails a great amount of “self-vigilance (that) transforms workers into ‘entrepreneurial labour’, making them risk-embracing rather than risk-averse, and ultimately normalizing a workplace in which workers absorb market risks as individualizing projects of the self (Neff et al, 2005, cited in Mears, 2014, p.1336)” . Managing an E-commerce business sits at the crossroads of both occupations. However, both erotic capital and aesthetic labour deal with the effort one puts into the body. The look index, however, could be applied to the human body as well as products, and the display of products of which the human body is one of many aspects. A model is very often the crucial part of product display, but many shops may also choose to display some products without a model. They instead show their products in a

well-curated setting, sometimes with a cat, plants, a cosy sofa or an artistic branch. These are all part of the look index.

Although there is no statistical evidence of correlation between sales and aesthetic display, it is the very foundation of differentiation in E-commerce. I cannot recall meeting anyone during my fieldwork who did not put great efforts into aesthetic display of their shops and products on Taobao. It is common for people to act as their own models, especially at the beginning of the E-commerce career. There were two fashion shop owners who modelled for their shops at the time of our encounter. They told me that they spent most of their time taking photos of their products. Very often they take more than 500 photos to select fewer than 10 usable photos of their products. One said, “before I opened the shop, I also thought it is a bit stupid to take photos in those *ins style* cafes and places”.²⁷ After photo shooting, they spent at least a day on photoshop editing of the selected 10 photos. Since they themselves were the spokespersons for their E-commerce shop, it required great self-discipline to look good. As one told me “many of my customers buy my clothes because of my style, I cannot get loose about my look index”. Both of them regularly visited the gym. One was already successful with more than 1 millions fans on Weibo²⁸, and the other was just at the beginning of her career with around 800 fans after four months. Both of them spent at least half of their time on photo-shooting and editing. When I asked the less experienced one whether she believed this was a good investment, she answered: “actually, most people get products from the same factory on Taobao, it is all about display.” She went on to tell me that many fashion Taobao shop owners in Guangdong province get their clothes from a physical market in Guangzhou, then combine their clothes in different ways, and sell them on Taobao under different marketing strategies.

²⁷ *Ins style* (*ins 风*) is a Chinese slang for styles of images that are perceived to receive many views and likes on the photo-sharing social network platform Instagram. It may contain different aesthetic styles ranging from Nordic style, minimalist style to luxurious style.

²⁸ Weibo is the Chinese equivalent of twitter, a micro-blogging social networking platform.

In other words, customers might get the same product from a punk-themed shop and a Hong Kong themed shop. Original design, which is believed to be the foundation of a fashion brand, seems secondary to aesthetic display in fashion shops on Taobao.

Jing and Zhao's company is another example. As their company does not do production, they get products from B2B factories and less than 10% of their products have an original design. Jing jested, "actually most products are the same. How can one scarf be so different from another? Just a piece of cloth with limited patterns – grids, striped, plain. There are some differences in materials. But it is not like wool or cashmere are as expensive as what customers think. Every time I go to Burberry, I laugh my ass off. We also get some scarfs from the same cashmere factory they collaborate with in inner Mongolia. In the end, it is about how you present your brand." Their Taobao shop carries an elegant classic style. At the beginning of her career, Jing modelled her own products. By the time of my visit in 2017, she had more than 20 fulltime staff in her design team in charge of product and shop display. There was a 30 square metre photography studio in their company with one professional photographer. They could change the setting of the studio for different styles including a girlish home with pink wallpaper and cotton sofas or a refreshing home with peppermint green wallpaper and coffee table. Very often their products are demonstrated by a slender, long-haired blonde Ukrainian model. Jing told me distressfully that it costs her 2000RMB (290USD) per hour for her photo shoot. Just to provide a comparison, she paid less than 500RMB (72USD) in total for Chinese models and 300RMB (43USD) per design for independent designers who collaborated with the company for their limited original design products.

Three other interlocutors also hired foreign models, and especially young women from Eastern Europe,²⁹ at a rate of 1000 to 2000 RMB (145 to 290 USD) per hour, which they

²⁹ This phenomenon could be of great interest to transnational migration scholars and has received some media coverages (see Hales, 2017; BestChinaNews, 2018).

considered a very large portion of their expenditure. One of my interlocutors said: “I know if I want to sell better, I must convey to my customers that my shop is *gaodashang*. Thus, I never save money on hiring foreign models.” *Gaodashang* (高大上) is an acronym for *gaoduan* (高端 high end), *daqi* (大气 classy), *shangdangci* (上档次 high grade) (Yabla, n.d.). The transnational aesthetic labour from Eastern European models, who are racially white and physically slender, constructed the cosmopolitan upper-class style of my interlocutors’ Taobao shops. For interlocutors who did not hire models themselves, it was common for them to send their products to other photography services on Taobao to outsource the aesthetic labour. One interlocutor of mine even expanded her E-commerce from selling leather bags to photography services. In her own words, she said: “the prices I have paid for the photos of my leather bags before had urged me to get into this new business. It is much more lucrative!” She is charging 1000-5000RMB (144-720USD) per product based on demand.

Taobao, a platform filled with fun and interactions, embodies Han’s (2017b) idea of the gamification of the economy. Both sellers and customers are players in the game. In this section, I explain how sellers are required to work perpetually and willingly on the look index of the shop and themselves, if necessary. A high look index ideally would be able to generate rewards for the sellers such as gaining more customers and fans. Customers, on the other hand, gain upgrades with more purchases and more closeness index. Another critical effort-taking realm for the sellers in the game of Taobao is customer evaluations.

Emotional labour

Good evaluation rates and positive comments from customers are the foundation of trust and reputation of an E-commerce seller (H. Cai & Jin, 2013; L. F. Zhang & Zhang, 2011).³⁰ If it is common for different sellers to sell the very same product on Taobao, then service is

³⁰ The trust system in E-commerce worth book-length discussions. This chapter puts focus on how emotional capitalism in digital economy leads to burnout, and therefore decide not to expand on this topic.

another factor that makes a shop distinctive. Sellers put great efforts into providing entertaining and pleasant shopping experiences for customers for good evaluations that distinguish them from other sellers. It entails an extensive amount of emotional labour to excel in the game of Taobao.

One of my interlocutors chose to use Amazon over Taobao. He provided me with three reasons. First, Taobao was too competitive when he joined around 2014. Secondly, he studied commercial English and therefore had an advantage in doing transnational businesses. And thirdly, he said: “the foreign buyers are a lot less demanding than the domestic ones. They don’t ask a lot of unrelated questions. If they do, it is via Email, and you can answer in a few days. Taobao buyers want your reply immediately. They ask for a discount. And some crazy ones even ask you for shopping advice. Selling things on Taobao can be annoying.”

While Amazon allows a delay in response time, instant messaging was introduced on Taobao as early as 2003. In her observations about the new media technologies in the workplace in the US, Melissa Gregg (2011) shows how our personal lives are permeated by work because of online technologies and how managing our work relations at home has become mandatory in the name of professionalism. In another perspective, Stefana Broadbent (2016) argues that we have also brought our intimacy to work, so that the work gains extra warmth. Their observations are two sides of the same coin, where the private and public must be redefined in the Internet age. In other words, both perspectives show that we are living in emotional capitalism, where emotion and economy are intrinsically intertwined in the shape of paradoxical integration. The technological infrastructure does not allow us to leave work in the workplace or leave private lives out of work, unless we can unplug ourselves from mobile devices connected to the Internet. If replying to emails has already generated disciplinary incitement for Gregg’s interlocutor to compulsively reply (Gregg, 2011, p.15), then the structure of instant messaging demands extra labour time from sellers on Taobao. Broadbent

(2016) notes that the more instant a medium is, the closer a relationship is (e.g. emails for colleagues and instant messaging for partners). In this sense, we could argue that Taobao requires a more intimate customer service style than Amazon.

The intimacy is also in tandem with a specific style of customer service, which netizens called Taobao style. Allegedly, it originated from fandom culture, whereby a singer started to call her fans dear (亲); then it became popular to address customers in Taobao shops as dear with an informal chatty style. Later, Taobao style also started to be adopted by official organisations such as universities, the Ministry of foreign affairs and police (Y. Yang, 2014). Listed beneath are two examples of the Taobao style.

First is an example of an E-commerce seller-customer dialogues:

“Seller: Dear, what do you need?

Customer: Do you have a Nokia 5230 phone?

Seller: Yep, dear, what colour do you want?

Customer: Do you have white? Shipping fee included?

Seller: Dear, have! We are selling it at the lowest price, cannot include the shipping fee. If dear wants, can give you a gift instead. ”³¹

The second example shows how Taobao style is adopted by official organisations. In 2011, Nanjing University of Science and Technology issued their acceptance letter to students via the following message:

“Dear, Congrats! You have been admitted to our school! NUST. We are listed in Project 211³². Lots of scholarship. Metro at your door! Beautiful scenery. Great place to study! Remember to register before the 2nd of September. The admission letter will be shipped tomorrow. Dear, full five-star reviews, please! Good comments, please! ”³³

³¹ Text cited from Xie (2011,p.146), translated by author.

³² Project 211 is a measure of National Key Universities in China.

³³ Text cited in Yang (Y. Yang, 2014, p. 171), translated by author.

Chinese linguists summarise a few characteristics of Taobao style: 1) using “dear” as the coreference for customers to convey cordiality; 2) using auxiliary words of moods at the end of a sentence to express the tone and emotion; and 3) using abbreviation, shortened sentences and idiomatic structure for informality (G. Xie, 2011; Y. Yang, 2014). With the assumed relation of femininity with caring, emotional and relational thinking, it is observed that Taobao style is feminine:

“Words as such make one feel warm, as if one is not shopping but making friends or chatting with relatives, friends and family. However amiable the words are, tender the tone is, friendly the reminder is – they embodied the benevolent humanities indeed- it is undeniable that they are driven by profits... Those auxiliary words of moods are what women like to use in a chat room, implying maidenly weakness, tricking customers to think of the seller as a girl. Therefore, a customer might be more accepting and less picky about the purchase.” (Y. Yang, 2014, p. 174)

Jing’s joke about her husband Zhao would be another example. “You know at the beginning, we need to do everything ourselves. You get the products, then take photos and do the design. Then you spend a lot of time talking to customers and then do the packaging and send the products yourself. I have full confidence in Zhao in everything, but the customer service. You know we have to talk in a certain way. ‘Qin (dear)’. ‘good taste’, ‘you must be so pretty’. You know all that. Otherwise, why do we call customer service little girl? (xiao mei, 小妹)” Jing was already laughing while narrating the story, “once I had to go for a university meeting and had to leave the customer service to Zhao. You know the way he is, just like that” She laughed again and waved her fist to imitate him because he was a martial arts fan, “I was worried the whole day that he would scare my customers away. But in the end, when I came back, I realised that he was just talking like a little girl.” Since Zhao had momentarily compromised his masculinity to deliver the Taobao style customer service, humour is a way to deal with the

transgression of the social norm (Raskin, 2008). Beneath the humour, however, are efforts and time that sellers put into customer service on Taobao from which Amazon sellers are exempted to some extent.

On Taobao, we can still differentiate the efforts sellers put in regulating emotions and aesthetics as a means to achieve the end of profit-making and argue that those efforts are not more than strategic performances for rational ruthless *homo economicus* to maximize utility. However, in the platform economy and social network economy, the boundary between emotion and economy, private and public, the affective and the instrumental is further blurred. I will demonstrate how emotions are not only manipulated for self-interest, but meaningful for self-subjectivities. They burnout not merely for an instrumental end, but an affective end as well.

Platform economy

This section is built upon my two-year experiences working as a freelance consultant for an online platform-based educational company. For anonymity and convenience, I call the company X.

X was established in the late 2012 by two overseas Chinese students, who both studied at Rice University. While the female founder first found a job in finance in the United States, she shared her experiences and tips for her then-boyfriend (now husband) in finding a job in the same sector. During her years studying in the US, she noticed a large demand among overseas Chinese students for sharing information and experiences about job applications in the US. Targeting this group, she then started a platform for a paid consultancy from employed people to job seekers, where she was the first mentor and her cofounder boyfriend the first student. She then asked a few friends of hers who started working on Wall Street to join the platform as mentors and put some advertisements on the social network circle of overseas Chinese students. Soon after, they expanded the service to mentorship from enrolled university students

to university applicants. In 2014, they brought their business to a start-up competition in China and secured angel investment of 4 million RMB. The same year, they quit their jobs in the US, returned to Chengdu, their hometown, and started managing the growing business fulltime with more than 40 fulltime staff and 1500 active online mentors by the end of 2018.

Two types of services are provided in X. First, individual services with different prices are listed by mentors on their personal page. A mentor could set the price (in USD), rounds of services, consultation time, word count they are willing to work on in one service. For instance, 300USD, 2 rounds, 60 min, 1500 words for a personal statement. The platform will then add an extra 20% as their commission fee to the price a mentor sets on their personal page. A student would make a request to a mentor by uploading a few lines of description and an attachment on the webpage. Then an automatic email would be generated asking the mentor to approve or reject the request. If approved, payments are made to X first so that students would be able to communicate with the mentor. Communication could be mediated through either X's official webpage or other instant messaging applications. Usually, students prefer to communicate on WeChat. During the service, X would not intervene until the end of service. While the evaluation from mentors to students takes the form of a private message, the review from students, including star evaluations (incrementally from zero stars to 5 stars) and a short description, are displayed publicly on the mentor's page without removal option. After mutual evaluation, X would send out the payment to either PayPal or Alipay accounts of a mentor.

The second type of service is called a VIP service. In this case, a student approaches X for a whole package service about university applications. A student can apply for up to eight universities on the premise that the student could be admitted to at least one. Then, X pairs students with two mentors: the primary mentor in charge of academic editing and the secondary mentor, usually a formal staff member of X, filling the application forms. Theoretically, limitless rounds of editing are available to the student until the student submits the application

forms. While X charges students around 45000 RMB (6430 USD), the primary mentor could get up to 20000 RMB (2860 USD) depending on negotiation. While the first half of the payment, 10000 RMB, is made after the service, the second half of payment is paid as a bonus if the student receives an offer.³⁴ The service usually starts with a half an hour probational WeChat group call that consists of a potential VIP student, an X staff member and a mentor. The WeChat chat group is dismissed immediately after the call so that the student does not have enough time to add the mentor personally. After the student makes the payment, the very same group will be assembled again. Even though it is suggested that all consultations are done in group chat, my students often add me personally and sometimes even create groups with their parents so that they can monitor progress. There is no mutual evaluation for VIP students, as the service is not listed on the mentor's page. While I have 106 reviews on my page with only one non-5-star review, I have had 4 VIP students.

Two vignettes

On the 21st of December 2017, I received a message on WeChat from my VIP student: “Urgent [with teary eyes emoji]. Could you work on my PS (personal statement) ASAP as the deadline for application is early Jan [with crying emoji]”? In the middle of packing for a Christmas trip to continental Europe, imminent frustration and anxiety struck me.

It was from Mary, a student who specifically requested me as her main mentor in the online educational platform X around early February. She did this after reading my “underdog queer women to Oxford PhD” story published in the X's WeChat public account. The public account is X's main source of advertisement and it had 200,000 subscribers by then. It shares not only tips and requirements about different overseas universities but also information about mentors' everyday lives. I wrote stories about me coming out to my mother as I went abroad, somehow

³⁴ The price I have provided is based on my personal experience. It is likely that for each case with different mentors, X would set price according. My students revealed the price they paid to X to me in private messages.

unconsciously attesting to Kam's (2019) observation of closeted Chinese LGBT "progressing" into cosmopolitan Chinese through mobility of going to a "better" liberal democratic place, which is also exactly why this article was published on X: not to promote LGBT rights in China but to offer going abroad as a utopian alternative for potential students with gender awareness.

In our first conversation, Mary told me, "my mother wanted to stick with the traditional agency first. But I cannot resist coming to you because I am touched by your story. I did research about you and showed her your official Oxford web page. So happy that I can find you." 17 years old, Mary had already headed four associations for gender equality and cultural heritage protection and delivered a TED talk, in addition to her many other academic and athletic achievements. It showed her capabilities as well as social class. She was preparing to enrol in top universities in the US from a very young age.

Initial contacts with her were pleasant. However, as endless rounds of consultation were permitted, I had to engage in one-to-two-hour consultations with her just to go through the structure of the personal statement, again and again at least 10 times. She would change her ideas just because she read one successful Harvard applicant's personal statement. At the very end of her application process when the deadline approached, she would call full-time staff from X at midnight using WeChat to ask them to fill the form "because it is daytime in the US". Meanwhile very often, she would also ask me to give feedback and proofread her work within a day or two. Managing my own studies simultaneously, I had to allocate time almost immediately to reading her work. Staff from X told me that Mary was the most demanding student that they ever had and that she irritated everyone she was in touch with. They even thought of ending her contract but thought it would be too far from complying to *renqing* (norms of interpersonal relations 人情). One staff member even told me just to revise her work carelessly because "VIP students cannot give you stars on your page". However, the result was that I still had to work on my computer during my trip, as she had to submit at least something

in the next fortnight. Later, Mary received a waiting list offer from a top ten university in the US and an acceptance letter from a top 50 university. She sent me a message again with a teary eye emoji asking whether I could still help with her appeal to the waiting list. “I am afraid not. This time, it’s really not included” I replied with a palms put together emoji, after X has transferred the rest of the bonus money to me. We remain friends on WeChat. Later, reading her WeChat friend circle posts, I noticed that she had been accepted by that top ten university.

Tom was among one of my early students, referred to me by another student of mine in 2016. In the referral WeChat message, my other student emphasized: “he is like you in that aspect as well. He likes boys.” By then, Tom already signed a contract with an agency, but my other student encouraged (or in her words “urged”) him to come to me for extra polish. He requested my individual services on a personal statement and CV. I edited each of his documents twice, complying with what I wrote on the webpage. We communicated at intervals for less than one month for his documents on WeChat and still greeted each other from time to time afterwards. As soon as the service was completed, he wrote very positive five-star reviews of my work. I was moved by reading the comments (then and even now when I read them again) and surely, these were helpful references for my students afterwards.

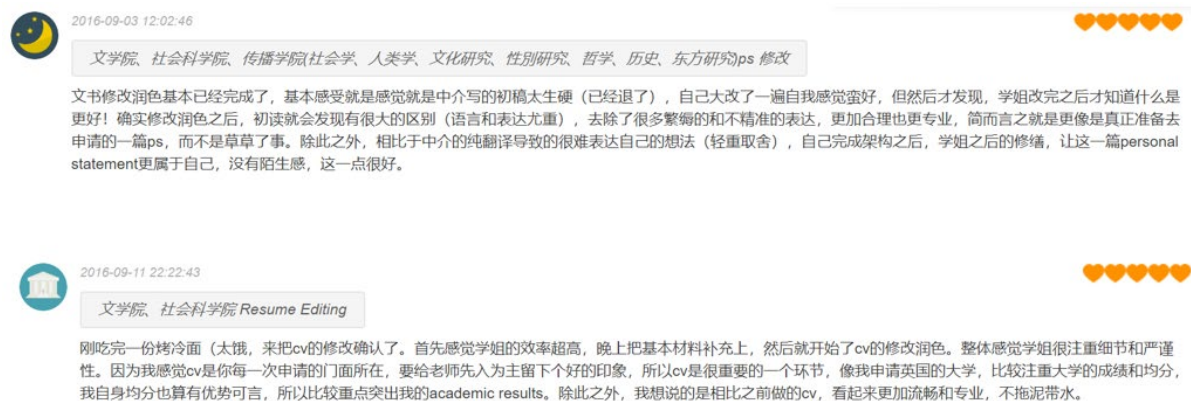


Figure 3 Screen capture of reviews on the platform X

Translations of Tom's comments:

For personal statement editing: "The modification of the paperwork was completed [before I approached Ling]. The basic feeling is that the first draft written by the agency is too stiff (especially in terms of language and expression). I made big modifications and felt pretty good. Then I found out about *xuejie* (学姐, study sister), I then knew what was even better! After her touch, you will notice a big difference, already in the first reading (especially in terms of language and expression). She removed many tedious and inaccurate expressions and made the piece more reasonable and professional. In short, it is more like real preparation for a PS rather than a hastily done job. In addition, the literal translation job that the agency did made it difficult to express my own ideas (and I found it hard to decide the importance of different sectors). After completing the structure [of the PS] by myself and the modification that *xuejie* made, this personal statement now really belongs to me, without distance. This feels good."

For the CV: "[I] just finished eating *naengmyeon* [a Korean noodle dish]. (I was too hungry and now I come to confirm the modification of CV.) First, I think *xuejie* is super-efficient. I added the basic materials at night, and then she started to modify the CV immediately. She pays great attention to details and is rigorous. I feel that CV is the facade of the application documents, so you must leave a good impression on the instructors, CV is important. I am applying for universities in the UK, which weigh more on university scores and grade point average (GPA). Since my GPA could also be considered an advantage, so I focus more on my academic results. In addition, I want to say that compared to the previous CV, this now looks more smooth and professional, not lengthy."

Most of my students call me *xuejie*, literally translated as an elder sister (*jie*) in learning (*xue*), carrying both a gendered connotation and the informal characteristic of the platform economy. It is gendered because, through naming, I unconsciously took up the role of carer as

an elder sister, slightly more experienced but in the same age group. It is informal because even though the job I do is more or less similar to a supervisor's, the relationship is not formalized because my "formal job", and the reason why I am listed on a platform as such, is that I am a fulltime DPhil student at Oxford. Paradoxically, the credibility of X as an education company is based on the fact that most educational work is outsourced to freelance mentors like myself without contracts.³⁵ As another student of mine pointed out, "why would an Oxford PhD work as an education agent? The most outstanding ones like you will never work fulltime for a company like that. That's why I can only find you on X."

In 2017, both Tom and his friend went to their ideal universities in London. They proposed to visit me in Oxford. I asked them to join me for a public talk in the China Centre, before I treated them to my college for formal dinner.³⁶ As they were late for the talk, I recognised them slightly before they could recognise me (it is also because they have uploaded more photos of themselves to their WeChat Moments than I have done on mine). I noticed that they cautiously looked around and I waved to them after I sent them a message on WeChat. Then, we went to the formal dinner, where they were impressed by the formality of Oxford. That was also the first and only time we have seen each other in person so far.

In Spring 2018, when I was applying for a scholarship based in London, I noticed anxiously during my onground fieldwork in China that the institute required me to send them physical copies. Most of my friends are based in Oxford. I then asked Tom, rather embarrassed and without much hope, whether he could submit the documents on my behalf. To my surprise, he replied almost immediately that he would print it out in the library and take the metro to the institute directly. Within an hour, he told me that he had delivered my dossier. This was a year and a half after we finished the consultancy.

³⁵ I used "most" because X hired two fulltime native speakers for proofreading.

³⁶ Formal dinners are college-arranged three-course meal with formal dress codes and academic gown.

Precarity and care

Platform economy has been studied extensively under the lens of precarious labour, deregulation, and in general as an intensification of neoliberalism. Without putting the spotlight on the digital economy, observers after the 2008 economic crisis have already pointed to the direction of unescapable neoliberal hegemony. Depression haunted posthumous writer Mark Fisher (2009) observed in his concept of *capitalist realism* that everything, even the alternative subversive looking ones, could be subsumed under capitalism as there has been a dearth of imagination about alternative systems after the collapse of Berlin wall. Problems in the capitalist system are reduced to individualistic problems of mental disorder, awaiting commercial treatment from the newly prevailing knowledge/power system of psychiatry (Fisher, 2009). Similar observations were made by Guy Standing (Standing, 2011) in his work that popularised the precariat class, a newly formed social class that started from below (also see Savage *et al.*, 2013) but gradually absorbed all in the new work relations deprived of security. Srnicek (Srnicek, 2016) poignantly observed that the platform economy is just another wave of coping mechanism within neoliberal capitalism to deal with the economic crisis and high unemployment rate. Indeed, the internet and especially the invention of platform economy sugarcoats unprotected unregulated labour in the name of sharing, community building and autonomy, and in fact adversely affects the mental health, long-term career development and living standard of most workers under capitalism (Bates *et al.*, 2019; Morgan, 2017; Muntaner, 2018; Prassl, 2018; Webster, 2016). As legal scholar Jeremias Prassl (2018) warns, the reality of the platform economy turning workers to micro-entrepreneurs is a circumvention of employment law and regulation.

By all means, my labour on X is not protected by any laws or regulations. I have never signed a contract with X. I have never been to X physically. I cannot resort to any legal help if X decides not to transfer a student's money to me. Nor can my students be guaranteed that their mentor will not counterfeit their education or withdraw support halfway. I have an unstable

flow of students and I cannot predict or calculate my working hours for each month. I am not arguing against the observation that platform economy is precarious, or that it is just another hoax of the neoliberal capitalism. However, echoing the questions raised by many, are exploitation, disenchantment and depression the only side of the story that needs to be repetitively told and emphasized (Chow, 2019; Lu et al., 2019; Skeggs, 2014; Skeggs & Loveday, 2012)?

Skeggs refuses to see modern humans only as interest-driven *homo economicus* and states, “we may be disenchanting, alienated and experience anomie and subject to the imperatives of neoliberalism, market populism and capitalist realism, but these are not the only social relations that shape us” (2014,p.16). Lu, Koon and Pun (2019) develop Skeggs’ critique and examine how care has become a major glue for class solidarity in vocational schools in China. Hong Kong lyricist and cultural studies scholar Chow Yiufai discerns “care in precariousness” of single women in the creative industry in Shanghai and offered a possibility to see the precariousness itself as affective, potentially liberating, and subtly subversive in the patriarchal neoliberal capitalism. Chow raises a possibility of considering both precarious creative work and singlehood as a choice and investigates the care single women provide to themselves as well as to each other, in addition to the vulnerability that many have observed (e.g. Fincher, 2012; To, 2015). In translating *precarious* in Chinese, Chow and his interlocutor poetically came up with the expression “*yaoyao yuzhui* (摇摇欲坠): tossing, swaying, trembling, about to, **wanting to** fall, to topple” (Chow, 2018,p.20, boldened by author). The nuance that added up in their Chinese translation is *yu* (欲) - wanting to. The voluntary desire and intentional decisions to choose a more precarious situation, even though there exist anticipated and unanticipated risks. By taking emotions into consideration, we can better understand how people voluntarily and willingly burnout in the digital economy.

Mary was not the only student who chose me via X thanks to the coming out article I wrote. My students could arguably form an LGBT and allies online community. It is noted that the Internet has facilitated the LGBT community and activism in China (J. Cao & Guo, 2016; Kang & Yang, 2009). Through my experiences of working on X, I wish to add that economy and commerce is another dimension of community. A strand of marketing scholars understand consumers in the post-Fordian era as forming **economic tribes** where shared values bond consumers and sellers together (Cova & Kozinets, 2007). The idea originates from social theorist Michel Maffesoli who defies the idea of intensified individualism (e.g. Beck, Giddens and Lash, 1994; Bauman, 2000), and argues that today we are seeing a proliferation of emotional communities, or in other words tribes, that are constructed through catchwords, brands and consumption (Michel Maffesoli, 1996). The Internet further connects and glues dispersed people with similar values (Castells, 2001) and allows various economic tribes to grow on different platforms like fans to celebrities with constant negotiations between economy and emotions (K. Hamilton & Hower, 2010; Mardon et al., 2018). For instance, Youtube Beauty Gurus need to negotiate with their fans about whether they can and how they should promote sponsored beauty products (Mardon et al., 2018). While some fans would consider it a betrayal to the fan community if the guru promotes the project too late, too early, too much or at all, others show understanding and support to the guru (Ibid.).

It is because of shared values that many students come to me. But at the same time, I am also expected to provide extra labour to guard the shared value, voluntarily or compulsorily. In the case of Mary, I shifted from providing extra work out of care for a promising junior who also cared about gender and social issues to doing professional consultancy in clarifying my duties. Mary heavily used emojis in her WeChat messages, in order to inject more emotions in her messages (Giannoulis, 2019) on a platform designed for the private realm with friends and families. Those emojis were tactics to urge me to work more for her, like her elder sister. The

attitude that she had with staff from X, as I heard, was less polite and “girly” but rather straightforward, or in their words “like giving orders”. It was intriguing. On the one hand, my freelance precarious work agreement with X provided me with full credit in terms of human capital as a fulltime Oxford student, but not a full-time educational agent. But on the other hand, since I had not signed any official contract with X, a good curation of emotions on WeChat became one of Mary’s limited means to keep me from walking away from her project. Theoretically, I could leave this task and let X allocate another mentor to Mary. X would avoid such situations because their platform could lose credibility among their target market as a start-up. Therefore, their staff resorted to two means. Firstly, they tried to form some work solidarity with me by complaining about what Mary did to other staff, and then allowing me to work less with compromised service quality. Nevertheless, by reiterating that VIP students could not give me evaluations, they were also reminding me that the work that I had with them was after all a micro-entrepreneurship project of my own, for which I should bear all the risks (as if they didn’t take half of the profit from Mary’s case!)

It was via the reminder of my neoliberal individualistic duty that X staff played the second card, a moral one. *Renqing*, norms of interpersonal behaviours serving as social insurance for the network, is a crucial concept in understanding *guanxi* (enduring interpersonal relations) in China (Barbalet, 2018). *Renqing* entails the consideration of the emotional closeness, social hierarchies, cultural norms as well as previous and predicted social indebtedness (Kipnis, 1997; Yan, 2003) and is one of the best examples to demonstrate relative morality that is known as a Chinese characteristic (Liang, 2005). Intriguingly, *renqing* is supposed to function among a community with enduring relationships (Kipnis, 1997; Yan, 2003). It is plausible to argue that the relationships that I have with people via X are enduring, especially compared to people’s network in rural China as researched by Kipnis (1997) and Yan (2003). In the context of urban China where people enjoy a higher level of social mobility, it is observed that people

demonstrate the understanding of *renqing* to facilitate *guanxi* building in banquets via extensive drinking and post-banquet social activities that usually include the consumption of sex work (Mason, 2013; Tang, 2020). Through my previous ethnography with marketing executives in Shenzhen, I (2016) argue that because of the lack of trust among newly formed *guanxi* networks, which is very often the case in the immigrant-fuelled metropolis, trustworthiness is demonstrated via a mastery of *renqing*. When X staff asked me to not to leave Mary's case behind by obeying *renqing*, they hoped that I could evaluate my collaboration with them as enduring, or at least potentially enduring, and demonstrate my trustworthiness.

With students who have requested individual services via X with moderate demands and especially those who engage actively in feminist and LGBT activism, I very often provided them with some extra help (e.g. one extra round of proofreading) to gain emotional satisfaction and, I had to admit, an ensured five-star review. It is also very common for E-commerce sellers to give extra discounts or gifts to their customers for good reviews. However, unlike most cases in E-commerce, very often, after the service was finished on X, my students would still be in touch with me to discuss gender issues and personal problems. Kozinets et al. describes virtual communities as

Combin[ing] work and play, passion and profit, adult like rules and the childlike wonder of play. Being engaged in passionate work with a group of supportive others...brings back intimacy with ourselves and our capacities alongside closeness with **friends** to share our passion. (Kozinets et al., 2008, cited in Hamilton and Hewer, 2010, p.274)

Following the idealised reading of economic tribes formed via the Internet, it seems that I should understand Tom's help as proof for our relationship evolving from customer/client to friendship. Similar to sociologists' approach to love (Illouz, 2012), friendship also needs to be contextualised in time and space to understand its meanings as well as boundaries. Drawing a

distinction between utilities and emotions is a long-lasting tradition in western philosophy since Aristotle and Cicero on their discussions about friendship (Pahl, 2003). The most sacred and supreme form of friendship is free from utilitarian intentions, hierarchies and obligations which are inevitable elements of kinship and neighbourhood (Ibid.). Friendships are hailed as congenial, devoted and democratic, similar to the construction of love, inheriting Cartesian mind/body dualism that denounced the utilitarian and material as contamination to emotions (Zelizer, 2005). However, as Zelizer (2005) demonstrates in her analysis of law cases, love and material, or rather emotions and economics, have always been inseparable. The concept of friendship in China is not so much reframed in Descartes' dualism. Admittedly, mutual understanding between well-educated men has also been highly praised in traditional prose, most famously in the story between musician Boya and music critic Zhong Ziqi³⁷ that led to the translation of soulmate into *zhiyin* (知音), one who understands your music. However, the mutual understanding between *zhiyin* is not exclusively one of utilitarian interdependence, as Aristotle and Cicero portray in the western tradition.

Instead of friendship, therefore, I propose to understand long-term intended seller-customer relations through the lens of *guanxi*, the enduring interpersonal relationship that consists of instrumental and expressive aspects (Barbalet, 2018; Bian & Ikeda, 2014; Qi, 2013). *Guanxi* has received great scholarly attention in understanding the development of capitalism in China (T Gold et al., 2002; Nolan, Rowley, & Warner, 2017). While the instrumental aspect of *guanxi* focuses on the reciprocity and benefits one gains from a relationship or a network, the expressive aspect of *guanxi* includes components of *renqing* (norms of interpersonal behaviours), *ganqing* (emotional attachment), trust, trustworthiness and face. As a social practice, *guanxi* is studied in terms of its usage over time and space (Bian, 2002; Bian & Ikeda,

³⁷ Allegedly, Boya destroyed his zither after Zhong Ziqi's death, as Boya believed no one could understand his music as much.

2014; C. C. Chen, Chen, & Huang, 2013; Kipnis, 1997; Yan, 1996; M. M. Yang, 1994), development in the light of the decline/maintain debate (Barbalet, 2015; T Gold et al., 2002; Guthrie, 1998; G. G. Hamilton, 1996) and male-centredness as criticised by many feminist scholars (Bedford & Hwang, 2013; Mason, 2013; Tang, 2020). In line with the post-colonial impetus to produce southern theories (Bhabra, 2007; Connell, 2007), there are important calls to theorise *guanxi* as a theory, which is equivalent to social network theory and social capital theory (Barbalet, 2015; Qi, 2013). Firstly, *guanxi* debunks the emotion/economic dualism and offers a way to understand this pair of opposites as a paradoxical integration (Qi, 2014). Secondly, the expressive components of *guanxi* are widely referred to in the Chinese context (e.g. how X used *renqing* as discussed previously), which are not only critical in dissecting the Chinese cultural specificity, but also crucial in making universal theoretical comparisons and contributions. Sociologist Qi Xiaoying (2011), for instance, delineates how the concept of face travels in global sociology, particularly in Goffman's dramaturgy.

In December 2018, Tom was in touch with me again to ask me to help one of his juniors for school applications. Initially, I replied to him: "as I have scholarships now to sustain my PhD, I am afraid that I could not help your junior."³⁸ But then, he persuaded me by telling me how much he appreciated my work and that he really wished his junior could receive a similar service. "I really don't want her to be fooled by other people and especially those agents who have no capability. *Xuejie*, please. [with teary eyes emoji]." As I was economically more sustainable after the first year of my PhD, I earned more freedom in choosing those to whom I provide service. The freedom discourse upheld by most of the platform economy is dependent on the economic status of the platform user. Sadly, many people choose to work freelance on the platform economy in the first place because of lack of other resources and opportunities (Bates et al., 2019; Muntaner, 2018; Srnicek, 2016), similar to lower-class women's making

³⁸ He used the term *xuemei* (学妹). Similar to *xuejie*, *xuemei* refers to younger sister in terms of learning.

the “choice” of sex work over factory work (Ding, 2016; Hoang, 2015). It was upon receiving my first batch of scholarship that I gained more freedom. I rejected numerous students if I noticed that they did not share similar values as me. For instance, I rejected a student on her follow-up request on the personal statement after the initial consultation service during which she asked me whether the programme of South Asian Studies would be filled with “achcha”, a derogative term Chinese speaking people use to refer to Indians and Pakistanis. Going back to Tom’s referral, I had to take into consideration that he submitted my application earlier that year. Certainly, care is generated from the precarious platform economy of X for and from both Tom and I (Chow, 2019). However, what Chow (2018) did not further elaborate on are the obligations embedded in cultured social interactions beyond instinctive emotions. It was both because of a voluntary visceral attachment that I have with Tom, known as *ganqing*, and an obligatory *renqing* debt (人情债) that I owe to him that I decided to help his junior. As a consequence, I had to spend more of my time for the service with the same standard as Tom probably described to his junior. I burnt out in the end, even though I had the economic freedom not to do so.

The reason why I burnt out on X was beyond Han Byung-chul’s elucidations. He would attribute this to the achievement society where individuals engage in self-exploitation (Han, 2015). He also believes that in the social network age, what is left to individuals are only the inflation of emotion and sensations, and that there is the agony of eros since one is left to sink in narcissism where no one can affectively resonate with another (Han, 2017a, 2017d, 2018c). In his logic, it is exactly because one loses meaningful connections with the world and others, then one would have no other meanings of life other than burning out for achievements. However, I burnt out exactly because of the emotional attachments and shared values that I had with my students on X. I burnt out because of the bittersweet economic tribe (Cova & Kozinets, 2007) that I share with my students. I had to work more to demonstrate our shared values and

it was because of the shared values that we had to provide more “free” labour for each other. I burnt out because I was engaged in, or trapped in, the *guanxi* that I had with my students.

While my previous analysis could be considered part of the attempt to use *guanxi* theory to explain the relations between seller and customer in the platform economy, I will further elaborate the point in the next section of social commerce.

Social commerce

In the Oxford Dictionary of Public Health, social network marketing is defined as

The process of conceiving, developing, placing, and testing highly targeted advertisements in social networks (e.g., Facebook) based on detailed data on the personal profile information and interactions of users. Many such advertisements are related to lifestyle, health, risk factors, and other health determinants. Companies and other organizations (e.g., tobacco companies and their contractors) may also have their own Facebook (etc.) pages, making it possible for users to be “friends,” with little or no regulation (Porta & Last, 2018).

In my fieldwork, I encountered two types of social network marketing, known as WeChat merchant (微商) and social commerce (社交电商). WeChat merchant, self-explanatorily, refers to those who use WeChat as a platform for business. The mushrooming of WeChat merchant is because of WeChat’s all-encompassing functions that include instant messaging, moments (social networking) and WePay (both in terms of monetary transaction and storage). Theoretically, social commerce includes WeChat merchants (Tan, 2015; Yali Zhou & Cao, 2016). However, E-commerce overlaps with social networking marketing because many Taobao sellers use WeChat as one of their means of marketing. My interlocutors therefore usually differentiate social commerce from E-commerce and WeChat merchandising based on the narrow terms of where the transaction is based. For them, if the transaction is conducted on Alibaba platforms, it is E-commerce; if WeChat, it is WeChat marketing; while other platforms linked with WeChat are social commerce. Nevertheless, I would refer to both WeChat

merchandising and social commerce as social commerce since the business models are very similar.

Social commerce is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Marketing as “an area of e-commerce that uses social networks to facilitate online buying and selling of products and services”. Social network marketing could be considered as both the means and defining character of social commerce. Very often, social commerce platforms are directly linked with WeChat while Alibaba platforms including Taobao and TMall are barred from doing so because of business competition. The most renowned social commerce platforms in China are *Pinduoduo* and *Yunji*. While *Pinduoduo* relies on users to ask their contacts for group deals (the larger the group, the cheaper the product would be), *Yunji* is a membership-based social commerce platform for users to develop their network marketing. On *Yunji*, users receive commissions up to two levels for other users they introduce to the platform. For example, if A introduces B to *Yunji*, B introduces C, and C introduces D, A could receive commissions for B and C’s purchases but not D’s.

Oxford dictionary of marketing defines network marketing as:

“a form of direct selling in which distributors of a product attempt to sell to end users and to others who will become themselves distributors. A network effect is created”(Doyle, 2016)

and direct marketing as:

“the process whereby the producer sells to the end users, final consumer, or retailer without intervening middlemen such as wholesalers, retailers, or brokers outside of a fixed retail location and usually in the home or workplace of the potential buyer. This typically involves face to face presentation, communication, negotiation, and persuasion using a direct sales force. It is probably the oldest form of commercial distribution, and, with the growth of the Internet, its importance is diminishing for consumer goods and

commodity services but [it] is still important in the sale of specialized goods and services”(Doyle, 2016).

According to definitions, network marketing and direct marketing seem to be in contrast with Internet marketing as the former two put emphasis on face-to-face interactions while Internet marketing presumes virtual connections. In marketing literature, network marketing and Internet marketing are used as comparative variables (Poon & Albaum, 2019). However, social commerce bridges network marketing and Internet marketing with social networking applications. Many scholars have discussed the professional and private boundary negotiations on Facebook (Frampton & Child, 2013; Peluchette, Karl, & Fertig, 2013) and how different platforms show the respective closeness of a relationship (Broadbent, 2016). In the WeChat ecology, however, most functions can be done in the single one app alone. WeChat moments is the most popular social networking platform with more than 87.3% of usage among all netizens (Luo, 2018). Because of WeChat’s market dominance and all-encompassing structure, there is not a dispersal of users to other platforms according to intimacy levels. We have friends, colleagues, schoolmates, family, intimate partners and clients all on WeChat. One user can have several WeChat accounts, but many functions, especially WePay, can only be activated when one links a bank card with the application. It is also via linking a bank card that the real-name authentication is executed, complying with state regulations.³⁹

Let me introduce Angel, who was introduced to me as a WeChat merchant legend. She started being economically dependent on her ex-boyfriend, a millionaire with his own start-up at the age of 26. They migrated to Shenzhen from Wenzhou before she finished her course in a polytechnic college in 2014 when she was 22. “My only duty was just being pretty back then. I had a job as a receptionist that only paid my taxi bills -3000 (RMB). My ex-boyfriend gave me his credit card for shopping. I would use around 10,000 each month.” But in half a year,

³⁹ More information can be found on WeChat Help Center’s webpage(Center, n.d.).

their relationship faced a crisis. She recalled a quarrel that led to the break-up, saying: “I threatened him that I would leave him if he would still control me like that. Guess what? He laughed and said provocatively ‘of course you can leave me. You can’t even afford a place to live, let alone your fancy lifestyle.’ I was enraged, even though I couldn’t deny the truth of his words. I packed immediately and moved to my friend’s place that night. I searched all over about what to do online. I didn’t even have a proper university degree... It’s impossible for me to have a job that pays well... Then, I just saw this person advertising Japanese enzyme drinks on their WeChat moments.⁴⁰ I thought, “I could also do that.” I then texted her to ask whether I could also be a distributor.” Angel joined in to sell enzyme drinks as a spot in the chain of network marketing. “At that time, I didn’t have many friends in Shenzhen. Guess what I did? I went to places like shopping malls, cafes and airports to add strangers using the WeChat people nearby to reach potential customers...”⁴¹ Angel’s customers then led to a snow-ball of customers. She soon developed a proportion of distributors of her own, and gradually earned a good living. She became the main provider for her family in her hometown, especially during the times when her father was fighting cancer.

“Why did people add you?” “I am presentable, charming and reliable.” Angel giggles, “who won’t add a stylish young beauty?” She then showed me how she carefully curated her three WeChat accounts, one for business, one for family and friends and the last one for matchmaking. I added her on her second account, which was already filled with selfies and enzyme drinks information. But then she laughed, “come on, I only post two posts per week in this account! In my business account, I post at least 5 per day.” She then showed me her

⁴⁰ Moments is a social-networking function for wechat users to share statuses including pictures, short videos, articles and captions. A user could decide the scale (to everyone, friends, selected groups of friends, or private)and accessibility of status (all accessible or accessible for a certain period of time ca. a year, half a year, three months, a week or three days.).

⁴¹ People nearby is a function that allows users to interact with other users who have turned on the function through phone GPS positioning. Tencent had not set a distance limit to the function. When the function is on, one can access other uses’ account, profile picture and moment if they are open to public.

business account. Interestingly, among the posts, more than half were lifestyle photos including attending business seminars in the Shangri-La hotel, travelling in Japan, or her convertible Porsche. Seeing that I was surprised and confused, Angel said, “I have to let my customers and distributors know that I have a desirable life. I want them to want to be me... My enzyme drink is about making people beautiful. How can an ugly person sell this? ... If people don’t want to live a life like mine, how would they be my contributors?” She then revealed that she had spent about 200000 RMB on plastic surgery, and that her Porsche was a parallel import. “I didn’t want to buy the Porsche initially, but my mom told me that some of her contacts were gossiping about me being a WeChat merchant. I just want them to know that I can live a magnificent life so that they can shut up. I want to give face to my mom.”

Sociologist Anthony Elliott (Elliott, 2008) deems cosmetic surgery to be an embodiment of self-design and self-improvement under hyper-modernity, echoing some previously discussed findings from aesthetic labour scholars (Mears, 2014; Christopher Warhurst & Nickson, 2001). From Angel’s experience, however, we observed how the investment she made on erotic capital is embedded in *guanxi*. *Guanxi* is different from friendship in that it does not carry a Cartesian mind/body dualism baggage. *Guanxi* always takes into account hierarchies, obligations, social roles and most importantly, utilitarian aspects in the name of reciprocity. For Angel, everyone around her could be potential customers or distributors. However, she would still need to balance her instrumental intentions, especially in terms of social media representations, to maintain different relationships. “I also have luxurious photos in my friends’ WeChat account and I post my products there. I am proud of what I do. It’s just milder in terms of frequencies. Plus, I also post my daily life there, like the stuff I cooked or just something fun in daily life... WeChat merchant is not a conventional job. People might think that you are annoying. I have lots of clients in this account [account for friends] too... And some of my clients asked to be added to my personal account after some time... They like to see my daily

life. They felt closer to me that way... But most of my distributors are in my business account. I need to let them trust me in my success.” Even though Angel uses both accounts for business, she made clear distinctions according to social roles to maximise her interests. To maintain the standardised beauty is also a means for her to turn the connections around her into profitable and useful relations. I asked her, then, what her representation is like in the matchmaking account. She giggled again with a twist of smartness, “I don’t post much luxurious stuff, so that guys won’t be threatened. I just post small things like meals I cook or plants I have at home... I would tell them that I am just an insignificant WeChat merchant... My job allows me to stay at home.”

A study based on a breakdown of a survey of 50 people reports that WeChat merchants are mostly women (82%) less than 30 years old (96%) who do it part-time (96%) and earn less than 4000 RMB per month (92%) (Gong, 2016). Even though the sample is not representative, it still shows the precarious condition of WeChat merchants. Based on this, it is not surprising that Angel would have to pay so much attention to proving the value of her work to customers and distributors, especially when her own income depends significantly on her distributors. It is also understandable that her mother would be put in a situation of face-losing because of Angel’s job. Angel chose to demonstrate her economic capital in a conspicuous manner to compensate for the lack of security in her work. By means of the Porsche Angel enabled her mother to vindicate herself. The mother could demonstrate her daughter’s materialistic reliability and leverage in attracting people around her. However, facing a heteronormative marriage market, the precariousness of WeChat merchant also became a way for Angel to demonstrate her femininity as a docile domestic woman who would not need to negotiate between public and private duties since her job allowed her to stay at home to cook and take care of plants. By the time I encountered Angel, it seemed that she could maneuverer all aspects of being a WeChat merchant. She was also actively planning her next steps by making

investments in the real estate market to turn her capital into a less liquid form. She already had flats in Shenzhen, Wenzhou and the US. During my in-depth interview with her, she was constantly checking her WeChat and replying to messages. At the end of the interview, she said, “the most tiring thing of being a WeChat merchant is that I always have to answer millions of texts at once and manage my Moments with extreme care. When I have enough property to generate rents, I won’t have to do all these anymore and can use WeChat more freely.”

How tiring could social commerce be, then, when everyday interactions all become potential work? Jing and Zhao collaborated with a TV personality to establish their own social commerce platform in 2017. Both parties were top sales people in Alibaba in their province, but they wanted to upgrade their business by having their own platform Z. Z also operated on a membership basis with a direct marketing business model, similar to *Yunji*, and both platforms sell selected businesses to customers (B2C) products. The founders of Z advertised the platform as “half love, half profession” since Z allowed its members to work flexibly in terms of time and space. Theoretically, members could allocate time for things and people they love. They also arranged their business schools online and onground to enhance the solidarity, devotion and influence of Z. I became a member and attended their business schools both online and onground. In their application, there existed a leaderboard where top sellers and their daily income could be seen by all members. Every day, the number one seller would share experiences in Z’s online business school, which operated on *qianliao* chat, a WeChat sub-application that allowed unlimited users to listen an online lecture.⁴² In one lecture, a TV channel director shared how she went through all her contacts on WeChat. WeChat has a maximum limit of 5000 friends. The director said that she set a goal of talking to 50 friends

⁴² X also uses *qianliao* chat for their promotions. *Qianliao* is designed for public lectures on WeChat for three reasons. First, WeChat only permits 500 members in a single chat group. Secondly, *QianLiao* allows the lecture organiser to set a fee for people to join a lecture room. Thirdly, it separates lecturers from audiences in its setting so that it is easier for the speaker to dominate the chatroom interface. Audiences’ responses would pop up in a section designated for questions while the main chat interface is controlled by lecturers and organisers of the talk.

per day. For each friend, she claimed, she would use at least 10 minutes to communicate and to promote Z systematically. If what she said was true, she would then spend at least 500 minutes, 8 hours and 20 minutes per day, to communicate for the business on WeChat just for outreach and the promotion of Z. If some people had further questions, she would use another half an hour or so to communicate and answer questions. With such working hours, one can hardly say working for Z was still a part-time job.

Some audiences asked what to do when friends felt annoyed by the business. She answered “social commerce is all about trust...it is time to test how much your friends trust you now... If they don't understand what you are doing now or decide to delete your contact, it means that they are not trustworthy in the first place.” *Guanxi*, especially after the economic reform, is studied extensively as a way to use enduring relations to achieve an instrumental end, like job seeking or business deals, and pulling *guanxi* is a typical phenomenon when a *guanxi* seeker strategically particularises a general tie for instrumental purposes (Bian, 1997; Nolan et al., 2017; Wank, 1996). The structure of social commerce has turned a friend in the social network as *guanxi* with an instrumental end. Moreover, as Zhao once shared with me, “actually a lot of our members do not use the money they earn on our platform. What they really enjoy is the reward system and their name to be shown on the leaderboard.” For platform Z, they have also added a layer of gamification to social commerce to entice members to voluntarily burnout even more.

Conclusion

The chapter enumerates how people burn out in E-commerce, the platform economy and social commerce, three types of digital economy governed by emotional capitalism. Emotional capitalism sees emotions as an inherent impetus for the development of capitalism in which people willingly burn out not only for productivity but also for emotional rewards. I first show how the entertaining game-like setting of Taobao urges sellers to put more efforts into both

aesthetic labour and emotional labour. Then, I demonstrate how the porous boundary between friend and customer in the platform economy and the shared values among online economic tribes request extra labour from both sellers and customers. Here I propose to view the long-term intending relationship between seller and customer as *guanxi* instead of friendship to elude the emotion/economy dualism. Lastly, I further develop the point that people burn out more by seeing all relationships as *guanxi* with an instrumental end by examining social commerce. Different from Han Byung Chul's theoretical underpinning that treats individuals as disconnected atoms, I argue that people engage in self-exploitation in the digital economy in China exactly because of the values they share and the *guanxi* they have with others.

The linkages to the Internet are made most apparent in this Chapter, as it is based on online ethnography. However, the Internet age is both online and onground (see Chapter 2). There is no online interaction without onground physicality, as there are increasingly few offline interactions that are free from digital devices that are connected to the Internet. The empowerment that I discuss in Chapter 3 is also enabled by the development of the digital economy. In the next two chapters, I try to scrutinise the varied social-economic contexts that have shaped the onground social realities of businesswomen in Shenzhen and Hefei in terms of their businesses and private lives.

Chapter 5: Shenzhen: Two Tales of a City

The previous chapter started with a beauty novelist selling her book with her beauty tips to audiences in front of their mobile devices at a Taobao online screening event and ended with Angel's story of success – a woman who invested heavily in her physical appearance, including plastic surgery, to boost her business success and achieve social mobility. One cannot help but ask: how could this be feminist?

Many scholars consider investment in appearances as loose and idiosyncratic (A. I. Green, 2013a; Mears, 2011, 2015), a postfeminist (Anderson, 2014; McRobbie, 2004) trap that forces women to become aesthetic entrepreneurs under neoliberal capitalism where appearances, including confidence, become an inherent part of success (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017). Women's appearance, and to a much lesser extent men's appearance, are scrutinised under a magnifying glass by corporates that diagnose "problems" usually following a patriarchal heteronormative middle-class standard (Elias et al., 2017; Mears, 2014). By cultivating and maintaining a certain look, the individual gains a sense of belonging and subjectivity: an urban belonging for Chinese migrant workers of rural origins (Pun, 2005), an upper-class belonging for hosts in Tokyo nightclubs (Takeyama, 2016), and a high-end fashion belonging for indebted runway models (Mears, 2011). However, as scholars warn, the vulnerability of these subjectivities further urges individuals to invest more in the volatile aesthetic labour (Mears, 2011; Takeyama, 2016). Anderson (2014) argues that the only "freedom" left for women in the postfeminist wave is the choice to be sexy and that the choice to be traditional is a blunt revival of misogyny. Nancy Fraser similarly contends that postfeminism, or the hailing of the social mobility achieved by an individual woman, only sabotages feminist emancipatory solidarity (Fraser, 2013a). Following critiques of aesthetic labour, it can be summarised that postfeminism under neoliberalism is anti-feminist, and that second-wave-like feminist

solidarity against the dual system of capitalism and patriarchy ought to be resumed (Anderson, 2014; Fraser, 2013a). If we apply this feminist critique to China, then we can immediately conclude, the Internet has transformed everything in China into a Debordian spectacle of beauties (Wu, 2020). Using Fraser's (2013b) words, women who lean into success become handmaidens to capitalism, which is anti-feminist.

As poignant and insightful as these arguments are, a direct application of these perspectives would render nuances unnoticed and forgotten. Breaking away from the collective trickle-down state feminism of Maoist China (Stacey, 1983), market feminism allows individuals a space to manoeuvre in their varying social contexts. As market feminism abandons an overarching feminist analysis, the task focuses instead on revealing different social contexts that have shaped the life trajectories of individuals. Li Xiaojiang promotes the understanding of Chinese women by an anthropological recording of presences (Li, 2010; also see Chapter 2). This is somewhat similar to grounded theory or Bourdieusian praxis, where theories do not necessarily dictate, but supplement and provide meanings to the empirical throughout the analysis. Empowerment and contexts are the two foci of market feminism. While I have elucidated the individual and group empowerment of businesswomen in Chapter 3, in these two chapters I move on to the contexts that shaped manifold burnout market feminism. If empowerment is about agency, then the contexts are roughly the structures that shape the agency. Contexts enable and confine actors. By including contexts as a focus, burnout market feminism shows complexity, ambiguity and even paradoxes.

People voluntarily burnout for achievements. These achievements constitute what my interlocutors perceive as empowerment. The content of achievements is gendered, classed and dependent on an intersection of their social and geographic locations. Market feminism depends on auto-exploitation, and therefore, burnout market feminism. Baring the common problem of male philosophers in reducing the classed, gendered and racialised diversities of

human experience to the archetypal western middle-class heterosexual men, Han's (2015, 2017a) theorisation of *burnout*, as well as auto-exploitation, is abstract, metaphysical and general. However, the labour that women need to invest is not only confined to the first shift of achievements in the realm of employment, but also the second shift in the realm of family (A. R. Hochschild & Machung, 2012) and the third shift in appearance management (Elias et al., 2017; N. Wolf, 1990). In these two chapters, I compare three groups of businesswomen in Shenzhen and Hefei to cast light on the contexts in which they burnout working these three shifts. In doing so, I try to avoid a yes-or-no monolithic answer to questions such as “are women empowered by the Internet?” or “are women empowered by their businesses?” The short answer is – both. By providing diversified **presences** of my interlocutors who have achieved material advancements, burnout market feminism unveils the dynamic between agency and constrains. Contexts shapes different groups of businesswomen's negotiations with patriarchy. While this chapter introduces two groups of businesswomen in Shenzhen, the next chapter will focus on Hefei.

Introducing Shenzhen

As the first special economic zone (SEZ), Shenzhen is certainly not one of the cities that is overlooked in China. An unremarkable market town in the county town of Bao'an before 1979, Shenzhen economic power out ranks all Asian cities, surpassing its neighbouring global city Hong Kong for the first time in 2018. Over this period, its population grew from 30,000 inhabitants to more than 13 million residents, with around 35% holding permanent *hukou* (household registration). Because of intranational migration, Shenzhen is the only city in Guangdong province where Mandarin, instead of Cantonese, is the dominant language. Shenzhen runs a “meritocratic” point system for its *hukou* system. While university-educated citizens, especially those with overseas degrees, are privileged or even rewarded for joining

Shenzhen *hukou*, the underprivileged migrant workers are barred from the system even though they account for most of the city's population.⁴³

In their work *Learning from Shenzhen*, hitherto one of the few edited volumes focusing entirely on Shenzhen from a humanities and social science perspective, O'Donnell, Wong and Bach artfully summarise the existing research about Shenzhen as “tale of two cities” (O'Donnell, Wong and Bach, 2017,p2), or rather, “two tales of a city”. One tale talks about the grandiose, the miracles, acceptance, flexibility, entrepreneurship and success that have taken place in this city (Du, 2020; Duan, 2014; J. Wang, 2011), which is both the epitome of market socialist modernity (O'Donnell, Wong and Bach, 2017,p7) and the China dream in a nutshell (Du, 2020; Wong, 2013). The other tale reviews the dark side of the metropolis: rampant driven-to-suicide exploitation of labour, especially of migrant workers (Chan, Selden, & Pun, 2020; Pun, 2005), and the malicious violation of intellectual property in the form of copycat, counterfeit and shoddy products, known as *Shanzhai*. *Shanzhai* even perfectly rhymes with the name of the city, Shenzhen. Interestingly, while *shanzhai* is heavily criticised by Euro-American corporates, politicians and media commentators, it is predominantly hailed by scholars as post-colonial, alternative, unsettling, disruptive and creative (Han, 2017c; Landsberger, 2019; Pang, 2012; Scheen, 2019; Y. Xiao, 2019).

Shenzhen embodies mainland China's transition from “made in China” to “created in China”(Q. Lin, 2016; Moon, 2018). Shenzhen started as a hub of labour-intensive factories for global capitalism and especially for Hong Kong in the 80s and early 90s. Gradually, Shenzhen also saw its own creativity boom, first through *shanzhai*, then by becoming the “Silicon Valley” of China, where it is now home to many internationally renowned tech companies (Rivers, 2018; Whitwell, 2014). Contemporary Shenzhen is hailed as the model for “socialism with

⁴³ Information gathered from Shenzhen Government's official webpage (Sz.gov.cn, n.d.).

Chinese characteristics” and is appointed as the core engine and the boost for technology and innovation in China’s Greater Bay Area (Sz.gov.cn, 2019; F. Wang, 2019). Shenzhen’s speed is worshipped. The development of the city is enshrined in the Shenzhen Reform and Opening-up Hall. And the documentary, *Story of Shenzhen* (深圳故事), was produced and aired by CCTV in 2019 as a glamorous part of the China dream iceberg. Shenzhen started off as the cheap labour provider for Hong Kong, but in 40 years, Shenzhen economically surpassed Hong Kong, a city that has been crowned the index of economic freedom for 25 consecutive years since 1994. The story symbolises how market socialism surpassed capitalism.

As O’Donnell, Wong and Bach (2017) discern, the very reason why Shenzhen became the model city in China, and gradually in the world, is not only because of a trickle-down visionary policy with strong governmental leadership since the late 1970s, but also because of the flexibility, ambiguity and spaces left to individuals to carve a way out from the planned economy. The development of Shenzhen is by no means linear and clear-cut. The boundaries of the SEZ are constantly shifting and the urban-rural divide is contested through a haphazard negotiation between urban development and local citizens, which scholars describe as “urban besieging rural” (O’Donnell, 2017). These transitions and metamorphoses constitute a dynamic process where the two tales of Shenzhen juxtapose and intersect with each other. The splendid and the oppressive, the creative and the tedious, the innovative and the copycat, the migrant workers in factories and the makers in co-working spaces, the factory owners and Internet celebrities: they all make up the kaleidoscope of Shenzhen.

If the border between Shenzhen and Hong Kong constitutes the primary border between the capitalist and socialist system, the secondary border within Shenzhen separated the SEZ from the rest of the city from 1979 to 2010. Though the physical border between the two Shenzhens was taken down in 2010, the secondary border in administrative divisional terms lasted until 2018. The four districts within the SEZ throughout the economic reform era were

Futian, Nanshan, Luohu and Yantian. Futian is the administrative and cultural centre. Luohu is the commercial centre closest to Hong Kong. Yantian is home to the world's top three container ports handling international logistics. And finally, Nanshan, which is arguably the rising high-tech and creative centre of the entire country after 2000, hosts some of the country's most renowned tech companies including Tencent, DJY and Huawei.⁴⁴ Nanshan is also where universities in Shenzhen are clustered. The districts outside the original SEZ experienced many alterations in terms of names, sizes and administrative levels, but '5' was number settled upon in 2018, with the districts: Bao'an, Longhua, Pingshan, Guangming and Longgang. Longgang is known for its manufacturing industry. In 2018, the secondary sector of the economy accounted for almost 70% of Longgang's economy.

My interlocutors are mainly based in Nanshan and Longgang. I returned to Shenzhen for fieldwork in the winter of 2017. I was raised in Shenzhen until middle school. This circumstance provided me with reliable contacts in the city for snowball referrals and a familiar place to live: my mother's home. I returned from England to Shenzhen with two secured gatekeepers to my research participants, Yvonne and Jing, the two businesswomen I introduced at the very beginning of this thesis. Even though Jing's business is based in Anhui, she has suppliers in Shenzhen. In the end, it turned out that most of the young start-up "makers" are based in Nanshan and the businesswomen who own factories are based in Longgang.

These are the two groups of businesswomen I delineate in this chapter. Each group embodies a different facet of the city. Based in Longgang, the first group of businesswomen I interacted with were factory owners whose businesses were in the process of transitioning from export-oriented mass production to generating their own brands. They participated in business associations and shared tactics to manage their market online with each other. They had space

⁴⁴ Huawei was founded in Nanshan but moved its headquarter to Longgang district.

to manage their businesses pragmatically without much obvious exclusion from business networks. Most of them were in their 30s or even in their 40s and had small children. Centered around Nanshan, the second group of businesswomen demonstrate the new role of Shenzhen as the innovation and technology “bay area” of China. These entrepreneurs were university graduates in their 20s. Many had international experience and they assertively pursued innovative and unconventional ideas such as a virtual-lover platform company, or companies that imported overseas cosmopolitan lifestyles that they themselves enjoyed, which included Thai-boxing, Italian ice-cream and techno music festivals. Seven businesswomen in this group said that they were in a same-sex relationship or used queer language to describe their relationships. Their queerness is tolerated on the premise of their economic success and they could engage in a reticent strategy of “coming-home,” as proposed by Hong Kong scholar Chou Wah-Shan (2001).

Shenzhen middle-Aged businesswomen: caught in transition

Female leadership: the first shift

Lucy was introduced to me by Jing in a coconut chicken hotpot restaurant during lunchtime. When Lucy arrived, she had prepared large golden chrysanthemum floral tea gift boxes for both Jing and me. As we had hotpot, Lucy kept filling our bowls with ingredients that she cooked in the hotpot such as bamboo mushrooms, sliced chicken, and Chinese water chestnuts. We were already abashed as we came empty-handed. Jing then uttered loudly: “See, this is what a successful entrepreneur is like. Lucy is so considerate. She takes care of everything and everyone around her. It is my greatest pleasure to collaborate with her”. As Jing flattered her, Lucy immediately replied: “The pleasure is certainly mine to collaborate with such a beautiful female boss with an amazing daughter too!” Jing turned to me and said boastfully: “Wow, which beauty is saying that? Ling, can you guess how many kids Lucy has?” I then acted

surprised in order to flatter Lucy's youthful appearance. Both chuckled and Lucy said: "I have two daughters already, both in primary school".

Lucy studied English at a university in early 2000. Upon graduation, she migrated to Shenzhen from Hunan province and soon found a job in a small-scale export-oriented B2B umbrella company. Having a typical story of neoliberal success, she linked her auto-exploitation tendency and workaholism with femininity:

I just never had the idea to rest no matter whether I am working for myself or for others. In my first job, I had already lost a sense of working hours because the foreign clients sometimes sent emails in the early morning or at midnight in China's time zone. I had the urge to reply to them immediately so I would always stay in the office until midnight. When there were no emails, I would clean the office, like the way I clean my own home... So later, when I started my own umbrella company, my previous employer had given only blessings and no malice. I am happy that after a decade, I could acquire the first company I worked for.

Lucy carries the typical qualities of feminine leadership: "friendly, emotional, caring, supportive, sensitive, empathic [and] dependent" compared to those of masculine leadership, which are "dominant, aggressive, strong, autocratic, analytical, competitive [and] independent". (Rosener, 1990, cited in Visser, 2011, p.17) When I visited her in 2017, she had an administrative office in Longgang with around 50 staff and another 80 workers in Huizhou, a city bordering Shenzhen within a half an hour drive from her administrative office. She asked her staff to call her "Lucy" rather than her Manager title. She regularly takes some of the administrative staff out for social activities or brings back gifts from overseas trips for her employees. She also demonstrates care and attention to employee's private lives. For instance, she even tried to arrange matchmaking events for some of her staff. One staff member told me

that people in the company treated Lucy as an idol and elder sister, but not as an authoritarian boss who commands.

However, Lucy resembled many women leaders in that she was subject to scrutiny by others concerning her competence in all three shifts: business, family and physical appearance. By looking into Lebanese women leaders, Sidani et.al. (Sidani, Konrad, & Karam, 2015) observe that it is only when women leaders have achieved success in the first place that the traits of feminine leadership are praised. But when women experience the slightest backlash or failure, their feminine traits become the causes for female failure and deficit. In other words, women's deeds are put under the magnifying glass of patriarchy, which assumes that women are subordinates but not leaders in the first place.

Besides producing umbrellas for other brands, Lucy also started to craft her own brand in 2014. As the Pearl River Delta, where Shenzhen is located, has been experiencing a lack of migrant workers since 2004,⁴⁵ by the late 2000s, Chinese brands had also gradually evolved from imitation to innovation (e.g. Xiaomi, DJI). This coincides with the economic crisis in 2008 that has reshaped global capitalism and pushed the Chinese export-oriented businesses to shift to the domestic market. Lucy lamented: "I have been making umbrellas for others for nearly 8 years. Some collaborators of mine have become top brands in their country, but no one knows that it is us who have been producing the umbrellas and even doing designs for them... I want to be [the] Apple in the umbrella industry". It was not surprising to hear Lucy juxtaposing Apple with her brand. Since 2017, the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area was set up with the mission to build the world's innovation centre that could be compared with the Bay Area in California (Gov.hk, n.d.).

⁴⁵ In 2004, there was a shortage of million workers in the Pearl River Delta, of which 20% of shortage in Shenzhen (J. Cai, 2006; Y. Hu, 2018; Jian & Zhang, 2005).

Lucy hired a designer with a salary of 20,000 RMB per month for her brand. To provide a comparative perspective, the average salary in 2017 in Shenzhen was 8,348 RMB (Sina.cn, 2019). The designer graduated from a top Art Academy in China and boasted a nationally popular product design before his employment. However, Lucy told me that she was unsatisfied with his performance as an umbrella designer. She invested more than 1 million yuan in her brand without recouping the investment. In a meeting with the designer, Lucy showed her dissatisfaction with the design. The designer rebutted that, “It is not because my design was bad. It is because as a woman you cannot see how promising those patterns are and the marketing team cannot do their job”. Lucy evaded his gendered attack and commented: “I think the market is a very good response to all designs” .

Lucy chose to fight back with “neutral” market performance language and ignored the designer’s appropriation of the structural inequality between men and women to shed his responsibilities. In other words, Lucy did not question the designer’s masculine domination, that is, how the preference of masculinity is anchored in everyday practices (Bourdieu, 2001). However, in undercurrents, she actively reached out for other design talent and asked me to introduce her to designers with overseas degrees. In her own words: “There is no need to be against anyone. If the business goes well, everyone will be happy”. When I visited her again a year later, her brand got accepted in the airport and Walmart shopping centres in Shenzhen. In hindsight, one could argue that this demonstrates Lucy’s feminine leadership: considerate, empathetic, and taking the whole picture into account. Unfortunately, no one knows when these very same characteristics will trigger misogynist shaming because of the slightest mistake; As South African feminist Bernadette Mosala summarises: “When men are oppressed, it’s tragedy. When women are oppressed, it’s tradition.” (cited in Beasley, 1999, p.6) The female leadership can only be maintained through consecutive achievements, which traps the women in the cycle of burning out.

For Han (2015), people or the prototypical male burnout occurs because achievement becomes the only source of joy as individuals lose meaningful connection with other people or the world around them. However, Lucy burns out because her female leadership needs to be proven over and over again via her achievements. In other words, as the empowerment of market feminism lies in the achievements, my interlocutors could subvert patriarchy only if they are considered successful. Lucy told me: “I came back to my company two days after I gave birth to my kids. I simply cannot stand not working”. This echoes Rottenberg’s critique of neoliberal feminism as eviscerated and limiting, because without challenging patriarchy systematically, women could only lean in and work harder on a personal level to keep the perfect balance between work and life (Rottenberg, 2018).

The second and third shift: retaining femininity

Other than the female leadership that they carry out at work, businesswomen also need to put in extra labour to maintain their heteronormative marriage as a way to prove their femininity. Female entrepreneurs are known as tiger girls or superwomen (*nv qiangren*) whose femininity is compromised for being “too” capable (Minglu Chen, 2011). In *Masculine Compromise*, Choi and Peng (2016) explain how Chinese lower-class male migrant workers strive to maintain their masculinity by making certain compromises and by shifting the symbolic boundaries of proper masculinities. While Choi and Peng’s (2016) interview respondents failed to meet the normative standard of masculinity because of their lack of material capability, my interlocutors had to devote extra effort to maintain their femininity at a comprised starting point because they were too capable in earning money. In their life stage as young mothers, their femininity is mainly maintained through a monogamous middle-class family.

Through Lucy’s business sisters’ gatherings, I met a group of seven businesswomen in Longgang. They were in their mid-thirties and early forties with children. Two of them had a

middle school education while the rest studied English or commerce in domestic universities. They formed their sisterhood in a local chamber of E-commerce, where most members were engaged with light industry manufacturing businesses. The items they produced included umbrellas, scuba equipment, screw caps, furniture, lightbulbs and sex toys. They regularly got together to discuss the pros and cons of various E-commerce platforms, new investment opportunities and to help each other out when one's business was stagnating. They also discussed their husbands and children.

One of the most admired businesswomen in the group manages a furniture E-commerce business and has two children. In a dinner gathering, others praised her and asked how she kept her husband doting on her throughout these years. She shared: "It is important to let your man maintain his face". Face can be understood as reputation given by meeting norms of social interactions (Hwang, 1987; Qi, 2011). Qi (2011) points out that face regulates Chinese society by punishing the norm transgressors. Gender norms are also under the governance of face. To give face to men includes complying with gender norms, which demands extra work for businesswomen. This includes the careful management of power display and women's appearance, as a good wife is virtuous, elegant, capable and supportive (Hooper, 1998).

Lucy let her husband be the chairman of the company, even though she managed almost everything: business negotiations, investments, client outreach and internal management. Every time I visited her office, her husband was either playing with his phone, having tea or was absent. He rarely appeared in business meetings held by chambers of commerce, client negotiations, and team building events. Managing family-work conflicts, especially in family firms, is also hailed as one of the traits of female leadership (S. Chen et al., 2018). In a business outreach with one of Lucy's clients, the client told me that: "It was only after a while that I realised that she is the boss of the company. On her name card, it only states 'manager'. I thought her chairman husband ruled." Lucy did not seem to be bothered by such

misunderstandings because she believed it was one of her duties to “let him feel worthy”. She also invested much time and money in beauty salons and weight management. On another occasion, a male manager of an incubator commented: “A woman who cannot manage her look cannot manage her company”. He was commenting on a businesswoman whose company was stagnating at that point, and he said that she had also gained weight and had skin problems. Elliot (2008) says that patriarchy is not the only engine for the cosmetic surgery industry and that women are not the only targeted customers. He notices that the double requirements of being young and successful also urge many professional men into the botox industry in the developed west (Ibid). I did not observe too much of a societal demand on appearances for men in Longang (as opposed to what I had observed in Nanshan, described in the next section), but it was clear that businesswomen needed to manage the three shifts well in order to prove their success and achievements.

Market feminism celebrates the burgeoning femininities, however many of these femininities are shaped by both feminism and misogyny, the paradoxical duet also observed in popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018). My interlocutors long for business success while being afraid of losing their femininity by not being able to sustain their marriage and their feminine attractiveness. These contribute to their self-generated ideal of successful and accepted femininity, which defines the achievement repertoire for this group of businesswomen. In pursuit of these achievements, the efforts become Sisyphean (Han, 2015, Chapter 1), and therein lies the tragedy of burning out. As discussed before, their female leadership is constantly under challenge. Governed by the market, beauty is both an exhibition of feminine subjectivity as well as a product of the male gaze. The realm of intimate relationships also demands great labour.

Once, when I visited Lulu, one of Lucy’ business sisters, in her screw caps company, she asked me to stay for lunch. However, during lunchtime, she and her husband started a fight in

front of me and her managerial team. She blamed her husband for employing a friend of his in the company. The friend failed at managing the production line and had a casual style of management, so her company did not meet the production target. Lulu almost smashed her bowl when she screamed at her husband: “Stop bringing trash to this company. It is enough for me to have you”. Her husband slammed his fist into the dining table. The table shook and our bowls quaked. Before her husband spoke, Lulu continued to shout: “Who do you think you are? You are just using my money. Last time, you also employed a relative of yours who even stole our money. We had to go to court”. One senior employee tried to ease the tension: “Sister Lulu, don’t accuse brother Xiang anymore. After all, you are a family. He might not be correct in all dimensions, but he did not have bad intentions”. When I later asked her about her husband, she said: “We are still together, life continues”. Intriguingly, Lulu regularly shared gender-themed articles on social media with titles such as “This is the life of a truly happy woman”. These articles usually promote a typical post-feminist value that even though women could be independent and capable at work, their “genuine happiness” lies in a happy heterosexual marriage (Anderson, 2014; McRobbie, 2004).

While Lulu still endured her marriage, the other friend in their circle, Rosa, was a divorced woman with two children. Rosa usually remained silent on the topic of husbands during the dining gathering. Once, after a group dinner, she invited me to her company for a long chat. Rosa was born in rural Zhejiang and did not finish middle school. She told me that she came to Shenzhen as a teenager selling pens as a street vendor in the mid-90s. “My entire village produces pens. I went through one factory to another factory asking them whether they needed pens or not. I sell each pen for 1 RMB. Perhaps you won’t believe it, but back then, I could earn 2,000 RMB on good days. What does that mean? It means the monthly salary of a white-collar worker... I knew my ex-husband then. We did business together. He was the son of a family friend from the same village. I was only 15, he was already 20. To be very honest with

you, I don't think I have ever loved him. I had to marry him because..." She paused, "He raped me. I tolerated him for many years. We had 2 children. At a point, I could not tolerate him anymore. He started 'having fun' outside. You know, those guy's dirty things: going to nightclubs, having mistresses". Even though monogamy was enacted in mainland China since 1950 with the introduction of the marriage law, the economic reform has brought back polygamy for elite men as a norm to demonstrate their masculinity and trustworthiness (Osburg, 2013; Uretsky, 2016; T. Zheng, 2009). Shenzhen is known as the harbour of mistresses and sexual consumption for Hong Kong businessmen after the economic reform (Ding & Ho, 2013; S. Y. Ho, 2014). The practice and consumption of extramarital intimacy later became a part of the standardised routine of *guanxi* (interpersonal relationships) shared by local businessmen and government officials as a way to demonstrate class distinction, masculinity and male solidarity (Tang, 2020).

Rosa put up with her ex-husband's violence for years, but the final straw that led to their divorce was his infidelity. It was not the breach of love – as sex is considered to be the ritual of love (Collins, 2004) – that caused the divorce. She claimed not to have loved him from the start. Instead, her husband's infidelity was a challenge to her femininity and success, as it showed that she did not manage the second and third shifts well. During their dinner gatherings, the business sisters shared tips on how to manage businesses as well as intimacy and appearances. Their conversation hinted that it was a women's fault if a husband became involved in an extramarital relationship, since it was either because "[a woman] was being too strong and tough on him [her husband] that he found the tenderness of women outside [the marriage]" or "[a woman] did not maintain her beauty well enough so she was not attractive to him". Men from Hong Kong who have extramarital relationships in Shenzhen can maintain their marriage in Hong Kong by providing more material support to their wives (S. Y. Ho, 2014). Because of the sexual double standard that assumes a predatory man and submissive

woman, the masculinity of the man is not challenged, but enhanced through extramarital relationships. However, my interlocutors' femininity had already been put in a compromised position by their wealth and leadership. For them, their husband's infidelity would be another attack on their femininity. Rosa went on: "I left the company to him and decided not to sell pens anymore... I kept almost all my savings and my two beautiful daughters... I wanted to enter a rising industry without much competition... I end up where I am now". As her tears were running down her face, we were surrounded by her scuba equipment: diving suits, goggles, and towels.

The week after the long chat with Rosa, I visited Lucy in her office. Lucy was there the night when Rosa shared her life story with me. Lucy was Rosa's best friend. In Rosa's dark days, when she was starting the new scuba equipment business, Lucy taught her how to use online translation websites to communicate with international customers, shared her sample emails of how to approach businesses overseas, and even replied to some of Rosa's emails for her. Lucy asked her husband to have tea with me in her office. She had a large vintage horn Bluetooth speaker connected to her computer playing new instrumental music. It was difficult not to notice. As we listened to "Secret Garden," she served pu'er tea with tangerine peel. Her husband did not say much during the conversation about their love story. They fell in love in an online chatroom. "Back then, we did not use emojis as we do now. He sent me an emoji of a rose. I thought that was a confession of love". Then, as her company grew, he quit his office job in order to help her business, only to find out that he was neither good at management nor at business. "At some point, you were really lost right?" Lucy turned to her husband. He sipped some tea: "Perhaps". "There is a time that he went to those dirty places for entertainments too". Lucy held his hand, "You won't do that again, right?" Her husband murmured: "No, no. Don't worry".

Centring on the interlocutor Lucy in this section, I depicted women's efforts to maintain the volatile female leadership in the first shift and their efforts to retain their femininity on the compromised ground in the second and third shifts. I am not arguing that my interlocutor failed to balance the three shifts, or that they excelled in them either. Lucy certainly managed all crises and challenges in the three shifts, and by showing these difficulties and struggles, I wish to demonstrate how the first group of women burned out for their market feminism. The requirement to excel in the three shifts was not only confined to the businesswomen in Longgang, but as the context changes, so too does the content of market feminism.

The new generation: embracing cosmopolitan desires

On the list of alpha cities evaluated by the Globalisation and World Cities (GaWC) in 2018, there were four cities from mainland China: Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. Coinciding with China's folk grouping of the first-tier cities, these four cities are the ones in China that are most integrated with the global economy. In her canonical work *The Global City*, Sassen examines how global cities are more similar to each other than other cities in their country (Sassen, 1991). With the expansion of global capitalism, global/world cities are also experiencing a rise in size and number. Elites in global cities gradually begin to share similar cultural capital, receive education from the few globally recognised universities, and have similar consumer habits and cosmopolitan tastes (Emontspool & Woodward, 2018; Igarashi, 2014). Cosmopolitanism here refers not to an ethics or political ideology (Beck, 2004; Fine, 2007), but to a multicultural mentality and lifestyle (Abbink & Salverda, 2013). The core of cosmopolitanism are the western middle-upper-class values, with "decorations" from other areas and classes (Radhakrishnan, 2011; Werbner, 2006).

The second group of businesswomen I met in Shenzhen were predominantly the post 90s generation born and raised in big cities, with many of them raised in Shenzhen and some

returnees from overseas. I conducted 11 formal in-depth interviews and countless informal conversations and observations. The generation of China's one-child policy, they came of age with Hollywood films, Japanese animation, Hong Kong TV dramas, and an excessive amount of investment put into their education by their middle-upper class urban parents. Many of them have had international experiences throughout their education. Almost all interlocutors I met received tertiary education and a few of them went to internationally recognised universities including the University of Cambridge, University of Oxford, University of California, University of Hong Kong and University of Toronto. A few of them hold American, Canadian or Hong Kong citizenship and passports, and many of them discussed their investment migration plans with me. Without a doubt, they are the nation's most privileged cosmopolitan Chinese; not the *nouveau riche* researched by John Osburg (2013), nor the lower-middle class student migrants studied by Vanessa Fong (2011), but middle-upper class global talents with cosmopolitan cultural capital.

I also regularly visited their offices and accompanied them to different social events, including dining, drinking, hiking and even pet leisure gatherings. On one occasion, we even went to a club where dogs could swim, play in the playground and have their fur washed and trimmed. The interlocutors in this group might not necessarily all have high-tech start-ups, but they certainly described their businesses with the same technical eloquence of a highly valued innovation. Their start-ups were varied and they dabbled in such industries as virtual-lovers services, ice-cream, techno-music. Partially because of their education, partially because of their experienced presentation skills honed in front of different angel investors, and partially because of their cosmopolitan subjectivity, even seemingly ordinary businesses surrounding cakes or gyms were enthusiastically described as if they were ground-breaking and as if they were introducing an entire new lifestyle to the general public.

Broaden – new generation’s chamber of commerce

I participated in events organised by a university-based chamber of commerce, which I have named Broaden. Different from the Longgang E-Commerce Chamber of Commerce that has thousands of members and official district government links, Broaden began as a student entrepreneurship interest club to discuss business ideas and share opportunities and information.

Members of Broaden gather every Friday at 6:00 am to have English breakfast together in a Scandinavian style café bar in the university. In one of the gatherings, a member explained:

To wake up at 6:00 am is the best way to show commitment. It is very common for young people to stay up late with friends these days. Thus, to experience the morning with each other is the real unforgettable solidarity-building event now. It shows determination and commitment. We don't like formal halls with tedious boring two-hour lectures. We only want interesting, thought-provoking and useful conversations here.

After its commencement in 2016, Broaden soon attracted people outside the university including other start-up makers, investors, consultants and people with similar status and lifestyles. It had less than 20 core members in the organisational committee when I was doing my fieldwork between 2017 and 2018. There is a rather balanced gender ratio of nearly half-half. Each member can invite people whom they believe are worth making friends with to the breakfast gathering. There were fewer than 40 people at each breakfast gathering. A guest needs to fill in an application form and pay for the breakfast in advance before joining the gathering. The price was 120 RMB, while it cost only one tenth of this to have a regular breakfast in the city. On the application form, an applicant was also required to give information including age, school of graduation, occupation and most importantly, what they can contribute to Broaden and what one expects from Broaden. The breakfast goers would be invited to join their WeChat group and are given a chance to participate in the network with an annual fee of 5,000 RMB. I was added to one of two WeChat groups that they had in 2018.

The second WeChat group was created after the original reached its member-limit. The maximum number of a WeChat group is 500.

The founder of Broaden is a female entrepreneur who, by 2018, already had two businesses. One is an ice-cream company and the other is an educational company targeting Chinese clients who are interested in education in Singapore. The Angel investor of her ice-cream company was also a member of Broaden, a Cambridge graduate. Both were in their 20s. Together with another co-founder, they intended to revolutionise the ice-cream consuming experience in Shenzhen and beyond. They claim to use only fresh milk, cream and egg yolks, which limits their expiration date to within seven days of production. Instead of selling their ice-cream in physical stores or supermarkets, they deliver their ice-cream directly to customers mainly through the WeChat public account platform. Although their method of producing ice-cream is arguably similar to that of gelato, their signature flavours demonstrate more of an inter-Asian culinary influence, and embody an Asia-centric globalisation flow (Iwabuchi, 2002, 2004). Just to name a few, they have Chinese oolong and jasmine, Japanese matcha and cherry blossom and Hong Kong milk tea flavours. Their ice-cream is packed in a black cotton cup with a yellow stick figure of a pair of staring eyes and their brand name. It's a simple but memorable design. To successfully launch their ice-cream in the market, they collaborated with a ride-hailing company and hired professional male models in suits as drivers to invite customers to have ice-cream with them. They also collaborated with a local food WeChat public account for an advertisement article. Titled "a god (男神) sharing ice-cream with you", it immediately became a hot topic on the Internet.

The ice-cream company's appropriation of the aesthetic labour of these male models is similar to that of women's, as I discussed in Chapter 4. However, in this case, it was the female entrepreneur who profited from the men's aesthetic labour of carrying the ideal youthful gentlemen look, which was described as "a god," and the emotional labour of performing

gentleness and care when they shared the ice-cream with a customer. This commercialisation of male beauty coincides with the development of the market economy in China.⁴⁶ On the one hand, women's dominance in consumption (assuming heteronormativity) and the shortage of men in the beauty industry led to an increased craze for male beauty (Yao, 2010). On the other hand, cosmopolitanism has pushed men under the gaze of metrosexual calibration and men's appearance is also included in the repertoire of success, so that men have also become vibrant consumers in the beauty industries (Elliott, 2008; Hall, 2015).

An ideal of cosmopolitan masculinity was embraced by this group of interlocutors, which deviates from the other type of masculinity embodied in the elite men mentioned in the previous sections who are less educated, less travelled, older and in a word, less cosmopolitan (Song and Hird, 2013, Chap.2). The cosmopolitan masculinity requires men to be the breadwinner and an enlightened modern being who respects women and upholds some belief in gender equality. They should also display good taste in consumption and a neat and healthy appearance, if not, a fashionable, athletic and attractive one (Ibid.). During Broaden gatherings, I rarely heard men commenting on women's appearance, but very commonly I heard women commenting on men's appearance. In one breakfast gathering, a new member was introduced to the club by the founder: "The new member has an online psychological consultancy start-up. But most importantly, he is extremely handsome". In another meeting, a female member said to a man: "You look so shabby today. Didn't you sleep last night? You will be bald soon". In one talk with an overseas returnee, some female members sitting next to me gossiped: "The speaker today is so handsome, I cannot take my eyes off his face and body. Wish he was naked". Even as I regularly heard such conversations from female members, men refrained from commenting on women's appearance in order to maintain their cosmopolitan masculinity. The

⁴⁶ It is worthwhile noting that the appreciation of male beauty was periodically prevalent in different dynasties across East Asia as well (see *nanshoku* 男色 in Japan and the craze for male beauty in Six Dynasties period in China).

investor said: “A good man should have more things to discuss than women’s appearance”. It is unlikely that the men in Broaden did not discuss women. The encounters that I had with them were contingent upon and subject to my positionality as a queer feminist of similar age and background. Nevertheless, for this group of Chinese cosmopolitan global elites, men need to perform their respect for women, while women become the subject of desire and gaze, as well as the entrepreneurs who appropriate men’s beauty for business.

Compared with the previous group, rather than considering this group as more emancipated, it is more appropriate to understand the discrepancy as a result of their educational and generational differences in addition to the varied extents of cosmopolitan information and experiences that they are exposed to. I should emphasise that men being subject to judgements about their look is not an indicator of gender equality, rather, a result of deepened commercialisation in which men’s beauty and emotion also become marketable (Elliott, 2008; Holmes, 2009).

Encounters with elite men as the desired prey

However, the young businesswomen cannot confine themselves to the cosmopolitan bubble. They need to deal with other types of masculinities, especially the elite masculinity among middle-aged businessmen. They are not exempted from the three shifts even though the specific content was different.

If the sexual consumption of women as a means of male bonding (Jieyu Liu, 2017; Osburg, 2013; Tang, 2020; T. Zheng, 2009) impacted the first group of women as wives of these elite men, then this second group of women are impacted by being the potential prey for such extramarital relationships. In her research about urban Chinese white-collar women, Liu Jieyu(2017) lamented that, “Women’s sexuality is highly moralized, women who had frequent encounters with male clients often found themselves walking a fine line between respectability and disreputability” (p.7). Based on his ethnography in Sichuan, Osburg (2013, pp.67-69)

noted a hierarchy of preferences for elite men in developing an extramarital relationship. Urban educated well-off women are at the top because they can best demonstrate these men's charm (Ibid.), as if the elite predator men did not need to use his material wealth to catch the prey. Osburg did not elaborate upon whether or not such a mentality turns a sexual or intimate relationship into a market exchange of erotic capital with economic capital (Hakim, 2011). Hakim (2010, 2011) coined the term 'erotic capital,' which consists of seven elements: beauty, sexual attractiveness, social skills in interaction, liveliness, social presentation (style) and sexuality (sexual skills). She advocates that people, especially women because of male sex deficit, should work on their erotic capital to exchange it for economic, social and cultural capital (Hakim, 2011, 2015). Ironically, even though Hakim appropriates Bourdieu's language, her erotic capital theory runs counter to the essence of Bourdieusian thinking – revealing the subtle and unnoticed ways power and inequality are reproduced (Shusterman, 1999).

“How much could you trade your body for the investment?” Yvonne asked a journalist from a reputable magazine. Yvonne said an investor invited her to a hotel lobby to discuss her business, after which he asked her to move to a private room for more privacy. After entering the hotel room, the investor hinted that she should have understood what he needed, while he was also very clear about her needs. Yvonne told the journalist it was not that difficult for her to say no and leave, but she asked, “The amount was only 2 million. But what if it is 20 million? What if it is 200 million?” Yvonne did not frame herself as a clear-cut victim of sexual harassment, but instead probed the boundaries between sexual harassment and consensual sex. This is because she considered it unproblematic to consider intimacy with the market logic of capital exchange. And more importantly, under the neoliberal self-entrepreneurial logic, blaming the structure indicates weakness. This may explain why in HSBC's report, Chinese women considered themselves as facing the least discrimination in business (Taylor, 2019).

If market feminism inherited pragmatism after the economic reform, then we could arguably modify Deng Xiaoping's famous cat proverb to argue that: "It doesn't matter what a woman does, as long as she maximises her achievements". Under the neoliberal logic, women's empowerment was not so much about creating a fairer structure for all genders, but the maximisation of an individual's interest (Jain & Sen, 2005; Rottenberg, 2018). As discussed in Chapter 3, Li's concept opened space for empowerment. However, problems arise when the empowerment sits in between local feminism and collides with a patriarchal mode of production, which celebrates competition and exploitation. In their attempt to theorise "Made-in-China feminism (C-fem)", Wu and Dong (2019) categorised women's strategy of exchanging erotic capital for economic capital as what they call "entrepreneurial C-fem", and acknowledged that women undermine the norms of monogamy and chastity to win benefits. Wu and Dong frame their C-fem within third world feminism. However, does this post-colonial alignment justify the neoliberal pragmatism that celebrates the survival of the strongest woman who can navigate, appropriate and gain most from patriarchy as feminist?

In Chapter 3, I engaged with the emancipatory possibility in the ambivalence of popular feminism (Banet-weiser et al., 2020) to show feminist solidarity in market feminism. However, as the ambivalence can swing to the side of collective solidarity, it can also oscillate between the pitfall of the neoliberal logic of domination and exploitation, which is patriarchal. It is feminist to break the glass ceiling. However, without breaking the neoliberal logic, individual women who become "as powerful as men" might as well become another exploiter of the less advantaged that perpetuates the patriarchal mode of social relations. For men who were equal or less advantaged, businesswomen could be the desiring subjects and exploit men's aesthetic and emotional labour. For older men who were more advantaged, Yvonne shared her story to question elite masculinity but did not challenge the logic of neoliberal pragmatism.

Transforming to queer: seeking for/justified by cosmopolitanism

Echoing the shared observation that market and cosmopolitanism give rise to queer gendered subjectivities (Bao, 2020; Rofel, 2007), I noticed a significant presence of same-sex desire and relationships among my young cosmopolitan interlocutors.

Yan started as a marketing executive in an eminent media company but left the company in 2016 to marry and start her own business.⁴⁷

She first tried to open a franchise store of a milk tea chain. As it failed, she joined a techno-music start-up company, and was in charge of market outreach. On a typical subtropical afternoon in 2018, Yan asked me whether I could come over immediately to discuss something important. The glaring sun beamed through the windows of a café in a newly opened glamorous shopping mall. The café was built to look like a cave, but combined with large French windows, it aimed to be eye-catching and Internet-famous. Yan ordered oolong tea with cream cheese topping without sugar. She was very direct: “I am having a crush on a woman”. “OK”. I was a bit surprised. She was still married and loved commenting on and fantasising about men. “Do you think it is disgusting?” Knowing that she was aware of my queerness, I gathered that what she needed from me was the affirmation and support for her newly discovered sexuality. I laughed and replied, “Of course not, come on”. Then, she asked: “Isn’t it a normal thing in the west? Only people in backward countries cannot accept this”.

The next year, Yan first started an affair with a woman entrepreneur named LY who had a company and a dog with her then-partner. The dog died and LY’s then-partner found out about the affair. They had a fight that led to LY transferring all the equity of the company to the partner as well as leaving her with a BMW car. “I think this is fair to her”. LY identified herself as a tomboy and played the masculine role in a relationship. “This is what a T (tomboy/butch)

⁴⁷ I have been following Yan’s life for more than 6 years, as I knew her from my previous research project. Thus, I kept her Chinese alias in this chapter though I said in Chapter two that I will use acronyms and foreign names for interlocutors in Shenzhen.

should do”. LY would like to imagine herself as a responsible provider and she embraced a masculine/feminine division of gender roles in a same-sex relationship.

Yan told me: “I am tired of men. They are predictable. They promise one and do the other. They want to sleep with you without providing you anything substantial.” Similarly, Yvonne also said: “I did not expect that I would be with a woman. But I feel that she is a lot more reliable than men”. Song and Hird (2013) compared the two types of masculinity mentioned above

The young urban men who aspire to this tender, cosmopolitan masculinity, learn to act and conceive of themselves as a new breed of boyfriends and husbands, distinguished from supposedly coarse, chauvinistic, “low-quality” manual workers and migrants, or blunt, unpolished, nouveau-riche entrepreneurs. (p.26)

However, they, conclude that for the cosmopolitan young men:

Under pressure to be the main breadwinner, men often retreat to what they know best: stereotypical ideas of men and women that demonstrate a profound inertia of gender attitudes and betray a deep unease about equality in relationships with wives and girlfriends, lest it lead to the tables being turned on them and their eventual loss of dominance. (p.27)

Yan and Yvonne started their relationships with women on the basis that they were unsatisfied with men, and in a way to show their disdain for the elite masculinity of the previous generation. They were disappointed by young men around them who turned away from cosmopolitan masculinity. They turned to same-sex relationships seeking cosmopolitan masculinity in women and they used cosmopolitanism to justify their same-sex relationship.

Yvonne told me: “I think the sex experiences with men or women are similar... However, my previous boyfriends simply cannot support me the way my girlfriend does”. In late 2018, her online shops were no longer sustainable, and she needed to find new ways to make a living.

Her girlfriend gave her around 200,000 RMB to open a restaurant near a local university. “I knew it was all the savings she had. She treated me wholeheartedly... My previous boyfriends only gave promises without actions... Only she is willing to provide me with everything that she has”.

Yan made a similar same statement. At the beginning of her affair with LY, she did not plan to divorce her husband and she asked me to collude with her in hiding her marital status from LY. However, half a year later, she found out that her husband owed others a large sum of money and had extramarital affairs. “Men are unreliable”, Yan said, “I thought he was from a rich family but who knew that it would come to such an end... What did I get from him in the end? Nothing... Now I just don’t want to share his debt with him”. Yan divorced her husband and started a stable cohabitant relationship with LY. Soon, they started an advertising company together. It is possible that Yan and Yvonne believed their female partners could better support their businesses; That neither of them could have their own business, if not for their partners.

While sexual minorities in China still face discrimination as heteronormativity governs most social institutions including marriage and work (Bao, 2018; Engebretsen, 2014; L. Y. Lo Kam, 2014), migration and economic advancement can empower LGBT individuals to negotiate heteronormativity (L. Y. L. Kam, 2019; L. Y. Lo Kam, 2014; T. Liu, 2019). However, what remains to be discussed is how achievements and success become the prerequisite for some queer relationships, making my interlocutors burn out to be queer.

No achievements, No queerness

My queer interlocutors did not participate in local *lala* community gatherings, which commonly consist of LGBT activists (Engebretsen, 2014; L. Y. Lo Kam, 2014). The queer comradeship and solidarity in activism that Bao Hongwei (2018) discusses were not of great interest to my businesswomen interlocutors. Their business and the network for business weigh

a lot more than queer activism and solidarity. While LBGT indicates confrontational identity politics, queer has been commonly used as a general designation for LGBT in demonstrations since the Stonewall. However, queer as a theory, belonging to poststructuralism, aims to deconstruct sex/gender/sexuality identities as well as other social constructions to open up space for possibilities, ambiguities and fluidities (Edelman, 2004; Halberstam, 2011; Sullivan, 2003). However, a decoupling between queer and LGBT would risk subsuming queer desires under consumerism while heteronormativity remains intact (Zhao, 2018). While homoerotic desires could be purposively shown on reality TV shows to evoke devotion and imagination from audiences, the heteronormativity in political-social life behind the screen is left unchallenged.

My interlocutors have a pragmatic strategy for their same-sex relationships. In the company of their business partners and employees, they would choose not to come out to their co-workers. However, they would also not refrain from demonstrating their intimacy or, in Goffmanian terms, they did not consider their same-sex relationship as a stigma and hide it. When they were in the office, LY and Yan did not refrain from occasional physical contact with each other. They also brought their cat to the office, whom they named Tesla. They said that they kept Tesla here because she could not get along with their dog, Gucci.⁴⁸

While I was having a business dinner with their collaborators, who were all in their late 20s, they also did not refrain from showing their intimacy even though their collaborators all seemed to be heterosexual men. LY would caress Yan during conversations about how to convince their then client to accept their business plan. However, the client that they were talking with was a married man in his 50s who proposed having an extramarital relationship with LY. While they were discussing the client, LY joked to other business partners that if he

⁴⁸ The names of their pets reveal clear cosmopolitan consumerism desire and a habitus of conspicuous consumption that I chose not to discuss in this chapter.

would pay 10 times the price of 2 million, she would not mind “sacrificing” Yan. After dinner, I asked LY and Yan whether their business partners knew about their relationship. LY said, “We never told them, but we were also not trying to hide”. Yan added, “Shenzhen is getting more and more international with many overseas returnees like you. No one would find it awkward”. They believed that same-sex desire and relationships should have already been commonly accepted in cosmopolitan cities. Our interlocutors demonstrate a similar imagining to the overseas Chinese queer students described by Kam (2019), where, despite the fact that homophobia and transphobia still prevail in western metropolises, their imagination of a queer-embracing cosmopolitanism helps them with the need to reconcile their own beings with their same-sex desire.

However, when I asked whether their clients knew about their intimate relationship, both responded immediately and simultaneously: “Of course not. We are not stupid”. LY asked: “Are there any benefits to telling clients the truth?” Considering LY’s joke about “sacrificing” Yan to the client, it is clear that the market logic serves as the guiding principle for them to understand intimacy. If the client pays well enough, maybe Yan could exchange her erotic capital with his economic capital. In this same logic, because they have enough capital, they have more leverage when negotiating with their family about their queer relationship. If a tomboy accumulates enough achievements, then it is worthy for another woman to fall in love with her. This explains a question LY asked Yan at the beginning of their relationship: “how much money [do] I need to earn for you to leave your husband for me?”

Facing their family, some of the young cosmopolitan interlocutors adopted a coming-home strategy as proposed by Chou (1997, 2001). It is not a “proud out loud” coming out identity politics commonly observed in LGBT movements in the west, but a reticent nonconfrontational tactic of letting the partner spend enough time with the natal family so that they gradually include the partner as part of the family. Yvonne’s partner lived with her in her home and with

Yvonne's father. They shared an en-suite room with one bed. I went to their home for dinner three times. While her father cooked, they washed dishes. A cleaner came to clean their apartment twice a week. They also had a cat and a dog. One time before dinner, while Yvonne's father was cooking, their Pekingese came to us for patting. Yvonne whispered to me in a playful tone, "Do you know that our dog is also like us?" I was confused, then she said, "Our dog is also interested in females!" Her father brought some dishes to the table, she paused but continued, "We brought her to the vets to inquire about this. They just said it's normal". After dinner, I asked her whether she told her father about her relationship. She said "No, but aren't deeds more convincing than words?... She [her partner] has already paid so much for our businesses together and my father is aware of that."

My interlocutors' queerness is dependent upon their achievements. In Chapter 3, I presented Lisa's story. In contrast to Yvonne and Yan, Lisa openly promotes LGBT politics and includes supporting LGBT businesses as a principle in her investment company. As Yvonne was also in Lisa's business network, Yvonne once told me that she might also be so "out" if only she was as successful as Lisa. Besides having more assets, Lisa also holds citizenship from a developed country. For Yvonne, it meant that Lisa had the credentials to "come out," while she only had those to "come home". For some of my T-identified interlocutors, they believe that they are only worthy of a relationship if they could excel over their male competitors in terms of meeting the cosmopolitan masculinity standard. Once, when LY was driving me home, she told me: "You never know when your woman will leave you for a man... You must constantly prove that you are better than them.... More caring, richer and more handsome". Another interlocutor even said: "If my business failed, I would just marry a man. I don't have the ground to be whatever I want to be if I am not rich enough to impress my parents".

Ding and Liu (2005) criticised the reticent politics in perpetuating heteronormativity, echoing Zhao's (2018) criticism of gender non-conforming stars as *queer yet never lesbian*. I would argue that my interlocutors have indeed subverted heteronormativity and patriarchy, as elaborated in Chapter 3. For Yvonne, Yan and VJ (Chapter 3), their businesses enable them to be queer and explicitly lesbian as a matter of fact, compared to Zhao's research subject of gender non-conforming female celebrities. Lisa, Yvonne and Sanmu overtly promoted feminism and included LGBT elements in their businesses. However, unlike the political comradeship observed among LGBT activist communities (Bao, 2018), my interlocutors' queerness is reliant on their achievements and especially a successful business. In other words, their queerness is highly volatile and unstable as it could be renounced anytime if they lost their material stability, just like how the concepts of femininity in female leadership, which I discussed in the previous section, will always remain vulnerable to failure. Hence, the result is that they must burn out to gain more credit in order to sustain queerness or become "more" queer.

Conclusion

Inspired by Li's (2005b, 2005a, 2010) work, market feminism denounces the post-structural, anti-state (activist) or anti-market feminism as western-centric, and instead advocates the empowerment of women at a micro-level. Burnout market feminism demands contextual analysis on women's living **presences** across different contexts to understand what is the exact content of achievements that entice women to voluntarily burnout. While I demonstrate empowerment in Chapter 3, this chapter is about how individual success and the subversion of patriarchy and heteronormativity in different contexts are volatile and contingent as they highly depend on achievements.

I delineated two facets of Shenzhen. One side of Shenzhen is the world factory and my first group of interlocutors were individuals who owned export oriented B2B companies that operated on the Internet. They were in their 30s and 40s with small children. They burned out to prove their female leadership at work and to keep their femininity by maintaining a heteronormative family with an emphasis on fidelity. The other side of Shenzhen is the innovation hub. Women become desiring subjects and can challenge heteronormativity by engaging in same-sex relationships. However, their queerness is highly dependent on material success. The next chapter is the darkest stage of the journey in this thesis. My research about businesswomen in Hefei turned into a traumatic fieldwork experience of being surrounded by men who were eager to crow about their elite masculinity. I contrast my own experience of being bluntly sexually harassed with the reticence of the businesswomen in commenting on elite men's extramarital relationships. While they were verbally submissive to patriarchy, small steps of resistance could be faintly discerned from their deeds.

Chapter 6 Hefei: Reticence and Resistance

Introducing Hefei

Hefei is the capital city of the south-east inland province, Anhui. Located to the west of Shanghai, it is a part of the Yangtze delta economic zone. The land boasts a long history of human inhabitation dated back to the Palaeolithic age. Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (1949), this area had always played a critical role in economy and culture. Huizhou, a part of present-day Anhui, was especially significant in the late imperial time of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing dynasties (1644-1911). It was known as a part of the Jiangnan region and for its vibrant social-cultural activities.⁴⁹ After the economic reform, Huizhou studies emerged as a subspecialty in history in China and Sinology studies overseas to understand the area's architecture, culture and merchants (for a review see Guo, 2015). Huimerchants dominated the trade in key items such as salt, tea and clothes. They also established their own gentry governance over Jiangnan and developed a cycle of art production, appreciation and circulation (Xiaomin Yang, 2006; C. Zhang, 2010).⁵⁰ In a way, the Hui merchants acted like the House of Medici in the Jiangnan region in late Imperial China. The anti-Confucianist New Culture Movement, which promoted democracy and science, also sprouted from Anhui with the iconic magazine *New Youth* published in the province (Yang Wang, 2014).

However, Anhui gradually lost its leading role in contemporary China. Hui merchants declined with the war between the Qing government and the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom,⁵¹

⁴⁹ Jiangnan literally means the South of Yangtze river. The region includes Shanghai and parts of Anhui, Jiangsu, Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces.

⁵⁰ Hui in this thesis refers to hui (徽) for Anhui or Huizhou but not hui (回) for Islam.

⁵¹ Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864) was an unrecognized Christian-Shenic oppositional state which aimed to overthrow the Qing Dynasty with Taiping Rebellion.

which destroyed commercial activities in the Jiangnan area (A. Chen & Xu, 2015, Chap 1). After the establishment of the PRC, Anhui was positioned as an agricultural province. Unfortunately, it became one of the provinces that suffered the most from the great famine (1958-1962)(Y. Chen, 2009). In 1978, 18 farmers signed an agreement to secretly subdivide the common land to cultivate produce for the market, as opposed to the socialist state. The incident was later marked as the beginning of economic reform in rural China. However, apart from this one historical moment, the spotlight of the economic reform was not so much on Anhui, but on the coastal area from Shenzhen to Shanghai, as well as Guangdong, Zhejiang, Fujian and Jiangsu province. It was not until 2016 that Anhui was formally included in the Yangtze delta economic zone, which is composed of Shanghai, Zhejiang province and Jiangsu province. However, with regard to GDP, Anhui ranked the lowest, with only half or less than half of the GDP of other three areas (Mingyang Huang, 2019). It was also the only area that was driven by manufacturing instead of service industries (Ibid.). Despite this, Anhui is home to some of the country's top universities, including the University of Science and Technology of China and Anhui University. Both universities are located in Hefei, its capital city. Somehow, Hefei seemed to be forgotten by ethnographers. There were only very limited publications on the ethnic minorities living in rural Hefei in the discipline of ethnology (W. Zhang, 2010).

Hefei has a population of slightly less than 8 million, half the size of Shenzhen. The per capita GDP of Hefei is 91,113 RMB, half that of Shenzhen, which is 183,127 RMB (Chamiji.com, 2018). If Shenzhen represents the cosmopolitan global Chinese city, Hefei is arguably a typical inland provincial capital city. Hefei is divided into 9 districts. My interlocutors are scattered over the city, and are not necessarily in Shushan district, which is known as the science and technological hub. Some of my interlocutors moved their companies to less developed districts due to lower rent.

Most of the entrepreneurs I interviewed in Hefei sold physical products (such as cups, clothes and umbrellas) via major Chinese E-commerce platforms. A few others were also involved in industries including advertising, real estate and animation. Based on my observations in the field, the standardised routine of *guanxi* or *yingchou* lingered as a lifestyle where gender norms were enforced, and women were excluded as equal participants. Patriarchy was constantly reproduced through daily interactions and conversations within the business network. Married businesswomen are reticent about their husbands' sexual consumption and extramarital relationships. In their reticence, there lies an acquiescence to sexual harassment. However, I detected a discrepancy between words and deeds. Even though the businesswomen verbally promoted domesticity, they would often leave domestic responsibilities, both household chores and children rearing, to their parents and, in one case, in the hands of the husband, in order to be able to focus on their business development. The concluding section of this chapter is dedicated to a comparison of three groups of businesswomen in Shenzhen and Hefei. Inspired by Mahler and Pessar's (2001) "gendered geographies of power" that "analyse people's social agency given their own initiative as well as their positioning within multiple hierarchies of power operative within and across many terrains" (p.447), I look at the manifold manifestations of burnout market feminism contextualised in place, gender, age, class and life experiences.

Scenes behind the model businesswoman

My access to the field in Hefei was granted by one of Hefei's most renowned E-commerce entrepreneurs, Jing. As mentioned before, she owned a medium-sized company with her husband, Zhao. Jing started her online shop in 2008. In 2017, they purchased a four-floor block in an industrial park. In 2018, their annual turnover was over 300 million RMB. The first floor is rented out to a logistics company, which oversees all their deliveries. The second floor is their photography studio and some of their business partners' offices. They told me, in order

to avoid monopoly on Taobao, the platform introduced different policies to prevent big companies from dominating the market.⁵²To overcome these limitations, they strategically helped around 20 of their previous staff members to establish their own companies to sell the same items with different branding strategies (see Chap. 4). The third floor is their warehouse. The fourth floor hosts their service, marketing and human resources teams. The executives' offices are also on the top floor. While the size of Jing's office is just around 10 square metres with a chair and a desk, Zhao's office is 10 times larger, with a fish tank, a three-seat sofa, a massage chair and work-out equipment. In contrast, Jing's business motto and her photos, including the one with Jack Ma, are hung at the entrance of the fourth floor. Jing is the face of the company that sells accessories targeting women. One of her employees told me: "Originally I thought the company was owned by Jing, but after I came here, I know that Zhao is the one is the one in charge". Still, in a TV interview about Jing's career success, Jing told the host: "The key to my business success is that I listen to my husband".

Jing's life trajectory can be considered inspirational for many women in China. Born in an urban middle-class family, she has a double Master's degree, founded a regionally known business and, at the same time, she is a good wife and mother who has also maintained her beauty and feminine charm. She met Zhao when she was 25. Their relationship was by no means hypergamous, as Zhao was from a rural area and did not finish middle school. Their romance persisted, and she gave birth to a child at the age of 36. She was hailed as the "have it all" woman in the business circles in Hefei, and a model female entrepreneur in the media coverage of her success story.

Before I met Zhao, Jing and I once took a photo with other two international postgraduate students. While she looked at the photo, she told me, "Well, I could have uploaded it to my

⁵² Taobao prevents a single seller from dominating the market in order to attract more small businesses to use the platform. According to my interlocutors, for instance, the advertisement fee for top and experienced sellers to be remained on the first page under keyword search would be higher than new sellers.

social media because it would be encouraging for my employees to see that I am socialising with foreigners. But I cannot do it now because the guy is leaning towards me in the photo. My husband would be mad. He is very traditional”.

Guanxi and yingchou

Before my fieldwork in 2016, Jing took the two international students, an Arabic man and a European woman, and me to Hefei for a company visit. The night we arrived, Zhao organised a banquet in a five-star restaurant, followed by a KTV singing activity where hostesses line up for the men in the room so men can choose their companions for the night. Jing did not stay with us after the banquet. Zhao did not order any hostess that night. Jing's leaving signalled her acquiescence, instead of resistance, which echoed Liu Jieyu's (2017) observations about double standards on sexualities for men and women (promiscuous men and chaste women) in her fieldwork in Jiangsu, Anhui's neighbouring province. Both Zhao's friends ordered hostesses that night, and they successfully persuaded the Arabic man to do the same. Banquet and sex-related activities constitute the two steps of a standard routine of *guanxi* for elite men (Jieyu Liu, 2017; Tang, 2020).

I have briefly explained what *guanxi* is in Chapter 4. In that Chapter, *guanxi* is taken as a theoretical framework to understand social relations, as opposed to the concept of friendship. In this chapter, I focus on the empirical making and practice of *guanxi*.

In studies of business *guanxi* in China, scholars argue that *guanxi* has greatly compensated for the “underdeveloped” market, legal, and social systems (Kao, 1991; Lin, 1949; Redding, 1990, all cited in Kipnis, 1997, pp. 153-155). At the macro level, *guanxi* was compensating for the underdeveloped economic infrastructure in China, including in the banking system, by assisting businesses in raising money for investment and thereby contributing to production and marketing (Bian & Ikeda, 2014; T Gold et al., 2002; G. G. Hamilton, 1996; F. Hu, 2006; Peng, 2004). It is also partially because of the “underdeveloped” legal system that *guanxi* has

led to corruption or, rather, an intense interest-driven collaboration between the political and economic elites, which Pei Minxin (2016) terms “crony capitalism.” In his 18-month fieldwork study of small firms in Xiamen, David Wank (1999) found that a “symbiotic clientelism” exists between local government and businesses consisting of huge amounts of smuggling and corruption – the government officials offering the entrepreneurs profits, special permissions, and protection, while the entrepreneurs provide payoffs, employment, and partnerships to the officials. As an outcome of the bureaucratic flexibility in this case and the “adjustability” of the legal content and the implementation of law, the local officials find themselves in a position of power when deciding how a business would access the market and resources, which in turn leads the businessperson in question to utilise a range of methods, both legal and illegal, to particularise the ties they have with the officials (Hsing, 1998). Meanwhile, in daily life, *guanxi* is utilised for the maximisation of self-interest. With the abolition of state-assigned jobs and the introduction of an open job market, *guanxi* was used by individuals as a mechanism to gain employment (Bian, 2002).

Scholars agree that the business *guanxi* practice, namely *yingchou* – work-related post-work social activities that provide a platform for pulling *guanxi* – in China, is gendered. While *guanxi* could strengthen the expressive aspect, *yingchou* is entirely instrumentally-oriented. Simply put, *ying* means “reacting to” and *chou* means “interactions or monetary reward”. When a person uses the word *yingchou*, it implies actions from voluntary obligations but not voluntary emotions. *Yingchou* is often highly patriarchal and involves the objectification of and commercialisation of intimacy, which includes women as erotic service workers (Bedford & Hwang, 2013; Ding & Ho, 2013; Evans, 2010; Jeffreys, 2005; H.-H. Shen, 2008; Uretsky, 2016; T. Zheng, 2009, 2012) and long-term extra-marital lovers (Osburg, 2013; S. Xiao, 2014).

Some of this research in the Chinese context outlines two rounds of *yingchou*, the banquet itself and the post-banquet activities that often involve female sex-workers and hostesses (Jieyu

Liu, 2017; Osburg, 2013; Tang, 2020; Uretsky, 2016; T. Zheng, 2009). Elite masculinity, trustworthiness and the stability of men's *guanxi* is established and enhanced during sex-related entertainment including the purchase of commercial sex and mutual introduction of potential mistresses (Ibid.). Even though it is introduced as "leisure", the business culture urges a man to join the consumption of sex as a way to demonstrate his business capability and trustworthiness to other men. While anthropologist Zheng Tiantian considers this practice a resistance to socialist values (T. Zheng, 2012), others believe that this is a masculine field for *guanxi* bonding among male elites, businessmen and cadres alike that women cannot join as equal participants (Bedford, 2015; Tang, 2020; Uretsky, 2016). Such gendered practices of *guanxi* exclude women, hinder their work performance, and regulate them into conforming to gender norms (Jieyu Liu, 2017; Tang, 2020).

My young interlocutors in Shenzhen consider *yingchou* incompatible with their cosmopolitan lifestyle but something that they simply cannot avoid in business. One young cosmopolitan entrepreneur told me: "Only people in backward areas are still into that [*yingchou*]. Or the older generation". My older interlocutors in Shenzhen could potentially subvert the elite masculinity, embodied in *yingchou*, by altering or divorcing their husbands. However, my interlocutors in Hefei seem to "keep one eye closed" on *yingchou* as well as the interrelated infidelity.

Reticence in relation to patriarchy

During my fieldwork in 2018, Jing was absent studying for a postgraduate degree in another city and I was alone with Zhao. This led me to observe an intriguing but revealing paradox. I was researching businesswomen or companies known for female leadership, but I was surrounded by men. During the daytime, I visited different businesspeople, men and women, introduced by Zhao, because he believed it was not enough to know only women's stories. In other words, he believed that business is inherently linked with masculinity. In the days without

interviews, I stayed in their company to observe daily operations and activities. At nights, Zhao asked me to join his social gatherings to better understand the business cycle. At the time, the company was trying to set up their own E-commerce platform, so banquets were arranged with representatives of other companies, usually managers, who were interested in launching products on their nascent platforms. During my fieldwork, I attended banquets with managers of a Korean cosmetics company, a cashmere clothing company, a home appliance company, and an agricultural company. All the managers were men. In the banquet, there were usually around 10 people, mostly men. Among the women who dined with us, there were female managers, opera actresses, mistresses of other male managers and, in one instance, the wife of one Korean businessman.

In my previous work about the gendered and sexualised *guanxi*, I identified five types of women in men's standardised routine of *guanxi*: erotic gifts, pseudo brothers, rational legal professionals, the desired but unreachable and the unspoken rule followers (Tang, 2020). In the first type – women as erotic gifts – women joined the banquet to boost the face of the elite man whom they were accompanying. For Zhao, I was that erotic gift. He regularly asked me to toast to other businessmen in the banquet and purposively asked me to sit next to businessmen who were not accompanied by women. At least four bottles of liquor would be provided per banquet. They usually prepared brandy (which they call *yangjiu* or foreign liquor) and *baijiu* (Chinese distilled beverage of 40% to 50% alcohol content). Each person would be allocated a small carafe (80-150ml) and a shot glass. At the beginning of the banquet, people would toast with the shot glass, but this was rapidly substituted for a competition in masculinity, and people would continuously down a carafe of strong liquor. There were many occasions when I was sexually harassed. One time, a businessman put his hand on my waist and another time, a businessman grabbed and kissed my hand forcefully.

But the worst encounter was with Zhao. One morning, when I went to their company, he informed me that I would need to join a one-day business trip, which, according to him, was precious for my research. I had doubts but felt obliged to say yes for my research and their hospitality. The vice manager of the company, Shuang also joined the trip as the driver. According to Shuang, she joined the company out of admiration for Jing after graduating with a Master's degree in management. Zhao's best friend Sun also joined. Sun owned a cosmetic surgery hospital.

This business trip was another business outreach event for their E-commerce platform. Before the banquet, the staff from the supplier company showed us around their facilities. A female manager approached and offered a piece of advice: "You are not too young anymore. You should get married and give birth to children. That's the real happiness for women". During the banquet, the manager joined as well but took on a very submissive role and fended off all the drinking. Shuang also left in the middle with an excuse that she had to see her family so, once again, I was the only woman drinking. When Zhao asked me to toast to the female manager, she interrogated me once again, "Young woman, be careful. You must be certain about what you want".

After the banquet, both Zhao and Sun were inebriated. Shuang came to pick us up. I was sitting in the rear seat with Zhao sitting in the front and Sun to my left. As Zhao started to yell in his dialect to order me to sleep with him, Sun began to lean over and attached his entire body to mine, while touching my thigh. I screamed no and desperately shouted out Jing's name while using my backpack to push Sun back. Shuang noted that, judging from the situation, we would need to stay in a hotel that night instead of going back to Hefei. In the hotel, we asked for assistance from the hotel management team to send Zhao and Sun to their rooms. I was sharing a room with Shuang. She told me: "Honestly, all these years, I have been thinking. Why would Jing marry Zhao?" I deduced that Shuang had probably experienced or witnessed many similar

incidents. “Do you think Jing knows about all of this?” I asked. “Of course, but she doesn’t talk about it”.

In the previous Chapter about Shenzhen, I discussed the efforts my interlocutors in Longgang devoted to conforming to heterosexual monogamy either by discussing strategies with other women or negotiating with their husbands. For them, the achievements in the private sphere are acquired through these open conversations and negotiations. However, for interlocutors in Hefei, the efforts are channelled into keeping silent about elite men’s infidelity so that women can maintain an image of an understanding and as being a smart wife. One night, Jing and I were sharing a twin-bed hotel room after an academic event. For the first time after knowing her for two years, she shared some thoughts about relationships: “A few years ago, I converted to Christianity to understand the relationship between men and women”. Then she cited Corinthians, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”. The intersection between religion and business in China is not part of my research (for the subject, see M. Yang, 2020), but when I asked if she had any issues with Zhao, Jing did not say anything further.

Going back to my encounter with sexual harassment in the field, all four of us had breakfast together the next morning in the hotel. Zhao and Sun claimed that they blacked out and asked Shuang and me to tell them what happened last night. I was too angry, shocked and numb to say anything. Shuang sniggered and told them about everything, except about sexual harassment. Zhao and Sun burst into a guffaw. Once again, women decided to remain silent.

Women’s silence is a contrast to men’s frankness. On our way back, Zhao and Sun openly discussed their affairs. The conversation started after Zhao said that he had told a woman called Sun that he should not have spent so much genuine emotion (*zhen ganqing*) on her. “You know it’s just for fun, right?” Zhao smirked, “You know that one time, the girl came to my company.

She asked me to give her things. I didn't want to give her anything precious, so I just asked her to choose some scarfs from the warehouse”.

As I wrote about Hefei businesswomen’s choice on reticence, I also retreated to silence. When we arrived in Hefei, I claimed that I was feeling unwell and wished to see a doctor. Shuang dropped me off at a hospital. I then went back to my hotel. During the next two days, I was haunted by discomfort and disgust toward my own body, a common experience among the victims of sexual harassment.

Individual advancement, collective retrogression

Through a detailed ethnography about Egyptian women practising piety in Islam, Saba Mahmood (2005) shows how feminism could go beyond a western liberal framework and that “agency [is] not simply a synonym for resistance to social norms but a modality of action (p.157)” to unveil the “discursive practices performed in making possible particular kinds of subjects... to understand the significance of that subordination to the women who embody it (p.188)”. Similarly, James Scott(1985) theorises the everyday trivial forms of non-cooperative resistance of Malaysian peasants as “the weapons of the weak” that undermine the dominating structures without explicit rebellion. However, unlike their relatively resourceless research subjects, my interlocutors are by no means the weak in their society. On the contrary, many of my interlocutors are regionally or even nationally renowned entrepreneurs with abundant assets. They are resourceful and powerful in their surroundings.

Ho (S. Y. Ho, 2014) observes that Hong Kong men compensate their wives for their cross-border extramarital relationships by providing more material stability. However, in Hefei, my interlocutors were more than able to be economically independent from their husbands. Despite owning such a stable economic foundation, they remain reticent about their husband’s extramarital affairs. Liu and Ding (Jen-peng Liu & Ding, 2005) criticised the reticent politics of “coming home” instead of “coming out” that locked LGBT people in Chinese-speaking

areas in a silenced marginalised position without challenging the heteronormative family structure. In the previous two chapters, I showed how young cosmopolitan interlocutors openly subvert heteronormativity on the premise of self-perceived success. My interlocutors in Hefei decide to remain silent and perform conformity to traditional gender roles because it fits their perception of achievement. These are their different versions of burnout market feminism.

In fact, Anhui is not particularly known for safeguarding gender roles and tradition in the modern history of China. Instead, the new cultural movement, which was led mainly by Anhuier arguably marked the beginning of promoting feminism on a national scale, though it was deeply intertwined with nationalism. The reasons why my interlocutors deliberately perform a traditional gender role were largely instrumental and pragmatic. On one occasion, prior to a meeting with an investor, Jing told me: “If you own businesses as a couple, then the investor will also take into consideration whether there you have a harmonious relationship”. She then underlined her perspective with a story about a business dispute due to a divorce. As expected, during the banquet, the investor asked her how she handled conflicts with Zhao. Jing answered, almost mechanically, using the same wording she uses in TV interviews: “The key to my business success is that I listen to my husband”. For a married businesswoman in Hefei, their verbal compliance with the gender norm is a matter of daily performance. In banquets, Jing often refused other people’s toasting by saying that: “It is not that I cannot drink alcohol but I only drink alcohol with my husband”. The image of a loyal and submissive wife added credit to the totality of her achievement as a docile wife. Unlike neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg, 2018) and the felicitous balance between private and public as discussed in the previous chapter, some interlocutors in Hefei disavow feminism verbally, strengthening instead their conformity to patriarchy.

Businesswomen in Hefei did not spend too much time talking about their husbands when they gathered together. During interviews, many of them felt reluctant to reveal too much about

their marriage life but focused on their children and parents instead. Many of my interviews with businesswomen in Hefei reached a point where women were confessing that they regretted not spending enough time with their family, be it their children or their parents. Even before I would begin with questions about their family, they would start to apologise and express their sadness, as if family-related questions were something they would have to respond to as a businesswoman. For instance, one interlocutor spent an hour explaining how she started her successful business with her two sisters, and how they managed to make an annual turnover of more than 50 million RMB. However, without my prompting, she immediately followed this with her confession: “I knew that you would ask me, so I’ll spare you the effort. Yes, I regret the most not spending enough time with my two daughters. And my mother of course. They mean everything to me”. She showed me her social media, where she used the cover photo of her two daughters, “I can only spend more time looking at them here”. She scrolled down and showed me her mother and a few cooked dishes. “That weekend, I cooked for my mother. See, my dishes are not bad, right?”

When I asked my other female interlocutors about their experience in banquets, many of them said that “Woman with a strong aura (*qichang*) are immune from dirty deeds”. Aura, a slightly supernatural term, can be roughly defined as the energy that an entity, including living beings, emits to their surroundings. It is beyond my intention to discuss the genealogy of the term. But it was clear that a self-enterprising neoliberal logic was adopted by the women in approaching the highly patriarchal male-centred activity. It is a woman’s fault if she failed to emit the appropriate aura.

The reticent politics adopted by my married interlocutors in Hefei – wherein they avoid talking about their husbands, their acquiescence to the extramarital relationships and the sexualised consumption of their husbands – help maintain patriarchy intact, at least on the façade. It is arguably a strategy for them to further develop their business and navigate the

patriarchal business realm. Through pragmatic calibration, these women have achieved what they intended to achieve: successful business with a harmonious family. This is the gendered subjectivity that they strategically craft. They are willing to work hard on remaining reticent and performing a traditional gender role. However, the way they verbally strengthen their conformability to patriarchy is arguably a retrogression compared to the socialist idea of equality between men and women. The market economy gives rise to a revival of patriarchal polygamy in a way that resembles the consumption of prostitution before modernisation (Hershatter, 1997).

This resonates with my findings in the previous chapter. Valuing pragmatism at its core, burnout market feminism evinces an ambivalence that swings between feminism and misogyny. As long as women work to achieve their self-perceived notions of success and femininity, it can be argued that they are practicing a modality of burnout market feminism. Similar to the neoliberal logic discussed in the previous chapter, a purposive performance of traditional gender roles also clearly hinders feminism. Compared to some interlocutors in my second group who advocate feminism on different media platforms, Hefei businesswomen decide to promote the domesticity of women instead. When Jing was interviewed for a TV channel, a national celebrity commented: “Managing such an important company, we all know how highly capable you are. The fact that you are attributing your success to your husband only demonstrates your wisdom”.

Resonating with Xie Kailing’s (2018) findings on urban middle-class white-collar women workers, to embody the gender ideal is a strategy for this group of interlocutors to achieve their self-perceived success. The individual advancement they made as a woman is based on a verbal promotion of the collective retrogression of gender equality.

Resistance

The discrepancy between words and deeds

However, the image is not entirely grim. The resistance that these interlocutors exert against patriarchy emerges not in their words, but their deeds. There is a great discrepancy between words and deeds.

During my years of knowing Jing and Zhao, even though Jing not even once shared anything about her dissatisfaction with Zhao, there were certainly times that she did not conform to his will. Zhao did not interfere in Jing's business until it became profitable enough. Jing also disagreed with the ways Zhao wanted to raise their daughter. Jing wanted to provide their daughter with a more international education while Zhao thought that domestic education was just fine. Zhao also clearly did not understand Jing's experiences as a postgraduate student and even asked her to quit a few times. In those critical circumstances, Jing opposed Zhao.

Once, when Zhao took me to a banquet, he was introduced as Jing's husband, since Jing acted as the public figure for the company. Zhao sneered at that introduction and later told me: "People who know us better understand that Jing listens to me. She even said it on TV". Jing's strategy of verbally conforming to the patriarchy has helped Zhao retain his elite masculinity, even though he co-manages a company known solely for its female leadership. It is with this rationale that Jing was praised as wise by a celebrity, as noted earlier. This strategy of reticence and conformability does not require less effort than the upfront negotiation as demonstrated by the businesswomen in Longgang. These are just different contents of labour they put into their second shift.

Similarly, another two interviewees told me that they reserved their Sundays for their children. However, on two subsequent Sundays, I met with them in business meetings with other clients. Even though their social media posts and public speeches made it seem as though

their children and family were the centre of their lives, in reality, they spare no effort to work in their offices and enhance their businesses.

Some businesswomen might laud women's domesticity, but in deeds they outsourced their domestic responsibility to their parents and the market so that they could better develop their company. When I asked two interlocutors about their children, they answered that the grandmother was taking care of them. All my interlocutors in Hefei with children lived with their parents. According to a sample pooled from nine provinces between 1991 to 2004, 45% of grandparents co-resided with their children and grandchildren aged between zero to six (F. Chen, Liu, & Mair, 2011). Notably, paternal grandparents were three times more common in their sample than maternal grandparents. Grandmothers and mothers invest equal effort and time in childrearing, especially if the mother has a heavy workload (Ibid.). Chinese sociologist Xiao Suowei (2016) examines intergenerational power dynamics and notes that mothers become powerful childrearing managers while grandmothers are the marginalised caretaking executors. In a way, grandparents also become their staff members, exchanging their labour for material support after retirement. Many of them also hired nannies or freelance cleaners to do household chores so that their parents could focus entirely on childrearing, delegating hands-on cleaning tasks to the realm of pure market transactions.

Arguably, the resistance observed in the discrepancy between words and deeds can be seen as the modalities of agency of these businesswomen juggling with patriarchy (Mahmood, 2005). Rather than challenging patriarchy, they navigate it for their self-perceived achievements. As they break the glass ceiling, elite masculinity remains intact and so does the subjugation of other women.

A small step for feminism

Not all women endure the intensity of reticence. Two women shared their divorce stories with me. In both cases, they were the breadwinner in the previous household. One case

involved domestic violence and the other an extramarital affair. When they were referred to me, before the interview, both referees added a note: “She has the story you need if they are willing to share”, indicating the intensity of stigmatisation that divorced women are confronted with in Hefei.

In the case of one divorced interlocutor, she purposively yielded the custody of her child to the father. “It is not that I don’t love my daughter. On the contrary, I love my daughter the most in this world. I need to let him understand that he cannot just leave the family and form a new family. I was the one who introduced the job to him. I was the one who fed the family. I bought their house in Shanghai and I am the one who pays for my daughter’s education”. That was the last interview that I conducted in Hefei, still haunted by the smell of alcohol in Zhao’s breath. I was weeping while she told me this, in the lobby of one of her buildings. She was weeping too, in front of her staff. That was a moment of sisterhood forming.

The interlocutor with whom I shared tears referred a friend, Meili for interview. Meili was introduced to me as a feminist. When I searched her name online, the descriptions I found were of a feminist writer. She wrote two books about women’s lifestyle and owned a new media platform that promoted, arguably, a post-feminist lifestyle, if we borrow this terminology for the purpose (McRobbie, 2004). She had more than 2 million subscribers in 2018 on her WeChat public account platform. While acknowledging women’s economic independence, her platform produced articles that reinforce the value that a safe and heteronormative family with a reliable supportive man was what, eventually, all women need. They also advised women to put effort into maintaining their beauty and charm or, in other words, “choose” to be a sexual object to better prepare herself for “true love”. They did suggest, however, that a woman should not make compromises when choosing a husband.

In her justification of being feminist, she said: “Many women around me compromise too much! They marry an abusive man. They put up with demanding and abusive intimate

relationships. My platform encourages women to focus on ourselves first. Only when we are satisfied with our lives can we be prepared for love”. Desire and economy are commonly interwoven (P. S. Y. Ho et al., 2018; Rofel, 2007).

If male-centred *guanxi* practice and sexualised *yingchou* remain unchallenged, asking women straightforwardly “not to compromise” is already feminist. The post-feminist mentality of seeking monogamous heterosexual marriage is already a feminist step in this context compared with burning out to remain silent and smart about the husband’s assumed infidelity in order to avoid the stigma of divorce. However, compared with the first group of businesswomen in Shenzhen who openly confront and negotiate with their husbands, the discourse of asking women not to compromise suggests that it is women’s responsibility to work harder on their morals and appearances to find “better” men or be treated “better” by their husbands. To put it differently, instead of demanding that elite men change, women are asked to do more work.

What constitutes subversion and agency in a way unveils the conditions of social realities and the intensity of patriarchy. Unlike Jing who flaunted her loyalty to her husband, Meili did not reveal much about her private life in media interviews or her books and public account. She glossed over her intimacy by calling him: “the father of my daughter”. I once asked the interlocutor who introduced Meili to me about Meili’s marital status, as they seemed close. However, the interlocutor said that she did not know much. We could argue that to conceal her private life from public view is not feminist as it evades the problem of the public/private divide and hierarchy, the foundation of patriarchy in the first place (MacKinnon, 1979; Walby, 1990). But in this situation, in contrast to the performance of confession and assertion from other interlocutors who perpetuate traditional gender roles, Meili already took a feminist step to keep her private life private.

Businesswomen I met in Hefei seemed to face two quandaries of reticence. For businesswomen in a heteronormative marriage, they verbally perpetuated traditional gender roles and acquiesced to their husband's extramarital relationships in order to excel in the business. The elite masculinity remains intact in reticence, while subtle resistances emerge in deeds that are inconsistent with words. The second quandary is faced by businesswomen who were the outliers in a heteronormative marriage, usually in the process of divorcing. They arguably took a small step forward from reticence and dare to promote ideas such as not making compromises in intimacy. However, such a discourse still puts the responsibility on women instead of challenging the patriarchal business practice.

Sexual harassment and rape in the field: my burning out

Before comparing the three groups of women in these two chapters, I would like to talk about my own burnout market feminism in this section.

Sexual harassment and even rape are commonly experienced by female ethnographers but have not received enough attention (Clark & Grant, 2015; Mingwei Huang, 2016; Isidoros, 2015; Kloß, 2017; Moreno, 1995; Steffen, 2017; Winkler, 1991). In the early 20th century when anthropology as a discipline was still in its formative years, Henrietta Schmerler, Ruth Benedict's student, was raped and murdered during her fieldwork with the White Mountain Apache Tribe. While Henrietta's post-mortem voice was silenced, the tragedy was framed as her own fault for not being professional enough. In 1972, the time of the second-wave feminism in the west, Eva Moreno was raped during her PhD fieldwork in Ethiopia but was able to reflect on this only after 20 years. She questioned the discipline of anthropology as a whole by saying:

“For female anthropologists, one of the consequences of the fictitious ‘gender-free’ life we lead at university is that, if we bring up issues that are specific to us as women in the academic context, we run the risk of doing damage to our identities as anthropologists..... the archetypal anthropologist is a man... who wants to be a *female* anthropologist when it

seems possible to be a 'real' anthropologist? 'Anthropologist' don't get harassed or raped. Women do." (Moreno, 1995, p.247)

In 2016, as feminism theories evolved into a manifold kaleidoscope with the third-wave and beyond, Mingwei Huang shared her trauma of being raped in Chinatown in South Africa, also during PhD fieldwork. As feminism evolves with different waves, the problem facing women ethnographers remains almost unchanged. Feminists are allowed space to produce feminist theories and knowledge in academia, but their bodies are still greatly disciplined by the patriarchy. Sadly, as shown in all three cases, academia has not become the safe home for female anthropologists to return to but another patriarchal realm where victim blaming prevails in the disguise of professionalism. Rape can destroy an anthropologist's career as well as her entire psyche, as rape is a social murder that totally deprives people of their agency and subjectivity (Winkler, 1991).

To propose, promote and promulgate sexual harassment as a common and legal concept was largely achieved by feminists in the 1970s, and especially by Lin Farley and Catherine MacKinnon. Farley first defined sexual harassment as the "unsolicited nonreciprocal male behaviour that asserts a woman's sex role over her function as a worker" (Farley, cited in Siegel, 2004, p.9). In her seminal work *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*, MacKinnon unveiled the linkage between sexual harassment and sexual discrimination. MacKinnon (MacKinnon, 1979) said: "sex harassment is seen to disadvantage women as a gender" (p.6), since it originates from and perpetuates the gender-marked public/private separation and subordination "by using her sexual position to coerce her economically" (p.7). In the 1980s, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) adopted MacKinnon's framework to define and prohibit sexual harassment. Since then, the development of sexual harassment as a concept in the US has included more dimensions into the framework, such as same-sex relationships, for example (MacKinnon & Siegel, 2004).

However, it would be un-post-colonial and methodologically problematic to apply the social-legal terms in the US to other societies, and especially to the “more peripheral” society where an ethnographer conducts fieldwork. In China, it was not until 2005 that sexual harassment was included in the amendment of *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests*. According to article 40 of the law: “Sexual harassment against women is banned. The victims shall be entitled to complain to the entity or the relevant organisations” (Pkulaw, n.d.). However, the specific content of sexual harassment is not clearly defined and therefore leaves the regional authorities with great ambiguity in its execution (Chinanews, 2019; Zhan & Qiang, 2011). In the following 10 years, between 2005 and 2014, different regions specified the content of sexual harassment. Around the same time, anti-sexual harassment systems were burgeoning at organisational levels as well, including in universities and workplaces (Feng, 2019). In 2006, Hunan province was the first to delineate a clear content of sexual harassment: “It is forbidden to sexually harass women in the form of language, text, pictures, electronic consultation, behaviours, etc. with obscene content that violates the law and ethics” (Ibid., p.211). In 2013, Shenzhen officially included men as potential victims of sexual harassment (Ibid., p.212). After 2015, while the state severely cracked down on a civil society approach to feminism, as exemplified by the detainment of the *feminist five*, after 2018, however, the global #metoo movement blossomed in China and put a spotlight on sexual harassment among the general public (C. Chen, 2019; Feng, 2019; Y. Lin, 2019). In 2019, the People’s congresses discussed a proposal to include a more specified clause of sexual harassment in the Civil Law as: “In violation of the will of others by sexual harassment in ways of speech, behaviour, etc., the victim has the right to request the perpetrator to bear civil liability according to law” (Yichun Wang, 2019). Thus, according to Chinese rules and regulations, it was more than evident and clear that I was sexually harassed in Hefei.

Why couldn't I walk away from my fieldwork? Did I lose my agency? Or was I, perhaps, enticed to stay to get more from my fieldwork? As I write about burnout market feminism, I also burned out for my thesis for my perceived achievements: to produce impactful and insightful research that would possibly contribute to feminist knowledge production. My knowledge is produced with trauma (Isidoros, 2015; Kloß, 2017) and burning out. Through my own experience, I understand the milieu in which my interlocutors burn out to be reticent or to keep their private sphere private. My pain and my experiences were the concealed part that my female interlocutors in Hefei omitted in in-depth interviews with me and in daily conversations with others. Only after two years from my fieldwork was I able to write and analyse myself in this framework. My words explain their/our reticence.

Three groups of businesswomen in comparison

In their edited volume, Mahler and Pessar (2001) analyse the manifold “gendered geographies of power” in transnational contexts that consist of, for instance, both European male sex tourists but also female refugees from the third world. They wrote:

The challenge is to see people's “everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts” (Ong, 1999,p.5) but also to see how these politics/actions can affect those power contexts.... Such a challenge sets out a mode of measurement that does not establish fixed steps or goals but sees empowerment as an ongoing dynamic within the broad context of a power geometry (Mahler & Pessar, 2001, p. 456).

I apply a transnational framework in an intranational context to better bring out the heterogeneity of Chinese businesswomen, so as to not fall into a monolithic orientalist description of China (see Chapter 2). In Hu Angang's (2001) categorisation of “four Chinas,” Shenzhen belongs to the first world of Chinese global cities while Hefei belongs to the second world of major provincial capital cities. I would like to use three phrases to summarise the three groups of businesswomen in my research: caught in transition, embracing cosmopolitan desires,

and trapped in tradition. The first group of women are in their 30s and 40s in Shenzhen and are caught in transition between the latter two groups of businesswomen, both in terms of their business model and their private lives. The second group of young businesswomen boast innovative business ideas and practices and dare to drift away from gender norms under the umbrella of being cosmopolitan. The third group of businesswomen in Hefei are still facing blunt patriarchy as if they are trapped in tradition.

To delineate the heterogeneity is not to generalise the geographical difference. Being very aware that my fieldwork is contingent, and an artefact produced by my idiosyncratic encounters, I am not making a statement that Shenzhen is more advanced than Hefei in terms of gender equality, which entails quantitative research. The comparison is made to unveil how different circumstances have shaped businesswomen's actions and their perception of achievements, which constitute the manifold burnout market feminism. A differentiation should be made between a deductive generalised statement about the two cities and using gendered geography of power as an analytical tool to unveil and understand the multifaceted lives of businesswomen scattered over China.

I will summarise differences between the three groups of businesswomen in the two cities in terms of *yingchou* and how I was received as a queer woman.

Many scholars understand *yingchou*, and the interrelated sexual consumption, as a “social fact” integral to conducting business in China, a Durkheimian term to describe the social values, norms and structures that transcend and exert control on individuals (Bedford, 2015; Tang, 2020; Uretsky, 2016). However, rather than considering *guanxi* and *yingchou* as static norms in the of conduct business as in the earlier stage of the economic reform, it is important to observe how they have transformed and lingered. The multiplicity of burnout market feminism can also be discerned from these metamorphoses across different sites. I did not observe the well-researched mutual dependence between business and local officials (Pei, 2016; Wank,

1996) in either Shenzhen or Hefei. My interlocutors value their connections with local government officials for business information but not access, and their approach to *guanxi* building has transformed.

During my time in Shenzhen, my interlocutors invited me to two talks delivered by local government officials. On one occasion, Lucy took me to a large-scale conference organised by the municipal government and local press for business policy analysis. Other key members of the Longgang E-Commerce Chamber of Commerce also attended the conference. After that, the members, both men and women, attended a casual dinner in a nearby restaurant. We combined two tables in the public dining area. In comparison, businesspeople in Hefei always booked private dining for large scale gatherings, even for family and friends. During the dinner, Lucy and the others discussed business deals and potential collaborative opportunities. When they reached an agreement, they symbolically toasted to each other with tea. Such practice was potentially a result of strict penalties for drunk driving in Shenzhen. Drunk driving in Shenzhen could lead to up to 6 months' detention. Anyhow, only a part of *yingchou* rituals lingered as a way to show courtesy. On another occasion, the university-based business association Broaden invited a young government official to a business breakfast gathering to share the policies about encouraging green entrepreneurship. The official was in his 20s, like most members of Broaden. Before the sharing, the speaker and a few male members shared shots of whiskey, just like the way they did in the UK during their student days, as they claimed. Two female members laughed and bantered: "Don't be funny". Women in Broaden can position themselves as desiring subjects while men are regulated by the cosmopolitan masculinity that includes some aspects of feminism. Although the young entrepreneurs also ritualistically shared alcohol, their ways of consuming alcohol and entertainment diverge from the customs observed in *yingchou*. The cosmopolitan entrepreneurs took me to KTV bars without hostesses, Japanese style whiskey bars, barbeques with live music, pet playgrounds and music festivals. However, they

still had to deal with elite masculinity in their encounters with senior men as desired objects for extramarital relationships.

Women in Hefei seemed to remain trapped in the male bonding practice of *yingchou*. They did not see *yingchou* as problematic and understood it as a woman's fault if she misbehaves in banquets and fails to "protect herself" (like in my case). Although I did not recall any banquets with government officials in Hefei, business negotiations within the commercial sectors still took place in extravagant banquet venues. Rituals of *yingchou* lingered: extensive drinking of alcohol, accompanied by toasting and conspicuous consumption. Basically, the *guanxi* seeker is expected to finish the whole glass of alcohol and lower the glass while toasting and flattering, while the favour provider drinks as he wishes. As the ritual is about male bonding, when a woman drinker attends the banquet, she becomes a target for men to challenge in terms of toasting. Drinking less than a woman is considered losing masculinity. Therefore, a woman drinker provides an arena for a competition of masculinity, a good means to entice the favour provider to drink more alcohol. That was the reason why I was brought to banquets by Zhao. The banquet is by no means the only way to establish business *guanxi*. Otherwise, Meili and a few other women would not have been able to thrive in the business realm as they have. It is, however, the taken for granted means to particularise a general tie or to pull *guanxi* and maintain *guanxi* among businessmen.

The caught-in-transition group of businesswomen in Shenzhen arguably shared plenty of similarities with the businesswomen in Hefei. Both groups were born between the 1970s and 1980s and received education mostly from domestic universities. Presumably, their husbands are middle-aged nouveau riche and the main group to conduct sexual consumption to boost their elite masculinity and male bonding. While the married women in Hefei remained reticent about their husbands, the women in Shenzhen were able to utter their dissatisfaction with their husbands directly and were able to persuade their husbands to refrain from such a lifestyle by

using the leverage of their economic capability. The businesswomen in Shenzhen did not possess more economic leverage than the businesswomen in Hefei. But because of the geographical differentiations, the first group of businesswomen in Shenzhen had more access to a cosmopolitan lifestyle. For instance, they could interact with overseas customers or younger generations like the second group of entrepreneurs. Their perception of intimacy might also be influenced by cosmopolitan masculinity. Shenzhen is one of the most international metropolises in mainland China filled with interprovincial and international talents. Hefei, on the contrary, consists mainly of intra-provincial migrants and is economically the weakest provincial capital in the Yangtze delta economic zone. Many university graduates in Hefei migrate to Shanghai, which is just three hours away by bullet train. Therefore, my interlocutors in Hefei were less likely to envision an alternative lifestyle than the more normative ones. While the first group of interlocutors in Shenzhen could negotiate with their husbands, the interlocutors in Hefei confined their resistance to deeds. While Lucy could utter and admit that “I was a workaholic. I care about work more than my family”, Jing and others repeated: “At the bottom of my heart, I think family is more important for women”. Nevertheless, as I observed, women in Hefei did not work any less than their counterparts in Shenzhen. Their verbal support for the domestic role of the woman was a protective suit that they considered beneficial for their businesses.

Interrelated, the second contrast was about how I was received in both cities, which was stark. While I was sexually harassed by elite men who had little knowledge of same-sex relationships in Hefei, there was an obvious presence of queerness among my second group of cosmopolitan entrepreneurs. Osburg understood the extramarital consumption of women by Chinese elite men as an “attempt to inject forms of value that are resistant to commodification into business relationships, to transform relationships of cold calculation into particularistic relationships embedded in moral economies of sentiment” (Osburg, 2013,p.43). He contrasted

it with the same phenomenon in the US as a way to expunge homosexuality and poignantly observed that the reason why the elite men in his research in Chengdu did not fear being accused of being homosexual or feminine was that homosexuality was simply unthinkable (Ibid. p.42). In other words, heteronormativity did not even need to be defended, as its antithesis of heteronormativity/homosexuality had not been instilled in their knowledge repertoire.

Therefore, while my queerness is visible to the younger generation of entrepreneurs in Shenzhen, it is invisible to the businesspeople in Hefei. I did not purposively alter my appearances to “fit in” to either site and I also did not intentionally come out as a queer woman unless I was asked. Therefore, how I was received in different fieldwork sites also reveals critical information about the sites themselves. For the first group of women, I was a female graduate student from Oxford who could provide educational advice for them to rear their children. For many women in the second group of women, I was a queer woman, even a Tomboy, of similar age, who also shared cosmopolitan living experiences via my education. They shared some queer and feminist desires and struggles with me. The third group of interlocutors did not discern any female masculinity (Halberstam, 1998) and queerness in me, but saw me as a young woman with a candid and hearty personality (the way they interpret my short hair) without a boyfriend.

Women’s agency against patriarchy is not dependant on their economic leverage, but on an assemblage of their status, education, living experiences, access to alternative information and knowledge, and the milieu they are surrounded by. And this is the reason why gendered geography of power is a critical analytical framework in revealing the pluralistic experiences of burnout market feminism in China. The cosmopolitan young entrepreneurs are not wealthier

than the first or third group of interlocutors. Their companies were much smaller in terms of size compared to other interlocuter's E-commerce companies.⁵³

Women in all three groups were burning out for different forms of market feminism and engaged in various battles as they negotiated with patriarchy. The businesswomen caught in transition shared a goal of prohibiting their husbands from having extramarital relationships. The young cosmopolitan entrepreneurs believed that material success would pave ways for them to evade elite masculinity and heteronormativity. The businesswomen in Hefei were trapped in tradition in terms of their business practices and family values, and they would exert only a faintly visible resistance to patriarchy in their deeds, but not at all in their words.

In terms of individualistic empowerment, all three groups of women actively make decisions that they believe are optimal in navigating their surroundings. In terms of challenging the gender norm, there is seemingly a descending order from embracing cosmopolitan desires group, the caught in transition group, and the trapped in tradition group. However, subjects constantly make actions in negotiation with their living contexts. I do not intend to argue that the young cosmopolitan women are more feminist than their senior counterparts, who have fewer international experiences and imaginations. All three groups of women make pragmatic decisions that they believe would generate the most achievements. In Li's theorisation (X. Li, 2005b), as long as gendered subjectivity arises from the bottom-up, it already deserves recognition as fulfilling the first step of market feminism. These varied subjectivities could form different group consciousnesses. While Lucy's feminist network overtly acknowledge

⁵³ However, it should be noted that the turnover of the company does not necessarily equate the profit they made as individuals. My interlocutors who manage E-commerce need to deal with stocks of goods and the salaries for their large number of manual workers. One interviewee in Hefei told me that it is too common to see an E-commerce company go bankrupt because the margin of profit was too low. If they failed to clear their stock for one season, they easily fall into deficit while being unable to pay the salaries or maintain their large office for the stock. Many of them are in a vicious circle of selling mass produced products, and where the originality of the product only lies in its online visual presentations (see Chapter 4).

gender inequality and challenges patriarchy and heteronormativity, Meili adopts a more post-feminist strategy for her community of women who disavow gender equality, but who advocate that women should be prepared and uncompromising for “true love”.

An individual woman burns out to achieve her self-defined success and fights different battlefields discursively. However, the patriarchal logic of hierarchy and domination legitimises misogyny and exploitation. Japanese feminist Ueno Chizuku warns that everyone ought to be aware that almost all self-acclaimed feminists are still very much shaped by misogyny (Chizuku, 2015). Regarding the debates and conflicts within feminism, I agree to understand feminism as a dynamic process of theorising in order not to fall into a pitfall of mutual accusation (Jackson & Jones, 1998). I am not making a relativist statement claiming “everyone is feminist” or that “everything is resistance” on equal ground. Resistance can be discursive and dispersed (Mahmood, 2005; Scott, 1985) as well as overt and collective. To scrutinise the contexts for empowerment means to decipher the heterogeneity shaped by a gendered geography of power.

Like us, our interlocutors also make spontaneous decisions and life is full of incidents that are unpredictable and ungovernable by theories. If Jing had decided to overtly undermine patriarchy, her business might not have been less successful than it is now. If Lucy decided to have a women’s network more like Meili’s, she might have even more followers than she had. Burnout market feminism is an analytical framework to understand the complexity and even paradoxes of the lived experiences of women in China, and hopefully beyond. By comparing women in these two chapters, I delineated the manifold contexts that shaped the actions and aspirations of three groups of businesswomen. I show how women burnout for different self-perceived achievements and therefore multiple market feminism. In the concluding chapter, I will tease out the paradoxical integration of patriarchy and feminism by using the concept of burnout market feminism. This paradoxical integration is embodied in the ambivalence and

multiplicity of the forms of burnout market feminism that could lead to both emancipation and constraints. I would also link burnout market feminism with the grander picture of the Chinese Dream to answer the lingering research question: How to understand feminism in China under such a paradox? What are the relations among paradoxical feminism, the lived experiences of Chinese businesswomen and the Chinese dream?

Chapter 7 Conclusion: Paradoxical Integration and the Chinese Dream

My thesis has revealed the paradoxes of different feminisms and the heterogeneity of how they play out in the field. To bookend the thesis, I first propose to understand these paradoxes and oxymorons as paradoxical integrations. I then go through the nationalistic sentiments I encountered in my fieldwork and link them with the China Dream narrative. The China dream harnesses and appropriates the potentialities of what I term burnout feminism in one direction – one that reinforces burnout by giving it new layers and sources of meaning. However, bubbling beneath the surface, I detected in the women’s hopes for the future, for their daughters, that other possibilities existed beyond the logic of hierarchy and domination. By wishing their daughters to be free from burning out, there rise a feminist possibility beyond achievement-seeking.

Paradoxical integration

This journey of this thesis was filled with paradoxes and conflictual findings: feminist and anti-feminist; emotional and instrumental. Chapter three was about empowerment. Chapter four discussed burnout in the digital economy for the sake of emotional motivations and commitments beyond economics, and for social values beyond the economic values of capital accumulation. Leaning towards a more instrumental side, Chapters five and six explored the emplaced contexts that gave rise to the manifold contents of achievements – emotional and economic - that impelled my interlocutors to burn out.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter three, these paradoxical findings might result from my mixed methods, which incorporated in-depth interviews and ethnography, both online and on-ground, in Shenzhen and Hefei as well as my own direct work experience. However, I believe that my paradoxical findings more strikingly reflect a reality that is complicated and paradoxical. Only by discerning and showing China's paradoxes can we avoid reducing China to a monolithic Other, Chinese woman to unliberated individuals awaiting emancipation, and our research subjects into empirical cases to prove our theories. To reiterate my point in Chapter two, it is methodologically feminist and anti-orientalist to see our interlocutors as complex as ourselves (quoting Li Xiaojiang (2019), as individuals who cry and laugh like us.

The paradoxes discussed in this thesis can be better understood in relation to the idea of paradoxical integration that is inspired by the Daoist classic *Daodejing*, rather than in relation to Aristotle's law of contradiction, which dominates social sciences and philosophy, especially through Marx' and Hegel's theories (Qi, 2014, Chapter 7):

The notion of paradoxical integration entails that opposites are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that they can exist interdependently. It also indicates that opposites do not necessarily negate each other, but that they may generate and produce each other. Opposites are capable of functioning in a cooperative and collaborative relationship. Instead of undermining each other, they have the capacity to provide access to each other. The vitality of the notion of paradoxical integration also lies in its recognition of transformation in that opposites do not remain unchanged and that one thing may be transformed into another. (Qi, 2014, p.220)

In other words, we can understand the contradictions in terms of Yin and Yang, a concept that originated from the book *Yi-jing (The Book of Change)*, where the black and white images are not mutually exclusive but are inclusive of each other, depend on each other, incorporate each other and are permanently transforming without a developmentalist and evolving

intention. Andrew Kipnis (2016) cites the Yin/Yang diagram in order to explain his concept of ‘recombinant urbanisation’ whereby he reenergises the understanding of urbanisation by examining the balance between “what is new in the post-transformation pattern, examining how the pattern draws on pre-existing elements, and analysing how various aspects of transformation interrelate” (pp.15-17). While I do not intend to pursue a philosophical discussion, it is also noteworthy that the paradoxical integration as understood in classic Chinese philosophy does not disrupt order and structure (as it is widely discussed in the post-structural or post-modern philosophies) but, on the contrary, it gives order to everything (Fung, 1948). Yin and Yang, known as *Taiji*, translated as “the great ultimate”, is derived from *Wuji*, translated as “ultimateless” or “the ultimate of nothingness”. While the contradictions and distinctions of the “poles” (*ji*) cannot be identified in *Wuji*, they are clear in *Taiji*, although not in a static, mutually exclusive way, as shown in the black-white dualist representation in Figure 4.



Figure 4 *Wuji*, *Yin-Yang* diagram and black and white dualism

The businesswomen whom I interviewed were feminist because they had crafted their gendered subjectivities. For too long in Chinese historiography, the stories about gender, sexuality and intimacy have been shaped in a trickle-down manner, with an emphasis on the collective rather than the individuals. I take Li Xiaojiang’s market feminism in recognising the gendered subjectivities that arise within the process of economic development as the first step of producing local theorisation of feminism. However, I show that in order to achieve and

maintain these gendered subjectivities, women need to work to an extent of burning out. These multiple modalities of burnout market feminisms could be both feminist and anti-feminist, shaped by various contexts and the gendered geography of power. As power-wielders in the society, my interlocutors break glass-ceilings and undermine patriarchy and heteronormativity in various battlefields. Individualistic empowerment is a start for market feminism, however, if it is seen as the end that overtakes feminist solidarity that subvert the unequal social structure, then, women would only be trapped in the cycle of auto-exploitation and burning out, as demonstrated by my businesswomen interlocutors. For my interlocutors, their negotiations with the structure is highly dependent on and should lead to their individual success and achievements. The patriarchal logic of hierarchy, competition, domination and exploitation remains intact in the pursuit of achievements. As the market (e.g. babysitters and domestic helpers) and other family members (e.g. grandparents) take over some domestic responsibilities from my interlocutors, these powerful businesswomen perhaps start to resemble “white heterosexual men” in Chinese women’s bodies, perpetuating a masculine protocol of success (Atanasoski & Vora, 2015). It is anti-feminist to celebrate the logic of hierarchy and domination and encourage women to become “successful men” with domestic responsibilities. But is it also anti-feminist and, in Li Xiaojiang’s (2005a, 2005b) words, orientalist, to discourage women, especially women in developing countries, from pursuing achievements and success? Li (Ibid.) reminds us that the empowerment of women is not free from problems, yet these problems could be and should be solved within the development process. In other words, the concept of burnout market feminism acknowledges the interaction between feminism and anti-feminism that is embodied in individuals and communities as a dynamic process.

The Internet age under Xi’s governance provides a unique opportunity to researchers to explore the development of China and the empowerment of women. While Li praises the period

between 1979 and the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing in 1995 (Chapter 3), the Internet age arguably sees the strongest presence of Chinese women in commerce both in terms of assets and number (Chapter 1). Compared to two decades ago, China also undeniably rose to power in the global arena through its strong economic performance.

Each of the three groups of women I observed and described in previous chapters five and six exercised their agency in different ways, or through different modalities. The young cosmopolitan entrepreneurs in Shenzhen directly subverted patriarchy and heteronormativity by allowing themselves to live their vision of a desirable cosmopolitan life with achievements and especially economic success. Some of them openly built women's communities for their businesses, avowed feminism and fought against patriarchy and heteronormativity. I call them "embracing cosmopolitan desires" group. I term the other group in Shenzhen "caught in transition" and the businesswomen in Hefei "trapped in tradition". These latter two groups multi-tasked to look after their careers, families and physical appearance in order to meet gendered expectations of them. But whereas "caught in transition" group in Shenzhen openly negotiated with their husband's elite masculinity, contesting these men's infidelity and consumption of sex services, businesswomen in Hefei used their labour and economic power to tolerate their husbands' infidelity by focusing on the meaning that they derived in their lives outside of their relationship with their husbands. These women disavowed feminism and burned out to fit in with traditional gender roles while pursuing their goal of achieving greater success in business.

Within market feminism I have especially highlighted 'burnout' which refers to auto-exploitation for achievements (Han, 2015) shaped by the social contexts and draws our attention to the ceaseless labour women need to take for their crafted gendered subjectivities forces us to rethink whether gendered subjectivities are dependent on material advancements. As mentioned, all the women were pragmatic as they became part of burnout market feminism.

Being confrontational versus being acquiescent to patriarchy both required effort and sacrifice. It is also not clear whether the confrontational women or the acquiescent women were more successful. Who burned out more? Who achieved more? Was it Lucy, the self-branded feminist and lesbian entrepreneur who broke gender norms and established investment business networks for fellow women and LGBT community members? Or was it Jing who was hailed in the media as the “have it all” woman, with a nationally famous enterprise with great turnover and who handles her marriage with Zhao with “wisdom”, that is, turning a blind eye to his elite masculinity practices and outwardly endorsing women’s docility and obedience? Even though their actions certainly produced different social effect, they both engaged in auto-exploitation, which means individual success and instrumental concerns would always be the yardstick to guide their actions.

However, compared with the pessimistic critiques of neoliberal feminism, which perceive the emphasis on individual success as a hinderance to the collective subversion of patriarchy (Rottenberg, 2018), my theorisation of burnout market feminism aligns closer to Banet-Weiser’s observation about the ambiguity in popular feminism (Banet-weiser et al., 2020). Ambiguity entails seeing individualistic success and emancipatory collective solidarity as a paradoxical integration, instead of a black-and-white antithesis. Inheriting Li Xiaojiang’s approach to feminism, my theorisation of burnout market feminism recognises group consciousness as a step toward gendered subjectivity. Collective solidarity may arise from the pragmatism of pursuing success, as in the case of Lucy. However, as pragmatism sits at the centre of burnout market feminism, this pragmatism could also swing to encouraging women to navigate patriarchy by performing traditional gender roles.

Unlike popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018) which discusses how celebrities in the Euro-American context self-brand as feminists in the mass media and in new media, burnout market feminism focuses less on celebrity-inspired feminism and more on the self-perceived

achievements that make women voluntarily work to the extent of burning out. In a one-sentence summary, my thesis explores how women **burn out** in order to be **empowered** to build successful lives within given **contexts**. For Han Byung-Chul, people burn out for illusory and deceptive freedom in the digital society with highly intensified individualisation. Because people lose meaningful connections with others, achievements become short-lived and it is through these short-lived achievements that people find meaning in their lives. However, for Li, the empowerment of women is by no means deceptive and illusory. Li values gender subjectivities and the possible solidarities that are formed bottom-up. Compared with Han who makes a generalised statement, Li's framework is more of a feminist relational theorisation that values the dynamic, change and heterogeneity. Han's purpose is to critique people's mental state in developed capitalist societies in the digital economy era whereas Li wishes to unveil local Chinese feminism's potential to empower women like herself. Therefore, Li's theorisation complements Han's thought in a feminist and local context-sensitive manner. However, as Li's theorisation risks almost romanticises and justifies all *minjian* (民间 in-between people) gendered subjectivities, Han's theory balances out and brings critical reflections on the ceaseless efforts that women need to undertake for this empowerment.

Minjian values the spontaneous actions from below, and in Chapter three, I argue that market may become the very realm left of *minjian* with the crackdown on civil society and NGO practices in general in the Xi Era. However, when the solidarity of women could only be formed in the market with mostly economic incentives, women are more likely to end in a cycle of burning out, rather than emancipatory subversive sisterhood against superiority and domination as well as the pursuit of them.

The Chinese dream

The last stage of my journey in this thesis discusses the patriotic and nationalist sentiment that was prevalent during my fieldwork. This sentiment is closely linked with the rejuvenation discourse of the Chinese dream - a discourse that encourages and accommodates my interlocutors' success and another reason why they willingly burn out.

The Chinese dream is President Xi's signature policy. Through the Chinese dream, China embarked on a journey to "realize the great rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation [as] the greatest dream". In particular, in 2012 Xi proposed "Two Centenaries" meaning that "by 2022, the 100-year anniversary of the founding of the CPC, China would become a *Xiaokang*, moderately well-off society; and by 2049, the 100-year anniversary of the founding of People's Republic of China, China would have become a 'strong, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and modern socialist country'" (People.com.cn, 2018a).

The idea behind the Chinese dream is to consolidate a new global order led by China (Z. Wang, 2014; T. Zhou, 2014). As Wang (2014) points out, the discourse of rejuvenation against the suppression of western imperialism has been present since the Mao era. During the Cold War in the late 1950s, Chairman Mao set the goal of "overtaking Britain and exceeding America" (S. Zhou, 1995), referring particularly to the steel industry, to demonstrate the supremacy of socialism over capitalism. Even though Mao did not see this objective realised, the Cold War lingers on and it constitutes the legacy of the Chinese dream today. In 2016, China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reached 74114.04 billion yuan, 200 times more than its GDP in 1978 (367.87 billion) ("Annual Data," n.d.). With an annual GDP growth of 9.52% for the last 38 years since 1979, it is estimated that its GDP will outgrow the US and take the global throne as the largest economy within a decade or so ("Annual Data," n.d.; "World Economic League Table 2016 Highlights," 2016). Internationally, China set up the Belt and Road initiative and the Asian Development Bank as an alternative to the World Bank and other

governmental organisations led by the developed capitalist countries and especially the US. Domestically, the notion of the Chinese dream provides an ideological mantle for the three-fold government policy strategy of *Mass Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, *Internet Plus* and *Made in China 2025* to upgrade the economy to become technology and service driven. In other words, the Internet age is expected to be the age when China achieves the Chinese dream articulated a long time ago and reclaims the crown in the global arena.

During my fieldwork, nationalism was rampant. My interlocutors often directly compared China and the west with a patriotic assertion and linked their business to the rise of China. One interlocutor who declined an offer from the London School of Economics in order to focus on her business told me: “China is reaching out to the world, but the real situation is that the entire world is looking at Beijing now. I have a business network of my own here with headhunters approaching me every week. I am already a manager here. What would I be if I take up the LSE offer? A student?” Another interlocutor shared with me her experience in B2B collaboration in the UK: “Ten years ago when I visited the UK, I walked on the streets of London. A man on a bus threw a two-pound coin at me, saying, ‘for you poor Chinese’. This year, as I visited London again, I saw a beggar. I gave him a twenty-pound note and told him, ‘Remember! I am from China’”. My interlocutors often advised me to return to China upon graduation. Jing said: “What could you possibly achieve by staying in the UK? I have been to the UK, and I have to say that their infrastructure, everything, really, is extremely backward. Don’t stay in a place that doesn't have the potential to develop”.

I could also not ignore the accentuated traditional Chinese aesthetic imaginary I repeatedly encountered in my fieldwork. Even though my interlocutors in Shenzhen claimed to be cosmopolitan with international experiences, they also actively practised traditional Chinese culture. Some members of Broaden, the university-based business association discussed in Chapter five, went to weekly study groups in traditional classics including I Ching and Tao Te

Ching. Research respondents in Hefei engaged in Chinese practices even more. They relished ink wash painting style dishes in a banquet surrounded by traditional Chinese interior design and Taoist/Buddhist decorations. They dressed in cheongsams. They drank tea at a table carved from a tree root. In a banquet that I went to, the venue also functioned as a museum of Chinese art. Inside the dining room, there was a separate compartment for calligraphy filled with ink paintings and carved jade. Certainly, there is a new type of cultural capital emerging in urban China, a new taste that resonates with the rise of China. These new aesthetics and tastes are about class distinction (Bourdieu, 1984) and patriotism; the supremacy of the Chinese civilisation. When I drank tea with my interlocutors, they actively sought confirmation from me that Chinese tea is more sophisticated than British tea. When I joined them while they were shopping, they spoke about Chinese patterns, cuttings and materials being more enduring and elegant than those in western fashion.

Osburg (2013) observes that elite men in Chengdu actively looked for opportunities to emigrate as a way to tackle their anxiety about losing the economic status and stability in a rather irrational Chinese business world. Fong (2011) discerns filial nationalism among overseas Chinese students in their defensiveness about China when they are living abroad with the analogy of defending their family, despite the inter-familial conflicts and issues that they may have. As these scholars conducted their fieldwork in the first decade of the 21st century, the notion of the Chinese dream was not yet widely recognised and the Asian ascendance versus western decline was not yet a trend. I conducted my fieldwork in Xi's era after the 2008 economic crisis. Unlike Osburg's (2013) and Fong's (2011) research respondents, many of my interlocutors, though embracing cosmopolitanism, perceived China as more advanced than other places, if not now, then certainly in the near future. Besides continuously sending out emigrants, China has also increasingly become a destination for immigration (Mathews, Lin, & Yang, 2017).

My interlocutors also believed that their businesses contributed to the rejuvenation of China. Jing told me that she envisioned that her E-commerce platform would dominate and influence the western market. She enthusiastically shared with me that Chinese business models, such as bike sharing, are “copied” by the western companies to imply that her own platform, based on social network marketing, also holds the potential to influence the world. In 2018, they paid for advertisements in Chinese language on the big screens in New York's Times Square. Their intention was not to launch their platform in the US, as they were yet to claim a more significant position in the domestic market. Their sole intention was to demonstrate to the Chinese market that they had “conquered”, using Jing’s own wording on her social media, the most critical commercial space in the US. The advertisement gave credibility to their platform while also feeding into the new patriotism of the market.

The interlocutors who engaged in B2B trading with international companies also often lamented that: “Those companies that sell my products are now famous in the world. Why can’t I make my own world-renowned brand?” The brands that collaborated with my interlocutors were indeed very high-profile companies from developed capitalist countries including Japan and the UK. Lucy wanted her brand to be the Apple of the umbrella industry. Rosa envisioned her company beating other international scuba equipment companies. Their revelations coincide with how the Chinese government wishes to shift its status in the world order from semi-periphery to the core (Wallerstein, 2004).

While Derek Hird claims that women are excluded from the Chinese dream due to its masculine and nationalistic nature (Hird, 2017), I contend that women are subsumed under this national project. A gender essentialist reading of economic development is actively adopted to justify the rise of China. The she-era discourse, upheld by Alibaba, metaphysically implies that the Internet age is “feminine” in comparison with the industrial and scientific revolution eras, which are conceived as “masculine” (Hao & Yang, 2015; Q. Jiang, 2012):

Underneath the surface of the technology of the steam engine era, the modern subject represents the Descartes's notion of 'I think'; however, behind the veil of the Internet technology and innovation, the post-modern subject has become 'I do not think' as described by Lacan... The patriarchal traits of industrialization are concentrated in Descartes's rationalism, which begets homogeneousness, universalism and centralization... The [feminine] heterogeneousness, pluralism and decentralization could be interpreted as anti-patriarchy, anti-Descartes and moreover anti-industrialization... Therefore, the inherent relationship between the Internet and feminism is not simply women browsing the Internet but the transformation of modern subjects.... With the assistance of the Internet, the feminine traits have become universal. (Jiang, 2012, pp.21-22.)

Feminism and nationalism are also in paradoxical integration. Paradoxical integration is filled with disproportions and expropriations. Many feminists consider nationalism incompatible with feminism, as nationalism often involves exclusion, fanaticism and expansion (Kaplan, Alarcón, & Moallem, 1999; Mayer, 2000). In the third world context, feminism is often subsumed under an androcentric, nationalist, post-colonial and anti-imperialist project where the male rulers of a nation might appropriate discourses that involve advancing women's status and livelihood to reclaim the reign, sovereignty and their masculinity, as the project as such is commonly metaphorically referred to as emasculated men claiming back their possessed and defiled women (Kaplan et al., 1999; L. Liu, 1994; Mayer, 2000). Under these circumstances, feminism and the empowerment of women are inherently secondary, if not a duplicity. Women are treated as subordinates to be motivated to contribute to the public sphere on some occasions (e.g. to ameliorate a shortage of labour and to support the army) and ushered back to domesticity on others (e.g. to mitigate a lack of public reproductive welfare) (Ibid.). However, Herr (2003) reminds us that the relationship between

the two is not merely paradoxical, and that there lies a possibility of integration. Rather than self-excluding from a nationalist project because of the perceived incompatibility, Herr (2003) appeals to feminists to actively participate in the making of a democratic and inclusive nation, in order to build a polycentric nationalism other than an ethnocentric one.

She-era discourse, promoted by Jack Ma backed with AliResearch headed by the male researcher Jiang, clearly fits into the classical paradigm of men using feminist language, or rather language related to the advancement of women or to female ethics, to achieve men's hope and aspiration of reclaiming the dominance. In her significant and timely book *Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff (2019) demonstrates how tech companies have fooled the users with convenience, free services, communities and entertaining enticements to provide our data voluntarily, which leads to an absolute monopoly of these corporates. Most digital platform companies would brand themselves as providing empowerment and connectivity to their users in order to extract more voluntarily provided data for profit. In a similar vein to Zuboff, Srnicek (2016) uncovers how the information and data are gathered by a few tech corporations which exacerbate economic monopoly. Alibaba, Tencent and Baidu have high monopoly of the Chinese E-commerce, social media and search engine platform businesses. It could thus be argued that the Internet did not bring about "the heterogeneousness, pluralism and decentralization" (Jiang, 2012, p.22) promised, but the very opposite.

Moreover, other than the profit-driven intentions, Chinese tech companies use such a discourse to support nationalism. The strategy of associating the Internet age with a feminine, relational, devoting and caring leadership of China in comparison to the masculine, rational, universal and apathetic leadership of the west is just another way of justifying China's rise and using the nation's rejuvenation dream to reset the global order around China. In other words, even though the she-era discourse uses feminist language, its purpose is not to build a decentralised feminist network of collaboration, care and equality but to denounce the "steam

engine era” dominated by the west as patriarchal. Even though my interlocutors, as well as other disadvantaged groups in China, may have benefited from the booming economy that intersects with the feminisation of labour in the digital economy (Chapter 3), most capital and data are collected by the tech tycoons that collaborate with the Chinese state. Zuboff (2019, Chap.13) has not left China out from her discussion. She makes the succinct point that Chinese tech companies, and specifically Alibaba, openly use the data for market outcomes and social outcomes in terms of assisting the state in monitoring and shaping the citizens to become docile subjects with good social credit.

A discussion of digital totalitarianism would go far beyond the scope of the thesis. Therefore, I shall turn back to how feminism is engulfed by the patriarchal logic of hierarchy, competition, domination, supremacy, centrality and ethnocentric nationalism.

My interlocutors are the embodiments of the discourse of she-era who are subsumed in the project of the Chinese dream, burning out in the process. Chinese tech companies openly brand their ethic of ceaseless work as demonstrating love, aspiration and devotion. In her observations over the past two decades about Chinese tech companies, Rebecca Fannin (2008, 2019) observes that Chinese practitioners find emotional satisfaction and fulfilment in working harder and innovating faster. In a way, women’s ceaseless work, often underpaid or unpaid, in the domestic and public spheres are not only not challenged but instead used to justify the new work ethic: working like a caring wife for her husband, or like a mother devoted to her children (Chapter 3). Chinese tech companies are known to have a work culture of “996”: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., 6 days per week. When programmers complained online about the 996 work culture and as the 996 work culture received increased societal attention, Jack Ma responded that 996 is a blessing to people to contribute more to the society (Xinjie Yang, 2019). If for the Calvinists, an ascetic of profit making is a way to respond to the divine calling that gives rise to the

capitalist spirit (Weber, 2001), then burning out becomes the way to participate in the Chinese dream.

With the aggravated demographic problems caused by the one-child policy, the central government altered its family planning policy in 2015, to allow and later encourage couples to have two children. In parallel with the alteration of the family planning policy, there has arisen a strong imperative and appeal for women to return to domesticity (Hird, 2017). Chinese feminist scholar Song Shaopeng (2011) reviews four waves of debate on “women-going-home” and makes the point that Marxist feminism is replaced by liberalism and that the advocate’s discourse of choosing domesticity as women’s freedom overlooks the structural inequality between men and women in the first place. Many scholars similarly observe that women’s primary role in reproduction has never been eradicated or even challenged, not even with the socialist women’s liberation project in the Mao era, even though women at that time were encouraged to work as defeminized Iron Ladies (Evans, 1997; Jieyu Liu, 2007; Z. Wang, 2017). In the Internet age under Xi, while women’s domestic duties are once again strengthened in the state’s promotion of women’s essentialised “special” role in family, women are actively encouraged to produce and consume (Xinhuanet.com, 2018). Local branches of All-China Women Federations actively organise workshops for women to participate in mass entrepreneurship as digital sellers (Paper.cn, 2020). The message is clear: women should take the responsibility to bear and rear children at home, but at the same time, women should also contribute to the economy by working from home with the Internet. In both the Maoist and Xi eras, women are mobilised to do more labour in both realms and burn out.

In another banquet when Zhao and Jing met with investors, as Jing received compliments for her success as a mother entrepreneur, Zhao “joked” that Jing should only be allowed to come back to the company if she had delivered a second child. To reiterate my findings in chapter five and six, the social structures and contexts have impelled women to burn out for

what might be considered a much-diminished form of agency against patriarchy and heteronormativity in their imminent surroundings. Nevertheless, thinking in terms of a paradoxical integration, I also demonstrate how the empowerment of women and feminist solidarity could arise from these economic activities.

Beyond the market, however, the problem becomes that if the ontological goal of burnout market feminism aligns with the Chinese dream and supports the logic of domination and hierarchy, then, where lies the feminist hope of challenging centralised authority? This type of empowerment of women in the Internet age feeds into Deng's pragmatism of his cat theory, which paved the foundation for the Chinese dream (Wang, 2014), a dream about using the economic development of China to demonstrate a superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics over the western liberal democratic models.

Nevertheless, feminism, after all, is not merely about a handful of successful women breaking the glass ceiling and working to the extent of burning out to maintain certain agency, but about diversity, care, inclusiveness, collaborations, equality and reflections. Feminism is not about encouraging the weak to become strong and then perpetuating the dominance of strong against the weak, but about challenging structural inequalities to make the system more inclusive and diversified. It is about greater plurality in what counts as social worth and human value. It is also not about assisting a nationalist patriarchal dream of rejuvenation, but about creating a different mode of order that puts hierarchy, competition and centralised political power aside and creates a safe and comfortable space for all.

I agree with Herr (2003) that an escapist or black-and-white confrontational attitude against nationalism would only leave the project of feminism entirely in the hands of ethnocentric and androcentric patriarchs. However, if feminism is reduced to individuals burning out for achievements; if my interlocutors willingly and enthusiastically participate in the nationalist project by working harder to expand their businesses; and if they do not believe in an alternative

mode of success and order, how could they make the Chinese dream more inclusive, fair and plural? How could the promise of the Internet age being feminine be anything but an empty discourse to be appropriated for further domination and exploitation? And how could patriarchy be subverted and counter-balanced?

Wishes for daughters, hope for future

Throughout the thesis, I have discussed how my interlocutors navigate patriarchy as daughters, girlfriends, wife and managers. For all these roles, they voluntarily burn out for their self-perceived and context-shaped achievements, as these achievements could provide them with leverage to negotiate with their surroundings. Shouldering more duties than mere neoliberal success in the public sphere, my interlocutors take part in a cycle of auto-exploitation, which is not a reactionary response to discipline or surveillance, but a voluntary act based on will, joy and fulfilment (Han, 2015).

For Han, the way to break the Sisyphean cycle of burning out is to re-establish meaningful connections with others and the world. He believes that the Internet has exaggerated neoliberalism, and his solution is for people to live alternatively from neoliberal capitalism. He appeals to people to completely forget linear progression and achievements and to enjoy the scent of time, the sunset, the art of lingering; the fact of being alive in oneself without assuming any type of instrumental end (Han, 2017e). This view is shared by German sociologist Hartmut Rosa. Rosa (2019) argues that the environmental, democratic and psychological crisis that we have experienced in late modernity could be solved by re-establishing a resonance with the world and by letting go of our fixation on resources and moments of success-driven happiness. With the booming of the economy after the economic reform, it is unrealistic to ask my interlocutors to stop developing their businesses and forget about success (Chapter 3). However, they are not unreflective about their burning out.

Some of them placed their hopes in their daughters. Some scholars have studied mother-daughter relationships in China including Hong Kong (Evans, 2008b; Jackson & Ho, 2020). I notice that mother entrepreneurs in my study primarily expect their kids to be “free and happy” rather than high-achieving. In contrast with their own lifestyle of burning out, some of them made great efforts for their daughters to grow up without thinking too much about material success and competition. In other words, they wish that their daughters could live in an environment free from hierarchy and domination.

Jing told me that she avoided a kindergarten which placed the emphasis on teaching skills and knowledge: “I don’t want my daughter to grow up with a lot of stress. I just want her to be happy and play with other kids. I want her to be exposed to art and nature, but not just money and success.” Another interlocutor argued with her parents-in-law in terms of how to educate her daughter: “I think my daughter is developing an interest in design and art instead of mathematics. My parents-in-law want her to excel in school and rank top in all exams. I think they are giving her too much pressure. I honestly just want her to be whoever she wants to be and do things that interest her... Even if she won’t be considered successful in normal terms, I think that is fine...”

The attitude they have for their own lives is almost opposite to what they wish for their daughters. As they burn out for work, they craft an environment in which their daughters do not need to burn out for their studies. As they spare no effort in seeking success, they prioritise happiness for their daughters. Many of them discussed with me about sending their children to study overseas. And with an increasing number of international immigrants in China, many also actively immersed themselves and their children in international surroundings. During a few summer holidays, Jing invited international students to stay at her home to spend time with her daughter. Other interlocutors also made friends with expats, and especially international

PhD students in their cities. They did this not only to elevate their children into cosmopolitan elites (V. L. Fong, 2011), but also, in an interlocutor's words:

“I feel that foreigners care less about achievements and material success. I don't want my child to be only exposed to these things when she is growing up. There are enough friends of mine that discuss these things [material success]. I want her to see other layers of life. I want her to know that a Brazilian man would come to China to brew beer. A German woman would spend all her life for art. And a British couple might travel around the world to do charity work... I want her to see different possibilities in life... [With my wealth,] it is really easy to support her to do whatever she wants in life... So I wish that her life would have more layers and colours than mine.”

In their wishes for their daughters, they are able to see that the achievement-oriented success is not the foundation for happiness. They are able to see values beyond China's material success over other countries and embrace multiculturalism in their surroundings. They are able to see beyond ethnocentrism, hierarchy and domination, and finally, beyond achievements and burning out... Even though they burn out, they put hope in a future when their daughter could live a different life from theirs, not a life of prosperity and wealth as mothers of the Mao era would hope for their daughters (Evans, 2008b), but a life of diversities, possibilities and happiness. In hoping for the future where happiness would outweigh achievements, there is a hope of embracing diversity, equality and care. They might be trapped in burnout market feminism, but in their hope for the future, there is the hidden, subversive and dynamic counterpower of feminism, a new type of feminism that comes from negotiating possibilities of empowerment whilst seeking to overcome the price paid by too many women, that is, the danger of burning out.

Bibliography

- Abbink, J., & Salverda, T. (2013). *The Anthropology of Elites: Power, Culture, and the Complexities of Distinction*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ahmadov, F. (2017). China's Wealth Boom Is Creating A New Generation Of Self-Made Female Billionaires. Retrieved April 17, 2019, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/outofasia/2017/11/27/chinas-new-generation-of-female-billionaires/#1f2f570729cf>
- Alibaba. (2015a). 互联网+她时代：女性创业者报告 Internet Plus She Era: the Report of Female Doing Start-ups. Retrieved April 17, 2019, from <https://www.useit.com.cn/thread-9297-1-1.html>
- Alibaba. (2015b). 马云内部讲话：相信明天 *Ma Yun internal speech: believe in tomorrow*. Zhejiang: Red Flag Publishing House.
- AliResearch. (2015). 互联网+：从IT到DT *Internet Plus*. Beijing: Chines Machine Press.
- Alison, A. (2016). Japanese Mothers and Obentōs : The Lunch-Box as Ideological State Apparatus. *Anthropological Quarterly*, 64(4), 195–208.
- Anderson, K. J. (2014). *Modern Misogyny: Anti-Feminism in A Post-Feminist Era*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Andors, P. (1983). *The unfinished liberation of Chinese women 1949–1980*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Annual Data. (n.d.). Retrieved August 10, 2020, from National Bureau of Statistics of China website: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/>
- Atanasoski, N., & Vora, K. (2015). Surrogate Humanity: Posthuman Networks and the (Racialized) Obsolescence of Labor. *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience*, 1(1), 1–40.
- Baines, T. S., Lightfoot, H. W., Benedettini, O., & Kay, J. M. (2009). The servitization of

- manufacturing: A review of literature and reflection on future challenges. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 20(5), 547–567.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Banet-weiser, S., Gill, R., & Rottenberg, C. (2020). Postfeminism , popular feminism and neoliberal feminism ? Sarah Gill and Catherine Rottenberg in conversation. *Feminist Theory*, 21(1), 3–24.
- Bao, H. (2018). *Queer comrades : gay identity and Tongzhi activism in postsocialist China*. Copenhagen: Nias Press.
- Bao, H. (2020). *Queer China: Lesbian and Gay Literature and Visual Culture under Postsocialism*. Oxon & New York: Routledge.
- Barbalet, J. (2015). Guanxi, Tie Strength, and Network Attributes. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 59(8), 1038–1050.
- Barbalet, J. (2018). Guanxi as Social Exchange : Emotions , Power and Corruption. *Sociology*, 52(5), 934–949.
- Barlow, T. E. (2004). *The question of women in Chinese feminism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Barringer, B. R. (2013). Entrepreneurship. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from Oxford Bibliographies website: <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>
- Bates, L. K., Zwick, A., Spicer, Z., Kerzhner, T., Kim, A. J., Baber, A., ... Moulden, dominic t. (2019). Gigs, Side Hustles, Freelance: What Work Means in the Platform Economy City/ Blight or Remedy: Understanding Ridehailing’s Role in the Precarious “Gig Economy”/ Labour, Gender and Making Rent with Airbnb/ The Gentrification of ‘Sharing’: From Bandit Cab t. *Planning Theory and Practice*, 20(3), 423–446.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bauman, Z. (2003). *Lyquid Love*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beasley, C. (1999). *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U. (2004). *The Cosmopolitan Vision*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (2002). *Individualization: institutionalized individualism and its social and political consequences*. London: Sage.
- Beck, U., Bonss, W., & Lau, C. (2003). The Modernization of Modern Society. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 20(2), 1–33.
- Beck, U., Giddens, A., & Lash, S. (1994). *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*. Cambridge: Polity & Blackwell.
- Bedford, O. (2015). Crossing Boundaries: An Exploration of Business Socializing (Ying Chou for Guanxi) in a Chinese Society. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(2), 290–306.
- Bedford, O., & Hwang, S. L. (2013). Building Relationships for Business in Taiwanese Hostess Clubs: The Psychological and Social Processes of Guanxi Development. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 20(3), 297–310.
- Bergère, M.-C. (1983). The Chinese Bourgeoisie , 1911-37. In J. Fairbank (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China Volume 12: Republican China, 1912–1949, Part 1* (pp. 721–825). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BestChinaNews. (2018). “Double 11” will go to a Large Number of Eastern European Models in China. Retrieved January 21, 2020, from <http://www.bestchinanews.com/Science-Technology/14841.html>
- Bhabra, G. K. (2007). *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bian, Y. (1997). Bringing Strong Ties Back in : Indirect Ties , Network Bridges , and Job Searches in China. *American Sociological Review*, 62(3), 366–385.

- Bian, Y. (2002). Institutional Holes and Job Mobility Processes: Guanxi Mechanisms in China's Emergent Labor Markets. In Thomas Gold, D. Guthrie, & D. Wank (Eds.), *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi*, (pp. 117–35). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bian, Y., & Ikeda, K. (2014). East Asian Social Network. In R. Alhajj & J. Rokne (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social Network Analysis and Mining* (pp. 417–433). New York: Springer.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001). *Masculine Domination*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Broadbent, S. (2016). *Intimacy at work : how digital media bring private life to the workplace*. London: Routledge.
- Burt, R. S. (2019). The networks and success of female entrepreneurs in China. *Social Networks*, 58(2010), 37–49.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing Gender*. New York; Abington: Routledge.
- Cai, H., & Jin, G. Z. (2013). More Trusting, Less Trust? An Investigation of Early E-Commerce. *NBER Working Paper*. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18961>
- Cai, J. (2006). *中国农民工生存纪实 Documentation of the Survival of Chinese Migrant Workers*. Beijing: Beijing Book Co. Inc.
- Cai, Y. (2013). *月份牌与民国时期女性社会性别变迁 Calendar and the female gender changes during the period of the republic of China*. Anhui Normal University.
- Cao, J., & Guo, L. (2016). Chinese “ Tongzhi ” community, civil society, and online activism. *Communication and the Public*, 1(4), 504–508.
- Cao, Y. (1990). *社会主义三大改造 Three major socialist transformations*. Beijing: Xin Hua Press.

- Castells, M. (2001). *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castells, M. (2010). *The Rise of the Network Society*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing.
- Center, W. H. (n.d.). Why does WeChat pop up “Real-Name Authentication” when opening a red packet? Retrieved February 15, 2020, from <https://help.wechat.com/cgi-bin/micromsg-bin/oshelpcenter?opcode=2&id=160704yveziq160704fmnrae>
- Chamiji.com. (2018). 世界人口大全 World Population Statistics. Retrieved May 10, 2020, from <http://www.chamiji.com/>
- Chan, J., Selden, M., & Pun, N. (2020). *Dying for an iPhone: Apple, Foxconn, and the Lives of China's Workers*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books.
- Chen, A., & Xu, D. (2015). *中国商帮 Regional Commercial Groups in China*. Shanghai: Shanghai University of Finance & Economics Press.
- Chen, C. (2019). 从对#Metoo在中国的三批批评看公众文化的生成 From the Three Criticisms of #Metoo in China to See the Formation of Public Culture. *Reflexion*, (38), 231–252.
- Chen, C. C., Chen, X.-P., & Huang, S. (2013). Chinese Guanxi: An Integrative Review and New Directions for Future Research. *Management and Organization Review*, 9(01), 167–207.
- Chen, D., & Wang, G. (2012). *网店运营与管理 Online store operation and management*. Beijing: China Light Industry Press.
- Chen, F., Liu, G., & Mair, C. A. (2011). Intergenerational ties in context: Grandparents caring for grandchildren in china. *Social Forces*, 90(2), 571–594.
- Chen, K.-H. (2010). *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Chen, Minglu. (2011). *Tiger girls : women and enterprises in the People's Republic of China*.

- London: Routledge.
- Chen, Mingxia. (2004). The Marriage Law and the Rights of Chinese Women in Marriage and the Family. In J. Tao, B. Zheng, & S. L. Mow (Eds.), *Holding up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present and Future*. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Chen, S., Fang, H. C., MacKenzie, N. G., Carter, S., Chen, L., & Wu, B. (2018). Female leadership in contemporary Chinese family firms. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 35(1), 181–211.
- Chen, Y. (2009). 安徽和江西两省“大跃进”及饥荒的比较研究 A Comparative Study of the “Great Leap Forward” and Famine in Anhui and Jiangxi Provinces. *Modern China Studies*, 1. Retrieved from <http://ww2.usc.cuhk.edu.hk/PaperCollection/Details.aspx?id=7032>
- Chiculture.org. (2018). China’s fourth entrepreneurship wave -- the era of mass entrepreneurship. Retrieved November 2, 2019, from <https://chiculture.org.hk/en/node/1014>
- Chin, K. (2014). *Going down to the sea: Chinese sex workers abroad*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Chinanews. (2019, June 24). 预防性骚扰 代表建议明确界定、完善地方立法Prevention of sexual harassment : the people’s representatives suggested that local legislation be clearly defined. *Chinanews*. Retrieved from <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2019/06-24/8873338.shtml>
- Chizuku, U. (2015). *Misogyny*. Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing.
- Choi, S. Y. P., & Peng, Y. (2016). *Masculine Compromise: Migration, Family, and Gender in China*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Chou, W.-S. (1997). *Postcolonial Tongzhi*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Tongzhi Research Centre.

- Chou, W.-S. (2001). Homosexuality and the Cultural Politics of Tongzhi in Chinese Societies. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40(3–4), 27–46. Retrieved from http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1300/J082v40n03_05
- Chow, Y. F. (2019). *Caring in times of precarity : a study of single women doing creative work in Shanghai*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ckxx.net. (2017). 港媒：中国新经济增速是GDP两倍 将帮助弥补就业流失 Hong Kong media: China's new economy is growing at twice the rate of GDP and will help make up for job losses. Retrieved October 9, 2020, from <http://m.ckxx.net/p/92141.html>
- Clark, I., & Grant, A. (2015). Sexuality and danger in the field: Starting an uncomfortable conversation. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 7(1), 1–14.
- Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. (1986). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. In *Configurations*. Berkeley & London: University of California Press.
- CNNIC. (2018). *中国互联网发展状况统计报告 Statistical Report on China's Internet Development*. Retrieved from http://www.cac.gov.cn/2018-08/20/c_1123296882.htm
- Collins, R. (2004). *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Connell, R. (2007). *Southern theory : the global dynamics of knowledge in social science*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Constable, N. (2009). The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 38(1), 49–64.
- Cool, J. (2011). The Mutual Co-Construction of Online and Onground in Cyborganic: Making an Ethnography of Networked Social Media Speak to Challenges of the Posthuman. In N. L. Whitehead & M. Wesch (Eds.), *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities Unhuman Subjects and the End of Anthropology*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado.
- Cova, B., & Kozinets, R. V. (2007). *Consumer Tribes*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.

- Crenshaw, K. W. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–167.
- Croll, E. (1978). *Feminism and socialism in China*. London: Routledge.
- Dána-Ain, D., & Christa, C. (2011). *Feminist Ethnography: Thinking through Methodologies, Challenges, and Possibilities*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Davis, D., & Friedman, S. (2014). *Wives, husbands, and lovers : marriage and sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and urban China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (2010). 资本主义与精神分裂 (卷二) *Capitalisme et schizophrénie II: Mille Plateaux*. Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House.
- Deutsch, F. M. (2007). Undoing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 21(1), 106–127.
- Diamant, N. J. (2000). *Revolutionizing the Family: Politics, Love, and Divorce in Urban and Rural China 1949-1968*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ding, Y. (2016). 她身之欲：珠三角流动人口社群特殊职业研究 *Desires: Transitions and New Possibilities of Sex Work in the Pearl River Delta Area*. Guangzhou: Social Science Academic Press.
- Ding, Y., & Ho, P. S. Y. (2013). Sex work in China's Pearl River Delta: Accumulating sexual capital as a life-advancement strategy. *Sexualities*, 16(1–2), 43–60.
- Dong, Z. (2008). *我的一个世纪 My One Century*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Doyle, C. (2016). network marketing. In *A dictionary of Marketing* (4ed ed.). Retrieved from <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:10012/view/10.1093/acref/9780198736424.001.0001/acref-9780198736424-e-1201?rskey=ZkTQqA&result=2>
- Du, J. (2020). *The Shenzhen Experiment: The Story of China's Instant City*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Duan, Y. (2014). *深圳拓荒人-基建工程兵创业纪实 Shenzhen Pioneer-Infrastructure Engineering Soldiers*. Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Ebrey, P. B. (2003). *Women and the Family in Chinese History*. In *Man*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Edelman, L. (2004). *No future : queer theory and the death drive*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Edwards, L. (2008). *Gender , Politics , and Democracy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Elam, A. B., Brush, C. G., Greene, P. G., Baumer, B., Dean, M., & Heavlow, R. (2019). 2018/2019 Women's Entrepreneurship Report. In *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor*. London.
- Elias, A. S., Gill, R., & Scharff, C. (2017). *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism*. London: Palgrave.
- Elliott, A. (2008). *Making the cut: How Cosmetic Surgery is Transforming our Lives*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Elliott, A., & Urry, J. (2014). *Mobile Lives*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Emontspool, J., & Woodward, I. (2018). *Cosmopolitanism, Markets, and Consumption: a Critical Global Perspective*. Cham : Springer International Publishing: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Engelbrechtsen, E. (2014). *Queer Women in Urban China*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Evans, H. (1997). *Women and sexuality in China*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Evans, H. (2008a). Sexed Bodies, Sexualized Identities, and the Limits. *China Information*, 22(2), 361–386.
- Evans, H. (2008b). *The subject of gender: daughters and mothers in urban China*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Evans, H. (2010). The Gender of Communication: Changing Expectations of Mothers and Daughters in Urban China. *The China Quarterly*, 204(December 2010), 980–1000.
- Fairbank, J. K. (1983). Maritime and continental in China's History. In J. K. Fairbank (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of China: Republican China 1912-1949* (pp. 1–17). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fannin, R. (2008). *Silicon Dragon: How China is Winning the Tech Race*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fannin, R. (2019). *Tech Titans of China: How China's Tech Sector is Challenging the World by Innovating Faster, Working Harder & Going Global*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.
- Feng, Y. (2019). 进入第三个十年的旅程：中国大陆反性骚扰历程回顾 The journey into the third decade: a review of anti-sexual harassment in mainland China. *Reflexion*, (38), 203–230.
- Fine, R. (2007). *Cosmopolitanism*. New York & Oxon: Routledge.
- Fisher, M. (2009). *Capitalist Realism*. Ropley: Zero Books.
- Fong, M. (2016). *One Child: The Story of China's Most Radical Experiment*. London: Oneworld.
- Fong, V. L. (2004). *Only hope : coming of age under China's one-child policy*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Fong, V. L. (2011). *Paradise Redefined: Transnational Chinese Students and the Quest for Flexible Citizenship in the Developed World*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Frampton, B. D., & Child, J. T. (2013). Friend or not to friend: Coworker Facebook friend requests as an application of communication privacy management theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(6), 2257–2264.

- Fraser, N. (2013a). *Fortunes of feminism : from state-managed capitalism to neoliberal crisis*. London: Verso.
- Fraser, N. (2013b, October 14). How feminism became capitalism's handmaiden - and how to reclaim it. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/14/feminism-capitalist-handmaiden-neoliberal>
- Frayssé, O., & O'Neil, M. (2015). *Digital Labour and Prosumer Capitalism*. London: Palgrave.
- Fung, Y. (1948). *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy*. New York; London: The Free Press.
- Ge, Z. (2011). 宅兹中國：重建有關「中国」的歷史論述 *Zhaizi China: Reconstruction of the historical discourse on "China."* Taipei: Linking Publishing.
- Ge, Z. (2015). 何為中國? : 疆域, 民族, 文化與歷史 *What is China: Territory Ethnicity Culture & History*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Gerson, K. (2009). The Unfinished Revolution: How a New Generation Is Reshaping Family, Work, and Gender in America. *International Journal of Gender Science and Technology*, 3(1).
- Giannoulis, E. (2019). *Emoticons, kaomoji, and emoji : the transformation of communication in the digital age*. London: Routledge.
- Gilmartin, C. K. (1994). *Engendering the Chinese revolution: radical women, communist politics, and Mass Movements in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gold, T, Guthrie, D., & Wank, D. (2002). *Social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gong, X. (2016). 微商行业发展现状调查分析报告 Investigation and Analysis Report on the Development Status of Wechat Business Industry. *Journalism Knowledge*, (11), 164–165.

- Gordon, R. J. (Robert J. (2016). *The rise and fall of American growth : the U.S. standard of living since the Civil War*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gov.cn. (n.d.). The State Council, The People's Republic of China. Retrieved April 15, 2019, from <http://sousuo.gov.cn/>
- Gov.hk. (n.d.). Greater Bay Area. Retrieved April 17, 2020, from <http://bayarea.gov.hk/en/about/overview.htmlf>
- Green, A. I. (2008). Erotic habitus: Toward a sociology of desire. *Theory and Society*, 37(6), 597–626.
- Green, A. I. (2013a). 'Erotic capital' and the power of desirability: Why 'honey money' is a bad collective strategy for remedying gender inequality. *Sexualities*, 16(1–2), 137–158.
- Green, A. I. (2013b). *Sexual Fields: Toward a Sociology of Collective Sexual Life* (A. Green, Ed.). Chicago, Illinois ; London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Greenhalgh, S. (2008). *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gregg, M. (2011). Work's Intimacy. *Work's Intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gregg, M. (2018). *Counterproductive - Time Management in the Knowledge Economy*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Griffin, G. (2017). feminization of labour. In *A Dictionary of Gender Studies*. Oxford University Press.
- Guo, Q. (2015). Appendix: Huizhou Studies in China: Scholarship and Sources. *Nan Nü*, 17(1), 165–180.
- Gupta, P. (2019). Beggars with QR code Chinese poor collect alms in mobile wallets, ditch tin bowls. Retrieved July 22, 2019, from Fincial Express website: <https://www.financialexpress.com/industry/beggars-with-qr-code-chinese-poor-collect-alms-in-mobile-wallets-ditch-tin-bowls/1641567/>

- Guthrie, D. (1998). The Declining Significance of Guanxi in China ' s Economic Transition. *The China Quarterly*, 154(154), 254–282.
- Guy, M.E; Newman, M.A.; Mastracci, S. H. (2008). *Emotional Labor: Putting the Service in Public Service*. New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Hakim, C. (2010). Erotic Capital. *European Sociological Review*, 26(5), 499–518.
- Hakim, C. (2011). *Honey money : the power of erotic capital*. London: Allen Lane.
- Hakim, C. (2015). The male sexual deficit: A social fact of the 21st century. *International Sociology*, 30(3), 314–335.
- Halberstam, J. (1998). *Female Masculinity*. Durham, NC ; London: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hales, C. (2017). How foreign fashion models are exploited in China: insider stories of the shocking risks they run in a largely unregulated industry. *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/fashion-luxury/article/2120857/how-foreign-fashion-models-are-exploited-china-insider>
- Hall, M. (2015). *Metrosexual Masculinities*. Basingstoke, England ; New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hamilton, G. G. (1996). *Asian business networks*. Berlin ; New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hamilton, K., & Hewer, P. (2010). Tribal mattering spaces: Social-networking sites, celebrity affiliations, and tribal innovations. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26(3–4), 271–289.
- Han, B.-C. (2015). *The Burnout Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2017a). *In the Swamp: Digital Prospects*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2017b). *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*. London&Brooklyn: Verso.

- Han, B.-C. (2017c). *Shanzhai Deconstruction in Chinese*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2017d). *The Agony of Eros*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: The MIT Press.
- Han, B.-C. (2017e). *The Scent of Time: A Philosophical Essay on the Art of Lingerin*g. Cambridge: Polity.
- Han, B.-C. (2018a). *Saving Beauty*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Han, B.-C. (2018b). *The expulsion of the other : society, perception and communication today*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Han, B.-C. (2018c). *The Expulsion of the Other*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hao, J., & Yang, Q. (2015). 互联网+她时代 Internet + She Era. Retrieved December 5, 2016, from <http://i.aliresearch.com/file/20150521/2015women.pdf>
- Haraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs, and women : the reinvention of nature*. London: Free Association Books.
- Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Harvey, D. (2005). *A History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- He, F. (2019). 变量：看见中国社会小趋势 *Variable: Seeing the microtrends in Chinese society*. Beijing: CITIC Press Corporation.
- Head, S. (2003). *The Ruthless Economy: Work and Power in the Digital Age*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hee, W. S. (2015). *From Amorous Histories to Sexual Histories*. Taipei: National Central University Press.
- Hefei.gov.cn. (2018). Hefei Statistics. Retrieved October 24, 2018, from hefei.gov.cn
- Heimer, M., & Thogersen, S. (2012). *Doing Fieldwork in China*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Hernandez, L., Nunn, N., & Warnecke, T. (2012). Female entrepreneurship in China:

- opportunity- or necessity-based? *International Journal Of Entrepreneurship And Small Business*, 15(4), 411–434.
- Herr, R. S. (2003). The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, 18(3), 135–160.
- Hershatter, G. (1997). *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hershatter, G. (2014). State of the field: Women in China's long twentieth century. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 63(4), 991–1065.
- Hillenbrand, M. (2010). Communitarianism, or, how to build East Asian theory. *Postcolonial Studies*, 13(4), 317–334.
- Hird, D. (2017). Xi Jinping's Family Values. Retrieved November 24, 2019, from The Asia Dialogue website: <https://theasiadialogue.com/2017/09/22/xi-jinpings-family-values/>
- Ho, P. S. Y., Jackson, S., Cao, S., & Kwok, C. (2018). Sex With Chinese Characteristics: Sexuality Research in/on 21st-Century China. *Journal of Sex Research*, 55(4–5), 486–521.
- Ho, S. Y. (2014). An Embarrassment of Riches: Good Men Behaving Badly in Hong Kong. In D. Davis & S. Friedman (Eds.), *Wives, husbands, and lovers : marriage and sexuality in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and urban China* (pp. 165–188). Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Hoang, K. K. (2015). *Dealing in Desire*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2012). *The Second Shift*. London: Penguin Books.
- Holmes, M. (2009). *Gender and everyday life*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Hong-Fincher, L. (2012). China's 'Leftover' Women. In *The New York Times*. Retrieved

from http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/opinion/global/chinas-leftover-women.html?_r=1&

Hong Fincher, L. (2014). *Leftover women : the resurgence of gender inequality in China*.

London: Zed Books.

Hong Fincher, L. (2016). *China's Feminist Five* | *Dissent Magazine*. Retrieved from

<https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/china-feminist-five>

Hong Fincher, L. (2018). *Betraying Big Brother : the feminist awakening in China*. Verso.

Hong, Y. (2019). *Networking China: The Digital Transformation of the Chinese Network-based economy in China*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Honig, E. (2003). Socialist sex: The cultural revolution revisited. *Modern China*, 29(2), 143–175.

Hooper, B. (1984). China's Modernization: Are Young Women Going to Lose out? *Modern China*, 10(3), 317–343.

Hooper, B. (1998). "China, Flower vase and housewife": Women and consumerism in Post-Mao. In K. Sen & M. Stivens (Eds.), *Gender and power in affluent Asia* (pp. 167–193). London: Routledge.

Horesh, N., & Lim, K. F. (2017). China: an East Asian alternative to neoliberalism? *Pacific Review*, 30(4), 425–442.

Horst, H. A., Miller, D., & Horst, H. (2012). *Digital Anthropology*. London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hsing, Y. (1998). *Making capitalism in China : the Taiwan connection*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Hsiung, P.-C., Jaschok, M., Milwertz, C., & Chan, R. (2001). *Chinese Women Organizing, Cadres, Feminists, Muslims, Queers*. Oxford & New York: Berg.

Hu, A. (2001). *地区与发展: 西部开发新战略 Regions and Development: A New Strategy*

- for Western Development*. Beijing: Jihua Press.
- Hu, F. (2006). *温州人生意经济学解读 An economic exposition of Wenzhou people's business sense*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang University Press.
- Hu, Y. (2018). *A Study on Corporate Social Responsibility at Transit Period in China*. Chengdu: Southwestern University of Finance and Economics Press.
- Huang, Mingwei. (2016). Vulnerable Observers: Notes on Fieldwork and Rape. Retrieved May 17, 2020, from The Chronicle of Higher Education website:
<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Vulnerable-Observers-Notes-on/238042>
- Huang, Mingyang. (2019). “转校生”安徽融入长三角，怎么就这么难 “Transfer students” Anhui - why is it so difficult for Anhui to blend in with the Yangtze River Delta. Retrieved May 10, 2020, from nbd.com.cn website:
<http://www.nbd.com.cn/articles/2019-04-12/1320631.html>
- Huang, Y., & Zhu, S. (2018). The Impact Mechanism of Entrepreneurship Policy on Entrepreneurial Behavior of New Entrepreneur: An Empirical Analysis Based on GEM Data. *Science of Science and Management of S&T*, 39(04), 100–110.
- Hwang, K. (1987). Face and Favor : The Chinese Power Game. *American Journal of Sociology*, 92(4), 944–974.
- Ifeng.com. (2014). 马云：我们是世界上最大的娱乐公司 Jack Ma: We are the Largest Entertainment Company in the world. Retrieved May 1, 2020, from
http://tech.ifeng.com/a/20141028/40849251_0.shtml
- Igarashi, H. (2014). Cosmopolitanism as Cultural Capital : Exploring the Intersection of Globalization , Education and Stratification. *Cultural Sociology*, 8(3), 222–239.
- Illouz, E. (2007). *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Cambridge, England ; Malden, Massachusetts: Polity.
- Illouz, E. (2012). *Why Love Hurts: A Sociological Explanation*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Isidoros, K. (2015). Between purity and danger: fieldwork approaches to movement, protection and legitimacy for a female ethnographer in the sahara desert. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford*, 7(1), 39–54.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2002). *Recentring Globalisation: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Iwabuchi, K. (2004). *Feeling Asian Modernities: Transnational Consumption of Japanese TV Dramas*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Jackson, S., & Ho, P. S. Y. (2020). *Women doing intimacy: Gender, family and modernity in Britain and Hong Kong*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jackson, S., & Jones, J. (1998). *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Jacobs, K. (2012). *People's pornography: sex and surveillance on the Chinese internet*. Bristol: Intellect.
- Jacobs, K. (2015). *The afterglow of Women's Pornography in Post-Digital China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jain, D., & Sen, A. (2005). *Women, Development, And The Un: A Sixty-year Quest For Equality And Justice*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jaschok, M. (2018). From Spiritual Precarity to Religious Authority: Female Ahong (Imam), Women's Mosques and the History of Chinese Women. Retrieved July 24, 2019, from Women and Gender in China website: <https://www.wagic.org/blank-2/2018/03/28/From-Spiritual-Precarity-to-Religious-Authority-Female-Ahong-Imam-Women's-Mosques-and-the-History-of-Chinese-Women>
- Jeffreys, E. (2005). *China, Sex and Prostitution*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Ji, L. (1993). *中国“下海”潮 China's "going to the sea" tide*. Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Press.

- Jian, X., & Zhang, J. (2005). 从“民工潮”到“民工荒”--农村剩余劳动力有效转移的制度分析 From “Migrant Worker Tide” to “Migrant Worker Shortage”-Institutional Analysis of Effective Transfer of Surplus Rural Labor. *Population Research*, 29(2), 49–55.
- Jiang, Q. (2012). 互联网的女性主义特征 The Female Characteristics of the Internet. *CIWEEK*, 7, 20–24.
- Jiang, Y. (2004). Employment and Chinese Urban Women Under Two Systems. In J. Tao, B. Zheng, & S. L. Mow (Eds.), *Holding up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future* (pp. 207–221). New York.
- Jing, M. (2016). 网络词语“颜值”的认知语言学解释 A Cognitive Linguistic Interpretation of the Internet Word “yanzhi.” *Modern Chinese*, 1, 127–130.
- Johnson, A. G. (2008). *The Forest and the Trees: Sociology as Life, Practice and Promise*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Kam, L. Y. L. (2019). Coming out and going abroad: The chuguo mobility of queer women in China. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 0(0), 1–14.
- Kam, L. Y. Lo. (2014). *Shanghai Lala*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Kang, Y., & Yang, K. C. . (2009). Gay and lesbian blogs in China: Rhetoric of reversed silence in cyberspace. *China Media Research*, 5(1), 21–27.
- Kaplan, C., Alarcón, N., & Moallem, M. (1999). *Between woman and nation: Nationalism, transnational feminisms and the state*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Khanna, P. (2019). *The Future Is Asian*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Kipnis, A. B. (1997). *Producing Guanxi : sentiment, self, and subculture in a North China village*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kipnis, A. B. (2016). *From Village to City: Social Transformation in a Chinese County Seat Recombinant Urbanization*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Kloß, S. T. (2017). Sexual (ized) harassment and ethnographic fieldwork : A silenced aspect

- of social research. *Ethnography*, 18(3), 396–414.
- Ko, D. (1994). *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: women and culture in seventeenth-century China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ko, D. (2005). *Cinderella's Sisters: A Revisionist History of Footbinding*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Lan, P.-C. (2006). *Global Cinderellas : migrant domestics and newly rich employers in Taiwan*. Durham N.C: Duke University Press.
- Landsberger, S. (2019). Shanzhai = Creativity, Creativity = Shanzhai. In *Boredom, Shanzhai, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China* (pp. 217–224). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Langley, P., & Leyshon, A. (2018). Platform capitalism: The intermediation and capitalization of digital economic circulation. *Finance and Society*, 3(1), 11–31.
<https://doi.org/10.2218/finsoc.v3i1.1936>
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: an introduction to actor-network-theory*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Pres.
- Laudon, K. C., & Traver, C. G. (2016). *E -Commerce 2016. business. technology. society*. (Global Edi). Edinburgh: Person.
- Lee, C. K. (2007). *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China's Rustbelt and Sunbelt*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Lentz, R. G. (2012). Civil Society in the Digital Age. In M. Edwards (Ed.), *Oxford Handbooks of Civil Society (Online)* (pp. 1–15). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Li, X. (2003). *让女人自己说话 Let Women Speak for themselves*. Shanghai: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Li, X. (2005a). *中国女人：跨文化对话 Chinese Women: Cross-cultural Conversations*. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House.

- Li, X. (2005b). 女性 / 性别的学术问题. Jinan: Shangdong People's Publishing House.
- Li, X. (2010). 后寓言: 〈狼图腾〉深度诠释 *Post-Mao Utopian: A Chinese Perspective on Contemporary Western Scholarship*. Wuhan: Hubei Changjiang Publishing House.
- Li, X. (2016). 女性乌托邦: 中国女性/性别研究二十讲 *Women's Utopia: Women's and Gender Studies in New China (20 topics)*. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.
- Li, X. (2019). 华人家国——致所有“仰望星空、心向远方”的年轻朋友 Chinese homeland-to all young friends who “look up at the starry sky and longing for a distant place.” Retrieved July 10, 2020, from aisixiang.com website: <http://www.aisixiang.com/data/115632.html>
- Li, Y. (2010). 支付宝的发展历程及对国内第三方支付的影响 The development history of Alipay and its impact on domestic third-party payment. *Oriental Enterprise Culture*, 1, 189–190.
- Li, Z. (2014). 中国古代妇女史研究入门 *An Introduction to Women's History in Ancient China*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Liang, S. (2005). 中国文化要义 *The Meaning of Chinese Culture*. Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin Press.
- Lin, C. (2006). *The Transformation of Chinese Socialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Lin, C. (2013). *China And Global Capitalism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lin, Q. (2016). 从“中国制造”到“中国智造”，制造业之路国务院今年这样走 From Made in China to Created in China: How State Council leads the Road of Manufacturing. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from gov.cn website: http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-12/26/content_5152990.htm
- Lin, Y. (2019). 「我也是」：作為集體行動的公共輿論運動 “Me too”: Public opinion

- movement as a collective action. *Reflexion*, (38), 253–324.
- Liu, B., Li, L., & Yang, C. (2014a). Gender Equality in China's Economic Transformation. In *United Nations System in China*. Beijing.
- Liu, B., Li, L., & Yang, C. (2014b). *Gender Equality in Economic Transition 中国经济转型中的性别平等*. Beijing: UNwomen.
- Liu, Jen-peng, & Ding, N. (2005). Reticent poetics, queer politics. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 6(1), 30–55.
- Liu, Jieyu. (2007). *Gender and Work in Urban China* (Vol. 21). London: Routledge.
- Liu, Jieyu. (2017). *Gender, Sexuality and Power in Chinese Companies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Liu, L. (1994). The female body and nationalist discourse: The field of life and death revisited. In I. Grewal & C. Kaplan (Eds.), *Scattered hegemonies: Postmodernity and transnational feminist practices*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Liu, L., Karl, R. E., & Ko, D. (2013). *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Liu, Q. (1994). *民族主義與中國現代化 Nationalism and Chinese Modernisation*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese University Press.
- Liu, S. (2009). *十个话题人物的悲情故事 The sad stories of ten controversial entrepreneurs*. Beijing: China Railway Publishing House.
- Liu, T. (2019). The empowerment of rural migrant lalas: Contending queerness and heteronormativity in China. *China Information*, 33(2), 1–20.
- Liu, Y. (2019). 我国第三方支付的发展现状与问题分析 Analysis of the development status and problems of third-party payment in my country. *Market Forum*, 80–95.
- Lu, B. C., Koo, A., & Pun, N. (2019). Attempting to transgress neoliberal value: Constructing a micro-foundation of social values of working-class youth in vocational schools in

- China. *The Sociological Review*, 67(5), 1050–1065.
- Lukacs, G. (2015). The labor of cute: Net idols, cute culture, and the digital economy in contemporary Japan. *Positions*, 23(3), 487–513.
- Luo, Y. (2018). 中国网民达7.72亿! 微信使用率达87.3% Chinese netizens reach 772 million! WeChat usage rate reaches 87.3%. Retrieved February 15, 2020, from ycwb.com website: http://3c.ycwb.com/2018-07/13/content_30045541.htm
- Ma, J. (2009). Small Is Beautiful. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/27/opinion/27iht-edma.html>
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1979). *Sexual harassment of working women : a case of sex discrimination*. New Haven ; London: Yale University Press.
- MacKinnon, C. A., & Siegel, R. B. (2004). *Directions in Sexual Harassment Law*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Mahler, S. J., & Pessar, P. R. (2001). Gendered Geographies of Power: Analyzing Gender Across Transnational Spaces. *Identities*, 7(4), 441–459.
- Mahmood, S. (2001). Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology*, 16(2), 202–236.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press.
- Mann, S. (1997). *Precious Records Women in China's Long Eighteenth Century*. Stanford, Calif: Standford University Press.
- Mardon, R., Molesworth, M., & Grigore, G. (2018). YouTube Beauty Gurus and the emotional labour of tribal entrepreneurship. *Journal of Business Research*, 92(January 2017), 443–454.
- Mason, K. (2013). To Your Health! Toasting, Intoxication and Gendered Critique among Banqueting Women. *The China Journal*, 69, 108–133.

- Massey, C. J. (2017). Equality Feminism. In A. Izenstark (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Psychology and Gender*. London: Sage.
- Mathews, G., Lin, L. D., & Yang, Y. (2017). *The World in Guangzhou: Africans and Other Foreigners in South China's Global Marketplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mayer, T. (2000). *Gender ironies of nationalism: Sexing the nation*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- MBAlib.wiki. (n.d.). 飞猪理论(Flying Pig Theory). Retrieved November 1, 2019, from <https://wiki.mbalib.com/wiki/飞猪理论>
- McRobbie, A. (2004). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies*, 4(3), 255–264.
- Mears, A. (2011). *Pricing Beauty: The Making of a Fashion Model*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Mears, A. (2014). Aesthetic labor for the sociologies of work, gender, and beauty. *Sociology Compass*, 8(12), 1330–1343.
- Mears, A. (2015). Girls as elite distinction: The appropriation of bodily capital. *Poetics*, 53, 22–37.
- Meng, B., & Huang, Y. (2017). Patriarchal capitalism with Chinese characteristics: gendered discourse of ‘Double Eleven’ shopping festival. *Cultural Studies*, 31(5), 659–684.
- Meng, Y., & Dai, J. (2004). *浮出历史地表 Emerging from the Horizon of History*. Beijing: Renmin University Press.
- Miao, Y. (2018). *Being Middle Class in China : Identity, Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Routledge.
- Michel Maffesoli. (1996). *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage.

- Millward, S. (2017). China's staffless gym startups are carb-loading on huge amounts of investor cash. Retrieved April 23, 2020, from techinasia website:
<https://www.techinasia.com/china-staffless-gyms-startups-grab-investor-cash>
- Min, D. (2007). Duihua (Dialogue) in-Between. *Interventions*, 9(2), 174–193.
- Mizoguchi, K. (2010). *作为方法的中国 China as Method*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Moon, L. (2018). How the mainland went from 'Made in China' to 'Created in China.' *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from <https://www.scmp.com/business/global-economy/article/2127847/how-mainland-went-made-china-created-china>
- Moreno, E. (1995). Rape in the field: Reflections from a survivor. In D. Kulick & M. Willson (Eds.), *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork* (pp. 219–251). London: Routledge.
- Morgan, G. (2017). *The Creativity Hoax: Precarious Work in the Gig Economy*. London: Anthem Press.
- Morini, C. (2007). The feminization of labour in cognitive capitalism. *Feminist Review*, (87), 40–59.
- Mufti, A. (2016). *Forget English! : orientalisms and world literatures*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Muntaner, C. (2018). Digital Platforms, Gig Economy, Precarious Employment, and the Invisible Hand of Social Class. *International Journal of Health Services*, 48(4), 597–600.
- Nader, L. (1972). Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up. In D. Hymes (Ed.), *Reinventing Anthropology* (pp. 284–311). New York: Pantheon Books.
- Neumann, C. B., & Neumann, I. B. (2015). Uses of the Self: Two Ways of Thinking about Scholarly Situatedness and Method. *Journal of International Studies*, 43(3), 789–819.

- Nolan, J., Rowley, C., & Warner, M. (2017). *Business Networks in East Asian Capitalisms*. Waltham, MA: Elsevier.
- O'Donnel, M. A. (2017). Laying Siege to the Villages: The Vernacular Geography of Shenzhen. In *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post-Mao Experiment from Special Zone to Model City* (pp. 107–123). Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- O'Donnell, M. A., Wong, W., & Bach, J. (2017). *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post-Mao Experiment from Special Zone to Model City*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Okely, J., & Callaway, H. (1992). *Anthropology & Autobiography*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ortner, S. B. (2016). Dark anthropology and its others: Theory since the eighties. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 6(1), 47–73.
- Osburg, J. (2013). *Anxious Wealth: Money and Morality Among China's New Rich*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Otis, E. M. (2012). *Markets and bodies : women, service work, and the making of inequality in China*. Stanford University Press.
- Oxford Dictionaries. (n.d.). businesswoman. Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/businesswoman>
- Pahl, R. (2003). Towards a more significant sociology of friendship. *European Journal of Sociology*, 43(3), 410–423.
- Pan, L. (2015). *When True Love Came to China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Pang, L. (2012). *Creativity and Its Discontents*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pant, M. (2014). Empowerment. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research* (pp. 291–292). London: Sage.

- Paper.cn. (2020). 把爱带回家 | 市妇联举办妇女创业技能培训班，助力消费扶贫 Bring love home | City Women's Federation organizes women's entrepreneurship skills training courses to help consumers help poverty. Retrieved September 28, 2020, from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_9176314
- Parida, V., Sjödin, D., & Reim, W. (2019). Reviewing literature on digitalization, business model innovation, and sustainable industry: Past achievements and future promises. *Sustainability, 11*(2), 1–18.
- Parsons, J. (2017). Beggars are now accepting mobile payments because we don't carry loose change anymore. Retrieved July 22, 2019, from Mirror website: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/tech/beggars-now-accepting-mobile-payments-11700364>
- Pei, M. (2016). *China's Crony Capitalism. The Dynamics of Regime Decay*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Peluchette, J. V. E., Karl, K., & Fertig, J. (2013). A Facebook "friend" request from the boss: Too close for comfort? *Business Horizons, 56*(3), 291–300.
- Peng, Y. (2004). Kinship Networks and Entrepreneurs in China's Transitional Economy. *American Journal of Sociology, 109*(5), 1045–1074.
- People.com.cn. (2018a). “兩個一百年”的邏輯生成與現實必然 The Logical and practical legitimacy of “two hundred years.” Retrieved June 12, 2018, from <http://theory.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2018/0307/c40531-29853392.html>
- People.com.cn. (2018b). 央行报告：全国76.9%成年人使用电子支付 Central Bank Report: 76.9% of adults nationwide use electronic payments. Retrieved April 15, 2019, from <http://money.people.com.cn/n1/2018/0814/c42877-30227885.html>
- Perez, C. (2007). *技术革命与金融资本 Technological Revolutions and Financial Capital: The Dynamics of Bubbles and Golden*. Beijing: Renmin University Press.
- Pink, S. (2009). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

- Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T., & Tacchi, J. (2016). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Pkulaw. (n.d.). Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests (2005 Amendment) [Revised]. Retrieved May 18, 2020, from Standing Committee of the National People's Congress website:
<http://en.pkulaw.cn/display.aspx?cgid=59781&lib=law#menu5>
- Poon, P., & Albaum, G. (2019). Consumer Trust in Internet Marketing and Direct Selling in China. *Journal of Relationship Marketing, 18*(3), 216–232.
- Porta, M., & Last, J. M. (2018). Social Network Marketing. In *Oxford Dictionary of Public Health* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2518/view/10.1093/acref/9780191844386.001.0001/acref-9780191844386-e-5197?rskey=XXtCPN&result=4529>
- Prassl, J. (2018). *Humans as a Service: The Promise and Perils of Work in the Gig Economy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pun, N. (2005). *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham N.C: Duke University Press.
- Qi, X. (2011). Face: A chinese concept in a global sociology. *Journal of Sociology, 47*(3), 279–295.
- Qi, X. (2013). Guanxi, social capital theory and beyond: Toward a globalized social science. *British Journal of Sociology, 64*(2), 308–324.
- Qi, X. (2014). *Globalized Knowledge Flows and Chinese Social Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Qiao, Y. (2015). Where are the Souls Going?—The Rethinking of“Self-hairdressing Women”and“Not Living in Husbands’Family” in Ming and Qing Dynasties in Lingnan. *Journal of Tianjin Normal University(Social Science), 1*(238), 25–30.

- Quan, W. (1982). *中国民族资本主义的发展 The development of Chinese national capitalism*. Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press.
- Rabetino, R., Harmsen, W., Kohtamäki, M., & Sihvonen, J. (2018). Structuring servitization-related research. *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 38(2), 350–371.
- Radhakrishnan, S. (2011). *Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class*. Durham, NC ; London: Duke University Press.
- Raskin, V. (2008). *The Primer of Humor Research*. Beilin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Risman, B. J. (2009). From doing to undoing: Gender as we know it. *Gender and Society*, 23(1), 81–84.
- Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital “prosumer.” *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13–36.
- Rivers, M. (2018, November 23). Inside China's Silicon Valley: From copycats to innovation. *CNN*. Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/11/22/tech/china-tech-innovation-shenzhen/index.html>
- Rofel, L. (2007). *Desiring China : experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Rosa, H. (2019). *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Rottenberg, C. (2018). *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Santos, G., & Harrell, S. (2016). *Transforming Patriarchy: Chinese Families in the Twenty-First Century*. Washington DC: University of Washington Press.
- Sassen, S. (1991). *The global city : New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton: Princeton

University Press.

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., ... Miles, A.

(2013). A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology*, 47(2), 219–250.

Scheen, L. (2019). 'Isn't that funny?' The Unsettling Effect of Shanzhai Products. In and L.

S. Jeroen de Kloet, Chow Yiu Fai (Ed.), *Boredom, Shanzhai, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China* (pp. 211–216). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak : everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New

Haven ; London: Yale University Press.

Shen, H.-H. (2008). The purchase of transnational intimacy: Women's bodies, transnational

masculine privileges in Chinese economic zones. *Asian Studies Review*, 32(1), 57–75.

Shen, X., Qu, Y., Yuan, R., & Han, W. (2020). In Depth: Investors sip bitter taste of Luckin

Coffee scandal. Retrieved April 23, 2020, from Caixin website:

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Caixin/In-Depth-Investors-sip-bitter-taste-of-Luckin-Coffee-scandal>

Shusterman, R. (1999). *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sidani, Y. M., Konrad, A., & Karam, C. M. (2015). From female leadership advantage to

female leadership deficit: A developing country perspective. *Career Development International*, 20(3), 273–292.

Siegel, R. B. (2004). *A Short History of Sexual Harassment* (C. A. MacKinnon & R. B.

Siegel, Eds.). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sina.cn. (2019). Shenzhen's monthly average salary was raised to 8,348 yuan, and the bases

of various social security contributions were adjusted accordingly. Retrieved April 17, 2020, from https://k.sina.cn/article_1895096900_70f4e24402700evar.html

Siu, H. F. (2010). *Merchants' Daughters: Women, Commerce, and Regional Culture in South*

- China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Skeggs, B. (2014). Values beyond value? Is anything beyond the logic of capital? *British Journal of Sociology*, 65(1), 1–20.
- Skeggs, B., & Loveday, V. (2012). Struggles for value: Value practices, injustice, judgment, affect and the idea of class. *British Journal of Sociology*, 63(3), 472–490.
- Smith, D. (1987). The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology. In *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Boston: Northeastern University Press .
- Song, G., & Hird, D. (2013). *Men and Masculinities in Contemporary China*. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill.
- Song, S. (2011). Retreating back Home Willingly or Being Unwillingly Sent Home?: Debates on “Women-going-home” and the Ideological Transformation in the Course of Marketization in China. *Collection of Women’s Studies*, 4(106), 5–26.
- Song, S. (2013). Socialist Feminism and Liberal Feminism Debate on the Woman Suffrage in 1920s. *Zhongguo Dangshi Yanjiu*, (5), 76–88.
- Songwanich, S. (2018). Chinese women entrepreneurs dominate global list. Retrieved April 17, 2019, from <https://www.nationthailand.com/opinion/30357380>
- Srnicek, N. (2016). *Platform Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Stacey, J. (1983). *Patriarchy and Socialist Revolution in China*. Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*. London & New York: Bloomsbury.
- Startupgrind. (2016). Shawn Xiao (Sexy Salad). Retrieved April 23, 2020, from Startupgrind website: <https://www.startupgrind.com/events/details/startup-grind-shenzhen-presents-shawn-xiao-sexy-salad/>
- Steffen, M. (2017). Doing Fieldwork After Henrietta Schmerler On Sexual Violence and

- Blame in Anthropology. Retrieved May 17, 2020, from American Ethnologist website: <https://americanethnologist.org/features/reflections/doing-fieldwork-after-henrietta-schmerler>
- Stockard, J. (1989). *Daughters of the Canton Delta: Marriage Patterns and Economic Strategies in South China, 1860--1930*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Sullivan, N. (2003). *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Sun, G. (2011). *我们为什么要谈东亚--状况中的政治与历史 Why should we talk about East Asia--politics and history*. Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company.
- Sun, G. (2019). 竹内好的亚洲主义研究 Asian Studies for Yoshimi Takeuch. *Open Times, 1*.
- Sz.gov.cn. (n.d.). sz.gov.cn. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from http://english.sz.gov.cn/aboutsz/profile/201907/t20190704_18035388.htm
- Sz.gov.cn. (2018). Shenzhen Statistics. Retrieved October 24, 2018, from Sz.gov.cn
- Sz.gov.cn. (2019). 深圳：发挥核心引擎作用 全力推进粤港澳大湾区建设 Shenzhen: to play the role of core engine, to promote the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. Retrieved April 6, 2020, from Sz.gov.cn website: http://www.drc.sz.gov.cn/ktyj/201907/t20190712_18050350.htm
- Takeyama, A. (2016). *Staged seduction: selling dreams in a Tokyo host club*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Tan, L. (2015). 社交电商营销中的羊群效应初探 A Preliminary Study on the Herding Effect in Social E-commerce Marketing. *Marketing Management Review*, (10), 67–68.
- Tang, L. (2016). *Gendered and sexualized guanxi: the use of erotic capital in the workplace in urban China*. Hong Kong Baptist University.
- Tang, L. (2020). Gendered and sexualized guanxi: the use of erotic capital in the workplace in urban China. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 26(2), 190–208.

- Tao, J., Zheng, B., & Mow, S. L. (n.d.). *Holding up Half the Sky: Chinese Women Past, Present, and Future*. New York: The Feminist Press.
- Taylor, C. (2019). A third of the world's female entrepreneurs face gender bias from investors, HSBC claims. Retrieved November 18, 2019, from CNBC.com website: <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/03/hsbc-a-third-of-the-worlds-female-entrepreneurs-face-gender-bias.html>
- To, S. (2015). *China's Leftover Women: Late Marriage among Chinese Professional Women and its consequences*. London: Routledge.
- Tsing, A. L. (2015). *The mushroom at the end of the world : on the possibility of life in capitalist ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Turkle, S. (1997). *Life on the screen : identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together : why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. New York: Basic Books.
- Uretsky, E. (2016). *Occupational hazards : business, sex, and HIV in post-Mao China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Veg, S. (2019). *Minjian: The Rise of China's Grassroots Intellectuals*-Columbia University Press. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Visser, M. (2011). The Female Leadership Paradox. In *The Female Leadership Paradox: Power, Performance and Promotion*. Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Vogel, E. F. (2011). *Deng Xiaoping and the transformation of China*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Vukovich, D. F. (2012). *China and Orientalism Western Knowledge Production and the P.R.C*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.

- Walby, S. (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wallerstein, I. (2004). *World-systems analysis : an introduction*. Durham ; London: Duke University Press.
- Wang, F. (2019, April 12). 深圳：携手周边城市共建粤港澳大湾区核心引擎 Shenzhen: Working with surrounding cities to build the core engine of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. *Xinhua.Net*. Retrieved from http://www.xinhuanet.com/gangao/2019-04/12/c_1124356948.htm
- Wang, G. (2013). *民间：作为中国现当代文学研究的视野与方法 Folk: As the Perspective and Method of Chinese Modern and Contemporary Literature Research*. Shanghai: Orient Publishing Center.
- Wang, H. (2010). *亚洲视野：中国历史的叙述*. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Wang, J. (2011). *深圳十大观念 Ten Concepts of Shenzhen*. Shenzhen: Shenzhen Baoye Corporation Publishing House.
- Wang, K. (2015). *民族主義與中日關係-- 「民族國家」 Nationalism and Sino-Japanese Relations-"National State"*. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press.
- Wang, Yang. (2014). *新文化运动与安徽 New Cultural Movement and Anhui*. Hefei: Anhui University Press.
- Wang, Yichun. (2019). 民法典人格权编对性骚扰的规制路径与规则设计 Monographic Study on the Personality Rights of Civil Code. *Henan Social Sciences*, (7), 49.
- Wang, Z. (2014). The Chinese Dream: Concept and Context. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*, 19(1), 1–13.
- Wang, Z. (2017). *Finding Women in the State: A socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China 1949-1964*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

- Wank, D. L. (1996). The Institutional Process of Market Clientelism : Guanxi and Private Business in a South China City. *The China Quarterly*, 147, 820–838.
- Wank, D. L. (2000). Cigarettes and Domination in Chinese Business Networks: Institutional Change during the Market Transition. In D. Davis (Ed.), *The Consumer Revolution in Urban China*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Warhurst, Chris, & Nickson, D. (2009). ‘Who’s Got the Look?’ Emotional, Aesthetic and Sexualized Labour in Interactive Services. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 16(3), 385–404.
- Warhurst, Christopher, & Nickson, D. (2001). *Looking good, sounding right? : style counselling in the new economy*. London: The Industrial Society.
- Warnecke, T. (2014). Are we fostering opportunity entrepreneurship for women? Exploring policies and programmes in China and India. *International Journal Of Entrepreneurship And Innovation Management*, 18(2/3), 154–181.
- Watson, R. . (1994). Girls’ Houses and Working Women: Expressive Culture in the Pearl River Delta. In M. Jaschok & S. Miers (Eds.), *Women and Chinese Patriarchy -- Submission, Servitude and Escape* (pp. 1900–1941). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Weber, M. (2001). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Webster, J. (2016). Microworkers of the Gig Economy. *New Labor Forum*, 25(3), 56–64.
- Werbner, P. (2006). Vernacular Cosmopolitanism. *Theory, Cultural & Society*, 23, 496–498.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, 1(2), 125–151.
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (2009). Accounting for doing gender. *Gender and Society*, 23(1), 112–122.
- Whitehead, N. L., & Wesch, M. (2012). *Human No More: Digital Subjectivities Unhuman*

- Subjects and the End of Anthropology*. Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado.
- Whittaker, D. H., Zhu, T., Sturgeon, T., Tsai, M. H., & Okita, T. (2010). Compressed Development. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 45(4), 439–467.
- Whitwell, T. (2014, June 13). Inside Shenzhen: China's Silicon Valley. *Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/jun/13/inside-shenzen-china-silicon-valley-tech-nirvana-pearl-river>
- Williams, C. L., & Connell, C. (2010). “Looking good and sounding right”: Aesthetic labor and social inequality in the retail industry. *Work and Occupations*, 37(3), 349–377.
- Winkler, C. (1991). Rape as Social Murder Author. *Antropology Today*, 7(3), 12–14.
- Wolf, M. (1985). *Revolution postponed : women in contemporary China*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Wolf, N. (1990). *The Beauty Myth*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Wong, W. W. Y. (2013). *Van Gogh on Demand : China and the Readymade*. Chicago, Illinois ; London, England: University of Chicago Press.
- Woolf, V. (1929). *A room of one's own*. London: Hogarth Press.
- World Economic League Table 2016 Highlights. (2016). In *Centre for Economics and Business Research*. Retrieved from <https://cebr.com/reports/welt-2016/>
- Worldbank.org. (2018). GDP(Current US\$). Retrieved October 24, 2018, from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2017&start=2017&view=map&year_high_desc=true
- WorldBank. (n.d.). Public Data. Retrieved November 21, 2019, from worldbank.org
- Wu, A. X., & Dong, Y. (2019). What is made-in-China feminism(s)? Gender discontent and class friction in post-socialist China. *Critical Asian Studies*, 0(0), 1–22.
- Wu, F. (2010). How neoliberal is China's reform? the origins of change during transition. *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 51(5), 619–631.

- Wu, G. (2020). The rivalry of spectacle: A Debordian-Lacanian analysis of contemporary Chinese culture. *Critical Inquiry*, 46(3), 628–645.
- Wu, J. (2004). *当代中国经济改革 China Economic Reform*. Shanghai: Shanghai yuandong Press.
- Xiao, S. (2014). “双重边缘”：婚外包养与打工妹的情感体验 “Double Marginalised” --the emotional experience of having sugar daddy and being a migrant worker. *China Youth Study*, 11, 9–13.
- Xiao, S. (2016). Intimate power: the intergenerational cooperation and conflicts in childrearing among urban families in contemporary China. *Journal of Chinese Sociology*, 3(1).
- Xiao, Y. (2019). Maoism and Disruptive Creativity Shanzhai – an Alternative Perspective. In *Boredom, Shanzhai, and Digitisation in the Time of Creative China* (pp. 186–210). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Xie, G. (2011). “淘宝体”浅论 About "Taobao Style“. *Literature Education*, Dec, 146–147.
- Xie, K. (2018). *Embodying the exemplary gender ideal: the lives of China's privileged daughters*. University of York.
- Xinhuanet.com. (2018). 习近平：组织动员妇女走在时代前列建功立业 Xi Jinping: Organize and mobilize women to walk in the forefront of the times and make contributions. Retrieved September 28, 2020, from http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2018-11/02/c_1123654725.htm
- Xinhuanet. (2014). 李克强倡导“万众创新”：为中国经济升级版发力 Li Keqiang advocates “innovation by all people”: working hard for China's economic upgrade. Retrieved January 8, 2017, from http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-09/14/c_1112473928.htm
- Yabla. (n.d.). Chinese English Pinyin Dictionary - gaodashang. Retrieved January 21, 2020,

from <https://chinese.yabla.com/chinese-english-pinyin-dictionary.php?define=gaodashang>

- Yan, Y. (1996). The Cultural of Guanxi in a North China Village. *The China Journal*, 35, 1–23.
- Yan, Y. (2003). *Private life under socialism*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Yan, Y. (2016). Intergenerational Intimacy and Descending Familism in Rural North China. *American Anthropologist*, 118(2), 224–257.
- Yang, M. M. (1994). *Gifts, favors, and banquets : the art of social relationships in China*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Yang, Xiaomin. (2006). *徽商 Hui Merchants*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House.
- Yang, Xinjie. (2019, April 12). 马云谈996：能够996是修来的福报，很多人想做没机会
Ma Yun talks about 996: Being able to 996 is the blessing , many people want to do it without a chance. *Paper.Cn*. Retrieved from https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_3291793
- Yang, Y. (2014). 论“淘宝体”的语体特征及其发展趋势 On the Stylistic Features and Development Trend of “Taobao Style.” *Academics*, 2, 171–179.
- Yao, L. (2010). 视觉盛宴下男色形象对传统社会的颠覆 The subversion of the traditional society in terms of male beauty appreciation under the visual feast. *Youth Journalist*, (30), 31–32.
- Yu, H. (2019). Self As Enterprise: Disability and Digital Entrepreneurship in China. In *Digital Transactions in Asia Economic, Informational, and Social Exchanges, 1st Edition*. London: Routledge.
- Yu, H., & Cui, L. (2019). China's E-Commerce: Empowering Rural Women? *China Quarterly*, Jun 2019(238), 418–437.

- Zelizer, V. A. (2005). *The purchase of intimacy*. Princeton, N.J. ; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Zeng, J. (2016). *中國女權——公民知識分子的誕生 Women's Rights in China-The Birth of Public Intelligentsia*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.
- Zhan, W., & Qiang, M. (2011). 论我国性骚扰防治法律制度的完善 On the Improvement of my country's Legal System of Sexual Harassment Prevention. *National Judges College Law Journal*, (11), 55–58.
- Zhang, C. (2010). *品鉴与经营: 明末清初徽商艺术赞助研究 Tasting and Management: Research on the Art Sponsor of Hui Merchants in the Late Ming and Early Qing*. Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Zhang, L. F., & Zhang, F. J. (2011). Does E-commerce reputation mechanism matter? *Procedia Engineering*, 15, 4885–4889.
- Zhang, W. (2010). *合肥农村地区回族丧葬仪式的文化研究 Cultural Studies about the Funeral Ritual of Hui people in Hefei Rural Area*. Anhui University.
- Zhang, Y. (2011). *过渡时期中国民族资本主义的历史命运 The history of China's national capitalism*. shanghai: Xue Lin Press.
- Zhao, D. (2001). *The Power of Tiananmen: State-Society Relations and the 1989 Beijing Student Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zhao, J. J. (2018). Queer , yet never lesbian : a ten-year look back at the reality TV singing competition show Super Voice Girl TV singing competition show Super Voice Girl. *Celebrity Studies*, 9(4), 470–486.
- Zhao, S. (2016, April 2). 當「女權」成為敏感詞 When Feminism becomes a sensitive word. *HK.on.Cc*. Retrieved from https://hk.on.cc/cn/bkn/cnt/commentary/20160402/bkncn-20160402000319171-0402_05411_001.html

- Zhao, S. (2017). *她們的征途：直擊、迂迴與衝撞，中國女性的公民覺醒之路* *Their journey: direct attack, roundabout and collision, the way of Chinese women's citizenship awakening*. Taipei: gusa publishing.
- Zhao, Y. (2008). *Communication in China*. Lanham, Md. ; Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Zheng, T. (2009). *Red Lights: the lives of sex workers in postsocialist China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Zheng, T. (2012). Female subjugation and political resistance : from literati to entrepreneurial masculinity in the globalizing era of postsocialist China. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 19(5), 652–669.
- Zheng, Y., & Lu, M. (2010). *中国妇女通史（民国）* *History of women in China (Republican Era)*. Hangzhou: Hangzhou Publishing.
- Zhong, S. (2004). A summary of the Study on the Thoughts of Industry Propelling the Country since the 1980s. *Journal of Zhuzhou Institute of Technology*, 18(1), 61–65.
- Zhou, S. (1995). 毛泽东“赶英超美”的设想浅析 An Analysis of Mao Zedong's Ideas of “Catch up with the British and Surpass the US.” *The Forum of Mao Zedong's Thoughts*, 2, 58–59.
- Zhou, T. (2014). *The China Dream and the China Path*. Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co.
- Zhou, W. (2016). 简论互联网思维 On Internet Thinking. *Journal of Beijing Union University*, 14(2), 1–7.
- Zhou, Yali, & Cao, Y. (2016). 社交电商发展中的问题及建议 Problems and suggestions in the development of social e-commerce. *CO-Operative Economy & Science*, (11), 164–165.
- Zhou, Yunyun. (2019). “Being a Good Daughter of the Party”? *China Perspectives*, 2, 17–28.

Zhu, B. (2015). 全球女性创业者大会马云演讲：男女是两个不同星球的人 Jack Ma's speech at the Global Women Entrepreneurs Conference: Men and women are people from two different planets. Retrieved December 21, 2018, from [guancha.cn website: https://www.guancha.cn/society/2015_05_20_320314_s.shtml](https://www.guancha.cn/society/2015_05_20_320314_s.shtml)

Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism : the fight for the future at the new frontier of power*. London: Profile Books.

Zurndorfer, H. T. (1999). *Chinese women in the imperial past : new perspectives*. Boston: Brill.