

**Transposition of the Self in Everyday Presentation
along the Formation of a New Consumerist Popular Culture
in the People's Republic of China**

by

Lai, Chiu-han Linda

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Much has been said about the paradox of the absence of a discourse on individual self attributes and the emphasis of person/relation-oriented-ness in Chinese culture. Hongkong-based sociologist Ambrose King, for example, observes that "most of the literature, sociological or not, depicts Confucianism as a social theory that tends to mold the Chinese into group-oriented or, more specifically, family-oriented and socially dependent beings."¹ Appealing to anthropologist Marcel Granet's studies, Marcel Mauss, in his own terminology, emphasizes the actor / performer aspect of the Chinese individual's presentation in everyday life, suggesting the priority of the "mask" over the "persona," and the subsequent lack of an internalization process from "person" to "self" in the individual.² While Mauss' discussion refers to ancient China, most literature written by native Chinese or scholars in the West asserts that the Confucian paradigm of social relation is still largely applicable in the mainland. King also writes, echoing Liu Binyen, former senior reporter of the People's Daily: "...although the Chinese Communists in mainland China have repeatedly launched vigorous campaigns -- including the Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution -- to attempt to uproot "feudal" elements of the Chinese culture, these concepts ["face," "human obligation" and "personal ties and networking"] . . . remain strong; they even threaten the formal and official ideological system of Marxism-Leninism."³ This essay, while summarizing a number of arguments amending the above views in recent literature, explores new questions of personhood arising from a relatively new kind of social dramaturgy of the everyday evolving in China as a result of the endorsement of a state-controlled market

¹Ambrose Yeo-chi King, "Kuan-hsi and Network Building: a Sociological Interpretation," The Living Tree: the Changing Meaning of Being Chinese Today; ed. Tu Wei-ming (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1994) 109-26. For my discussion in this paragraph, see p. 112.

²Marcel Mauss, "A Category of the Human Mind: the Notion of Person; the Notion of Self" (trans. W.D. Halls), The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History; ed. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, Steven Lukes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985) 1-45. For his discussion of China, see pp. 13-4.

³Ibid., 109.

economy that grows towards privatization. Rushed in with the new economic softwares is an unprecedented consumer culture in Socialist China, which finds the everyday Chinese in the cities gradually adopting new dress codes, new jargons and mannerism, new ways of congregating, new channels to articulate personal opinion and so on that are markedly different from the days before economic reform was introduced. The new behavior and assumed, implied values are often grouped under the label of "the popular" (versus "the mainstream" and "the artistic/aesthetic") in local journalistic and intellectual discourses. An immediate reading of the surface signs finds a strong intent to articulate the private and the personal, often in a vocabulary that echoes notions of an authentic inner self and self autonomy in the West. The new phenomenon therefore produces surplus meanings to the existing grand narrative of the Chinese concept of the person, and begs for new ways of understanding and explaining the situation of the person in the everyday dramaturgy.

An ideal study should traverse intertextually from officially acclaimed as well as banned films, prime time tv drama series, news reports to popular fiction, aspects of city life and so on. With such, I should be able to fully demonstrate a number of apparently contradicting yet co-existing discourses. There is the pedagogic packaging of the new corporate and consumer culture to instruct on proper reciprocal attitudes of the ordinary person to comply with the new economic policy, prominent in, for example, the nationwide broadcast prime-time tv series Zhongguo Shangren ("the Chinese Businessmen"). There is the dissident, often subversive, textualization of deviance and discontent toward traditional containment of personal expression and utopic vision of alternatives in, for example, films Wan zhu ("Trouble-shooters," Beijing Zazhong ("Beijing Bastard") and Postman. There is also mainland intellectuals' theoretical attempt to contain the emergence of the popular within existing socialist Chinese marxism, such as in the

continuous explication of Mao's seminal directive "Shi jian lun" ("On Practice"), and film theorists' revised views of function of the cinema and so on. The intensifying "capitalist" tendencies, evident in, for example, the sprouting of shopping malls and related consumer service facilities in major cities, also result in explicit measures of state protection of public spaces under socialist ideological principles. But due to the limit of space, I can only outline the contradictions I discovered during my research. In the following deliberation, I shall only concentrate mostly on a number of films and a tv series. My discussion will end with a note on the question of mobilization of theories, and how to configure a theoretical discussion that would tackle the here-and-now problems of personhood in the mainland.

THE PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF THE CHINESE SELF

To borrow from concepts in existing literature, the "mask" aspect that Mauss expounds on can be understood as determined by the number of ming (names) ascribed to an individual based on his or her birth-order, rank and social class; and "names" in turn occupy fixed, designated positions in the grand machinery of institutions. Mauss is correct in pointing out that the notion of the "person" has ceased to evolve because the source of ming necessarily lies outside the body of an individual.⁴ As many scholars in Confucian social theory read, the content of the names has been laid down in the Confucian classic the Doctrine of the Mean as the master scheme of wu lun, the "five cardinal relations" or the "five differentiated order," namely, of parent and child, ruler and subject, husband and wife, older brothers and younger brothers, and between friends.⁵ Confucian scholars have summarized the appropriate tenor of these "five duties of universal

⁴Mauss, Ibid.

obligation" as qing (affection) for parent-child relation, i (righteousness) ruler-subject, bie (distinction) husband-wife, shu (order) between brothers, and cheng (sincerity) between friends accordingly.⁶

But three aspects are overlooked in Mauss' sketchy summary. First, the supra-stable structure of the machinery of social institutions that catches his attention actually does provide the individuals much flexibility in how they organize their behaviour and performance in their social life. True that it does not culminate to any essential notion of a unitary, indissoluble self, but within the five differential orders of interpersonal relation, an individual is constantly and actively engaged in adjusting his or her role, obligation, function, and role-ascribed behavior from moment to moment, from situation to situation, in all cases of which he or she has to make active choices of how to present the most appropriate persona and, where necessary, to resolve conflicts of roles and duties. As Wang argues, "the Chinese have 'pluralistic' identifications with other individuals or social groups according to the 'attributes' the individual has in common with other particular individuals or social groups."⁷ "Attributes" in this context refer to factors contributing to someone's relational network that are acquired not only by birth but by achievement.⁸ Thus the second aspect that Mauss has overlooked: that not all names exert demands on an individual in the same manner. As early twentieth-century Chinese philosopher and literary theorist Hu Shi contends, of the different orders of relation, "some of them are preordained givens, while others are voluntarily constructed; the father-son and brother-brother

⁵The *Doctrine of the Mean* XX:viii, collected in *Confucius: Confucian Analects, the Great Learning & the Doctrine of the Mean*; translation with exegetical notes by James Legge (New York, 1983), pp. 406-7.

⁶King, 112.

⁷King, 116. Wang Sung-hsing's original text that King uses, *Han ren de jia zu zhi: shi lun yu* "guan xi, wu zhu zhi" *de she hui* [The lineage of the Han people], is unpublished.

⁸King, 114. The term is borrowed from Japanese anthropologist Chie Nakane. See Nakane, *Japanese Society* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 1.

relations belong to the former type, husband-wife and friend-friend relations belong to the latter type."⁹ Whereas preordained relations indicate individual behavior with prescribed fixed status and responsibilities, voluntarily constructed relations allow an individual considerable freedom to decide whether or not or in what way to enter. Following up on this, King asserts that there is much more to look at about the individual as he asks, "What is the role of the individual in the process of relation construction? In particular, what is the role that the individual plays in those relations which are voluntarily constructed?"¹⁰ At this point, the third aspect that Mauss has slighted is rather obvious: the paradigm of names only lays down the theoretical guidelines that designate definite points of departure for an individual's execution of everyday actions. The actual manoeuvre in existential moments of interaction demands a much more complex analysis.

Summarizing many who have written on the subject, King points to the importance of *mian zi* (face) and *ren qing* (human obligation) in Chinese societies. These two aspects of interpersonal relationship culminate in a social phenomenon called *guan xi*¹¹ (literally meaning personal relationship), which pertains to particularistic ties as well as personal network(ing) in the more general sense. Asserting that Confucian social theory has the theoretical thrust of developing a person into a *guan-xi*-oriented individual, King also observes that Chinese on the practical everyday life level do demonstrate "impressive and sophisticated skills in networking." Based on this, King begs for a fuller embrace of the individual as someone capable of taking full control of one's own will and presentation to others, against views that overtly emphasize the individual's passivity in a mechanistic paradigm of social relation.

⁹Hu Shi, *Zhongguo zhixue zhi dagang* [an outline of the history of Chinese philosophy] (Shanghai, 1919), p. 116.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹To be consistent with the internationally accepted citation practice, I have chosen to substitute the *pin ying system* for the *Wade system* that is used in King's essay. The three terms, *mian zi*, *ren qing* and *guan xi* I use in this essay appear as *mien-tzu*, *jen-ch'ing* and *kuan-hsi* in the original.

Building on de Bary's view that "the relations alone . . . do not define a man totally," and that "his interior self exists at the center of this web and therefore enjoys its own freedom,"¹² King goes much more beyond merely affirming Confucianism as attaching a good deal of autonomy to the individual. Mobilizing Meadian terminology, he contends that the Confucian individual "consists of a self (ji) that is both an active and a reflexive entity." Being capable of defining one's own role, the Confucian individual is always at the center of the stage of actions, the "initiator of social communication in the non-preordained, lun relation with others outside the family structure," and "the architect in relation construction."¹³ The volunistic nature of the self, moreover, has to be viewed in the performative moments when an individual comes into the presence of others. Guan xi (ties and networking) consolidates when the interaction between two or more individuals finds shared "attributes," or commonalities of shared identification, such as locality, kinship, coworker, classmate, sworn brotherhood, surname, and teacher-student.¹⁴ "The more attributes the individual has, the more guan xi he is able to establish. The more guan xi he has, the more advantageous his position in mobilizing resources in order to achieve his goals in a competitive world."¹⁵

Indeed, the studying of the various ways of "pulling guan xi," that is, establishing or strengthening relations with others when no pre-established relation exist, has developed into a complicated "science" of the management of human relations called guan xi xue (relationology).¹⁶ King also appeals to findings of a field research carried out in Shanghai in

¹²Wm. Theodore de Bary, "Individualism and Humanitarianism in Late Ming Thought," in de Bary, ed., Self and Society in Ming Thought (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 149.

¹³King, 113.

¹⁴Bruce Jacobs, "A Preliminary Model of Particularistic Ties in Chinese Political Alliance: *Kan-ch'ing and Kuan-hsi in a Rural Taiwanese Township*," China Quarterly 78 (June 1979):237-73.

¹⁵King, 115.

¹⁶People's Daily, May 8, 1979, 4; quoted in King, 116.

1988, which "confirm the prevalence of the practice of kuan-hsi [guan xi] in mainland Chinese society today." The same survey also shows that "young people seemed to attach greater importance to [guan xi] than older people."¹⁷

A major contribution of King's essay is his outline of the Chinese Communist Party's 40-year systematic yet unsuccessful attempt to dissolve the force of guan xi.¹⁸ The first phase of the campaign, starting around 1949, aimed at transforming the traditional norms of personal relations from "friendship" to "comradeship," from private morality to universalistic ethic.¹⁹ For comradeship was meant as the embodiment of a citizen's public spirit in the socialist state, transcending particularisms based on kinship, locality and so on. In China today, however, practical utilitarian concerns have overridden traditional and socialist moral values. The creation of "the new Socialist man for the new Socialist society" continued through the 1950s and 1960s by using "organization" to destroy and replace the institutional structure of the Chinese traditional social system, largely achieved through fear. By late 1960s, China had basically become one big organization, and society was re-structured into "an all-inclusive, functional collectivity" called dan wei, literally meaning "units." "Almost every working adult belongs to a dan wei, which provides its members with extensive goods and services," thus bringing full cycle a "culture of organized dependency." During the Cultural Revolution (1967-77), the Party "not only tried to monopolize activities in the public sphere, it even tried to eliminate the private sector." Drastic changes in social-political life alongside the Four Modernization in the

¹⁷King, 116-7. The study was published in Godwin Chu and Ju Yanan, The Great Wall in Ruins: Cultural Change in China (Honolulu: East-West Center, 1990). The study, as King explains in the footnote, drew a sample of 2,000 respondents, with 1,199 from metropolitan Shanghai, 304 from two nearby towns and 497 from twenty villages in the nearby rural districts.

¹⁸Ibid., 117-9.

¹⁹Ibid., 117. The two terms are borrowed from Ezra F. Vogel, "From Friendship to Comradeship," China Quarterly 21 (1965): 46-60.

aftermath of the Cultural Revolution brought about "a retreat of political power from its increasingly deeper penetration into civil society and the economy." For the first time in Communist China, people returned to traditional behavioral patterns now officially sanctioned in the privatized social-economic spheres." Towards the end of his narrative, however, King brings in a note of ambiguity as he uses Guangdong province in 1989²⁰ as an example to illustrate how the not fully completed economic reform brings back the instrumental role of guan xi in advantage-seeking. King quotes Vogel: "in Guangdong in this early but dynamic stage of commodity society, when markets were not yet fully opened, the new desire to make things happen led many entrepreneurs to use guan xi to achieve what was otherwise impossible." In the second half of this essay, however, I shall argue that the "return" of the voluntaristic self in the 1980s and 1990s does not only bring back guan xi for practical ends, but has other implications vis-a-vis China's experience of modernity.

Contrasted with Ambrose King's empirical-based sociological deliberation, mainland literary theorist and philosopher Liu Zaifu and Lin Gang produce a diagnostic, symptomatic reading of the design of the person in Chinese culture in a monograph published in 1988.²¹ Liu and Lin contends that "culture can be understood as the design of the person."²² But unlike many scholars who subscribe to a notion of national-character as a natural product of long-period development evolving and accumulating from across centuries, he describes national character as something that can be engineered by a project he calls "the modernization of the person." In other words, the "person" can be re-designed as a function of modernization. To Liu and Lin, the

²⁰The example is borrowed from Vogel, One Step Ahead in China (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 407.

²¹Liu Zaifu & Lin Gang, On Chinese Culture's Design of the Person (Changsha, 1988).

²²Ibid., 26.

best model so far is from the May Fourth Movement,²³ when a new generation of scholars "purged" China of traditional residue (refuge) with the rational tools they brought in from the West. Liu and Lin embody their critique of China's "sickness" and her failure to renew herself as a modern nation in two inter-related metaphors: the slave(-master) mentality on the one hand, and the "eating" of man, or "man-eater," on the other. When the person is designed as "slave" or "master," the person itself diminishes. The slave mentality, as they comment, produces either the master or the slave, neither of which is "real" human. "It is the result of traditional culture's suppression and refusal to acknowledge the unique position of personality, subjectivity and character of the individual."²⁴ "Eating man," an idea borrowed from prominent May Fourth writer Lu Xun, casts some as the victim, the "eaten," and others as the oppressor, the "eater." The "eaten" in turn plays the "eater" and multiplies the number of the "eaten." "Eaters" do not only eat others, but themselves as well. "Self-eating" ultimately results in the repression of self-consciousness, the total destruction of the self. The source of both "man-eating" and the "slave mentality," as Liu and Lin point out after Lu Xun, lies in the Confucian moral ethical paradigm perpetuated over the centuries through the feudalist system of society. Such moral ethical paradigm comprises not only of wu lun (the five cardinal relations) discussed earlier on, but also li zhi zhi xu (the "ritual order" of manner), which directs behavioral performance in the everyday life setting. As Liu and Lin comments, "speaking from today's point of view, we see the ritual order of manners as one kind of design of man, . . . which should not be merely simplified to or equated with the feudalist system, for it is something much inner, much more deep-structured."²⁵

²³The initial phase of the movement was between 1917 and 1919, with precipitating forces evolving around 1915, and later developed into the New Culture Movement around 1919-1920. See Chow Tse-tsung's The May 4th Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China (1960; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980).

²⁴Ibid., 16.

²⁵Ibid., 25.

In other words, "man-eating" and the "slave mentality" is so deep-seated in everyday life that people are not aware of their own "self-destruction" when they experience it.²⁶ Another metaphor -- "children" -- is used to describe the general Chinese person's incapability of self-discipline and independent decision-making. The ritual order, Liu and Lin argue, has the tendency to reduce "adults" to "children." In calling for a new mode of self-maintenance, they also critique the building in of self-moderation into the general paradigm of Confucian moral ethics. Mobilizing yet another of Lu Xun's metaphor, they point out that such paradigm does not only instruct on, positively, the way one relates to another, but also, negatively, how one should exercise self-control, submit to authority, adjust oneself to external demands, and most of all, an escapist belief in the ultimate transcendence of pain borrowed from Buddhism and Daoism. What Liu and Lin have completed here is a Chinese version of government much in the Foucauldian sense.

On one level, Liu and Lin's discourse reflects a humanist tone, drawing attention to the theme of *ren dao zhu yi* (humanism) that cuts through film and literature since Deng's endorsement of the Open Door Policy in 1979, especially in the early 1980s. But is their call for the care and reform of the individual person, and subsequently the re-design of the person in the general cultural context so as to release and realize the inner person, directed merely towards humanitarian ideals like those in the West? Why must an individual show his or her feelings?²⁷ Why is it important for a person to be a person even when outside relational networks?²⁸ What does Liu and Lin mean when they insist a person be someone capable of organizing and planning one's life as a

²⁶Ibid., 22.

²⁷Ibid., 27.

²⁸Ibid., 31

process of self-realization?²⁹ What makes it an imperative for human subjectivity to be independent of the names? If Liu and Lin seek so rigorously to unveil the power of a prevailing form of technology of the self (in the name of Confucian moral ethics), what is the point of calling for another form of technology in the name of libertarian humanism? While the answers to these questions remain ambiguous, some clues may be picked up in the last two sections of the monograph when they fully focus on the effect of the older form of technology of the self. The lack of real address to the inner self produces, rather paradoxically, a race of people who are totally selfish, self-interested and pragmatic, without a sense of the public and the collective, individuals who are merely on-lookers but no participants. Ethical norms, in other words, are moralized but not internalized. The lack of care of the inner person -- or in Liu's terms "body" without the "heart" -- results in the individual's permanent indulgence in appropriating anything external to fashion one's personal needs, thus the total collapse of the border between "self" and "other." These heart-less bodies, as they further, even substitute blood relation and relational networking for moral integrity. Externalization of the person (due to the lack of internalization) also further reinforces "face" (related to shame) which gradually grows into the "skin" (mask, appearance, pure performance). Anyone familiar with writings in the 1980s before the Tiananmen crackdown would recognize the above as a critique of the ill path of socialism (especially the Cultural Revolution) and expression of desperation over the sluggish process of modernization.

The significance of Liu and Lin's discussion lies exactly in the resonance and distance between the time they spoke (1988) and the May Fourth period, as well as the way they fashion the correlation. Their discourse explicitly constitutes both periods, each in their own ways, as peak

²⁹Ibid..

moment of modernization. For, according to their reading, both moments envision the "true" cure of China as the creation of the "new" person, and the key to successful, complete modernization and the creation of a "new" society with "new" persons. Though generally accepted views on the May Fourth Movement take the movement as constituting the factors that later turned the route of China's revolution from enlightenment via Westernization to anti-colonial patriotic nationalism, it is also basically understood as a many-faceted intellectual and socio-political phenomenon, the most flowery and fruitful stage of incorporation of Western knowledge. Liu and Lin's discourse, however, decontextualizes the May Fourth fighters' demand for a new people from its humanitarian course, and turns it into a treatise of effective government, overtly emphasizing the necessary relation of self-cultivation, self-improvement, reflective consciousness and so on, to social responsibility that sees successful modernization as the ultimate goal. A quote from Chen Duxiu, a major contributor of the May Fourth who was also an earliest founder of the Chinese Communist Party, recalls immediately the traditional Confucian paradigm of the "five cardinal relational orders:" "the forefront task is to renew the heart and blood of the individual to bring about new personalities; with that we shall have a new nation, then new society, new family and a new race."³⁰ Here, emphasis of the importance of the inner self is ultimately co-opted into a basically instrumental view of personhood for the realization of the common good and a more effective form of collectivity in congruence with the Socialist political line.

King, Liu and others that I have included above form the dominant intellectual discourse of "self" on Chinese culture local and overseas. In the following, reverting the top-down approach

³⁰Liu and Lin, 11. Chen Duxiu's quote is from a collection of Chen's writings published by the *Ya Dong Tu Shu Guan* [East Asian Library] (1923) 1: 43.

to articulation from the popular, I shall outline a rather different picture that the dominant discourse of selfhood does not seem to be ready to naturalize. This picture also begs that contemporary China should not be simply viewed together with Hong Kong and Taiwan as a unitary cultural system.

SNAPSHOT 1

"This is unjust. Society should have created better conditions for you guys. I have to shout to the world to let them come to care for you. My thought for you often makes me sleepless," says Zhao, university professor of moral education, to Yu, Yang and Ding, three young, modern city-dwellers in Beijing who contentedly acknowledge themselves as vulgar, banal and nothing more than "eat-drink-man-woman"³¹ (*Trouble-shooters*, dir. by Mi Jia Shan, 1988). The above piece of advice, offered in the larger context of the importance of young people's conscious life-planning so that their talents may benefit society, echoes the pedagogic overtone of the official political discourse which was still much alive in the hey days of reform in the late 1980s. But this piece of advice is an object of ridicule in the film.

What draws my interest here is the unprecedented open rejection of patriarchal guidance, articulated in the three men's responses, in a text circulated nationwide. As one of them replies, "so you mean we are all living in pain?" "That's just too obvious. I can feel it even if you don't verbalize it," the professor returns with much sympathy. "What if we're not in pain?" "That's not logical. Why aren't you guys in pain? You surely should feel the pain of life. Only when you feel pain would your life be redeemable." "Then let us tell you, we really don't feel any pain at all...," the three men giggle to one another, pretending that they are crying as they turn their

backs on the professor with disgust. The overthrow of patriarchal protection is foreshadowed earlier on in the film when Professor Zhao asks them how they spend their leisure time. "We do nothing, just hang out, play cards...." "You can read. Reading helps to ease your worries and loneliness," Zhao advises. "We don't have much to worry about. And we don't read. There're hardly any worries." "Too much worries is no good, but not having any worries isn't too good either. ...You should make more friends. Don't confine yourselves to a small circle." This conversation is later on turned into a case for pedagogic instruction by Zhao in a broadcast public speech on moral health he offers to a group of university students, which Yu, Yang and Ding watch (on tv) in dismay. The general protest against the demand on young people to be useful to society is also furnished by Yu's decision to break up with his girlfriend who insists he should be more career-minded and be "a strong shoulder" for her to lean on. Similar instances denouncing top-down imposition of social duties and the obligation of personal life-planning to the end of such are yet numerous in the same film. Here, the film demonstrates an interesting twist of the neo-Confucian view of the person. As contemporary neo-Confucian scholar Tu Wei-ming affirms, "the point of departure in Confucianism is self-cultivation (xiu shen)," and "self-cultivation necessarily leads to social responsibility."³² In Trouble-shooters, not only is the subservience of self-perfection to social responsibility disavowed, but also any attempt to fashion the self is mocked and suspected. Yet by doing this, a certain category of private self and autonomy is assumed and reinforced: (???) a new category of private self by which self-interest ends in itself, with a total obliteration of any sense of (???)

³¹I borrow the term from the title of Li Ang's latest film. The four Chinese characters corresponding to the four words (eat, drink, man, woman) in the title form an idiomatic expression in the Chinese language that describes people with hedonistic indulgences.

³²Tu Wei-ming, Humanity and Self-cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979) 71.

Yu, Yang and Ding, whom Professor Zhao remarks as "sinking" and "aimless," co-found the "3-T Company," which offers services to solve people's personal problems: ranging from dating a woman on behalf of someone too busy, nursing an unattended old, paralyzed mother, informing someone's fiancée of his intent to break the engagement, playing substitute for a husband whose wife needs to unleash her anger on someone, keeping company a woman thirsty for interesting conversations, organizing public award-presentation ceremony for an unknown writer who wants his name to be publicized, . . . to various kinds of talk-cures, such as advice on how to avoid sex with one's wife, how to abstain from masturbation (-- both for the preservation of male health), how to deal with cops, bargain with one's senior, come to terms with the rising cost of living and so on. Trouble-shooters is among the first films that speak of personal problems as nothing but personal problems, and captures broad attention for its taunting effort to center the question of how to preserve, protect, care for and properly present the "self" in everyday life. It also takes a unique interest to problematize private life as a domain threatened by political and moral disciplinary, public pedagogy.

"Vulgar" and "banal" as the three men are, they have the due common-sensical wisdom required of someone who has to survive the intensifying commercialization and confusion of contemporary urban life in China. They harbour a broad range of fashionable "knowledge" both local and imported from the West. Yang, for example, is articulate in the vulgarized versions of Western scholarship, from Nietzsche to Freud to biology and all kinds of life sciences, and manages to integrate them into any context with versatility.

The fact that Trouble-shooters (its Chinese title meaning "stubborn masters") was one of the three films nominated for the Golden Rooster Awards Best Picture 1989 (for films made in 1988) speaks of the kind of free atmosphere prevailing then at the peak of economic reforms led

by Zhao Ziyang. From mid-1988 to mid-1989 was also the time when the so-called avant-garde movement in art displayed the most unrestrained expression of their breakaway from norms and defiance of authority, whether moral, aesthetic, political or ideological. The Golden Rooster Awards were presented in November of each year. It is therefore rather easy to imagine that Trouble-shooters, in the immediate aftermath of the suppression of student demonstration on Tiananmen Square, was in every sense too alarming to be named the best picture. As a matter of fact, the Best Picture Award was withheld that year with three outstanding, popular but failing nominated films.³³

To substantiate my discussion of the new gestures in situating and presenting the self in the everyday dramaturgy in the Mainland, I can certainly name many more examples from the cinema and television. Postman unveils the psychological interiors of a morally perverse postman who intervenes the life of those whose mail he secretly opens. Both Chicken Feathers and Beijing Bastards portray a world of aimless people unfolded in a wandering narrative without a definite direction in the conventional sense of plot development. Great Separation speaks of the courage to embrace the freedom to love via a relation between a man and a woman whose marital partners both left them behind in China to pursue their own goals in North America. And the list goes on. But these texts should be read with caution without being reduced to mere reflectionist function of representation, but rather in terms of the implication of their availability to accessible channel to the public. On the ground that filmmaking in Socialist China has always been a direct indicator of political climate, and the fact that China after Communism remains a text-oriented society with a strong pedagogic function attached to textual

³³Huang Shixian, "The Movie Screen Should Match the Wave of the Age of Change," Film Art (Beijing) no. 4, 1992, p. 15.

practices, I would argue that a film in the mainland is better understood as a "socially productive spectacle,"³⁴ rather than merely a text of intrinsic linguistic qualities and internal coherence to be dissected structurally. As a "spectacle," a film gathers people around itself for at least one or more outstanding aspects immediately visible to the observer -- whether expressive qualities or an intellectually provoking statement to make, or something publicized as profoundly significant. The content of the spectacle should then be examined as to how it is negotiated and internalized in private or semi-public spaces like workers' study group meetings in their own factories. But due to space and the lack of sufficient material, I would here confine myself to taking Trouble-shooters as an exceptionally explicit, utopic statement of rebellious, subversive sentiments in a brief, momentary, politically sanctioned space of liberal expression. What is interesting, too, is the space that lies in between Trouble-shooters, a rhetorical discourse like Liu Zafu's, and ???sociological empirical studies,??? all of which were product of 1988, the climax of "liberalization."

In the same light, the implication of Trouble-shooters would not be sufficiently grasped unless when read together with the promoted success of Zhao Yu Lu, made the year after the Tiananmen crackdown, and the Golden Rooster Best Picture 1991. Zhao, also the name of a Communist cadre, glorifies the exemplary virtues and devoted services of a famous Party member dated back to the early days of New China, who sacrificed his life for the good of a small deserted town in the northwest. The film hauntingly retrieves the call for the subjugation of personal virtues to public good, and at the same time marks the difference by summoning for the preservation and care of "good" public servants. In one scene, comrade Zhao stood the risk

³⁴I am borrowing this term from Tomas Gutierrez Alea's "The Viewer's Dialectic [1984], Reviewing Histories ed. Coco Fusco (Buffalo: Hallwalls, 1987) 178-96.

of being accused of embezzling public money in order to improve the food ration for his colleagues in the township who, one after another, fell sick because of under-nutrition. Zhao justified his act, saying, "Party cadres are precious property of the people. We must cherish them." In a time when the mainland film market became more and more saturated with action films and city comedies, Zhao prominently recalled for its congregation Men at Middle Age (Ren dao zhong nian; 1983), which woke the Chinese audience in amazement with a similar appeal in the early 1980s, the then high time of post-Cultural Revolution humanitarianism. Standing in its own time, Zhao "exceeds" Men by its seamless union of Fifth-generation film aesthetics and the more traditional melodramatic structuration of characters as moral binary typification. Zhao does not at all signify a set-back on the quest for a private-private self to those who hold filmmaking as a tool for disguised subversion. For the same period in the mainland has witnessed growing numbers of independent film/video-makers who adamantly sustain the voice that Trouble-shooters has initiated.

SNAPSHOT 2

"In Beijing, the number of major shopping centres has multiplied almost seven times from four in the late 1980s to twenty-seven in 1993. Before 1990, retail business in Beijing was basically state- or collectively owned. But since 1992, in-flow of foreign capital created totally new infrastructure for privatized retail shopping. A severe battle broke out among department stores as they struggled to upkeep their sales figures. Some modernize the interior design of the stores, some diversify their sales items, some multiply their branches, yet some others upgrade their publicity and marketing strategies."³⁵

³⁵Capital issue 87 (February, 1995), pp. 76-79.

The above is the opening of a feature report in the "New China" section of a business finance monthly in Hong Kong. Ramifications of sales battle of similar kind are expected to continue to transform mainland city-dwellers' sense of community and mode of congregation. Rather than gathering at Bei Hai Gong Yuan (North Sea Park), Tiananmen Square or dumpling restaurants, family and friends may now prefer to spend their time in shopping centers and malls often decorated with cafe and snack facilities, enjoying a new sense of presence with the world outside. In the course of adjusting their movement to the changing urban geography, and in experimenting new relations with the growing consumerized material culture in terms of everyday personal decision-making and negotiation with new behavioral codes and other material signification systems, new personal identities and notions of collectivity are ingrained into the everyday life dramaturgy.

But when the shopping mall phenomenon is translated onto the tv screen, what is foregrounded is more than mere fascination with material abundance, but a carefully structured network of social relations and moral-ethical paradigm, heavily taxonomized in terms of gender, age, generation and seniority hierarchies:

In a certain key commercial centre southwest of Shanghai along the Yangtze River, a major battle broke out among the city's three largest department stores. The first is run by Tian, a bright, handsome, computer technologist in his early thirties, who embraces a management ethics that is both people- and efficiency-oriented. The second is run by Luo, a "nu qiang ren" ("professional strong woman," a sexist term often used to connote women with capabilities compatible to men's). Luo has a young Frenchman as her right-hand man, is therefore apt in the most innovative marketing and sales strategies in the West. The third store is run by Long, an experienced middle-age businessman whose patriotic zeal and innovativeness in business had

survived the Cultural Revolution but not quite the new, rising generation of entrepreneurs like Tian and Luo. Tian, without the knowledge of it, is actually an illegitimate son of Long who abandoned his mother before Tian was born in order to fulfill a family-arranged marriage. As the store battles became more fuelled up, Tian gradually discovered the secret and became entangled with all kinds of personal-moral and professional-ethical struggles. Luo, too, is torn by struggles. Between a husband she still loves, a daughter whose long-time sickness demands a devoted full-time mother, and the self-love of her own talents, Luo counts the cost of a bright, growing career future against a pending marriage shipwreck. Watching the close rivalry of Tian and Luo, Long finds himself lagging behind the demand of the new economical climate. He feels isolated, aging, struggling whether to come to terms or not with his son Tian, and at the same time come under the severe, constant criticism by his own father who was himself a shrewd old-time capitalist, a once most outstanding department store owner in Shanghai before 1949. While the fate of the once family-owned department store is left to Long's staggering manoeuvre, his father, now a billionaire, moves on to the international finance market, just completing an investment deal with a French bank (opening scene of the series). Who finally wins the department store battle? Tian? Luo? or Long with the assistance of his son-in-law? None of them, but a young woman assistant of Tian's in her twenties. Drawing no other character's prior attention, (nor much of the viewers',) she beats all competitors in a major bid for a piece of property in the center of the city. Her glowing ambition takes her from a saleswoman in a boutique to sales manager in Tian's department store, and finally the new threat to the local business community. She is now partner of a new investment team that is about to open the fourth department store in the city, with long-term campaigns charted out to absorb all department stores in the city into a conglomerate, mopping out all obsolete practices.

The above is my summary of a 20-episode prime time tv soap called Chinese Businessmen

[Zhongguo Shangren] broadcast a year ago across the country in China. The series is co-produced by media units Zhejiang province TV Drama Production Centre and the Beijing Central Television Station, as well as the Bureau of Commerce of the city of Hangzhou, a trade promotional unit, with the assistance of Hangzhou Department Store (Hangzhou Baihuo Dalou) and Hangzhou Department Store at Jiefang Road (Hangzhou Jiefang Lu Baihuo Dalou). Chinese Businessmen is only one of the many recent examples of films and tv drama that self-classify as "popular." The series is also an explicit attempt to combine a variety of actual changes -- economic relaxation from collective state-ownership to independent small-capital business to corporatized joint investment -- into a dramatized whole.

On the visual level, Chinese Businessmen produces an aestheticized compliment to modernity, calligraphing what I would call a new "urban aesthetics" to capture an unprecedented fascination with the economic, material manifestation of modernization. Almost indulgent tracking shots meander from one room to another in residential settings, pondering over their Western-style furniture and interior design. Characters are often given "excuses" to engage in activities such as making coffee, using audio-visual equipments or listening to cheezy Western music at home; and other times ordering imported drinks at a bar or cafe. The petit bourgeoisie life-style is developed into the paradigm of modern life. When conflicts of the drama becomes too intense, the camera dissolves into breathing shots of the city with neonlights, busy traffic or absorbed pedestrians. When compared with other family or social realist melodrama, Chinese Businessmen shows a clear attempt to suppress distinctive Chinese cultural symbols for suggestive signs of globalization.

On another level of reading, the Chinese Businessmen series mobilizes most of the typical rhetoric of prime time soaps that writers on television in the West often describe. The opening episode, for example, establishes step by step three families and three work places with a total of a dozen of characters all having an individual story of their own developed at various point of the series, bringing audience back week after week. The above note, which may seem too obvious to the familiar tv viewer in the West, is in fact important clue to a new textualizing strategy vis-a-vis the new situation of the self in the mainland. Whereas most tv drama series remain merely tv version of a lengthy film, with the plot still developed around a central character (a hero necessarily) and dramatic actions and choices of individual characters teasing out the texture of moral conflicts, Chinese Businessmen is among the first to position many individual characters each on their own locations with their own world of actions and responsibilities to carry out, in the process of which they thresh out their inner world and personalities until a due moral decision brings about the final resolution. Multiple subjectivities is here both the function and result of textualization, drawing viewers of all kinds to a new kind of character-identification exercise. If conventions of realist drama and melodrama situate a viewer to internalize an ideal moral position via identification with the hero, then China's new tv spectators congregating with intense concentration around prime-time spectacles like Chinese Businessmen would find themselves constantly shifting subjectivities as the series dives deep into the "world" of a certain character and out into another. Chinese Businessmen does not only flow along a multiple plot development, but also constantly raises the question: "who is the hero?" Unlike prime time soap in the West which, according to critics, often takes a feminine audience as the object of address, Chinese Businessmen encompasses an audience of both genders. In a way, the series can be said of as comprising two gender-cast narratives. First, there is the story of the struggles of

professional women in the new economic era, their dilemma between domestic and public responsibilities, and professional, personal fulfilment on the one hand. The second is the story of new challenge for the Chinese male and the struggle between shrewdness in corporate business, ethical integrity of leadership, and the traditionally assigned male role as burden-bearers of the nation's future. A well mix of prime time soap and melodrama, Chinese Businessmen nonetheless portrays a complex situation with conflictual discourses of values. The story of the store battle seems to advocate corporatization and privatization as the MODE of modernization/Westernization, while affirming Chinese traditional moral values as ETHOS and PATHOS of everyday life. There is also the interplay between corporate ethics (duty of a good administrator and service person), home ethics (duty of a mother, a wife, a son, a father, an elderly and so on), and moral ethics resulting from the new "capitalist" life-style.

The series also attempts to re-historicize the present market economy. It lines up the department store battles in the 1990s in the same trope with similar ones in Shanghai in pre-Communist China (which is then the centre of European export commodities and of department store wars). The trope provides the space for a debate of what accounts for the real entrepreneurial spirit, examination of traditional values, and reconciliations between national patriotism and modern management philosophies. The return of the "old" capitalist (Long's billionaire father) also constructs a kind of historical continuity between pre-Communist Shanghai and the new city of New China under liberalized economic practices, with the elliptical "in-between" (the forty years of Communist China) turned into a significant structural absence.

THEORETICAL CONTAINMENT OF THE POPULAR IN THE MAINLAND

Mainland film critic Tao Dongfeng captures this new bent towards the popular in his article

"Post-1989 Chinese Film and Television,"³⁶ a subject-matter that has drawn much attention from among film writers recently. He posits his discussion within a "mainstream-versus-popular" framework. Referring to the late 1980s and early 1990s, he writes:

Thus we have witnessed a very unique wen yi [meaning "literary and artistic"] phenomenon: charismatic characters in mainstream wen yi ["literature and art"] have stepped down from the high altar to the popular mass; and the authoritative discourse of mainstream wen yi has absorbed mass culture's norms and mechanism of production. On the other hand, mass culture and popular art, while operating according to its own rules and means of production, is also consciously or unconsciously realizing the value systems and ideological functioning of the official mainstream culture. I call the product of this double-bind penetration "post-main-stream art" or "popular art."³⁷

Tao further observes, in perjorative terms, that these popular dramas are marked by cheap sentimentalism and superficial allusion to morality. They prize traditional moral values, and seek to please their viewers with "happy endings" with no irresolvable conflicts. Lacking the political overtones of mainstream art and literature, they challenge no official ideology. Tao even closes his article by critiquing these works as "empty signifiers" that dissolve discursive functions altogether.

In a more sympathetic tone, mainland film writers Mu Gong³⁸ contains the wave of what Tao calls popular art as a manifestation of the rising "consciousness of the civil subjects of the city"³⁹ and the gradual maturation of ping min wen hua. The term, translated as the "layman culture," is

³⁶The article cited appears in *Twenty-first Century Bimonthly* n.24 (August, 1994), pp. 135-8.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 135.

a new creation. Yet it is consciously used in contrast with intellectual or elite culture. In the dominant discourse of Chinese cultural, the latter denotes the sanctioned obligation of the intellectuals to understand and interpret things in the world for those who are outside. They are therefore a special hermeneutic community who assume conscious pedagogic duties in naming the world for the mass. It is against this context that the above quotes on the "the sphere of the popular" should be understood. In this sense, both Mu Gong and Tao Dongfeng are fulfilling the imperative to give widespread phenomena due theoretical consideration. But "the popular" still remains an ambiguous entity, an area of theoretical contestation that has not yet been naturalized into China's intellectual master narrative. Similarly, the question of the situation of the self in an economically reformed social dramaturgy, which on justifiable basis can be subsumed under the discussion of the popular, has not yet been addressed. To the Mainland Chinese intellectual community, the discourse of modernity has so far been burdened largely with grand theories from both local and abroad, and especially with translating those imported from the West, channelling them into hermeneutic cycles for local application. The emergence of the "popular" social sphere seems therefore to produce a kind of residue meanings they have yet to naturalize into their discursive practices.

If, in the West, the recognition of the study of popular culture has finally gained its legitimacy in the academic domain,⁴⁰ then China is at an infant stage still struck with much paranoid.

Contemporary Mainland philosopher Gan Yang points out that the discussion of cultural issues so far has always been subsumed under the discourse of modernization. Gan Yang, celebrating

³⁸Mu Gong, "Chinese Film in the Age of Practicalism," *Film Art Bimonthly* (Beijing) no. 4, 1992, pp. 8-13.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 11.

⁴⁰Chandra Mukerji & Michael Schudson, "Introduction: Rethinking Popular Culture," *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*; ed by Mukerji and Schudson (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: U of California Press), 1-2

the final blossom of the Mainland discourse on culture since 1985, also characterizes its

belatedness:

'A task will not actualize unless the material conditions for actualization are ready or in the process of formation.' (Karl Marx) Roughly speaking, ever since the end of the turbulent decade when the task of modernization resumed, Chinese people have walked three big steps before they arrive at [cultural] issues: first, we had to open up China to the world and to introduce advanced technology from advanced, developed countries; next to that we had to reinforce democracy and legislation and to execute massive reforms of the economic system, for without corresponding advanced managerial infrastructures, technology means nothing; then finally, cultural issues are brought to the front stage of society...⁴¹

PROBLEMS OF CONCEPTUALIZATION

Up to this point of the discussion, the real issue here remains: what kind of conceptualization suffices the explanation of the latest phase of the self phenomenon that is at the intersection of diverse forces, ranging from the political, economic, cultural, intellectual, discursive and that of everyday aspirations of the ordinary people? The discussion I introduce in the first half of this essay to me is limited by its own disciplinary constraints. In my discussion of film and tv texts, I suggest the importance of examining mass transmitted cultural texts like film and tv drama, where the question of self receives most articulations. (It is also the area that constitutes the surplus meanings for mainland intellectuals.) I have also tried to explore the complex, possible

⁴¹See Gan Yang, "A Few Questions Concerning Cultural Discussion in the Eighties;" Cultural Consciousness of Contemporary China, ed. Gan Yang (Hong Kong, 1989), pp. 1-35. Quote cited is from pp. 1-2.

relation between the textual world, the actual world and the users of the text from a more

heterogenous perspective. This area, I suggest, warrants much further consideration.

[GAP.....]

To fill up the ellipses here, I would turn briefly to Toby Miller's model of cultural criticism discussed in his book The Well-tempered Self. Miller describes how the modern capitalist state "musters a variety of cultural forces to send deliberate mixed messages about the nature of citizenship and the self." This process creates ideal citizens as cultural subjects who are "trained to meet the conflicting needs of the political and economic systems." Miller also contends that a certain kind of politics in practice would require complying, consenting subjects of designated qualities. "To fulfill these conflicting needs for political order and economic prosperity, powerful cultural forces are employed to instill a sense of 'ethical incompleteness.' Citizens are then offered political, cultural, and economic opportunities to become better, happier, and more fulfilled -- opportunities that, in turn, encourage loyalty to both the political and economic systems."⁴²

Although Miller's analysis is directed to the modern capitalist states that trade on democratic politics, the above description seems to fit into the present Mainland context in which political instruction says one thing, and economic practice does another. Miller argues for the maintenance of boundaries between government (state rule) and culture, and the means to cross them being organized via pedagogic routines. The examples I have quoted above, however, produce a scenario that does the contrary. Historically accepted pedagogic routines unite culture and government via textualization that blurs and rationalizes the contradictions of the official

⁴²See summary on back cover of Toby Miller's Well-tempered Self: Citizenship, Culture, and the Postmodern Subject (Baltimore and London, 1993).

disciplinary discourse. The kind of "ethical incompleteness" that has to be instilled via government is grounded in the question of: what does China require (what kind of ideal subjects does China need) to maintain and serve the conflicting needs of her political and economic systems? On the one hand, China needs submissive, community-minded, selfless, patriotic, political subordinates of a socialist state apparatus. On the other hand, she needs adventurous, versatile, shrewd, free-spirited, innovative and autonomous, those of global vision for economic building, eager consumers for the new expanding retail market. Such contradictions bring about a crisis of the ethical identity of the everyday Chinese who find themselves both "singular, private persons" and at the same time "collective, public national subjects." Liu Zaifu and Lin Gang's call for the nourishment and redemption of the private self, in this light, is the most justifiable project. Ethical incompleteness as such, too, has to be inscribed into the larger discourse of modernization and progress. Chinese Businessmen is thus a carefully thought out pedagogic text, via the dramatization of ethical dilemmas, that suggest and indicate correct or incorrect attitudes, desirable or inappropriate conduct. In other words, the contemporary urban Chinese subjects, the congregation of this special tv spectacle, is provided with a roadmap with a taxonomy of social personae struggling for rightful ethical decisions in both their private and public life, and especially in occasions where the two spheres conflict each other.

The above pedagogic function has yet to be read against an on-going discourse, which deals with the individual as the subject of knowledge, that has instructed every single mainland subject in school, and has informed the general moral paradigm of social life. This discourse is built around one of Mao's seminal instructional text "On Practice" written in 1937, which lays the philosophical foundation of the adaptation of Marxism to the Chinese context, and is still frequently retrieved into contemporary official discourses as pedagogic foundation. "On

"Practice" is a treatise of the relationship between knowledge and praxis, emphasizing marxism as a guide to action and not pure intellectual doctrinarism. Throughout the 1940s, "On Practice" remained the chief thought weapon mobilized against an ideological authority pressuring China from outside, namely, marxist doctrinarism, which was then much alive among a group of Chinese communist intellectuals who were well read and adhering to the original writings of Karl Marx. What is more important is that the text constitutes the beginning and foundation of the sinicization of marxism in the Mainland -- a process that contemporary Mainland intellectual Jin Guantao describes as "confucianization," or, the subsumption of marxism into the system of traditional confucian moral ideals.⁴³

Developing along the marxist line, Mao claims that real knowledge is a result of a "two-step" practice: first, the coming into contact with things of the external world and, second, inference, judgment and conceptualization based on empirical data and personal perception. Mao also distinguishes between direct and indirect experiences. A direct experience is from which real knowledge springs, whereas indirect experience refers to foreign and historical knowledge. The latter, nonetheless, points one back to the direct experience and thus real knowledge of those in the past or in foreign land -- thus again, the importance of praxis.

Speaking in the context of the 1990s, Jin Guantao's retrieval of Mao's seminal essay also points to two important assumptions in the latter's writing: first, that judgment equates moral judgment, and second, collective moral ideal equates nature, Dao, or "heavenly way" (tian dao) in the confucian sense.⁴⁴ Therefore, knowledge, whether gained via direct or indirect experiences, necessarily carries a moral content and is related to moral activities. In other words, knowledge,

⁴³Jin Guantao, "Mao's 'On Praxis' and the Confucianisation of Marxism-Leninism," Twenty-first Century Bimonthly 20 (December 1993), pp. 19-28.

theory and practice are in the service of collective moral idealism. Moreover, Mao also differentiates between rational and emotional knowledge. And what enables the leap from the emotional to the rational is not an epistemological shift, but value judgment for a paradigm of collective moral motives. Thus, Jin's ultimate thesis is that Mao's "On Practice" is actually a revised version of zhi xing guan (the concept of knowing and practice) in the neo-Confucian tradition. In brief, according to Jin's interpretation, the knowing subject is expressed by the practising subject, who is bound by moral ideals that are basically confucian and would serve the good of the people and nation in general.

Coming back to Chinese Businessmen, the series provides a "direct" yet "indirect" experience of reformed economy and a new modern life that is suggested through textualization as possible and in the making. The series is not only a kind of "experience," but also a form of practice and knowledge -- by making sense of, and imposing logicity and rationality on, a bunch of objects, activities and sentiments floating loosely out there in the actual everyday urban dramaturgy still begging interpretation. At the same time, to the majority Mainland viewers who are not a member of the apparatus of (the production of) corporate culture, and who are not yet in the management or leadership level of the new market economy, their point of identification is designated outside rather than within the diegetic text. As the major characters are almost all personnel of the new corporate culture (-- they are investors, entrepreneurs, managers, administrators, sales persons), the everyday consumer is basically not represented. The one important exception -- and an important one -- is one scene in which hundreds of customers flood into a department store to compete for free offers and finally bring about a major catastrophe with many casualties. The everyday consumer's engagement with the drama is

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 20.

therefore extra-textual in character, not via identification with the main character as in conventional drama, but as someone who should ideally re-adjust one's own role and conduct of participation as a response to his or her "indirect" experience of the model key players in the new market environment. The ideal good everyday person is thus expected, on the one hand, to empathize with the hard work and personal struggles of the new class of economic leaders, to support the new state economic policy, and to be appreciative of the new bourgeois' contribution to the nation. On the other hand, they are expected to be good marxists by translating their indirect experience (of the model characters in the diegetic world) to direct experience as good consumers to gain real knowledge to make the functions of the new economic machinery come full cycle.

In this context, the effectiveness of the technology of government always falls back on to the the organizing of the ideal urban national subject as moral subjects themselves. The conduct of the new consumer is thus premised not only upon pragmatic principles in favor of economic growth, but also upon these principles as essential moral imperatives and ethical necessities. Here, we find the final union of the principally conflicting needs of the political and economic systems, and the meeting of confucian morality and marxist ethics. The Chinese Businessmen, among many similar types of tv series and popular films, serves far more than a text reflecting late economic, social changes. It is a rehearsal for the everyday person who, before entering into the presence of others⁴⁵ in real life society, would arrive at a projected definition of the new marketplace situation that carries a distinctive moral character.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 1.

⁴⁶Ibid., 13.

The notion of organized national subject for ideal social conduct can be further substantiated by Mainland avant-garde film theorist Ma Junxiang's proposal of organized viewership. Ma points out that a unique character of film spectatorship has been cultivated since the founding of Communist China.⁴⁷ Ma cites the example of the film "Qiao" (The Bridge) premiered on May 1, 1949 in the city Boyang. Six days later on May 7, the city council organized a panel discussion through the Dongbei Ribao (Northeast Daily) and the Dongbei Film Studio. In that meeting, the film Qiao was praised as speaking on behalf of the proletarian class and therefore an outstanding educational film for the new society of China. Before Qiao was premiered at Xingdu Theatre in Nanjing, over 2,000 workers' representatives from 23 units gathered for a spectacular street procession to celebrate the film. Qiao was also highly appraised in Shanghai. Ma Junxiang concludes that this strong ritualization of viewership via congregation and collective guidance has characterized Chinese cinema since 1949. It is a ritual that "blends together the fictional, mythical and sociological into one performance."⁴⁸ Though viewership today does not always express such highly performative quality as in the early days of New China, the organization of viewership via party guideline, propaganda and journalism has remained prominent throughout. As much as the new urban landscape and bourgeoisie life-style would fascinate the majority viewers, through their congregation in front of the tv sets during prime time family viewing, they anticipate their participation. Together these participants would contribute to a single over-all definition of the new economy.

⁴⁷Ma Yunxiang, "the Art of Language in Revolutionary Cinema." Twenty-first Century Bimonthly 20 (December, 1993), pp. 52-60.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 53.

Here, Erving Goffman provides a helpful vocabulary for the understanding of everyday activities in public spaces by what he calls the presentation of self as a kind of performance.⁴⁹ A performance, Goffman writes, may be defined as all the activities of a given participant at a given occasion which serve to influence in any way any of the other participants."⁵⁰ Using the terms he provides, one can say that Chinese Businessmen as a site of performance by itself cast those who gather around it into the roles of audience and observers on the one hand, and participants / performers on the other. Attached to each role is a "routine" or "part," the repetition of which across time and space forms "social relationship." It can also be understood as a public spectacle that lay out for the spectators the dramaturgical problems that will confront them in the new consumer's society -- such as conflicts between one's social and domestic roles, attitudes toward authority and tradition and so on.

Goffman's definition on social establishment as space "surrounded by fixed barriers to perception" helps to further clarify the significance of a tv series like Chinese Businessmen in the new economic climate in the Mainland. "Within the walls of a social establishment," Goffman writes, "we find a team of performers who cooperate to present to an audience a given definition of the situation. This will include the conception of own team of audience and assumptions concerning the ethos that is to be maintained..." And Goffman calls this "impression management" -- "impression" being "a source of information about unapparent facts and as a means by which the recipients can guide their response to the informant without having to wait for the full consequences of the informant's action to be felt." Viewed this way, the Chinese Businessmen series forms the expressive components of the state's "impression management" of

⁴⁹Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (New York, 1959).

⁵⁰Ibid., 17.

the new economic order, of which a renewed spirit of collectivism is required⁵¹ via the maintenance of moral norms.

Going back to Jin Guantao's analysis of Mao's "On Practice," at the very point of intersection where films and TV series like Chinese Businessmen meet with the maturing market economy of Chinese characteristics, there lies the reinstatement of the Confucianization of socialism. In order to close the gaps resulting from these contradicting messages, and to produce "reformed" national subjects for effective government, the state has to work on a certain kind of "impression management" that would fully utilize the more manifest aspects of the everyday social dramaturgy. And at this moment of history, the gaze of amazement surrounding television drama, still much of a novelty to the mass, plays a unique role in the whole socializing-pedagogic process.

In short, neither the mimetic relation of text to actuality, nor symptomatic, ideological critique that unveils the subtext of domination, alone suffices the job of explaining the interaction of a complex multitude of social, economic, ideological and intellectual forces here and now in the mainland. The choice of theoretical frameworks should be considered from situation to situation. In the case of Chinese Businessmen, what Toby Miller called an "extra-exegetic mode"⁵² of analysis that reads "screen evidence as extra-diegetic historical narrative"⁵³ seems to be more appropriate for a situation that involves the border-crossing of nature versus culture and knowledge versus power.

CONCLUSION

⁵¹This idea is explored in Mainland social science researcher Wang Ying's article "Neo-collectivism and Market Economy with Chinese Characteristics," Twenty-first Century Bimonthly 25 (October, 1994), pp. 11-4.

It seems I have configured my discussion in the second half of this essay in a way that argues for new ways of understanding popular screen texts. But what I am actually concerned is to re-configure the investigation of personhood and social relations in ways that would encompass the here-and-now situations of mainland China in the late 1980s and 1990s. This latest phase of the situation of the self, as suggested above, embodies a set of complex relations: among economic demands, political disciplinary power, textualization via broadly disseminated representational practices, and heterogeneous presentation of the self in everyday life constantly varied according to the interaction of the just said factors. To further examine the Confucianization of Marxism and the Marxist translation of Confucianism, and to go beyond mere philosophical containment, is just the beginning of a huge pending project. It is precisely in the space marked out by the incommensurability of the diverse discourses I have juxtaposed that one can begin to articulate unattempted questions of (inter-)subjectivity, subjectification and objectification in the highly pedagogy-sensitive culture of China.

⁵²Miller, *Well-tempered Self*, p. 62.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 52.

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