"We've Always Worked": Professionalizing Life among White-Collar Women in

Contemporary Urban China

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**Abstract**

Based on 12 months of ethnographic research in Shanghai, *"We've Always Worked"* focuses on the culture of work in today's urban China, and how it has permeated life beyond the workplace to shape bodily training, family, kinship and social relationships among young white-collar women in their twenties and thirties. It integrates studies of work, body, gender, and kinship, investigating how ideas and practices of work reconstitute women's subjectivities, families, and social lives. *"We've Always Worked"* takes its readers on a journey through three spatial locations of urban Chinese white-collar women's lives as observed by the ethnographer in Shanghai—cubicles, spaces of physical training, and homes—without presupposing dichotomies such as the public/private and production/reproduction. In an age of stagnant economic growth and declining fertility, the state and society have put pressure on young women to increase both their productivity and reproductivity. This ethnography examines how white-collar women respond to these pressures and protect their right to work by working hard in and professionalizing almost all domains of their lives. In other words, the statement "We've always worked" not only alludes to the history of Chinese women's participation in the labor force, but also captures how a culture of work has permeated various aspects of their lives in contemporary urban China.

*"We've Always Worked"* contributes to understanding how the embodiment and extension of a hard-work ethic perpetuates the hegemony of the work culture, and has profound impacts on women's bodies and families. Thus, a key aim and contribution of *"We've Always Worked"* is integrating studies of labor with those of gender and family, to explore how work permeates and shapes other aspects of life.

*"We've Always Worked"* not only draws from materials gathered during my year-long ethnographic fieldwork, but also engages historically grounded studies of body, gender, work, and kinship to compare the past and present. As the state and society exert new pressures on young women's productive and reproductive lives, in an era of declining fertility, stagnant economic growth, and changing configurations of work and family, *"We've Always Worked"* examines their responses to neoliberal forms of corporate governmentality and values highlighting self-disciplining, self-responsible, and self-enterprising individuals. Building on relevant existing social-scientific literature on East Asia, East Central Europe, Russia, North America, and beyond, *"We've Always Worked"* contributes to understanding how women adapt to changing urban political economy.

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*To the women in my family*

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**Introduction**

Lucia[1]'s entrance into the multinational marketing service company where I did ethnographic fieldwork was accompanied by a rumor, that she did not disclose her pregnancy to the HR manager on her day of job interview. Once during a lunch break, another young woman in the office, Sarah, leaned close to me and whispered her question: "Did you know that she [Lucia] was the one who did not reveal her pregnancy during her job interview but on her first day at work?!" Three other female colleagues at the table, Tina, Luna, and Sophia, heard Sarah's whisper. They looked surprised with mouths wide open, and exclaimed quietly, "What?! Why would someone do that? Does she even want to keep her job? Doesn't she want to have a career in this place?" Luna responded calmly, "Well, I don't think someone like her will have much professional development here." Nobody suggested that Lucia intentionally lied to her interviewer, but they were astounded to learn that she revealed her pregnancy on her first day at work.

This rumor made me curious about Lucia's side of the story, especially after she moved next to me as my cubicle neighbor. Once during our subway ride after work, Lucia tried to balance herself in the crowd when telling me that her pregnancy was an accident. She did not indicate whether she found out about her pregnancy *after* her job interview. Having reassured me that it was unnecessary to look for an empty seat for her in the rush hour crowd, Lucia shared her anxiety about keeping her job as a pregnant woman:

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[1] Many of my interlocutors preferred English names which are widely used in multinational and private corporations in Shanghai.

> I don't know how long I can keep working here, as I get more pregnant. I want to take maternity leave in the near future, but I know that I cannot do it soon, because of the workload of my team. The company will give me 124 days of maternity leave with some sort of pay, and the Shanghai local government will use my maternity insurance to pay the company for its loss, but I don't know whether I should take more time taking care of the baby, for a year or so, before coming back to work…If I am away for too long, I don't know whether I *can* come back to work. I need to work…I *want* to work!…I cannot be unemployed.

Lucia's statement expressed her strong desire for working. I asked, "Why do you think you need to work, besides for income?" Lucia responded assertively, "My mother told me that she worked until the very last day of her pregnancy, right before giving birth, and it was very common in her time. She told me that as Chinese women, 'we've always worked!'" For the next several months, Lucia kept working more than eight hours a day, right up until she started her leave eight months into her pregnancy.

The statement, "We've always worked," is a powerful one that shows a Chinese woman's nostalgia for the socialist era when women's participation in the labor force outside the family/household was both widespread and unprecedented. In the last four decades since the economic reforms and opening up in the late 1970s, the labor force participation rate for Chinese women has decreased from above 70% (for instance, 73.2% in 1990s) to a little over 60% (61.49% in 2017) (World Bank website 2018). In the post-socialist era, urban Chinese women have experienced aggravated gender-based

discrimination in the workplace, especially after the two-child policy was announced in 2015 and companies became more reluctant to hire women who would require additional maternity leaves if deciding to have more than one child (The Economist website June 2018).

Based on 12 months of ethnographic research in Shanghai, *"We've Always Worked"* focuses on the culture of work in today's urban China, and how it has permeated life beyond the workplace to shape bodily training, family, kinship and social relationships among young white-collar women in their twenties and thirties. It integrates studies of work, body, gender, and kinship, investigating how ideas and practices of work reconstitute women's subjectivities, families, and social lives. *"We've Always Worked"* takes its readers on a journey through three spatial locations of urban Chinese white-collar women's lives as observed by the ethnographer in Shanghai—cubicles, spaces of physical training, and homes—without presupposing dichotomies such as public/private and production/reproduction. In an age of stagnant economic growth and declining fertility, the state and society have put pressure on young women to increase both their productivity and reproductivity. This ethnography examines how white-collar women respond to these pressures and protect their right to work by working hard in and professionalizing almost all domains of their lives. In other words, the statement *"We've always worked"* not only alludes to the history of Chinese women's participation in the labor force, but also captures how a culture of work has permeated various aspects of their lives in contemporary urban China.

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**Situating Women Between Production and Reproduction**

As an anthropologist studying lives of white-collar women in today's urban

China, I found myself running through different domains: work, physical training after

work, and home. The statement "We've always worked" indicated both the penetration of

the culture and ethic of work in various domains of women's lives and the historical

continuity across generations of women with respect to their constant movements across

these domains. The structure of this ethnography seems to take its readers from the

domain of production/work into that of reproduction/home, with an interim chapter on

the culture of women's physical training and struggles between their productive and

reproductive roles. Yet when analyzing the lives of Chinese women, we need to first ask,

are dichotomies such as production/reproduction, work/home, and the public/domestic

applicable to what we are seeing in their lives? Following previous endeavors made by

feminist anthropologists, this section takes a critical look at such commonly held dichotomies.

The dichotomy between the domestic and public was proposed by Michelle Rosaldo (1974) to explain the universality of sexual asymmetry and women's subordination to men in Western societies, in ways similar to the nature/culture opposition proposed by Sherry Ortner (1974). Rosaldo (1974: 23-24) offers an *a priori* definition of the domestic domain based on the mother-child relation, or "those minimal institutions and modes of activity that are organized immediately around one or more mothers and their children." Women are presumably absorbed primarily in domestic activities because of their role as mothers, and the focus of their emotions and attentions is directed toward children and home. Therefore, the predominance of domestic activities and childcare responsibilities that women are absorbed in is assumed to prevent them from participating in economic and political activities outside of the domestic domain. This argument that the mother-child relationship dominates women's lives restricted in the domestic domain and that it is a domain defined by such relationship seems tautological (Collier and Yanagisako 1987: 18). Rosaldo (1980: 404) later came to share Reiter's (1975) view of the domestic/public opposition as an ideological product and legacy of the Victorian heritage that "cast the sexes in dichotomous and contrastive terms" in Western societies (see also Collier and Yanagisako 1987: 19).

Despite Rosaldo's (1980) reconceptualization of her initial proposal and misgivings about a distinction that she came to view as the product of a particular social formation, the domestic/public dichotomy continued to be used in anthropology and related disciplines "as if it constituted an empirically observable, uniform difference in

the orientations and interests of men and women in most, if not all, societies"

(Yanagisako 1987: 88). It remained productive for feminist anthropologists to begin

questioning the assumption of the universality of a domestic sphere organized by the

affective and moral attributes of the mother-child bond, "to which other functions—

economic, political, and ideological—might be added without changing its primary

'natural' role of human reproduction" (Collier and Yanagisako 1987: 5). Scholars who

were concerned with cultural variations of gender conceptions and women's lives began

to relate observed differences in women's experiences across cultures to different forms

of economic, political, and cultural organization, which led them to question the

naturalness of the domestic sphere formed by the mother-child bond and the legitimacy

of male authority. For instance, Goody (1976) offers a historical account of the evolution

of the domestic domain, by showing how production processes and property

transmissions shape domestic groups, and Bourdieu (1977) observes that people in

particular societies reproduce relations of production and social inequality through

marriage strategies (Collier and Yanagisako 1987:6).

Anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern (1984) take issue with the taken-for-

granted association of women with children, reproduction, and the domestic sphere,

which confines them to a lower order of social integration in the West. According to

Strathern (1984), western women run the danger of appearing as less than full persons,

because they are seen as belonging to the narrower world of the domestic group rather

than to the wider social world of public affairs. Thus, in Western societies, women are

regarded as childlike and dependent, as the subsistence of households is dependent on

their husbands' income, and they feel liberated when able to work outside of the domestic

sphere that subordinates them. This rendition of Western gender stereotypes is spelled out in order to bring to light Melanesian notions of domesticity (Strathern 1984: 31): in Hagen, those in the domestic domain are not regarded as less than adult, incapable of autonomous action. Hagen cultural symbols of domesticity and femininity do not resemble those in the West, and the sense of liberation (if any) for Hagen women would not mean being uprooted from their domestic involvement. From the perspective of Hagen notions of personhood that do not tie adulthood to independence and that render socialization a critical means to children's maturing into adulthood, Strathern argues against treating domesticity as what subordinates women universally across cultures.

Meanwhile, feminist scholars have argued for the need to develop a theory of relations of reproduction, since Marxist theory places too much of an emphasis on modes and relations of production (Collier and Yanagisako 1987: 21). For these scholars, women are cast as 'means of reproduction' for not only biological reproduction but also the reproduction of social systems in both capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. Harris and Young (1981: 113), for instance, propose to salvage the concept of reproduction by isolating different meanings of the concept:

> Here we have isolated three senses of the concept of reproduction for discussion which seem to us to cover the major uses of the term and to illustrate the confusion that has resulted from their conflation. We feel it is necessary to distinguish social reproduction, that is, the overall reproduction of a particular social formation from the reproduction of labor itself; and further to distinguish the latter from the specific forms of reproduction.

It would be too limiting to talk of the reproduction of labor in itself, and more accurate to talk of the reproduction of adequate bearers of specific social relationships through the labor of women (Harris and Young 1981: 117). Along these lines, Yanagisako (2002: 12) notes that by 'reproduction' feminist scholars mean more than the biological processes through which new generations of humans are produced; they also mean "the social production of humans with labor capacity," crucial to which is the domestic work of women that nurtures and socializes other future workers. Feminist scholars have argued that women's work in the domestic domain includes not just the housework, but also their emotional labor in creating a home that gives meaning to wage-labor outside of home (Yanagisako 2002: 12).

Yet underlying such statements is the assumption that the family is treated by people as a refuge from the demands of work, the commodification of labor, and the market at large. By studying the role of kinship in family firms in Italy, Yanagisako (2002:12) regards the "relations, sentiments, and values" from the domestic domain as integral to capitalist production and the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. Similar to Yanagisako's endeavor to bring attention to what is assumed to come out of the domestic/reproductive domain to penetrate that of production, Kondo (1990) investigates how family values of obligation and sentiment shape Japanese small businesses that themselves grow out of the corporate form of kinship. The last chapter of my dissertation reverses the direction of influence and asks: What if the domestic domain is not just about relations, sentiments, and values that constitute a refuge from work?

What if the reproductive domain is very much shaped by what one sees in the productive domain and transformed into another sphere of work?

To understand the multifaceted lives of white-collar women that I interacted with in Shanghai, the first step is for me to challenge analytical separation between the domain of home/domesticity/reproduction and that of work/publicity/production. Categories and divisions growing out of the analytical separation, have produced the following sets of binary oppositions (Collier and Yanagisako 1987:25). They at best culturally and institutionally meaningful only in some aspects of Western societies, and these structural-functionally differentiated spheres of activity cannot be treated as universals existing across cultures and imposed onto them, or even assumed to be universal in the West:

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|---|---|
| material goods | people |
| technology | biology |
| male or gender neutral | female or gendered |
| wage work | non-wage work |
| factory | family |
| money | love |

In some Western folk models, each side of these pairs is linked respectively to the productive and reproductive, or public and domestic, spheres. And we can add more pairs, such as rationality and sentimentality (see Yanagisako 2002), that map onto the larger dichotomy between production and reproduction. Scholars debate whether these analytical distinctions are reflective of cultural categories in relation to the emergence of state, formation of class, and rise of industrial capitalism in history (Reiter 1975; Sacks

1975; John Comaroff 1987; see also McKinnon and Cannell 2013: 13), and others question their utility in analyzing Western societies (e.g. Yanagisako 2002). Following Yanagisako's (1987: 89) lead to see models of kinship and gender domains as "the products of a particular culture undergoing a particular historical transformation," I do not want to assume that the terms western social theorists use can be applied to China matter-of-factly, without examining the historical processes that have produced these concepts and their social implications in the first place. This will be the mission of the following chapter.

**Transposable Habitus Between Production and Reproduction**

This ethnography takes its readers from the domain of work/production to that of home/reproduction, with the intention to show how the culture of work—such as its conceptual and practical apparatus—permeates women's lives at home and training of their bodies. What happens beyond the cubicle in bodily training and at home is very much shaped by the kinds of value, mentality, ethics, and culture inside the cubicle. A habitus of work, overtime work, and hard-work is transposable and transposed from the office to gym and home.

Bourdieu (1990: 190) defines habitus as "a system of predispositions, a habitual way of being, that becomes inculcated in the body as a result of the objective conditions of daily existence (for example, economic and class conditions) as well as of more condensed efforts to instill them" (see also Brownell 1995: 11). This notion of habitus inherits from Mauss's (1979) notion of the "techniques of the body" defined vis-a-vis the "total man" that is constituted by the assemblage of physio-psycho-sociological actions

and meanings. Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to overcome the traditional opposition between objectivist and subjectivist approaches in social theory: Habitus is in fact a process of habituation, by which everyday practices of the body train oneself to be oriented to the world she inhabits in particular ways (Brownell 1995: 12)[2].

We can see a kind of "work culture" constituted by the assemblage of physio-psycho-sociological actions and meanings—to use Mauss's term—and everyday practices that train oneself to be oriented to her world in specific ways that emphasize the value and ethic of work. After white-collar women finish work and overtime work in corporate offices—the subject matter of Chapter Two and Three—some of them go to train their bodies and socialize with other bodies—accompanied by the encouragement, advice, admonishment, and help from each other—to enact the belief that core muscles embody self-disciplined, hard-working, and striving individuals (Yan 2011). Many of these women who have the time and means to train bodies after work are single, untethered from familial obligations to serve husbands and rear children. Many married women with children are already in a time bind as they juggle tasks between home and work, and I show in Chapter Five how they transform domestic spaces into spaces of work by transplanting notions of efficiency and rationality from the workplace.

In the domains of work, bodily training, and home in the exhausting, sleep-deprived lives of my white-collar women interlocutors, we often see them bring into

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[2] Drawing on Mauss and Bourdieu, Brownell (1995: 10-11) develops the notion of "body culture", or the "culture of the body", to mean "everything that people do with their bodies…and the elements of culture that shape their doing." Body culture as a broad term includes not only daily practices of fitness but also the way these practices are trained into the body, the way the body is publicly displayed, and the lifestyle expressed in such display. Chapter Four on women's training of core muscles after work is inspired by Brownell's development of Mauss and Bourdieu.

action tropes of self-improvement grounded in neoliberal values. In Chapter Two I analyze how the neoliberal, enterprising self is gendered in locally particular and meaningful ways, by showing experiences of my white-collar women interlocutors negotiating their relationships to the state and private sector when their experiences take advantage of the stability offered by the former and embrace the mobility advocated by the latter. In Chapter Three, I demonstrate how corporate govermentality—forms of managerial and social control in the workplace—rationalize overtime work, and how women endure, accommodate, and resist it. Chapter Four on women's training of core muscles recognizes an appeal of bodily aesthetics that relates to tropes of self-improvement promising the possibility of change through bodily training.

In his *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*, Sewell (2005) attempts to bridge social sciences and history partly through Bourdieu's theory of habitus. Sewell (2005: 140-3) breaks habitus into two elements—resource and schema—before pointing out the transposability of schemas. To transpose is to cause something to change in form or content by passing it from one domain into another, and such capacity to transpose and extend schemas to new contexts is defined as agency. Structures and structural complexes—such as production and reproduction in the case of this ethnography—intersect and overlap, and schema—such as an ethic of work—can be appropriated from one structural complex and applied to another. Sewell contends:

> Structures, then, are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that
> empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social
> action. But their reproduction is never automatic. Structures are at risk, at least to

some extent, in all of the social encounters they shape—because structures are multiple and intersecting, because schemas are transposable, and because resources are polysemic and accumulate unpredictably.

**Women and the Changing Chinese Family**

During my fieldwork I observed that white-collar women heavily relied on their parents and parents-in-law for traditional forms of domestic labor and childcare (Epilogue), so that they could work hard and late in offices (Chapters Two and Three), train their bodies after work (Chapter Four), and focus on the disciplining and education of children when they were at home (Chapter Five). Although family life comes last in this ethnography, existing literature on kinship and the Chinese family, especially studies that intersect with gender, has helped me frame my interpretations of ethnographic materials.

Although gender categories in China are influenced by its contact with the West, Chinese gender concepts clearly follow their own course of development. For instance, Brownell and Wasserstrom (2002) review studies on the hierarchical relationships between male and female bodies, and contend that social gender insofar as women undertaking the roles of daughter, wife, and mother was prioritized over anatomical sex in traditional Chinese cosmology. Barlow (1994) theorizes the Chinese category of "woman" and traces categorical shifts in different periods of the 20th century. Two neologisms as Chinese translations for the word "women"— *nüxing* (女性) and *funü* (妇女)—were created when sex-identity politics first emerged in the May Fourth Movement

(1919). The chaste, domestic wife was transformed in the revolutionary era from a symbol of a civilized, prosperous empire to a symbol of a backward and weak semi-colonial nation. Republican-era reformers (1912-49) used the term *nüxing*—a Western-inspired concept—to name the newly discovered transcendent category of Woman. Barlow (1994: 28) states,

> Essentially, 'she' was discovered when the reformers started to see themselves through Western eyes and decided that a major reason for China's relative weakness and backwardness was that the female population was brutally oppressed and living in a condition of virtual slavery. Before this time…the seclusion of women from public life and the binding of their feet had been regarded as a symbol  of purity and morality. In the Republican era, however, these previously admired women became symbols of backwardness and the targets of modernizing efforts.

Also, the category of the backward Chinese Woman in need of modernizing emerged in tandem with the category of the modern Chinese Man who was seen as emasculated and needing to change to become national leaders (Barlow 1994: 90). In the socialist era following the founding of the PRC, gender became an unmarked and neutralized category, whose role as a vessel of self-identity was greatly diminished and whose significance for politics was lost (Yang 1999: 46). Terms such as *nuxing* were rejected as 'bourgeois' and considered inappropriate for the androgynous ideals of the Maoist period (Barlow 1994: 31). I will look in depth at the changing configurations of gender from the

socialist to the post-socialist era in Chapter Five by participating in the scholarly debate on the (re)naturalization of gender.

Chapter Five of this ethnography looks at my white-collar women interlocutors in the context of their family lives. I now briefly review transformations of the Chinese family in the second half of the 20th century as the background of my ethnographic research. Given the primacy of the family as the foundation of Chinese society, family change has long been a central concern among scholars of China. Wolf (1985:192) treats the Chinese family writ-small, the domestic unit, as the basic and most important social grouping among Chinese people. Rofel (1999:226) observes that anthropologists and popular writers of all sorts have invoked kinship to explain various aspects of life in China.

Challenges to the traditional Chinese big-family ideal and Confucian notions of filial piety intensified during the Maoist era—1949 to late 70s—with new legal regulations governing marriage practices and the redistribution of family property (Yan 2003). According to Baker (1979) and Davis and Harrell (1993), both Nationalist and Communist Party reforms in the first half of the 20th century attacked Chinese patriarchy. After the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continued to undermine the ideal of the big, extended family and the existence of strong lineages, by launching land reforms and instituting the Marriage Law of 1950. Although the CCP still advocated mutual responsibility between parents and children in its marriage laws, it dissolved the economic foundation—land ownership—of big families and strong lineages, and added conjugal values of companionship, love, and support to advocate simple (nuclear) family in the Marriage Law of 1950. Davis and Harrell (1993: 1) note,

> [T]he collectivization of the economy and elimination of private property
> destroyed much of the economic motivation that previously shaped family
> loyalties, and the frontal attack on ancestor worship and lineage organization
> struck directly at the cultural and religious core of the extended family.

Then, the Cultural Revolution from the 60s to 70s did as much to strengthen the family as it did to weaken it. The 'family head' system and parental authoritarianism were attacked, on the one hand, and yet on the other hand, ordinary Chinese found it more necessary to rely on family and kinship relations when facing the often repressive egalitarianism promoted by the communist regime. Overall, although the Communist state took over what was considered to be the family's responsibilities, and equality between men and women as labor force participants rose, patrilineal principles of the Chinese family, especially manifest in the politics of marriage, had not been cast aside (e.g., Croll 1981).

Studies of Chinese kinship echo the critique and reconfiguration of kinship in anthropology. The importations of British anthropology on Africa into studies of China (see Chun 1996), such as the lineage paradigm established by Freedman (1958) and the overall male focus that it represents, later gets critiqued by feminist anthropologists. Feminists critiques raise important questions about power relations in kin networks and trace the class and gender inequalities in kinship, highlighting the ability of women to maneuver within patriarchal families and form relationships in and beyond domestic spaces of natal families and webs of in-laws (Wolf 1972, 1985; Rofel 1999: 227; see also Watson and Ebrey 1991; Mann 1994; Silber 1994; Stafford 2009). Besides, these studies

challenge an overarching view of a singular "Chinese" family, and differentiate the kinds of personhood that women imagine and enact in kin relations from those of men. Studies that move the focus of Chinese kinship beyond official models of patrilineality and into the realms of practical kinship (Wolf 1972; Wolf and Huang 1980; Stockard 1989; Judd 1989; Sommer 2015) enable analysts to see and conceptualize Chinese women not solely as victims of patriarchy but also as agents in the everyday making of kinship and social relationships.

Yan's (2003) groundbreaking ethnography of rural China documents family change in the past several decades from the multigenerational household to the nuclear family, including "an increase in youth autonomy, a decline of parental power, and a rise of young women as active agents in family politics," as well as the rising importance of notions of romantic love, free choice in spouse selection, conjugal independence, and individual property (Yan 2003:8). In his description of the rise of girl power and youth culture in contributing to the decline of parental authority and patriarchy in China since 1949, Yan (2006) observes that rural young women transitioning from teenage daughters to daughters-in-law have played increasingly active roles in shifting the intergenerational power differentials in particular dimensions of private life such as mate-choice, negotiation of bride wealth, post-marital residence, and family division.

The emergence of conjugality based on intimacy and affection shifts the power dynamics between the older and younger generations, contributing to the waning of parental power (Yan 2003: 88). The rising status of the young couple in the domestic sphere leads Yan (2003:109) to argue that "the horizontal conjugal tie has replaced the vertical parent-son relationship as the central axis of family relations in most

households." In other words, parental authority and power have been challenged to benefit the younger generation of married couples.

In the post-Mao era, economic reforms that started in the 1980s dismantled the People's Communes that were the core political and economic units in the Maoist era, subcontracted most of farmland to individual families, and shifted the economy away from collectivization towards marketization, privatization, and entrepreneurship. Davis and Harrell (1993:7) bring to light that the post-Mao era Chinese family has become noticeably smaller, partly due to the one-child-per-family policy and declining fertility. The one-child policy that was first implemented in the early 1980s has, for more than three decades, controlled fertility and the size of the nuclear family, and even discouraged marriage among many women (Fong 2004; Greenhalgh 2008; Fincher 2014). Yet, they contend that the Chinese family has not necessarily become more nuclear, for filial obligations to parents (Whyte 1997) and mutual obligations within kin-based, geographically dispersed networks (Davis 1993) have not declined. Davis (1993) notes the continuing salience of multigenerational households that sustain economic and social ties to kin, under conducive material conditions such as limited living spaces and family incomes in cities. Jankowiak (1992, 2002) writes about practices of parental affection in the post-Mao era, while Ikels (1993) discovers new "intergenerational contracts" that highlight the binding nature of exchange dynamics across generations. Though the majority of this ethnography focuses on lives of young urban Chinese women, I bring to surface other people in their families in the Epilogue, especially their parents and parents-in-law whose support enabled them to work hard in and professionalize various domains of their lives.

**"Eating, Living, and Laboring with": Some Methodological Revelations and Reflections**

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I found it hard to understand white-collar women's talk about their work lives in cubicles and skyscrapers, let alone how work shaped other parts of their lives. As a student in their eyes, I could not imagine how they experienced work and its wide impact; nor could I get a sense of it by asking questions and interviewing (see Briggs 1986; Sanjek 2014). Offering an explanation to the anthropologist requires, at the same time, detachment and attention on the part of the interlocutor: h/she must disengage from the immediate surroundings and yet observe them acutely. When drawing a clear picture of a social world for someone who is unfamiliar with it, i.e. the anthropologist, such simultaneous detachment and engagement also requires the interlocutor to objectify the world around him/her and present it in abstract terms. Nevertheless, many people understand their lives not by extracting meaning from them or giving them determinate forms but in concrete everyday situations, and their perceptions of the world around them are not fixed but vary according to relations among the persons involved and the circumstances they are involved in (Ogasawara 1998: 13-14). That is why interviews may not be a good way to obtain ethnographic knowledge sometimes, because reality cannot be separated from its representation made by people whose actions and explanations of their actions are context dependent.

During my fieldwork in Shanghai, I employed participant observation to immerse myself in domains of work, bodily training, and home, with the help of semi-

structured, in-depth, open-ended interviews when I needed to hear my interlocutors recount their life stories and discuss issues that they cared about. There were three phases of my fieldwork that correspond to the three parts of my dissertation. First, I conducted participant observation in two corporations for six months in total, first working as a brand promoter in a privately-run women's fashion company and then as a business consultant for a multinational corporation providing marketing services for internationally-known cosmetic brands. For urban white-collar women, work not only occupied the greatest amount of time in their everyday lives but also defined their identities. It was only through my immersion in the workplace that I could become a good observer of their lives in an intersubjective way (Packer 2011). My white-collar women co-workers who became my interlocutors captured my immersive research by the phrase "eating, living, and laboring with" (*tongchi tongzhu tonglaodong* 同吃同住

同劳动). I recruited female informants from these two workplace settings, where the majority of employees were women aged between mid-twenties and early thirties. Most of my informants were not born in Shanghai, and migrated to the city for college and post-graduate education and work and settled down. Chapter Two and Chapter Three presents the lived experiences of white-collar work and overtime work among these women, drawing on knowledge I gained through my immersion in these workplace settings and beyond.

Second, at the same time as my participant observation in the workplace, I followed some white-collar women after work to a pilates studio in downtown Shanghai, where I observed how an ethic of hard-work was embodied in their training

of core muscles, and how social relationships were produced as women disciplined themselves and one another to become hardworking subjects. Chapter Four draws from my participant observations of women's physical training, to interrogate how the contemporary culture of work—that emphasized the ethical value of hard-work— extended beyond the workplace to shape women's bodily aesthetics, subjectivities, and relationships. The third part of my fieldwork interrogated the family lives of white-collar women. Drawing from my interviews with women about their families and observations in their domestic spaces, Chapter Five explores how contemporary family life in urban China was "professionalized", as women made use of conceptual and practical tools common in the workplace when performing domestic and reproductive labor and thereby reproduced tenets of efficiency and rationality that were transplanted from the workplace and came to saturate domestic spaces. The Epilogue describes the people who play key roles in the lives of my white-collar women interlocutors—husbands, mothers, and mothers-in-law.

*Cubed in a Global City*

On the first day at my job in a multinational marketing service corporation, I found the endless rows and columns of cubicles constituted a world of black, white, and dark gray. Black computers and laptops occupied cubicles that were separated by white wooden boards, and dark grey stairways stood at the corners of each floor. The Human Resources Manager came to greet me with a professional smile. She walked fast, two steps in one, as she delivered a speech to me about the company in a gentle and yet fast-paced voice that felt like continuous short waves of spring breeze. She showed me how

those innumerable cubicles were divided by departments, projects, and teams. Since this company provided marketing-related services for almost all cosmetic brands, the majority of employees were young women in their twenties and thirties. Ong (2008, 194) observes that foreign businesses in China turn to women to represent the global and cosmopolitan to the Chinese public, and characterizes white-collar women as carving "a role for themselves as domesticators and framers of the foreign for the Chinese domestic market." Rather than accentuate perceived feminine attributes and social skills working as receptionists and secretaries, those white-collar women working for the marketing service company took positions as business consultants, data analysts, and account managers (managing the company's relationships with clients), taking advantage of their college and graduate educational backgrounds, foreign language skills, and professional wit.

People stared at their computers and laptops, eyeballs almost touching the screens sometimes. It felt like a world frozen in time with very little human movement, except the sound of people hurriedly tapping their keyboards and clicking their mice. There was no individual office, but directors of departments worked in cubicles as well, twice or three times the size of the others. Despite a sense of hierarchy reflected in people's titles—that one could not see but only hear occasionally—and distinctions of cubicle size that were also hard to see, the company seemed to promote a flat corporate structure with its spatial organization, so that an observer would not distinguish status differentials among employees at first glance. In a similar corporate context, Kunda's (2006) ethnographic study of a tech firm demonstrates how the firm's spatial configuration imposes notions of openness, flexibility, and informality on its employees, to minimize status distinction and encourage them to increase face-to-face exposure to one another.

Rows of green plants on the aisles separating small blocks of cubicles brought liveliness to this world of white, grey, and black. Besides the tapping of keyboards and the clicking of mice emanating from the cubicles, I heard a gentler sound which came from a small but delicate piece of rockery standing next to the big glass door that separated the dark work area for employees from the well-lit public area for guests. A little spring flowed down from the rocks, the rippling sound of which felt like someone playing a harp. Bits of artificial "nature" were grafted into the cubicles, but access to the real nature outside became a means through which people were subtly distinguished in terms of status in the company. Those working near the windows were account managers who spent more time meeting clients outside of the company than crunching numbers, making phone calls, and writing emails in their cubicles. Those who spent less time inside compared to others, however, could enjoy natural sun light shining through a few trees and windows.

Therefore, contrary to Kunda's (2006) observation of a tech firm and what I was told by the HR manager showing me around, status distinction and hierarchy were present and made explicit by cubicle dwellers' access to nature and natural light. As Saval (2014) observes in his social historical account of the cubicle, large windows and natural light were crucial in elevating white-collar work in a cultural sense, suggesting that office workers were indeed performing a kind of special labor for which light, airy conditions were de rigueur. It was important to maintain an office workforce that could imagine itself to be above and beyond factory work, and for that reason, amenities were ensured to be put in place to make white-collar workers feel that they were part of a glamorous enterprise. In addition to being close to natural light and windows that were

luxuries for high-ranking cubicle dwellers, the status of account managers was elevated by inhabiting cubicles in proximity to the managerial and executive class, which encouraged them to aspire to those positions.

Artifacts on people's desks conveyed a work ethic. Almost every computer and laptop was put on top of racks, boxes, or books so that people did not have to lower their heads all day and hurt their necks and spines due to long hours of computer work. Small plants were put next to computer screens with the hope of reducing radiation that people received from the computers. Some laid out notepads, notebooks, and pens for occasionally scratching down what they had just heard from their colleagues and supervisors. Computers were typically on all day, providing a constant flow of background noise, such as quiet humming and spurts of keyboard clicks interspersed with beeps of arriving and departing e-mail and Wechat messages (Wechat was used more often than email for communication among employees and oftentimes between them and supervisors). Some brought their lunch in bags; others left snacks, mostly healthy ones such as fruits and nuts, on their desks so that they could have something to chew on whenever they needed to be energized. Some displayed on their desks trophies they got from games and competitions held in the company.

An anthropologist studying the white-collar culture should look at the workplace itself, which is a site of not only capitalist but also cultural production by workers (Wills 1978; see also Upadhya 2016). Workplaces are "powerful loci for structuring socioeconomic status and identity, as informed by cultural, symbolic, and economic capital" (Freeman 2000, 48–9; see also Bourdieu 1977). If I were to adopt Kunda's (2006) distinction between organizational and non-organizational self that was made

through artifactual display in the workplace, I would say that there was nothing on their desks that did not point to their organizational self. A repeated theme that Kunda (2006: 196) observed in a tech firm's office space was the relationship of the individual to the company:

> The catchy insights that decorate office spaces reflect the image of the organizational self that their residents wish to convey. Such statements combine role embracement and role distancing. For many, the image is that of a strong individual surviving in a hard, competitive, often irrational world: it is at once the manifestation of the entrepreneurial spirit prescribed by the member role and a criticism of the company and its way of life.

Through artifactual display in their cubicles, people were eager to show their embracing of their organizational roles. For instance, I did not see any framed family picture on a desk, which would serve as a permanent indication of one's non-organizational self, although women quite often shared with each other family pictures on their phones during lunch breaks. Both conscious design of the office space and implicit ways of how the space was actually utilized by cubicle dwellers spoke to the theme of disciplined work and organizationally affiliated selves.

The number of pendants and lights in the office was not proportional to the number of cubicle dwellers. If one spent a whole day here, the touch of sunlight would feel refreshing and invigorating. Air circulation was poor, and later I heard people complain about office syndromes developed by staying more than eight hours per day

inside. After working here for some time, I became close with Sarah, a young woman in her late twenties who always dragged me out of the cubicles for a walk late in the afternoon, when she could not bear with "sitting in front of a computer and fixating one's eyes on the screen" any more. She once said:

> I do not feel comfortable in this environment…Shortly after I started working here, I always got lost and circled around the same area again and again, not being able to find my desk. There is not enough air circulating in such a small and crowded area, for so many people to breath…Work is very exhausting, but time and space for people to rest is very limited. The boss does not allow us to rest on our desks.

I heard other women complaining about the negative health impacts of their jobs, such as not breathing fresh air for the majority of a workday and their necks and backs hurting so much after sitting for hours and hours in front of computers.

Work in the cubicles not only jeopardized their health but also reduced their ability to socialize with each other and with the world outside. Sarah continued:

> I cannot see what is happening in the outside world every day, as if I am completely cut off from the outside … Although there are a few comfortable chairs under warm light in the middle of each floor— you know, the multifunctional areas where you can use the printers, get water from the water fountain, and put your lunchbox in the fridge—those areas are not separated from

the work areas. It's okay to make a short phone call or discuss with your colleagues about work for a short period of time when you are printing or getting water, but to have a moment of rest there? No! Our dining hall upstairs is not a place for socializing either. You see how small it is! We have to grab a table and eat and leave quickly so others can sit down and have lunch.

In his social historical account of how the modern office cubicle, came into being, Saval (2014) observes that it was characterized as boring and tedious, and yet simultaneously respected as the ground for an indispensable twentieth-century discourse of the upward mobility of the middle-class. Despite such prestige associated with those who worked in offices, white-collar work might as well have been as numbing and repetitive as factory labor. A sense of being watched loomed large in the process of white-collar work, so much so that the distinction between manual and non-manual labor, or between blue- and white-collar, became less easy to draw. Despite intense supervision over all kinds of labor under the capitalist regime, the office gradually took precedence over the factory. As office managers and employees served as active agents in the promotion of business, the office started to be appraised as a necessary economic factor.

The white collar, who coordinated business activities into smoothly working units inside organizations of enormous size and power, rose to dignity. This was especially visible in skyscrapers that have remained as one of the most peculiarly white-collar institutions, "much more a symbol of the prowess, even ruthlessness, of American-style capitalism than…an especially tall collection of boring offices" (Saval 2014: 87). In Shanghai, skyscrapers are viewed as objects of aspiration: the rise of China since the

economic reforms and opening up in the late 1970s is crystalized in the financial zone of Shanghai's Pudong District burgeoning with skyscrapers.

Since the late 1970s and early 1980s[3], market-oriented reforms instituted by the national government have strengthened Shanghai's ties to the world, and the city has not only retained its domestic leadership position but also become one of the world's major economic and financial centers. Policies of economic reforms in post-socialist China have highlighted globalization as a central component to the nation's modernization goals, although cities such as Shanghai were quite globalized already a century ago in semi-colonized China (Yan 2002; Duthie 2005). Many residents in Shanghai, whether they were born here or not, see the city as built by corporations with a global focus, and take great pride in its global history prior to the Communist Revolution in 1949 and in

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[3]The history of Shanghai captures several of the most critical socioeconomic transformations in China over the last several centuries. The thirteenth century through the Opium War (1839-1842) saw the city emerge as a trading center of local, regional, and eventually limited international significance, when it was serving as a transshipment point for goods circulating between China's hinterland and Southeast Asia. Then as one of the initial five treaty ports forced open to global commerce in the late 19th century, Shanghai underwent intensive forms of globalization from the 1840s to the 1940s, and quickly incorporated many elements of Western capitalist modernity. By the early 20th century, Shanghai had already grown from a small coastal agricultural town into an industrial, trading, and financial center of the Far East and the world. After 1949, Shanghai became a leader in economic and political changes of the newly established People's Republic of China. Several decades of socialist transformations (1950s through the early 1980s) did not completely cut the city off from international currents, but rendered it much more firmly enmeshed in the national political and economic order, and from the 1950s to 1980s, its new state-owned economy dominated Chinese industry. Benefiting from a globalized culture that was first established in the late 19th and early 20th century, and more importantly, from China's economic reforms and opening up in the early 1980s, Shanghai has secured its position in China as the window to the world and the world to China. Starting in the early 1980s when economic policies began to lure specific types of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into east coast cities in China, the center of the economy in Shanghai has been shifted away from manufacturing to service industries such as finance and technology.

Shanghai's leading role in the economic reforms and opening up in late 20th century China.

As a city "hungry for the future," Shanghai's cosmopolitanism—"cultural crossings and openness to the outside"—is deeply tied to its commercial importance (Greenspan 2014: 1, 117). It is widely acknowledged that the standard language in the innermost circle of corporate Shanghai is English, when the middle circle speaks Mandarin and the outermost circle speaks the Shanghai dialect, because foreign, jointly-run, and state-owned enterprises concentrate in the innermost and middle circles and many people working and living in Shanghai are from all over China—as were my interlocutors—and around the world[4]. White-collar as an urban professional subject distinct from the socialist revolutionary cadre of the Maoist era, emerged extensively in cities like Shanghai after the state initiated economic reforms and opening up in 1978. The white-collar social identity in Shanghai is simultaneously produced by global capitalism and deeply situated in national and local political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts.

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[4] Shanghai has always been a city of sojourners, shaped by people permanently on the move, and this hybrid identity of being both of the city and outside of it extends throughout social classes (Greenspan 2014: 160, 175). Shanghai as a cosmopolitan metropolis is at once intensely global—playing a welcoming host to a myriad of wandering populations—and also solidly and exclusively entrenched in a particular historical, cultural, and geographic location. The city's modernity is defined by the friction between these two seemingly contradictory states, as a place where "one can be both absolutely at home, and at the same time, forever adrift" (Greenspan 2014: 178-9).

*"She is Writing a Novel" and "We are Part of the History"*

Women who were my interlocutors in Shanghai represented "not a geographically bounded 'community' in the traditional sense of a physical locality" (Freeman 2000: 18), but rather a constituency formed by individuals who had migrated from various cities in China to Shanghai and commuted to work and back home from different corners of the city every day. The mobility of my interlocutors introduced a new wrinkle to critiques of the traditional ethnographic frame "in which the anthropologist's power and unique gaze are embodied in large part through her travel to (and within) far-off places and her ability to depict her subject in their fixed place in space if not in time" (Freeman 2000: 20). The knowledge I obtained from the women around me was much influenced by the dynamics of fieldwork, in which the gender and age of myself as the researcher was an important operating factor. We were all women and close in age, which made it easier for them to establish rapport with and trust in me. More importantly, they saw me going through similar struggles in the life stage we were at as young women, and offered me advice that was rooted in their own life experiences. One could say that my account is partial, "screened through the narrator's eye/I" (Kondo 1990:8), and yet I would argue that such partiality is the essence of the processual and emergent nature of ethnographic inquiry and any process of making theory.

The complexity and texture of everyday life cannot be encompassed by theoretical models relying on "organizational structures, 'typical' individuals, referential meanings, or invocations of collective nouns" (Kondo 1990:8), in ways similar to how standard definitions of ethnography and fieldwork in the discipline of anthropology fail to

be grasped by an anthropologist's interlocutors. A month into fieldwork, I decided to check in with my interlocutors to see whether they were comfortable with my presence and clear about my research agenda. A woman named Jaycee—who interviewed me and gave me the job in a multinational corporation—raised her concern immediately:

> After I have seen what you are doing here and with us for a while, I am still a bit afraid of the thing called fieldwork. When I was interviewing you, I asked whether you were working here to study us. You answered that you were not studying anyone in particular like a scientist studying rats in a biology lab. You said you wanted to experience and understand young women's work lives and to get to know us personally. I am still wondering, are you observing everything about us and what is your purpose?

Although I attempted to explain as clearly as I could what anthropology, fieldwork, and my research was during the interview that made Jaycee interested in having an anthropologist on the team and producing something other than project reports and PowerPoints, Jaycee's rather blunt questions in front of everyone made it necessary for me to explain better. Instead of providing a well thought out answer just to Jaycee, I invited everyone in the group to a lunch that I turned into an informal discussion about my fieldwork.

A young woman on our team named Erica always inquired about the progress of my fieldwork with excitement. She often asked me at the end of a workday, when she knew that I would head home to write up some notes from my conversations with women

here during the day, "So, am I going to become a character in your novel?" Not only did she assume the product of doing ethnography would be a novel, her interest in my "novel" drove her to keep a journal full of interesting stories either from her life or other people's lives she had observed. Both Erica and another young woman named Luna cared much about how I would portray them in my "novel," and asked regularly, "I am a very good character, right?" I would tell them that they were very beautiful and nice women in my "novel," and yet Luna was not easily satisfied. "I want the character based on me to be slender. And she does not eat as much as I do every day," Luna smiled naughtily with her eyes squeezed into two thin lines on her round face. Other women at the table laughed hearing what Luna said, and before I started to explain anything about my fieldwork, took turns to express how they would like me to write characters based on them in my "novel." The discussion culminated when Luna asked what would happen if someone bought my novel and turned it into a movie or TV show.

Before I had any chance to answer Jaycee's concern, which was my purpose of the group lunch, Luna gave her own answer to the question:

She is not here to *study* us, like biologists studying rats in labs. She is here working with us because she needs knowledge on things that we know better and she wants to be informed and inspired by what she sees in our lives. Each of us will be a character in her novel, and others—even those who kind of know us— would not recognize us immediately when reading it. But, if the novel gets turned into a TV show or movie, each of us can, after some adjustment, act out our characters just by being who we are. Is that right?

Isn't this the perfect way to understand how realistic an ethnographer can be in her work? I could not think of a better answer than that.

I said to them later during the lunch, "Since I am here with you all, our lives are intertwined and impact one another's. I am also part of the novel, and cannot write it as if I was somehow looking at you all from the above as an outsider." Jaycee gave me a polite smile, which I took as a sign of her satisfaction with how her concerns had been addressed. Another woman named Tina offered her own understanding of my work and said to everyone, "She is not studying us. She is recording our stories, and…She is turning every one of us into part of the history. *We* are becoming part of the history." The others fell silent for a moment, and I was impressed by my interlocutors' understanding of my work as an anthropologist. My hope in this ethnography is turning these women's lives into part of the history, of labor, body, gender, and kinship in modern China, and my writing would not have been possible without the inspirations and knowledge they contributed.

Jaycee's question of whether I was "studying" the people around me also reveals a common paradigm of scientific research by which a researcher takes him/her outside of what is being studied for the purpose of obtaining a more or less "objective" view, a paradigm that anthropological research—just as much scientific, if not more— rejects. The anthropologist, similar to her interlocutors, contends with diverse and conflicting representations as she is producing her representation of the field that is inhabited and acted on by both her and her interlocutors. In my fieldwork, I used myself as a tool for research, and as a person of thoughts, actions, and emotions, my own subjectivity cannot

be separated from my ethnography (see Sanjek 2014; Kunda 2013). Moreover, my own personal and educational background, as well as past experience, helps form my interpretive framework. During fieldwork, I opened up myself and subjected my own body, senses, and social situations to the set of contingencies that played upon my interlocutors (Goffman 1989 [1974]: 125). My immersion and participation served as a gateway to understanding what was the field and what was going on there.

Understanding lives of the women around me involved acknowledging my limitations as a researcher in accessing their lives, based on my subjectivity and capabilities, personal and educational background, and past experiences. Let me give a fun example to illustrate one of my many limitations. After I entered a multinational corporation as a business analyst, I started taking short afternoon walks with other women in the office. We would take a break from our computer work in the cubicles to breathe some fresh air outside, and stroll from the office building to the underground shopping mall across the street. We would often get milk tea or bubble tea, as a treat for our hard-work, and then spent the rest of the day regretting our sweet guilty pleasure. Such moments were great opportunities for me to hear those women's life stories and experiences at and reflections on work, and yet I also noticed that there was another small group of women having a cigarette-smoking party outside the office every afternoon. How I wish I could join and get to know them! I made up my mind to learn smoking, and asked a good male friend to teach me. After wasting many of his cigarettes and choking myself constantly, I simply gave up on the idea of learning something that was too difficult for me just to be able to blend in a group of office women whom I had very little interaction with.

I have taken full advantage of my own position to develop an interpretive understanding of the field and recognize the dialogical and intersubjective construction of social reality (Packer 2011). Although I never truly 'blended in' either in the workplace or homes of the women I am writing about, my presence in these spheres eventually achieved "a kind of normalcy as I became another fixture of the environment" (Hanser 2008: 23). While my authorship of this ethnography has given me the power to reconstruct and frame the words and actions of other people, I want to emphasize that this rarely reflected the dynamics I experienced in the field. Not only was I highly dependent on my interlocutors for everything I could learn, but they also kept me as their close companion. Anthropological modes of knowledge production depend heavily on the relationship and collaboration between insiders and outsiders that afford analytical opportunities (Thomas 2016; Peng 2018).

Ethnography is reflexive in that it acknowledges the anthropologist's own entanglement in the lives she is studying, and I was never much reflexive on my own entanglement in the field until when my husband visited me and met the women in my "novel." He asked my interlocutors what he had longed to ask, "What do you all think about her research?" Women from the office laughed and responded, "You mean her novel?" These women, who once again had forgotten my identity as a researcher, went on to tell my husband in great detail their interactions with me over the months. Later I took him to walk around and into the office building. He stood next to the big glass doors that separated the dark cubicles inside from the well-lit public area outside, and gazed inside through the glass door. When he was trying to find my cubicle and imagine what it was

like for me to work there, I realized that I had also been looking into the world of these

women through a glass door, and that I might have never actually entered their world.

**Chapter One**

**Gender, Labor, and the State in Modern China**

In the imperial era, the ideological basis of the socio-political order of China presumed a strict gendered division of space and labor (Goodman and Larson 2005: 1). Chinese differentiated between *nei* (內 inner, domestic space) for women and *wai* (外 outer, public space) for men. The *nei*/*wai* distinction of gender and space under the imperial Chinese state-family (a state modeled on the principles of family) bears some resemblance to the domestic/public distinction in Western cultural contexts and yet does not automatically map onto the latter. This gendered division of space and labor possessed political urgency in the imperial era, in that women who stepped beyond the spatial boundaries of *nei* would create "a cosmological impropriety that threatened social stability" (Goodman and Larson 2005: 2). Nevertheless, boundaries between *nei* and *wai* were contextually defined; rarely did they denote morally and conceptually separate worlds (Goodman and Larson 2005: 5; see also Mann 2005).

Women in imperial China had not always been confined to the work and life of the domestic, inner domain. Constant interplays between different views of gender and of patriarchy produced "a text with multiple grammars, female and male, that could simultaneously accommodate popular visions of cosmos and society and the secular orthodoxy of the educated elite" (Bray 1997: 5). In her historical account of technology, gender, and power in late imperial China, Bray (1997: 5) demonstrates that up to the Song Dynasty the social contract between the state and people was embodied in the

working couple, each of whom contributed equally and complementarily to the upkeep of the state. For instance, women's production of textiles inside households—among many forms of domestic labor—was not only construed "in terms of complementarity to male domain of farming" (Bray 1997: 5), but for statesmen and philosophers, 'womanly work' was an indispensable moral contribution to the social order (Bray 1997: 4, 52)5. This complementarity between men and women was de-emphasized by Neo-Confucianists during the Song Dynasty who emphasized "the segregation of the sexes, the seclusion of women, and their subordination to men," and yet plenty of men and women expressed "the classical view that wives were active partners rather than acquiescent subordinates" of husbands (Bray 1997: 42). This chapter interrogates Chinese women's places in and movements across these domains through their productive and reproductive labor from the late imperial to the modern era.

Women and men fulfilled separate and yet complementary tasks of producing food and clothing, the twin necessities that rendered farming and weaving a pair in imperial China. The ideal of men and women working in separate domains was strictly observed only by elite families, "while poor farmers often adhered to a pattern of

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[5] Textiles were classed as goods fundamental to the maintenance of the world order; women's textile skills were integrated to other practical ones that women exercised to maintain the domestic order and organic Chinese polity in which "a well-run household was the basis of a well-run state" (Bray 1997: 47). During the late 19th century, however, new forms of organization of production replaced the old, as the textile sector became increasingly commercialized and specialized and women's domestic textile work of spinning, weaving, and needlework became marginalized, except for upper-class women who abandoned earlier forms of textile work for embroidery. The commercialization and specialization of textile production during late imperial times shifted the balance between women's productive and reproductive roles, and increasing numbers of women were physically secluded in the domestic sphere.

'husband and wife working together'" (Eyferth 2012: 371). Women not only performed domestic and reproductive labor such as weaving cloth, bearing children, and feeding families, but feminine attributes of serving and caring shaped the domestic domain. Given that the Chinese pantheon takes on qualities and images of the lived, ordinary social reality, goddesses in Chinese religions are analogic to women in the Chinese family who are both divisive and unifying (Sangren 1983: 14-15). As daughters-in-law and wives, they are divisive, sexual, and polluting; as mothers, daughters, and sisters, they hold brothers together, mediate with fathers, and unify and take care of their families. These different social roles that women undertake parallel beliefs in female pollution on the one hand, and the worship of idealized maternal deities on the other. Female deities are best understood "with reference to the contradictory demands, roles, and expectations confronting women in... Chinese domestic life" (Sangren 1983: 5): goddesses negate wifehood and enact the unifying role as mothers of universal love for followers, which is "a metaphoric transformation of the relation between a mother and her children" through the dimensions of inclusivity, mediation, and alliance (Sangren 1983: 15)[6].

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[6] Goddesses like Guanyin and Mazu are saintly women who are mothers (and daughters) without being any man's sexual partner. They embody only the maternal nurturing values of unconditional love, inclusivity, mediation, and alliance, instead of the sexual, divisive, and polluting aspects of wives and daughters-in-law. Goddesses are treated as universal mothers who forgive, care, and love all followers as children, with deep compassion and without preference based on class, wealth, virtue, etc. Here is a paradox projected from the Chinese family to the pantheon: to be a wife is bad but a mother good. Those female spirits who show maternal qualities of compassion, nurturance, and mercy that distinguish themselves from the male, bureaucratic stern upholders of the imperial order are mother goddesses. Meanwhile, there are other female spirits that are sexual vampiresses and fox fairies, dangerous seductresses depleting men of their *yang* essence. There is also the Queen Mother of the West who is the patroness of powerful, assertive women, and the wife of the earth god (Tudi Po) who is narrow-hearted, shrewish, penny pinching, and opposes

Wolf (1972) explores Chinese family from the perspective of women, and stresses the cohesive unit—the uterine family—constituted by intense emotional ties between a mother and her offspring. Wolf (1972) shows different images of Chinese women, as wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers-in-law, and as mothers, sisters, and daughters. As a wife and daughter-in-law, she is an outsider and object of deep suspicion seen by her husband and parents-in-law. The strategy for her to create a sense of belonging is creating her own uterine family by bearing and raising children, "a goal that happily corresponds to the goals of the family into which she has married" (Wolf 1972: 36). In the context of the expression of intense emotional bonds joining mothers and sons in Wolf's uterine family, Mann (1987) presents widows in late imperial China fulfilling obligations to serve their households: "rear heirs (including adopted ones), produce food and clothing, and care for her aging in-laws" (1987:45). The mother-child relationship in particular played a critical role in shaping the narratives of widows in local gazetteers:

> [T]he picture drawn by biographers of chaste widows sketches a household in the throes of a survival crisis. An only son, perhaps married late, has died soon after producing an heir—sometimes during his wife's pregnancy. His parents are past their productive years. The children, if sons, must be educated; if daughters, married…[T]he triumphant end to the chaste widow's tale tells us that the young

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her husband's acts of generosity. These unmotherly female spirits embody the negative qualities attributed to Chinese women as wives and daughters-in-law who are divisive and use sexual allures to alienate husbands from their natal families (as 'pillow ghosts').

woman dutifully served her parents-in-law and instructed her children, until the

former were properly buried and the latter properly married. (Mann 1983:46)

Gendered division of space and classical notions of female virtue have continued

to retain their authority in the modern era (Judge 2005), despite the efforts of both

Republican-era reformers and communist revolutionaries "to 'liberate' Chinese women

from their seclusion and oppression and to create new sexually integrated public spaces

and notions of civic or revolutionary virtue" (Goodman and Larson 2005: 6). Well into

the twentieth century, Chinese women and their 'proper' place have remained associated

with the 'inner' realm of family and household, while the proper place of men has been

linked to the 'outer' world of labor and public affairs (Hershatter 2007: 51). Although the

vocabulary of 'inner' and 'outer' realms was not always explicitly used, women's venture

into public spaces such as factories, for instance, initially caused some anxieties. Women

found themselves running into "a double ideological barrier": They violated not only the

traditional ideal of the household as a self-sufficient productive unit but also traditional

norms of chastity and family honor that placed women inside the household (Honig 2000:

70). Women's entrance into the workforce, especially spaces dominated by men, shifted

the terms of femininity and turned the female sex into something potentially humiliating

and disgraceful, because men with no familial connection to their women counterparts

could nonetheless gaze upon them (Rofel 1999: 74). It was not work per se but where

work was performed that was interpreted as exposing women to danger and opprobrium

from the outer world (Hershatter 2007: 53).

In collectivist China (from 1949 to late 1970s), the *nei*/*wai* boundary was reconstituted to ideologically orient loyalties and aspirations of individual men and women away from the family and toward the party-state in the form of the collective workplace. Communist revolutions worked at "releasing women from their imprisonment in the domestic sphere" and promoted and legitimized women's entrance into the labor force, despite their feelings of being caught between the "affirmative public (*wai*) values of…gender equality and the disparaged *nei* positioning of women in their domestic relationships and activities" (Evans 2008: 103-104). Efforts to liberate women from their confinement in the domestic sphere started with the May 4th Movement in the early 20th century that attacked Confucian cultural heritage to move the society toward gender liberation, the founding of the PRC in 1949, and the 1950 Marriage Law that granted women legal status as equal to that of men. All these movements attempted to free women from their social and moral association with the domestic domain.

Nevertheless, gendered division between *nei* and *wai* has persisted through the Maoist and post-Mao era with more nuance and flexibility. Women in socialist China were expected to work in both *nei* and *wai* domains, as workers and as wives and mothers. The *nei*/*wai* dichotomy in Chinese cultural and historical contexts has created gendered meanings on women's bodies, so that women (and men) realize their gender identities as they move into and through cultural schema marked as appropriate or inappropriate for them.

**Multiple Shifts: Women's Labor across Domains**

Revolutions in the 20th century China have attempted to redefine "what is work and what is not…the proper kinds of work for men and women, educated and uneducated, rich and poor…and specifically the differences between household-based and non-household based labor" (Harrell 2000: 67). It is an important legacy of the 20th century revolutions that granted Chinese women the right to work outside of the domestic domain and removed stigma associated with outside labor for women. Such labor, as Hershatter (2011: 66) states, "was no longer linked with family disaster, hardship, instability, and barely getting by," but the Party-state "reorganized, valorized, and propagated a new gendered division of labor." Work relationships outside of the household also expanded women's social networks beyond their natal and marital families (see Jacka 1992, 1997; Hershatter 2000). Women's labor extended from inside to outside of the household, and also from the private to public sphere. For many women cadres and labor models in the 50s, their commitment to work outside of households built for them a profound desire to excel in working and mobilizing other women to work, and opened up possibilities for them to prioritize production and political work over domestic labor and childcare (Hershatter 2011: 206). Exceptional women who were both discovered and trained as labor models exemplified "skilled farmers, dedicated midwives, astute livestock handlers, and tenacious cotton growing heroines," echoing themes of ancient and imperial tales about virtues of women such as industriousness, self-sacrifice (albeit for the collective rather than the patriline), willingness to suffer, and sexual integrity (Hershatter 2011: 210-214). Thanks to these role models of women workers,

recalcitrant family members were convinced that it was both acceptable and advantageous for women to work away from the immediate supervision of kin.

What did the legacy of promoting women's work outside do for women's labor inside? During the socialist era, as men moved into factory and construction work and agricultural development came to heavily rely on women's labor in the fields, spinning, weaving, and shoemaking inside the household became "domestic affairs, hidden away at home and invisible for purposes of generating income or assessing women's actual labor burden" (Hershatter 2011: 72). Yet Eyferth's research on women's work of producing homespun cloth in socialist China (1949-1980) demonstrates that millions of rural women continued to spend large portions of their waking hours spinning after full days of collective labor in the fields. Many rural people continued to wear homespun cloth and traded its surplus for food until the very end of the collective period, which testifies to the role of women's domestic textile work— unpaid and invisible as it was— in underpinning not only socialist production and accumulation but also the reproduction of village life (Eyferth 2012: 391)[7].

Official discourses in the PRC during the socialist era did not afford legitimacy to women's domestic work, particularly of making cloth and clothing, "to the extent that when such work was perceived at all, it was treated as an insignificant household chore, tainted by its association with a backward peasant economy and a feudal gender system that locked up women in the household" (Eyferth 2012: 366). Rural women in fact were constantly shuffling between productive labor in the fields during the day and domestic

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[7] Besides textile production, women performed many tasks in the fields and in other handicrafts, as well as their domestic labor. Also, some areas did no textile production, and traded local produce for cloth produced elsewhere.

(needlework) and reproductive (childcare) labor at home at night (Hershatter 2011: 175).

Women's memory of the collective past highlights "utter exhaustion" (Hershatter 2011:

183-6) caused by not only plowing, fertilizing, and harvesting but also feeding, clothing,

and caring for growing numbers of family members (the elder generation at that time

offered very little help with childcare).

According to Eyferth (2012: 369), women's work in much of Chinese history was

understood primarily as textile work, and was believed to be a moral as well as an

economic necessity. He states, "Work was considered one of the 'four womanly virtues,'

and work with spindle, loom, and needle exemplified the wisdom, frugality, and

industriousness that women were expected to possess." In the eyes of statesmen and

philosophers, women's work was meritorious only if it produced use value for the state

and household rather than private profit. Needlework was the activity that most

epitomized "the incessant, ephemeral, and occasionally creative temporality of domestic

life," and after field labor and needlework, women always found leisure or sleep in

constant short supply (Hershatter 2011: 183). The invisibility of rural women's domestic

labor in the public discourse stood in stark contrast to the powerful recurrent image of

women performing needlework by lamplight, "an enduring symbol of women's

industrious virtue that found new expression in the collective era" (Hershatter 2011: 186).

Women's domestic responsibilities proved especially crucial during difficult times such

as those years of famine between 1959 and 1961 (later labeled as "the three years of

difficulty" or "the three years of disaster"), when the survival strategies of farming

families greatly depended on women's skill of foraging and ability to produce woven

goods that could be traded for grain (Hershatter 2011: 250). During other times,

pervasive shortages of cash and grain forced rural households to sell their ration coupons

and "weave cloth from whatever scraps of cotton they could obtain," and thereby

rendered women's labor elastic enough to always be able to put up with an extra shift

(Eyferth 2012: 366-7).

Even as their domestic responsibilities remained "constant, unnamed, and

unremunerated," women were driven by both financial and political necessity to show up

each day to engage in collective field labor (Hershatter 2011: 183). In the public

discourse of labor in the collectivist era (1949-1978), there was no such thing as

'domestic labor', because 'labor' (*laodong* 劳动) was usually reserved for field work and

collective sideline production and what went on at home was simply 'domestic tasks'

(*jiawu huo* 家务活) (Hershatter 2011: 186). Yet in order to better mobilize women's

productive labor for farming and funding industrialization, policy planners made efforts

to socialize domestic work such as childbirth and childcare, for the benefit of both

household income and the collective economy. For instance, the Women's Federation

made attempts to organize rural childcare groups and daycare centers during the harvest

season (Hershatter 2011: 182-3). There emerged Five Changes (*wuhua* 五化) that aimed

at "assigning domestic tasks to the production brigades [so that] eating was to take place

in dining halls, clothing was to be made by sewing machines, babies were to be born in

birthing stations, children were to be cared for in daycare centers, and flour was to be

milled by machines" (Hershatter 2011: 246). These forms of labor were still performed

by women, albeit no longer in individual households but in socialized settings and for the

purpose of earning work points.

Such socialization of domestic tasks, for the purpose of liberating many women's labor power for the collective agricultural production, primarily relied on local people to build and fund their own institutions. Socialization of domestic labor was not pursued consistently either at the national or local level, and dimmed quickly with the collapse of the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962). Hershatter (2011: 258) states,

> As the high-stake attempt to propel the countryside toward communism began to fail, the analysis of domestic burdens and the attempts to ameliorate them, faded as well. Nowhere is this pattern more obvious than in the most widely implemented and vividly remembered of the Five Changes: the dining halls.

Regardless, the Party-state through its short-lived efforts to socialize domestic labor recognized that the time- and labor-consuming burden of domestic labor fell heavily on women, and that no previous regime had addressed such burdens adequately. The Party-state's approaches to socialize domestic labor might have gone to extremes, such as confiscating all sources of food from individual families and destroying domestic cooking utensils for building collective dining halls, and yet its efforts did temporarily pay off in terms of mobilizing women for laboring in the fields.

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We can see that Chinese women, despite their labor being complementary to that of men for most of the imperial times, were physically and ideologically secluded to the domestic domain during much of the late imperial era. The socialist revolution and

government in the mid 20th century recognized and promoted women's labor outside of the domestic domain as a necessary component of social production and nation-building. Although the socialist state made short-lived attempts to undertake burdens of domestic and reproductive labor having been shouldered by women, through public institutions such as dining halls and daycare centers, women continued to work hard in the private domain and domestic spaces to clothe and feed family members. We could say that women in socialist China were very much active in the public sphere as well, especially given the labor models who were motivating other women to participate in social production and later to abide by the party state's one-child-per-family policy. The 20th century witnessed Chinese women's unprecedented entrance into the public sphere and the sphere of production outside of the household, when they simultaneously found themselves still responsible for working in and managing the domestic domain. Women had always been working in all those domains.

**Women at Work in 20th Century Pre-Reform China**

We cannot understand the lives of professional women today without taking a historical approach to their predecessors in the long twentieth century, those who made contemporary women like Lucia believe that Chinese women have always worked and should always work. Drawing on literature from history, sociology, and anthropology that presents lives of working women from the pre-liberation Nationalist/Republican regimes to the socialist and post-socialist era in China, I demonstrate that whether women participated in work outside of the household and the kinds of work they performed was

largely driven by state policies of economic development and labor mobilization that were themselves inflected by gender ideologies.

*Mill Sisters and Working Daughters: Women's Labor in the Early 20th Century*

Questions of when Chinese women have worked, under what circumstances they have worked, and what impacts their work has brought to the society have been interrogated by historical and ethnographic studies covering the 20th century from pre-liberation to the economic reforms. Honig's (1986) historical research on women working in cotton mills in early 20th century Shanghai shows that the working day for women in the mills was long, demanding, and in some ways brutal. Yet women workers did not experience the daily work routine as isolated individuals, and instead, an important part of a mill worker's experience was learning to manipulate the contours of the workday, enlisting the aid of her coworkers for purposes such as covering each other's shifts at noon so one could feed herself and/or her baby (Honig 1986: 164).

This mutual dependence among women workers became more critical, when a woman who walked back home after work by herself was vulnerable to attack by hoodlums. Sworn sisterhoods emerged out of the need for mutual aid and protection, although they failed to develop into full-blown feminist social organizations among women workers (Honig 1985). Other barriers impeded the development of gender sociality. Working in a gigantic factory that employed several thousand workers of varied origins did not lead to unity as women's social circles, based on shared provenance, divided them. Segregation within the factories was reinforced by differences in terms of economic development in the regions from which women emigrated (Honig 1986: 70-1).

Thus intra-gender divisions persisted between women from different native places, and an inter-gender division of labor existed between men who were considered skilled labor and women who were considered unskilled (Honig 1986: 70-1).

Women, by earning wages from working in cotton mills in early twentieth century Shanghai contributed significantly to their families' income, which caused their parents to regard daughters as valuable economic assets rather than the financial liabilities they had traditionally been perceived to be (Honig 1986: 169). Working women themselves experienced a growing sense of independence by earning their own income. Similar to Stockard's (1989) ethno-historical account of women working in the silk factories in the 20th century Canton Delta, the opportunity for women to work in urban factories in Shanghai resulted in delayed marriage among them. This delay usually did not mean that women had greater power in making their own marriage arrangements than before; instead, the decision to postpone marriage was made by their parents on the basis of what was economically best for a family. It was in the financial interest of most parents to keep their daughters at home as long as possible, since the majority of single working women turned a large part of their wages over to their parents (Honig 1986, 183). The majority of women workers stopped working by the time they reached their late thirties, and many women probably never returned to Shanghai or the mills once they began having children. A woman who continued to work after she had children was likely to end her career when one of her children was old enough to enter the work force and contribute an income to the family (Honig 1986, 194-5).

*Labor Models and Iron Girls: Women Workers in Socialist China*

After the founding of the PRC in 1949, China's weak industrial base could not satisfy the employment demands of urban women who were, for the first time in history, granted by the state the right to work outside the home and without permission from family heads. Women's labor from the late 1950s to the end of the collective era in the early 1980s enabled the state's accumulation of resources that were critical to national economic strategies on which subsequent economic reforms have been built (Hershatter 2011: 11-12). Women's labor was particularly crucial to collectivizing agriculture in the 1950s when the national government encouraged women to participate in production co-ops in rural China. Hershatter (2011: 137) displays women's memories of field work in the 1950s when highlighting that the ability to work in the fields side by side with other women their own age was a pleasurable expansion of the social worlds of both married and unmarried women, and that the need for work points—the major source of food rations and income for families at that time— overrode earlier opposition from their kin groups for women to go out to work. Since families kept obtaining food rations and other daily necessities from the co-ops, women's labor in the fields was absolutely necessary to keep their families from going into debt to the collective and earn income (Hershatter 2011: 138).

Chen (2003) interrogates one of the most widely circulated female icons of socialist modernity in the PRC, the female tractor drivers who appeared in state propaganda in the 50s and 60s. Situated in the official lexicon of Maoist China, the female tractor driver represents shattering the fetters of Confucian, feudal, and patriarchal notions of womanhood and the arrival of a socialist modernity (Chen 2003: 270).

Hershatter's (2000) study of women labor models in rural China in the 1950s demonstrates that women's labor, on the one hand, was linked with "family disaster, hardship and instability, and barely getting by" (2000:83), and on the other, manifested "the zeal with which labor heroines took on (and still recall without apparent ambivalence) their model status and the honors it brought them" (2000: 92). Furthermore, collective labor provided women with "an alternative social universe, a community of peers" that helped them negotiate difficulties in early years of marriage and virilocal residence.

Although the state promoted equal pay for equal work in ideology, a man doing field labor typically earned ten points per day, while a woman earned between six and eight (Hershatter 2011: 139), and many women explained the disparity in terms of differences between what counted as physically appropriate work for women and for men. Yet women were routinely paid less than men, even when they did the same task with the same quality of result. Hershatter (2011: 140) explains how women interpreted this income disparity as follows:

> Many [women] maintained that they were regarded as equal when they were assigned several fewer points than men for a day's labor. In part this is because equality was generally understood as a feature of a public, political domain, not an economic domain…In the public economic domain of the rural co-op, in contrast, the operative assumption was not gender equality, but gender difference…This foundational assumption that difference was immutable and had

nothing to do with equality, may help to explain why women often did not object

(at least not consistently and vociferously) to the work point gap.

Despite their hard-work, women earned a consistently lower rate than men on average,

even when the range of tasks deemed appropriate for women got expanded over time

(Hershatter 2011: 140). Although a division of labor and a pay gap predicated on gender

difference that was widely taken for granted, many women activists regarded themselves

as equals of men (Hershatter 2011: 129-130).

The legacy of the Great Leap Forward in the 1950s established the definitive

presence of women in the agricultural labor force and the feminization of agriculture: As

men moved first into construction projects and then into management and technical work

and only came back to the fields during busy seasons of plowing and harvesting, women

replaced them in the fields (Hershatter 2011: 237, 147). Since agriculture was the main

sector that the Maoist economy depended on to fund industrialization, the gendered

division of labor— between men working in construction projects and women in the

fields—undergirded the state's primitive accumulation" (Hershatter 2011: 265).

Women's labor in the fields freed men, not only to work on short-lived projects

but also to develop small-scale rural industries in subsequent years. In this regard, women

were rendered a significant component of the human capital for national economic

development, when their work was uncompensated at home and under-compensated in

the fields and yet crucial to economic development in both domains. Women's

mobilization in the agricultural labor force not only undergirded rural economic

development but also supported the economic development of cities during and after the

Mao years. The participation and support of women, mobilized by the Party-state's accumulation strategies and propaganda embodied by women cadres, helped make extensive collectivization and early industrialization possible. During the Great Leap Forward (1958-1962), the vast majority of urban women was also mobilized, organized, and assigned to state-owned units and neighborhood collective enterprises.

Next came the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), a period in which women's participation in the labor force was glorified. Images of women portrayed as Iron Girls— strong, robust women capable of performing jobs that required physical labor more commonly done by men—symbolized the Maoist slogan "Whatever men comrades can accomplish, women comrades can too" (Honig 2000: 97). The Iron Girls were celebrated as the emblem of gender equality of Maoist China, and yet gendered dimensions of work during the Cultural Revolution were far more convoluted than the propaganda. Honig (2000: 107-108) characterizes the complexity of women's work experience as sent-down youth to the countryside in this period as follows:

> [A]dolescent urban-educated girls clearly took slogans such as 'women can do whatever men can do' or models such as the Iron Girls at face value, invoking language provided by the state to contest actual social practice. Too young to have had work experience themselves, they assumed that urban women were indeed liberated and enjoyed full equality in the workforce. These young women adopted a missionary-like attitude in   bringing liberation to their rural counterparts…
> It is important to point out that not all female sent-down youth saw themselves as either inspirational models for rural women or as zealous crusaders fighting local

opponents to women's equal status in the workforce. The initial glamor and glory of engaging in hard physical labor was sometimes replaced by a desperation to escape work altogether.

Therefore, women's work experience during the Cultural Revolution could not be collapsed into a simple model of the Iron Girls which never even represented the totality of the state propaganda, political rhetoric, or social reality but was at best appropriated by some women to accord value to labor based on raw physical strength. The Iron Girls later became "the subject of merciless mockery" during the 1980s, because it represented what was later considered—in the context of economic reforms—inappropriate gender dynamics of equality (Honig 2000:108-9), and repudiation of it constituted a larger argument for a gendered division of labor more closely tied to beliefs about women's natural—in the sense of biologically innate and physiologically determined—abilities.

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During the socialist era of the planned economy from 1949 to 1976, gaining and ensuring the right to work outside the household had a tremendous impact on lives of Chinese women. The fact that women no longer needed to seek permission from their fathers or husbands emancipated them from the control of male heads of households. In addition, the general public accepted women's employment as a normal part of women's lives and the economy and an important indicator of gender equality. Since women as well as men worked outside the home and both were responsible for contributing to family finance, women's status inside the family got strengthened. Yet under the planned system of employment, women's inability to choose jobs created an obstacle to improving

the quality of their employment. In addition, heavy and uncompensated domestic burdens fell onto the shoulders of women who were also laboring outside.

My review of the history of Chinese working women from the pre-liberation to the socialist era also demonstrates that whether women worked and what kinds of work they did was largely determined by state economic policies that were themselves inflected by gender ideologies. During early years of the PRC, the party insisted that women could not be fully liberated without fully participating in the labor force and national economic production (Davin 1973, 1975a, 1975b; Croll 1979, 1985). State policies regulating women's labor were framed with the Engelsian concept of women's liberation and gender equality: "[O]nly through participation in social production would women achieve liberation" (Wang 2003: 139). During times of economic growth, women's labor was regarded as being integral to state development strategies, manifest particularly in campaigns in the 1950s to publicize women's labor models and emphasize their enthusiasm for work (Hershatter 2000; T. Chen 2003).

Nevertheless, during periods of economic slowdown such as the early 1960s (when natural disasters further impoverished the nation), the state turned to emphasize the importance of women's domestic roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper (Davin 1976; Croll 1980; Hooper 1984). Manning (2005) calls the official Maoist approach to mobilizing women 'Marxist materialist,' because it sought to achieve gender equality by drawing women into remunerated labor when the state needed them, and yet highlighted their reproductive and domestic roles when they were threatening men's employment opportunities in an era of economic slowdown (see also Hershatter 2007: 54). Meanwhile, studies of urban working women during the socialist era elaborate on state

policies that, on the one hand, called for gender equity and downplayed gender distinctions in favor of class, and on the other hand, legitimized men as better-paid and more skilled laborers holding more prestigious jobs (Bauer et al. 1992; Jiang 2004).

Overall, for rural and urban women who grew up in the socialist era, employment was something that they took for granted as an important component of a woman's life, even though far from all women in actuality experienced a sense of liberation by participating in socialist production. Women's employment in the socialist era enhanced their status at home since their income contributed significantly to the family in the egalitarian low-income system (Wang 2003: 139). The socialist state promoted women's participation in production in the public domain, and to that end provided—albeit for a brief period of time—public welfare such as dining halls and childcare facilities that relieved women from household burdens (Hershatter 2011: 250-262). Under such conditions, great waves of rural and urban Chinese women entered the ranks of waged labor.

Many Chinese women have looked in retrospect at that period of history with nostalgia (Andors 1983; Rofel 1994), a time when the state brought women out from the household into the world of work and socialized childcare and other domestic responsibilities. Such state-initiated opposition to the boundary between male/public and female/domestic spheres could also be found in the socialist Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Meyer 1985; Lapland 1989). Although women's entrance into male-dominated contexts of work did not result in full gender equality, the state diminished patriarchal family power over women to a certain extent, through replacing family with the collective work-unit as the basic unit of production (Yang 1999: 37; see

also Verdery 1994 for a similar case in Eastern Europe). In the post-socialist era, state policies of economic development and labor mobilization driving women into the public domain of production and back into the domestic domain of reproduction when economic growth slowed have continued, and moreover, femininity itself has become an integral part of women's labor, particularly in the rising service industry.

**Stepping-down Workers and Service Girls: Women's Work in Reform Era China**

Starting in the late 1970s, China has transformed itself from a planned economic system to a market economic system. China's economic growth in the post-socialist era, based on reforms of restructuring the economy and opening its market up to the world, has created enormous opportunities for women to join the labor force. Nevertheless, many state-owned factories scaled down their operations and personnel in order to become more competitive, and middle-aged working women were usually the first to go (Yang 1999: 52-3). Middle-aged factory women were removed from the workforce by early retirement and prolonged maternity leave (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 250-2), as the economy was restructured for more efficient use of material and human resources. Meanwhile, the problem of unemployment plagued Chinese cities in the 1980s, since millions of 'educated youth' who had been sent to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution came flooding back to cities and the products of the baby boom of the early 1960s reached working age in the 80s (Jacka 2000: 13).

The security of having a job for life assigned by one's production brigade and work unit in socialist China (Walder 1986)—referred to by Chinese as 'eating from an iron rice bowl'—has become less and less certain in the post-socialist era. Moreover,

women joined the workforce in the reform era on unequal bases: First, they were most often assigned the least-skilled and lowest-paying jobs in neighborhood-run enterprises and the state sector. Second, when the reality of urban male unemployment conflicted with the vision of women's mass participation in the labor force, as was the case in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, women were encouraged to leave their jobs and contribute to socialist construction by retreating to the domestic domain (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 243). A deeper force that prevented women's participation in the labor force from reaching the level of men in the reform era was the culturally sustained assumption that Chinese women had two major roles to fulfil: that of mother and of worker. So long as women were perceived as bearing primary responsibility for housework and childcare, employers considered them incapable of devoting themselves to jobs as fully as men and therefore preferred men over women (Robinson 2009).

Although there were women gaining jobs in the collective and private sectors when large numbers of industrial women workers were losing their jobs in the state sector, economic reforms substantiated an increasingly rigid distinction that had emerged between the production line jobs construed as manual labor and those jobs more highly valued as skilled technical and mental labor. As part of this process, manual labor tasks usually became women's work, while technical and mental tasks were often assigned to men. This gendered division of industrial labor took shape through gendered interpretations of men's and women's labor capabilities: Women and men were believed to have different capacities uniquely suited to different tasks (Rofel 1999: 120). The qualifications specified for managerial jobs in particular were gendered, in that women were seen as lacking the necessary leadership qualities—such as talking people into

doing things, making social connections, and resolving disputes—to be managers (Rofel 1999: 121).

The decline of manufacturing and the rise of the tertiary sector of the economy in post-socialist China has created a host of interactive service jobs that formed a new occupational landscape for Chinese women. Within this world of labor, the traits of youth, beauty, and deferential bodily dispositions constitute the market value of the labor of pink-collar women (Otis 2011: 36). Experiences of pink-collar women depart drastically from those of their parents who labored in the fields and factories of the Maoist era. Instead of working for the common good as defined by the socialist state and collective, service women workers cater to consumers' individual habits, predilections, and desires. Whereas their mothers would have been penalized for overt display of femininity in dress, pink-collar work requires performances of femininity and deference.

In contrast to the "iron rice bowls"—secure life-time employment and welfare benefits provided by the socialist state—young women in post-socialist China draw on the "rice bowl of youth" to convert their youth and beauty into employment opportunities in service industries (Zhang 2000: 17; Otis 2011: 36). The rice bowl of youth is gendered by the sexual politics involved in service work: Exclusive stores serving the rising middle-class elite expect female salesclerks to exemplify a "new, modern version of femininity associated with affluence, luxury, and deferential service" (Hanser 2005: 595). To appeal to the status expectations of consumers, service employers mobilize women's bodies to produce and reproduce "market-embodied labor" that privileges the female body as a site for labor control, as service employers discipline, regulate, and alter women's bodies to ensure that they perform a femininity of deference to the rising

middle-class consumers (Otis 2011: 9-11). The creation of a service class in the post-socialist era has fundamentally transformed women's social status by segregating them into work that is low wage, low prestige, and precarious (Otis 2011: 6).

Body, class, work, and gender are intertwined in the service workplace to produce hierarchical social relationships in the process of delivering service. Social distinctions are made as pink-collar women undergo profound physical and social transformations at the hands of their employers and amidst interactions with consumers (Otis 2011: 8; see also Hanser 2005; 2008). Class distinctions also get legitimized by people's differentiation between well-educated urban women who work at white-collar jobs and their 'uncultured' rural and less-educated urban counterparts who work at service jobs. The shift from the 'iron rice bowl" to the "rice bowl of youth" involves a process that feminizes and sexualizes women's bodies in the workplace and distinguishes "productive" bodies worthy of respect from unproductive ones. Constructions of 'proper' femininity in post-socialist China map onto not only class but also generational distinctions, associating young, educated urban women with affluence and modernity and working-class, middle-aged women with unproductive and unreformable remnants of the past (Hanser 2005: 596-597). Gendered and generational differences in turn translate into class distinctions, which are produced for and consumed by status-conscious customers (Hanser 2008:16). Therefore, distinctions among working women's bodies and femininities solidify inequality between various class positions, and facilitate the formation of a consumer culture by which class and gender inequality gets buttressed, legitimized, and naturalized.

Changes in the nature of work are reflected in and affect changes in gendered self-formation (McDowell 1997: 139-140). By repeating gendered ways of doing work, women internalize gendered expectations in the professional world. Cast as sexualized objects of desire (Hooper 1998; Liu 2017), women in the global service industries are increasingly expected to embody strong emotional connections between service providers and clients (Hochschild 1983; McDowell 2009), using their physical attractions and social skills as essential attributes for good performance at work. The expansion of service industries and increase of women entering waged employment in service correspond to a shift of the center of the economy from manufacturing to service. In the meantime, growing numbers of jobs and occupations are based on "purportedly feminine attributes of serving and caring, as well as on a growing emphasis on less hierarchical, more empathetic and cooperative styles of management" that come to be more associated with women (McDowell 1997: 11). Thus, two processes happen simultaneously: Femininity gets constructed and reconstructed by workplace practices; the workplace itself gets feminized in that ideals of domesticity, morality, and respectability pervade pink- and white-collar jobs (more on the emergence of white-collar women professionals in the following chapter). Thus, the rise of pink- and white-collar jobs results in that femininity gets not only performed on bodies (Butler 1990) but also projected by women's bodies onto their workplace.

In post-socialist China, women have worked not only in the state-owned sector but also increasingly in the rising private sector of the economy, and attempt to assume positions of legitimacy in an environment largely constructed as a male territory not suitable for women (Wylie 2004: 43). The private sector composed of new-style capitalist

organizations is shaped by gender imbalance (Gold 1989; Pearson 1997; Guthrie 1999), and women are subject to gender-based discriminatory practices in professional settings (Hilderbrandt and Liu 1988: 306-9; Croll 1995, 117-24). Gender-based discrimination in Chinese corporations partly results from the fact that women lack access to well-established male-dominated business networks (Korabik 1994: 121-2), and are therefore at a disadvantage to men due to the gendering of *guanxi* practices (Wylie 2004: 48-51). Women often use *guanxi* in a careful and non-threatening way, by drawing on traits of friendless and warmth as key factors in navigating relationships in the workplace and in achieving a cooperative and rewarding environment, even when they get to operate in positions of power.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Before the reforms, the socialist Party-state used to make labor the cultural arena in which women and men crafted the meaning of liberation, proved their moral worth, expressed nationalist sentiments, and received their rewards or punishments from the state. The post-socialist state has continued to treat labor as one of the means by which it has measured its own modernity, shaped gendered identities, and defined the meaning of socialism and capitalism (Rofel 1999: 122).

The kinds of labor women perform inside and outside of households and how the female gender gets perceived and embodied correspond, so that ideals of womanhood change with women's participation in the labor force and the lack thereof (Hershatter 2007). The ideal of "revolutionary wife" in the Maoist era of militant egalitarianism and socialization of domestic labor shifted a woman's loyalty away from an exclusive focus

on the domestic domain (although women were still expected to be the main caregivers of their families), and challenged traditional gender association that required a woman to serve in-laws, husband, and children without any consideration for public-oriented concerns. The fact that women could work outside of the household and labor in the fields, in contrast to the traditional gendered division of labor, affected how they interpreted and embodied a certain gendered identity in the socialist era.

Given transformations that have happened to Chinese women from the pre-liberation to post-socialist era, some scholars (e.g. Rofel 1999) argue that each generation of working women interprets their lives differently. The older generations of women workers might interpret laboring for a socialist job as a symbol of their personal liberation from the tyranny of domestic labor (see Wolf 1985:60) and the core of their identity, the younger cohorts of workers may turn more exclusively to naturalized ideas of womanhood and motherhood to determine their identities. Despite such generation-based distinctions, I argue that Chinese women have always worked multiple shifts, facing demands from both reproductive and productive spheres. Such demands have been aggravated by the socialist legacy of women's unprecedented participation in the labor force and the post-socialist reality of the retreat of the state in socializing domestic and reproductive labor.

**Chapter Two**

**Making the Gendered Neoliberal Self through White-Collar Work**

Maggie, a white-collar woman in her mid-twenties that I was working with in a multinational corporation, was facing a series of structural and personnel changes that were happening to her team. In the midst of these changes, Maggie was introduced by a former HR manager of the company— an old friend of hers— to a new position at another company. After sneaking out on a workday afternoon for a job interview, Maggie quit her position in our company and switched to the new job right before the new year, without hesitation. "I was so ready to leave that I did not even care about waiting for the annual bonus to arrive," Maggie remembered her excitement from job hopping. Many white-collar women like her took advantage of, pursued, and even embraced the kinds of mobility that were afforded by the market economy and would not have been possible under the socialist labor regime a few decades ago, embodying the neoliberal self.

Existing literature on the neoliberal self does not adequately show how it is gendered in locally particular and meaningful ways. This chapter illustrates how the neoliberal enterprising self is gendered by women's experiences of work. Economic reforms and opening up in China, that started in the late 1970s, have established the juxtaposition between the state and private sector in the urban political economy, despite the fact that the state has always been regulating almost all aspects of urban Chinese people's economic and social lives. Both the state and private sector have been recruiting young women—who benefited from unprecedented investment from their parents in their

educational and professional development in the reform era of the one-child policy—to become white-collar workers inside state-owned enterprises, privately-run companies, and multinational corporations.

The chapter starts by showing a lack of gendered perspectives in the existing literature on the neoliberal, enterprising self. Then, drawing on literature on the history of labor in modern China, I present how women's labor has been reconfigured to become projects and enterprises of individual self-improvement under post-socialist labor regimes, when acknowledging the continuous practice of state governance that renders women's labor as a kind of resource reserve for economic development. The majority of the chapter demonstrates how women constructed themselves as neoliberal enterprising subjects by negotiating gender and gendered relationships to the state and private sector at work, when their experiences of work also imparted locally contextualized meanings to the notions of stability and mobility both in and beyond Shanghai.

**The Not Yet Gendered Neoliberal Self**

Neoliberalism dictates how people should best function in a market-ordered world: as enterprising selves (Gershon 2018: 173; see also Foucault 2008). The neoliberal model of the enterprising self posits an individual who "continuously engages in self-examination, self-regulation, and self-development in accordance with accepted notions of normality" (Rose 1998: 3–4; see also Upadhya 2016: 19). Neoliberal notions of governmentality employ the autonomy and self-regulation of individuals, and construct a particular kind of subject through a process by which individuals internalize self-governance in ways aligned with neoliberal goals.

Neoliberal notions of the self presume that an individual is an entrepreneur of him/herself (Foucault 2008: 226; see also Read 2009: 28) and that h/she owns skills and traits as flexible, marketable, and improvable bundles (see Rose 1992; 1998). Inspired by Foucauldian theories, scholars (Burchell 1993; Cruikshank 1999; Botalski and Chiapello 2006; Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008; Gooptu 2009; Gershon 2011, 2016, 2018; Rankin 2011; Ganti 2014; Allan and McElhinny 2017) have elaborated on a neoliberal model of personhood, the enterprising self, that is supposed to be self-reliant, self-governed, and self-disciplined, prepared to take responsibility for his or her own well-being and for managing risks and vulnerability (O'Malley 1996). The self-governing and self-responsible neoliberal self needs constant improvement (Rose 1999: 93; see also Rose 1992, 1998), which results in life itself becoming an enterprise and project (Gordon 1991, 44; see also Hoffman 2010: 79). Success or failure in the neoliberal era is perceived to be built on autonomous choice and individual ability and effort, and work has become a newly available realm for exercising individual agency and achieving self-development (Foucault 2008: 226; see also Read 2009: 28).

Anthropologists who adopt the approach of governmentality to studying neoliberalism have explored how subjectivities are formed in ways following discourses about market rationality, efficiency, competition, entrepreneurialism, and individual autonomy (Yan 2003; Quan 2005; Urciuoli 2008; Rudnyckyj 2009; Comaroff & Comaroff 2009; Hoey 2010; Gershon 2011, 2016; see also Ganti 2014: 95-96). They have tracked the dissemination of neoliberalism as ideologies and practices to produce neoliberal subjectivities in various places of the world, while highlighting how the neoliberal self merges with cultural orientations (e.g. Urciuoli 2008; Upadhya 2016;

Gershon 2018). In this light, local history and culture "reframe globalizing neoliberal techniques...and in so doing, give them new meanings" (Freeman 2014: 12).

Nevertheless, much of the existing literature on the neoliberal enterprising self has yet to address how this form of subjectivity is gendered. During my year-long ethnographic fieldwork in Shanghai, I heard from my white-collar women interlocutors that they understood their work from the perspective of self-improvement (*ziwo fazhan* 自我发展). What does it mean when urban Chinese women understand their laboring subjectivities in ways that seem to fit the neoliberal model of the enterprising self but are situated in the particular history of transition from socialism to post-socialism? I show in the following sections that this ethos of the self as an enterprise to be improved all the time was created in the reform era and has created a new kind of worker-subject. This worker-subject takes charge of her own work and career through self-surveillance and planning, who is proactive, self-confident, and goal-oriented, and who reflexively and flexibly tends to her own qualities and traits as owned and improvable assets (Hoffman 2010, 218; Gershon 2011, 542).

**Changing Configuration of Women's Labor in Post-Socialist Urban China**

This section first provides a brief history of the rise of white-collar work, especially among urban women, in post-reform China. Next, I show how women's labor has been reconfigured to become projects and enterprises of individual self-improvement under post-socialist labor regimes, when acknowledging the continuous practice of state governance that renders women's labor as a kind of resource reserve for economic development. It is beyond the scope of this chapter (or this dissertation) to trace the

history of neoliberalism through economic reforms and opening up that started in the late 1970s in China. Drawing on Wang (2004) and Rofel (2007), it is worth noting that the specificity of neoliberalism in post-Mao China rests in part on the premise of continuity in the political system of governance and the state's promotion of marketization and privatization. Economic reforms entailed not a complete rejection of collective enterprise but a gradual promotion of a market economy, which has not been set up in opposition to the state or developed in spite of or around the state but rather by the state. Also, four decades since the launching of economic reforms and opening up, China has not adopted a seamless totality of neoliberalism; nor did the state simply impose overarching neoliberal apparatus and policies on citizens' subjectivities and desires.

*Economic Reforms and 'White-Collar Beauties'*

Economic reforms in China starting in the late 1970s have reconfigured its urban political economy in the following ways: first, aggressive and radical economic restructuring, including the privatization and corporatization of state-owned enterprises (with the Chinese state as the majority shareholder), was instituted (Chong 2018, 198); second, the division between the state and private sector has been entrenched; third, the economic base of China has shifted rapidly from primary to tertiary industry, especially in light of growing high-value-added sectors that require well-qualified urban professionals (Liu 2017: 14). We should understand white-collar as a social identity, born out of global capitalism but deeply embedded in national and local political, cultural, and socioeconomic contexts. Social meanings attached to white-collar workers and attitudes they embrace are simultaneously the result of the history of global capitalism, state-led

market reforms, local cultures, and the agency of white-collar workers themselves (Duthie 2005).

In China, white-collar as an urban professional subject distinct from the socialist revolutionary cadre of the Maoist era, emerged extensively in cities after the state initiated economic reforms and opening up in 1978. The social identity of white-collar in post-socialist China is often gendered female (Duthie 2005), reflected in the commonly used term *bailing liren* ('white-collar beauties' 白领丽人). They are not secretaries and assistants of the sort described by Mills (1951) in his account of the male-dominated corporate world in America during the first half of the twentieth century. Urban Chinese white-collar women have worked not only in the state-owned sector but also increasingly in the rising private sector of the economy, attempting to assume positions of legitimacy in an environment that has been largely constructed as a male territory (Wylie 2004: 43).

Contemporary Chinese women have done well in multinational corporations (MNCs) as managers, consultants, and directors holding positions throughout the corporate hierarchy (Yan 2002: 23). Duthie (2005: 6) and Liu (2017: 14) list major reasons behind the rise of white-collar professional women in China. First, women who are single-daughters born to well-to-do urban families in the era of the one-child-per-family policy have enjoyed unprecedented investment from their parents in their educations, especially in learning foreign languages indispensable for entering MNCs (Ong 2011). Second, under the sway of neoliberal forces that "endorse the youth, intelligence, beauty, and materiality" of a market economy (Liu 2017: 6), many young women make use of gendered career paths inside MNCs, by which they start as personal

assistants to male sales representatives and managers and are thereby given greater access to corporate decision-making processes.

*Resource Reserve for the Nation or Self as an Enterprise?*

During the Maoist era (1949-76), paid employment became a standard feature of rural and urban women's lives (Wang 2003). Under the previous planned system of high socialism, labor power was not "owned" by an individual to be sold on any market, but rather constituted part of the means of production owned by the state (Bian 1994, 51, 96). Returns on an individual's labor power was realized only through its participation in production for the state, and job assignments by the state aimed to equalize development across the country and eliminate exploitation and unemployment (Hoffman 2010: 88). Citizens of the socialist Party-state considered acquisition of skills "for the improved performance of the organization or the fulfillment of political objectives of the central or local party leaders," not for individual fulfillment or personal career specialization and advancement (Davis 1990: 89; 2000). Simply put, work under socialism expressed an outward duty to building a nation rather than an inward focus of self-development.

In the context of post-reform urban China, Hanser (2002: 190) observes that the old pattern of getting a job—which rewarded some people's ability to maneuver for the best of government-allocated, guaranteed, lifetime jobs— has been replaced by "a new form of competition in which, increasingly free market mechanisms distribute jobs that people hardly expect to hold for life." Young Chinese seeking jobs and careers in the market in the post-socialist era have more autonomy and mobility compared to those relying on the stability provided by state-regulated work units under socialism, and that they work to achieve self-development and fulfillment through choice-making dependent

on ability. Hanser (2002) draws on Rose's (1998) definition of the enterprising self to argue that over the course of four decades since the launching of the economic reforms and opening up in the late 1970s, there has been a decided shift away from the old understanding of labor power toward the new idea that it should be developed for and by the individual.

Such analysis of the rise of the neoliberal, enterprising self among workers in post-reform urban China seems to assume that neoliberal ideologies are adopted on a blank slate, and does not adequately address the question regarding the foundation on which people adopt neoliberal ideologies to reform their subjectivities as workers. I argue that instead of viewing the changing configuration of women's labor as a unilateral shift towards the enterprising self, we should pay close attention to how women's socio-economic roles—especially their entry into and retreat from the workforce— have undergone substantial fluctuations in accordance with the overall priorities of the central government's policies in both the socialist and reform era (Hooper 1984: 318). The dominance of economic priorities has had both positive and negative impacts on women's participation in the labor force and production: Whether women work and what kinds of work they do have been subject to state policies of economic development and labor mobilization that are inflected by gender ideologies (Hershatter 2007: 59-60).

During early years of the PRC, the party insisted that women could not be fully liberated without fully participating in the labor force and national economic production (Davin 1973, 1975a, 1975b; Croll 1979, 1985). Women were especially encouraged to participate in the paid labor force in times of labor shortage, when strategies for economic development required large amounts of labor in general and men's labor

specifically for technical and managerial work (Andors 1983; Rofel 1999; Manning 2005), such as during the First Five-Year Plan (1953-7), Great Leap Forward (1958-60), and early years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1969. During times of economic growth, women's labor was regarded as being integral to state development strategies, manifest particularly in socialist campaigns to publicize women's labor models and emphasize their enthusiasm for work (Hershatter 2000; Chen 2003a, 2003b). Nevertheless, during periods of economic slowdown, the state turned to emphasize the importance of women's domestic roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper (Davin 1976; Croll 1980; Hooper 1984; Manning 2005; see also Hershatter 2007: 54).

During the early years of the reform era, state policies of economic development and labor mobilization driving women into the public domain of production and back into the domestic domain of reproduction (when economic growth slowed), have continued. China's economic growth in the post-socialist era, based on reforms of restructuring the economy and opening its market up to the world, has created enormous opportunities for women to join the labor force. Nevertheless, as the market's economic rationalism strengthened and the state's protection of public welfare weakened, women disproportionally bore the negative impacts of the reform (Jiang 2004: 208-9). In the 1980s and 1990s when the state was promoting market economy and enterprise autonomy, many state-owned factories scaled down their operations and personnel in order to become more competitive. Certain areas and sectors of the economy (such as manufacturing) witnessed the phenomenon of 'stepping-down women workers' (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 250-2; Yang 1999: 52-3). Women were pressured to withdraw from the labor force as a way of easing problems of excess labor supply, especially when

unemployment was serious among men (Jacka 1990: 1-2), thereby becoming the victims of neoliberal reforms.

Acute urban unemployment among women rendered female labor in general more expendable than male labor and caused many women's departure from the public domain altogether. Western writers on women in modern China, such as Hooper (1984) and Davin (1987), have paid attention to the phenomenon of women "returning to the kitchen," not only in the context of neoliberal reforms of economic restructuring but also in terms of a historical pattern in which "women have been encouraged to participate in the paid labor force in times of labor shortage, but at other times…have been discriminated against and pressured to withdraw from the labor force" as a way of easing problems of economic slowdown and unemployment (Jacka 1990: 2). Many employers in the reform era realized that it would be less "cost-effective" to hire women than men, because it was they instead of the state—contrary to the socialist era—who would pay for female employees' maternity leaves and provide childcare facilities (Jacka 1990: 10-11).

A deeper force that has prevented women's participation in the labor force from reaching the level of men was the culturally sustained assumption that women had two major roles to fulfil: that of mother and of worker. So long as women were perceived as bearing primary responsibility for housework and childcare, employers considered them incapable of devoting themselves to jobs as fully as men and therefore preferred men over women (Robinson 1985). Discussions of women's unemployment and retreat to the domestic sphere in the reform era raised serious questions about the status of women.

In short, working women in urban China formed a great reserve of labor power: they were urged to enter the workforce en masse when their labor was deemed necessary,

and found themselves redirected to domestic and reproductive roles during periods of economic slowdown and restructuring. Neoliberal economic reforms that extoled the role of the market and corporations and propelled the retreat of the state exacerbated such fluctuations of women's employment.

**Negotiating Gender at Work**

Haiyan, the heroine of a popular online TV series *The Photo Album of a Shanghai Woman*, is getting ready for her job interview with a global advertising company, having borrowed a nice business suit from her white-collar cousin and reciting her responses to hypothetical interview questions. As a young woman hailing from a small city inland, Haiyan is graduating from a university in Shanghai, and her dream of finding a white-collar job and establishing a life in Shanghai motivates her to work harder than her peers who are local. Everything that she hopes for depends on the job interview, but she is not only running late but has accidentally spilt coffee on the white blouse that she has borrowed. "How can you be a white-collar woman when your collar is not white?" Haiyan's cousin asks rhetorically when she sees Haiyan running into the building for her job interview, and Haiyan feels even less confident.

Despite showing a lack of competency in English during her nerve-wracking job interview, Haiyan ends up getting an entry-level job in the company. Her first day at work proves to be even harder than the day of her interview. This time she comes in really early, only to find that no one is in the office except another new employee. "Hello, my name is Kate. What's your name?" A fashionably dressed woman exuding youth and beauty wants to shake Haiyan's hands, and she introduces herself in Chinese, except

when stressing her English name, Kate. Haiyan gets nervous and stutters when responding to Kate, "I am…my name…is…Haiyan." Kate politely smiles back and asks, "So you don't have an English name?" Right at that time, several other new employees walk in, and the HR manager who has interviewed them a couple of days ago appears and greets everyone. When she hears the name "Haiyan" after a series of English names, she frowns for a second and asks Haiyan to get herself an English name immediately.

Not only does her lack of an English name make her unfit for the global ambience of the firm that serves more foreign businesses than domestic ones, Haiyan feels even more discouraged by her poor English skills when trying to communicate with an American client in front of her supervisor. On top of her long hours and late nights at work, Haiyan decides to spend time studying English on weekends that are also devoted to brainstorming ideas for the firm's advertising projects. All her efforts pay off when she suggests an excellent solution for a project in dire circumstances, speaks fluent English with the foreign client about her solution, and finally introduces herself as Harriet. Since then, "Harriet, good job!" has been accompanying Haiyan on her way up to eventually become a business director, before she quits and starts her own business.

*The Photo Album of a Shanghai Woman* not only celebrates the professional success of Haiyan, a college-educated white-collar woman who eventually becomes a business executive and an entrepreneur, but also presents her romantic relationships with several men, including an executive from Hong Kong (who later turns out to be married) and a local business tycoon who encourages Haiyan to start her own business. The show has instigated debates online as to whether Haiyan relies on the help from men for her professional success. Some viewers commented that these men have only given her

advice and encouragement for her to do what she already wants to, and that Haiyan's upward mobility should be attributed to her own talents and hard-work. Others questioned how much of Haiyan's success is facilitated by the "help" she has received from these men who are infatuated with her beauty.

Social meanings attached to white-collar workers and attitudes they embrace are simultaneously the result of the history of global capitalism, state-led market reforms, local cultures, and the agency of white-collar workers themselves (Duthie 2005). Moreover, the white-collar professional identity in urban China is gendered, given the Chinese phrase "white-collar beauties" (*bailing liren* 白领丽人) that ties certain kinds of femininity to it (see Introduction). This section shows how white-collar women in Shanghai negotiated their gendered professional subjectivities. Cultural values are shaped, contested, and defended in different domains of power relations (Ong 1991: 281), and women are involved in complicated, dynamic processes in which power hierarchy, social norms, and business culture are intertwined to create a complex structure of gender interactions at work.

It was often assumed that talents and hard-work would not be enough for women's upward mobility in the corporate world, and should be coupled with, or facilitated by, feminine attractiveness. Catherine, who worked in the Shanghai office of a multinational company, learned through personal experiences that a woman's success did not always get attributed by others to talents and hard-work. Catherine was recommended for a position held by someone who was leaving the company for another place. A recommendation was made for Catherine based on her outstanding progress compared to her peers, spreading her reputation as the ideal employee that all bosses would desire to

have. Proud of her hard-work that got recognized by people above and around her, Catherine was disappointed to overhear others commenting on her potential promotion behind her back: "Catherine is getting along very well with all these bosses, isn't she? She is moving up so quickly, for someone so young. I wonder why everybody just likes her." Catherine sensed the suspicion underneath such comment commonly targeting young, attractive women.

> You work hard, but others don't see your progress as a result of your own hard-work. They just think that you are attractive and can get away with things…I hold high standards for work and always do my best. Once my very nice boss tried to cover for a mistake I made, but I insisted that I take the responsibility. I have never made that same mistake again.

Other young women dealt with similar suspicions that their upward mobility came as a result of feminine attractiveness instead of talents and hard-work. Female charm in this context was considered not as a discreet term for sexual services, but rather as the ability of women to play on the attraction between the sexes, which in many cases, including the show The Photo Album of a Shanghai Woman, could be a sufficient reason for a man to assist a woman on her way of climbing up the corporate ladder (Yang 1994: 83; Wylie 2004: 49).

Before becoming a freelance career development consultant who advertised her paid service online for young white-collar workers, Yolanda worked as a human resources manager for a multinational Fortune 500 company for many years. She told me

how her former work environment promoted hard-working, ambitious, and even

aggressive women:

> Female supervisors from my former company were always on top of everything,
> all kinds of overlapping schedules and assignments with pressing deadlines. They
> were always multitasking and working very efficiently, and were always
> demanding assertively what others in their teams should do by certain deadlines. I
> guess they had to present themselves in that way to be taken seriously. After I got
> promoted to the managerial level, I became one of those ambitious, even
> aggressive women myself.

Chan's (2017: 111-112) research on female bankers in Shanghai shows how the image of

*nü hanzi* (tough ladies 女汉子) operates in professional settings. In Chinese, *hanzi* (汉子)

refers not only to a man, but more importantly to a brave, tough man. The expression *nü*

*hanzi* reflects the expectation of the professional world for women to embody both

feminine and masculine traits and present themselves as ambitious, aggressive persons.

Some white-collar women revealed to me that they felt more stressed if working

under female supervisors who considered them as potential competitors. This resonates

with Chan's (2017: 152) observation of Chinese women bankers who see their workplace

as a hyper-competitive environment:

> Women do not want to work for women, they compete against each other and
> harbor a 'crab-pot mentality' – crabs in a pot all want to climb up and out to

freedom and mobility, but all they do is pull each other down so that in the end, tragically, none manages to escape; no woman escapes from a comparatively low position. Women are also afraid of women who are their bosses, because they know their weaknesses and deficiencies, such as the family pressure to have children, the traditional expectation toward wives to sacrifice for their families or their husbands; being too emotional in doing their work…not being as committed to their careers as men; and so on. Other women in the bank become their own 'looking-glass', their own mirror. Male bosses know less about women and therefore male ignorance can be and will be exploited by women.

White-collar women in Japanese corporations, who were once called office ladies (OLs) or "office flowers" with the implication that they served at best a decorative function to inspire office men to work hard (Ogasawara 1998:12), may have experienced something quite different. Evoking their awareness of gender-based discrimination at work, Japanese OLs gossip about men during work breaks, and direct a collective, critical gaze at men who in their eyes are taking free rides on their labor. OLs' judgments of men in their gossips are subversive to the extent that men are publicly embarrassed and irritated by women's persistent critical gaze. In practice, OLs humiliate men through their gift-giving on Valentine's Days that serves as a poll of popularity, and their unwillingness to take on extra work or be cooperative when demanded by men whom they disliked can cause men great distress (Ogasawara 1988: 87).

Many Japanese white-collar women embody "ironic aloofness from office hierarchy" through acts of critique and resistance targeting male co-workers (Ogasawara

1998: 96). They assert rights within the terms defined by the corporation and available to them: It is because some Japanese OLs are not expected to be responsible for work or to move up the corporate ladder through work that they can refuse to take the initiative to improve their own work or group performance when responding to a man's request for a work-related favor. While OLs' acts of resistance call into question the hitherto taken-for-granted work attitudes and basic values of *sararīman* (salary men) whose egos, reputations, and prospects for promotion become targets of OLs' defiance (Ogasawara 1998: 97), such resistance indicates that women themselves are not part of the race. Thus, what enables Japanese OLs' subversive acts is "their accommodation to company policies that set separate career paths for men and women," and thus OLs "must adapt themselves to discriminatory company policies before they can voice resistance" (Ogasawara 1998: 163).

Japanese OLs who are seeking serious careers in Ogasawara's (1998) account are uncomfortable with their fellow OLs' acts of resistance, and perceive such defiance against men as not helping them obtain, and indeed may prevent them from obtaining, the "real" power that enables them to be on equal footing with male colleagues. These ambitious women end up being more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation: Because they cannot take irresponsible attitudes toward work, they often work hard and overtime with little reward in either pay or promotion. At the same time, the more those who show aloofness to organizational hierarchy and career advancement resist, the more they promote the stereotype that women are unable to make rational decisions or be seriously committed to work (Ogasawara 1998: 163). Overall, discriminatory

environments at the Japanese workplace lead men and women to assume different attitudes toward work, and such differences are ultimately understood in terms of gender.

In contrast to the conflation of gender and organizational positions in the Japanese workplace—what I observed in Shanghai was the upholding of authority regardless of gender. Not only men but also women were in positions of power, and could demand workers lower in the corporate hierarchy to serve them in ways that benefited them. For instance, when a boss—either male or female—wanted to get something done in the bank but did not want to waste time waiting, h/she had the right, granted by his/her position of power, to ask one of those who worked for him/her to wait in line instead. White-collar women around me did not complain that their gender was being manipulated to legitimize and naturalize their inferiority to male and female superiors in the workplace (cf. Joan Scott 1988; c.f. Liu 2017). A lot of them attributed feelings of discontentment with work to the prevalence of bureaucracy and hierarchy in the workplace[8].

**Negotiating Stability: Women Working for the State**

I have shown that post-socialist China has continued from the socialist era to perceive and regulate women's labor as an important resource reserve in the state's strategies of development, while some analysts have noticed the rise of the neoliberal, enterprising self among workers who treat their laboring selves as projects and enterprises of individual self-development. I now draw on ethnographic materials from

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[8]In the context of the company where I worked, there were a few men occupying superior positions at the managerial level (and working on the floor above me and my interlocutors). During the course of my fieldwork there, I did not have much interaction with them.

my fieldwork in Shanghai to show that the neoliberal enterprising self is gendered in locally particular and meaningful ways that have to do with how women negotiated relationships to the state and private sector and experienced stability and mobility. This section focuses on a few women working in the state sector, and demonstrates a sense of continuity from the socialist era in how they conceptualized the notion of stability in their relationships to the state as an employer and paternal provider and negotiated between taken-for-granted stable careers and individual ambitions.

Min, a woman in her late-twenties working for the Shanghai office of a large state-owned bank, saw herself as defying commonly held assumptions about employees in the state sector. She stated:

> I am a very goal-oriented and hard-working person. Although I work in a state-owned company, which people think is lagging behind the competitive market and a place of comfortable and easy work, I set clear goals for myself and tell myself what I need to do to achieve my goals. I am also very detail-oriented. I constantly revise what I write, and make beautiful excel spreadsheets so much so that when I see those spreadsheets made by others who fail to reach my standards, I just cannot accept them. My colleagues were very impressed by my hard-work, but they often judged that I took my work too seriously. They discouraged me by asking, 'Can they give you a raise in salary? If you don't work hard like you do now, will they fire you?'

Min's colleagues' questions pointed to the widely perceived comfort and stability of working for a state sector employer. Their judgment about her highlighted the fact that one's workload was not necessarily proportional to one's income in the state sector. Although she could easily have kept her job and earned the same salary even if she had worked less hard, Min could not let her work ethic compromise with what she saw as an irresponsible attitude towards work not necessarily bound to a particular sector.

Devoted wholeheartedly to every detail of her work, Min rarely left the office at 6pm sharp, which was a normal point in time for many state-sector employees to get off work. Min at one point desired to switch to a job in the private sector, and yet her mom discouraged her from doing so:

My mom believes that my current job is very stable and privileged. It is the perfect job for a woman who wants to get married and start a family, because we don't work late at night and can spend time taking care of husbands and children after getting married. Overtime work is only very occasional for us officially. How good is that for a woman interested in starting a family?! I know it is a good job in many ways, but I am not passionate about it.

The commonly held perception of a state-sector job reflected in Min's story resonates with Hoffman's (2010) observation among college graduates in the Chinese city of Dalian that jobs in the state-sector are usually thought of as ideal ones for women who are expected to be family-oriented. This perception of state sector jobs can be traced to the legacy of socialism in constructing the state as a provider.

Within a brief span of eight years after the communist revolution in 1949, the Party-state in China in the 50s reformed urban industrial production partly by transforming privately owned enterprises into one form or another of state ownership and control. State-owned enterprises not only paid workers' salaries but also provided consumer goods, meal services, health insurance and pensions, medical care, housing, childcare, education, and other forms of subsidies, which people who were not permanently employed in the state sector were not entitled to. Situated in this pattern of socialist redistribution, workers depended socially and economically on the socialist enterprise in ways explicated by Walder (1986: 16) as follows:

> [E]mployment in the state enterprise is not primarily a market relationship. It is a position that establishes the worker's social identity and rights to specific distributions and welfare entitlements provided by the state. Moreover, the state exercises authority not only over one highly specialized role, but over the whole person.

Walder (1986: 81) argues that the dependence of Chinese workers on state enterprises is a variant of a generic communist pattern in which labor is treated not as a commodity but as a political and economic resource. State-owned enterprises in urban China, which provided primary sources for the satisfaction of a broad range of workers' needs and played a central role in the delivery of free or highly subsidized goods and services, enacted a paternalistic approach to managing labor relations and offering collective

benefits. This historical legacy from high-socialism decades ago still shapes the urban economy in today's China.

In socialist China, urban families received cradle-to-grave welfare packages including housing, steady salaries, pensions, medical care, and schooling for children—as part of the "iron rice bowl" (*tiefanwan* 铁饭碗)—through state-regulated work units (*danwei* 单位). This system from high socialism (Walder 1986) has left not only a material but also a symbolic legacy associating the state sector with security and stability (Hoffman 2010: 122). Similar to what could be provided by one's household headed by the father, the state was often seen as a paternal figure of provision. Women, discursively associated with the domestic, inner domain, were and still are often seen as more suitable for state sector employment, working for either government offices and schools or state-owned enterprises. At the dawn of economic reforms, work habits associated with some state sectors, such as flexible working hours, unoccupied time due to overstaffing, and an early end to the workday, were perceived as more suitable for women (Hoffman 2010: 128). Meanwhile, men who were traditionally located in the outside, public domain took advantage of the growing private sector to seek new employment and business opportunities in the early years of economic reforms.

By examining the ways the gendered division of labor mapped onto the state/private sector division and was incorporated into different employment choices between men and women, Hoffman (2010) illustrates that the production of a professional subjectivity is not predetermined but requires the state to associate proper work with men and women. Women are often seen to desire more security and stability

than others that can be supported by state sector jobs. Although jobs in the state sector have lost their appeals for some young people in post-reform urban China, I met several white-collar women working for state-owned enterprises during my research in Shanghai, whose experiences of work reflected gendered expectations for stability and shed light on a critical component of the formation of professional subjectivities in contemporary urban China.

What would happen when the state could fail to fulfill the desire for stable provision among those working for it? Ju worked for a state-owned enterprise in Zhangjiang Technological Zone of Pudong District where the national and local governments were involved actively in incubating new startup businesses. Ju recalled an easy and unexciting period of time, not long after she started the job, when she came to the office only to get her own reading and studying done. As a talented, ambitious young woman who graduated from a prestigious university in central China and got her master's degree from England, Ju stood at an advantageous position in the job market in Shanghai and had been given other options of working in the private sector. She eventually picked her current state sector job, for a better chance of obtaining the local *hukou* (household registration 户口) which was a benefit that has continued to be provided mostly by state-owned enterprises and a handful of multinational corporations in Shanghai.

Getting a local *hukou* and becoming a new Shanghainese portended stability and security for Ju, who planned to get married and settle down in the near future. Much to her dismay, Ju was informed, over a year into the job, of not satisfying the salary requirement for getting a Shanghai *hukou*. "I felt that I was cheated. The only reason I chose this state sector job instead of others in the private sector was because of *hukou*.

Otherwise, I would have chosen jobs and places that were much more challenging and stimulating for me." Stuck between an easy job with an average salary and an empty promise, a job market that was slowing down at the time of the bad news, and her need to pay rent, Ju struggled to pull herself together so that she could come to work without feeling frustrated and angry every day. After staying put at her job for a few more months, holding a little bit of hope, Ju finally saw her silver lining, that the supervisor of another department in the company wanted her on his team so much that he helped raise her salary to a level that qualified her to apply for a Shanghai *hukou*. Knowing that it was only six more months to wait before becoming a new Shanghainese, Ju decided to forget about the unmotivated days of work, and happily stayed to work for the state. This story highlighted that even for young people who had studied and lived abroad and might have been drawn towards the work culture of multinational corporations and the private sector, the security, stability, and welfare provided by the state sector—similar to the care provided by a paternal figure— could still appear very attractive.

Ju's experience of almost being let down by her state-sector employer calls to mind Pugh's (2015) discovery of the impact of insecurity on stably employed Americans. Pugh (2015: 135) argues that in both realms of work and home, the stably employed demonstrate an assumption of mutual responsibility and reciprocity, "in sharp contrast to the fervent insistence upon individual accountability—what has been called 'neoliberal subjectivity'— that we have seen insecure workers profess in myriad ways." The stably employed approach work in a pragmatic way, in that they maintain high expectations for a work ethic among themselves and loyalty from their employers, and even call upon metaphors of family to describe their relationship to the workplace (Pugh 2015: 140).

Although their propensity to make compromises at work enables them to endure

hardships, high expectations for employers among the stably employed could lead to their

sense of betrayal and even open defiance, when employers fail to meet their expectations

of loyalty and support (Pugh 2015: 142-3). The stably employed insist upon a kind of

relationship with their employers that emphasizes shared obligations and contests the

universality of insecurity (Pugh 2015: 144).

Pugh (2015: 144, 18-9) contends that those stably employed generally reject the

one-way honor system prevalent among those not stably employed—by which employees

may accept that insecurity prevails at work as they maintain high expectations for their

own duty and dedication and yet low expectations for employers—and instead "embrace

similar standards of commitment from their employers to those they expect of

themselves." Along similar lines, Ju took for granted the provision of social welfare—

*hukou* in her case—by her state sector employer, when acknowledging that she was

willing to accept the lack of challenge and stimulation that came with a state-sector job in

comparison to jobs in the private sector. As long as she was willing to come to work

every day, when there was no work to be done and nothing exciting to motivate her, she

expected the state employer to shoulder its responsibility and keep its promise of helping

her become a new Shanghainese. Such a paternalistic relationship between the state and

its employees is similar to that between parents and their children. Ju's frustration with

the state's inability to provide not only a sense of stability and entitlement but also

tangible benefits of public welfare that would come with a Shanghai *hukou* at one point

discouraged her from committing fully to work. Yet when she saw that the state employer

was able to keep its promise and fulfill her expectation, Ju could easily forget the

drawbacks she and others would associate with a state-sector job and return to being a good employee with a high level of performance and loyalty.

Not everyone appreciated the perks and privileges that lured others to work at jobs in the state sector. I was told by some former state sector employees that they stopped enjoying what they used to take for granted, such as having personal cars, chauffeurs, special license plates (that got them through busy highways with ease), and explicit and implicit gifts and briberies, after President Xi embarked on anti-corruption campaigns. Ruth, currently an HR manager for the Shanghai office of an American company, talked about her past experience of working for a state-owned enterprise without a tinge of nostalgia in her tone:

> I still do not think working for a state-owned enterprise is a good job for a woman. Chinese officialdom and business are highly integrated, and both are domains of powerful male actors. Look at those who occupy powerful positions in business and in politics nowadays…It is hard for women to climb up the ladder because you will have to go to banquets, drink a ton of liquor, and form close relations with men. As a woman, you have to work hard to make those men treat you almost as a brother.

Thus, resembling American professional women who experience a gender-based glass ceiling in the workplace, Chinese women working in the state sector experienced difficulties that they could not overcome as women. The culture of business was grounded in masculine practices of drinking and forming fraternal bonds that women—

especially those concerned with traditional notions of feminine virtues—found hard to participate in and take advantage of.

**Managing Mobility: Women Working in the Private Sector**

Carla Freeman (2014:1-2), drawing on Foucault (1988), contends that the self as an 'entrepreneurial' project under constant renovation is a key signpost of neoliberalism's perpetual quest for flexibility in the changing global economy, and that technologies of the self are integral to the entrepreneurial ethos. Freeman (2014: 3) states, "At the heart of the entrepreneurial ethos is a vigorous entanglement of *selfhood* and *labor* for envisioning and making one's self entails particular forms (and particular intensity) of work." This section delves into my white-collar women interlocutors' experiences of working in the private sector and dealing with the everchanging nature of the market. Inspired by Freeman (2014), it looks at their relationships between selfhood and labor, to shed light on how the reign of flexibility is construed as the essence of the neoliberal self.

*Struggling with the Easy Days*

"Would you like to get lunch together and go to the renovated Shanghai History Museum afterwards?" Snow, a young woman working in an insurance company in downtown Shanghai, texted me on Wechat to plan our activities for the next day. I could sense excitement flowing from her phone to mine. I happily accepted her invitation, although I could not help but wonder why she would get such a long lunch break on a workday. Having read my mind, Snow texted with an emoji of a cunning smile, "I am not busy these days." On the next day, Snow invited me to her company's cafeteria for lunch,

and I asked her quietly when we were waiting in the line at the entrance, "What did you mean when you said you were not busy these days?" Snow responded, "There isn't much work these days…I mean, there isn't work these days."

Snow lowered her voice and glanced around to make sure that there was no co-worker of hers nearby hearing our conversation. She kept her gaze down on the dining table, and narrated:

It started with a scandal revealed by the press about our company, and we had to stop everything to let regulators do their investigation. It was kind of nice in the beginning, to just come to work and be expected to do nothing, like having days off and still getting paid. You know, our lunch break officially ends at 1pm, but since we don't have any work, we can just wander around until 2 or even 2:30pm. That's why I said I could go to the museum during my lunch break! But after a while, business still hasn't picked up, and I continue to have nothing to do at work. Not just me but my colleagues and boss, all of them have nothing to do except when they are called to meet a client. The problem is that we really don't see our clients that often, so that amounts to not much work. It is quite worrisome now.

In a tone tinged with embarrassment and anxiety, Snow told me that she had signed up for a professional certificate examination, and had been studying textbooks to prepare for the exam during her easy days in the office. When I asked whether anybody worked overtime at all in this circumstance of reduced workload, she laughed, waved her

hands, and said, "The boss leaves on time, I mean, really on time. I can see that she cannot wait to leave at 6pm! So, no one works overtime these days. But it can be completely different on busy days…" Snow's words conveyed her nostalgia for the good old days when it was much busier in the office, and she continued to tell me, "I have seen people putting up their revised resumes online, some after years of working here, and I can feel that my boss is also looking for a new place, or probably has already found one." Snow lowered her voice even more, expressing anxiety about not working enough and the futility of trying to find something to make use of her time with other than reading textbooks for getting professional certificates in her industry. In a half-joking, half-serious tone, Snow said that some of her female colleagues were preparing to get pregnant on those easy days. "Why not? Can you get an even better time than now to spend months getting pregnant when you are not stressed by work but are still getting paid?" Snow shrugged and asked rhetorically.

Snow's unease about and struggle with the easy days reflects the precarious nature of the market and private sector in the urban political economy of today's China, in contrast to the taken for granted stability among workers in the state sector that I showed earlier. Snow considered herself underemployed by a job that had not fully employed her time and talents. Lane's (2011) ethnography of unemployed and underemployed high-tech workers in early 21st century America documents how individualist, pro-market ideologies shape workers' lives and worldview, in the midst of transformations happening in the workplace such as the rising frequency of job change, expanded use of outsourcing, offshoring, and part-time or contract workers, relative absence of labor unions, rapid rates of organizational and technological change, and prevalent self-

employment and entrepreneurship. Facing these changes, high-tech workers see themselves as "companies of one," that is, entrepreneurial agents engaged in the constant labor of defining, improving, and marketing their personal brand (Lane 2011: 9). It is worth noting that there is a difference between under-employed people in the U.S. economy in Lane (2011) and Snow's situation: she was not under-employed in the sense of not having a steady job. She was under-employed because there was nothing to do at work. This made her worry, that her company would fail or downsize, and that as a consequence she would lose her job, which is different than not having a job and constantly having to seek work.

Snow mentioned that people in her office put their revised resumes online to market themselves to companies that they hoped would provide more secure employment and steady workloads. When wishing to go back to normal busy workdays and preparing to leave for another job at the same time, Snow also kept a part-time contract job that she did not want her colleagues to know about. Snow's professional life resonates with Lane's observation (2011: 47-48) that in the neoliberal era, a career is no longer a linear progression up a predetermined ladder in one corporate context, but something to be actively pieced together from an assortment of various stretches of employment: part-time and contract positions, permanent jobs, periods of self-employment, and occasional underemployment and unemployment. Whether employed or not, many white-collars like her felt it necessary to stay abreast of industry trends and keep their work skills, educational degrees, and professional certifications relentlessly up to date. Therefore, employability became prioritized over actual employment as a new measure of white-collar security (Lane 2011: 47).

How to achieve a sense of professional security when facing the precarious market? Freeman (2014: 19) states, "Whatever a source of anxiety, an external command of promise, or a deeply internalized desire, if a single concept could capture the complex essence of the entrepreneurialism...it would be flexibility." While a sense of self-reliance in the context of professional precarity and financial hardship establishes masculine agency among Lane's (2011: 46) high-tech unemployed informants in America, I observed that white-collar women in Shanghai made great efforts to be self-responsible for realizing professional ambitions through not only working hard but also improving one's employability. In a way, the Shanghai women seemed to be also developing a sense of masculine agency like that described by Lane. As Rose (1992: 151-2) argues, work has been re-construed in the neoliberal era, not as a constraint upon freedom and autonomy, but as a realm in which working people can express their autonomy and achieve fulfillment not in spite of work but by means of work.

*Managing Career, Managing Self*

Acutely conscious of the insecure nature of employment and holding visions for their continuous professional self-development, white-collar women around me constantly made efforts to augment their 'skill sets' in line with what they judged the market and future jobs would demand. In interviews, many expressed the fear that they would become obsolete if they were unable to keep up with rapidly changing technologies and growing knowledge in their industries. They internalized the concept of the worker-self as a 'bundle of skills', in which one's very person was defined as a conglomerate of commodifiable pieces of knowledge, ability, and skill (Upadhya 2016: 29-31). White-collar women around me considered themselves not only as bundles of

commodifiable capabilities and skills but also continuous projects of the development of human capital, which is an extension of, as Gordon (1991: 44) states, "the idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself" (see also Hoffman 2010: 79). Foucault (2008: 266) states, "Homo Economicus is an entrepreneur...an entrepreneur of himself...being for himself his own capital...his own producer...the source of [his] earnings." Following Foucault, Freeman (2014:20) states,

> The directive to become an 'entrepreneur of the self' implies an independence in which the individual is defined as a self-propelled, autonomous economic actor, ever responsive to a dynamic market place and simultaneously encouraged to seek introspection, self-mastery, and personal fulfillment. This edict entails not only retraining and the procurement of new skills, networks, and the imagination and courage to break outside of the established channels of upward mobility but also an interior dimension of selfhood and flexible self-making through enterprise in which capital accumulation is not an end in itself but a means to reinvent oneself.

Neoliberal ideologies impel individuals to cultivate a self "that is a flexible bundle of skills that reflexively manages oneself as though the self was a business" (Gershon 2011: 537), and this notion of self as a project and enterprise has become accepted as the de facto model of global capitalist citizenship in diverse social contexts (Gagné 2019).

White-collar workers in my field believed that being a hard-working and loyal employee was not enough for job security and upward mobility in today's hyper-competitive and precarious market economy. Instead, they attempted to blend the ethics

of self-sacrifice, eating bitterness (*chiku* 吃苦), hard-work, and the spirit of

entrepreneurship to become proactive managers of their careers. Similar to American

high-tech workers that explicitly reject previous ways of thinking about loyalty, seniority,

and the social contract of employment (Lane 2011: 48), many of my interlocutors

working in the private sector did not depend on traditional patterns of job security,

stability, and upward mobility provided by the state. Instead, they came to rely on their

educational backgrounds and professional skills, to always look for better opportunities

and take responsibility for marketing their personal brands (Gershon 2016). In this way,

they reframed the precarious nature of contemporary employment seen across companies

and industries as a means through which workers accumulated a varied and valuable

portfolio of skills that would potentially ensure their future employability and prosperity.

Although one could not control the situations of unemployment and

underemployment that were driven by external, oftentimes market forces, many white-

collar interlocutors wanted to be active agents and managers of their own career paths.

Most of the conversations that I had in the field about job hunting and job hopping

happened between me and Catherine, a woman in her mid-twenties who had worked for

two years for a multinational company in Shanghai. Always thinking about the next

employer and job, Catherine was eager to share what she had been reading about those

issues:

> I once read an online article that said over 80% of white-collars in Shanghai were
>
> in the stage of wanting to change their job. The article analyzes when it is the best
>
> time to change your job, and also, for instance, how many jobs one can have

within four years. The article talks about, which I agree with, the fact that we young Chinese are brought up to study, not to develop our real interests and practice them in social life. Growing up, we are isolated from the real society so much that we don't exactly know what we want to do when we enter the job market. Only by accumulating real-world experiences can one find her true passion. That's why many people keep changing their jobs: only by trying one after another can they find their real interest along the road. In the long-run, their career paths become more stable once they have found their true passion.

"Do you see yourself switching to a new job anytime soon?" I asked. Not answering my question directly, Catherine continued to tell me what she read:

Some say that hopping to a new job within 9 months of one's current job could be considered a negative sign of loyalty. It is more understandable for one to switch to a new job after two or three or four years, but it all depends on whether your job is something you enjoy…In my case, I don't think it is good to change that soon…Nine months is a critical period of time because there is usually a six-month internship period when the company and you are both deciding whether it is a good fit and when you get to learn all the basics. If you leave before the end of nine months, it is either because you cannot handle the job and are basically fired, or it is not a good fit. Anyway, hopping to a new job before you've worked at your current one for less than a year will be considered by HRs as either a sign of your lack of loyalty to an employer or your inability to learn at work…But if

you have worked at a place for four years and you still don't see the possibility of

promotion or learning new things, you should definitely leave. The bottom line is

that you should think whether you have the potential for upward mobility at a job,

and if not after a while, you should leave. Otherwise you can pretty much see the

rest of your life in one place.

Catherine's calculation of when to switch jobs exemplifies a young professional woman

taking responsibility for her own career management and professional development (Lane

2011; Gagné 2018). This stands in stark contrast to the socialist era when the state and

the work-units it regulated largely determined whether women should work or not and

what kinds of work they should do, irrespective of their own visions of self-development.

Practices of professional self-development in today's urban China reference, on

the one hand, market-based notions of entrepreneurialism, and on the other, classical

Chinese notions of self-cultivation by which one strives for excellence and perfection

through disciplined hard-work. The classical Chinese notion of self-development gets

crystalized in the old saying, "When Heaven is about to place a great responsibility on a

great man, it always first frustrates his spirit and will, exhausts his muscles and bones,

exposes him to starvation and poverty, harasses him by troubles and setbacks so as to

stimulate his spirit, toughen his nature, and enhance his abilities." Catherine once

confessed to me,

I used to be quite motivated and make the best of my time after work every night

and on weekends, when I had just started working. But it seems that I have been

living more and more comfortably these days. This is dangerous. Success does not come from comfort, but from self-discipline…No matter what job I do in the future, I want to be a person who is always disciplined and diligent and is never slacking off. I believe that self-discipline and hard-work make me a better person.

Besides her full time job, Catherine worked as a tutor for English and French on the weekends, which she did not only to earn extra money but more importantly to hone her language skills. "I have always wanted to work for jobs that make good use of my language skills, and no matter what specific job I do, I want to always be prepared."

In the context of post-socialist China, Zhang and Ong (2011) define self-making as "an ensemble of techniques that frees up not only entrepreneurialism but also powers of the self" (Zhang and Ong 2011: 12), to argue that the fundamental effect of privatization in post-socialist China lies in animating self-consciousness and self-governance among Chinese people. Zhang and Ong (20011:3) explain the neoliberal nature of this process of subject formation in contemporary China as follows:

> This subjectivizing aspect of privatization as a mode of thinking, managing, and actualizing of the self is a central element of the neoliberal doctrine…that individuals should be free to become entrepreneurs of the self in confronting the uncertainties of the market. In a fundamental sense, the self-enterprising subject begins by developing basic individual capacities to make autonomous decisions, to take initiative and risk, and otherwise to act on his or her own behalf to achieve optimal outcomes. The point is never to limit such personally responsible and

self-propelling behavior to the market environment but rather to embrace such a

calculative logic as the ethic of subject formation.

In my field many white-collar women did not approach job hopping and

relocation as signs of insecurity, but used the language of individual choice and agency to

explain their moves in terms of flexibility and upward mobility[9]. They resemble the high-

performance "itinerant" workers in Pugh's (2015) ethnography[10], who are the "winners"

in the new economy and show their loyalty to their work by not attaching themselves to a

particular job and always moving for better opportunities. Pugh demonstrates that when

they are responding to the calling of vocation and embodying a new-era Protestant work

ethic, these high-performance, low-loyalty workers are also enacting American notions of

individualism, independence, autonomy, and agency. Similarly, my white-collar women

interlocutors did not treat loyalty as a prized attribute among themselves, nor did they

expect employers to hold onto such attributes from the bygone days of high socialism

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[9]They seemed to assume continuous economic growth and a tight employment market, while also being concerned with future possibilities of economic slowdown and the contraction of the job market.

[10]Pugh's (2015: 2-4) research on the broader impacts of job insecurity on intimate and family life in contemporary America leads her to define insecurity culture as "a culture of personal responsibility and risk, linked to the spread of precariousness at work, the neoliberal receding of the state, and the dominance of the market." Elsewhere, following Ortner's (2011) observation that labor has become dispensable, disposable, and replaceable in the neoliberal era, Pugh (2017:6) refers insecurity culture to "the constellation of contemporary economic and political practices that emphasize market solutions, a shrinking role for the government, and a narrative of individual risk and responsibility, often gathered under the rubric 'neoliberalism'." Pugh (2015: 22-25) observes that workers have responded to job insecurity by working harder and longer and attaching moral valence to not only working hard but also identifying oneself with one's work. In other words, workers accept job insecurity as an inevitable matter-of-fact, and distinguish between what feels possible to change and what feels possible to manage, which shapes their attitudes to work.

when everything in life including work and family was predictable and stable. Those women professed low expectations for employers and high ones for themselves. Instead of drawing on the discourse of insecurity, they saw their mobility both in and beyond Shanghai as indicating the ascendance of flexibility in an era in which workers should be responsible for their own careers, employability, and risk-taking.

**Embracing Mobility Beyond Shanghai**

Haiyan, the heroine of *The Photo Album of a Shanghai Woman*, is sitting at a cafe downstairs from her cubicle in an advertising company during her lunch break and waiting for her boyfriend to show up. She has been slowly adjusting to her new job in a global firm, and yet her boyfriend is still looking for something that can pay his rent. Haiyan anticipates that he may want to leave Shanghai for his hometown, and that he wants to take her there to get married. Indeed, the man shows up and provides Haiyan with two train tickets to his hometown and a marriage proposal without a ring. For a short moment, Haiyan imagines what it would be like if she said yes and they went back to his hometown, got married, and had kids. Immediately after, she gets pulled back into reality, fixing her gaze on several exquisitely dressed professional women standing outside the door of the cafe. She stares at these women—who may as well represent her future self— before leaving behind her boyfriend and his tickets on the table.

Most of my interlocutors, just like Haiyan, were originally from other cities and came to Shanghai to attend college, before successfully landing internships and jobs in multinational corporations such as the one where I worked with Maggie. I asked many of them why they wanted to work and live in Shanghai, and got a widely shared response that they were drawn to how global and cosmopolitan the city was. Some of them first

came to Shanghai to see the World Expo in 2010, and became infatuated with the diverse architectures, cultures, and lifestyles they found in Shanghai. What they liked about their work experiences in Shanghai was that they were able to connect working in a cubicle of a multinational corporation to a world much larger than both their workplace and where they came from.

While a life-changing decision for Haiyan is leaving behind her hometown and her boyfriend's marriage proposal that would take her away from Shanghai, some of my white-collar interlocutors were thinking about whether they should leave Shanghai to pursue a different kind of career and life. Having worked for several multinational corporations where she felt like "a small nail in a big machine", Maggie—whom I started this chapter with—wanted to try something different outside of the city in organizations that extolled egalitarianism, team-work, and creativity:

> When I was looking for a new job, I did have some interviews at startups in nearby cities that have very dynamic, ambitious, energetic, and innovative cultures of work. When you are in their office, everyone seems very casual, wearing t-shirts and shorts for instance. You don't really feel a hierarchy existing there. It feels like you can do whatever you   want, as long as it is good for the company.

What Maggie described calls into mind Saval's (2014) characterization of the work culture of the Silicon Valley. The famously informal work culture of Silicon Valley

stands in stark contrast to the formal ambience of Wall Street, the center of gravity in

American capitalism before the rise of the Silicon Valley[11].

Maggie reflected on what she called "the downside of the white-collar culture in

Shanghai" shaped by deep influences of multinational corporations, and asked, "Why

didn't Chinese tech giants like Alibaba (headquartered in Hangzhou), Tencent

(headquartered in Shenzhen), and JD.com (headquartered in Beijing) emerge in

Shanghai?" She continued to answer her own question:

> It has to do with the work culture, the financial environment, and the everyday life
>
> of Shanghai. This city leaves people with an impression that lacks risk-taking,
>
> entrepreneurship, and invention…We cannot deny that the introduction of foreign
>
> investments and multinational corporations starting in the 90s directly caused the
>
> takeoff of Shanghai's economy…Since then, Shanghai has gone through major
>
> transformations almost every three years. But what has dominated the scene of
>
> economic takeoff in Shanghai is not local businesses and technological
>
> innovations, but big Fortune 500 companies. Graduates of elite colleges set their
>
> goals to be white-collar workers for Fortune 500 companies, and some people
>
> working in state-owned companies envy those working in multinational

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[11]Saval (2014: 110) relates the culture of informality in the Silicon Valley to college life:

"This pervasive culture, or cult, of informality, coupled with an intense devotion
to all-hours work, would have an enormous influence on the work environments
of the Valley…The disaffection with figures of authority meant that most Silicon
Valley types could not tolerate university learning for long, even though,
ironically, they would go out of their way to make their offices resemble college
campuses…It was the college lifestyle that was extended into the early days of a
startup and then institutionalized as the startup got bigger."

corporations…Shanghai's multinational corporations used to bring new technologies and management methods, but they are now losing the battle to local startups that have made cities such as Hangzhou and Shenzhen more appealing to ambitious and hardworking young people.

While noting that foreign investments and multinational corporations had produced a highly cosmopolitan professional identity that distinguished Shanghai from other Chinese cities, Maggie lamented that the white-collar work culture in Shanghai pulled the city behind others benefiting from fewer influences of multinational corporations and stronger drives of local innovation and entrepreneurship.

Elaine, another young woman whom I worked with, decided to leave Shanghai for the nearby metropolis Hangzhou. A reticent young woman with long, straight hair and no makeup, she spoke in her typical soft voice, "Hangzhou is a super vibrant city full of technological innovations and entrepreneurship." With little nostalgia, Elaine commented that Shanghai was no longer as appealing to her as a few years ago, stating:

People used to say *bei-shang-guang-shen* (北上广深 the first character of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen). But now, Shanghai has dropped to the fourth in my eyes, after Beijing, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou. Shanghai used to be a great choice for young people, because a lot of foreign companies first stepped into the Chinese market by setting up offices in Shanghai…But now, job opportunities in these multinational corporations aren't as stimulating as before.

With a raise in her pitch, Elaine expressed discontent with holding a white-collar job in Shanghai, which calls into mind Alexy's (2017) observation of the predictable lives of salarymen in Japan who consider their jobs secure but boring. Interestingly, many women working in both state-owned enterprises and multinational corporations in Shanghai complained to me about stable, predictable, and yet boring jobs when confined to their cubicles.

Career paths of professional women such as Elaine who had tried to establish themselves in Shanghai and then outside of it related their expression of autonomy and agency through work to the changing urban political economy. Hoffman (2010:10) documents the governmental change in reform-era China away from state-directed planning and towards individual choice and self-governance, stating:

> This shift away from direct state assignments is an important aspect of the development of professionalism, for the new methods of labor distribution require a subject who differs from the high-socialist worker…In the process of learning how to make choices—and making them—active, enterprising subjects have emerged…Late-socialist neoliberal governmentality has cultivated active and enterprising subjects who are able to make choices about appropriate employment that develop the individual, the city, and even the nation.

Individual job selections in post-socialist China differ from state-initiated assignments in the high-socialist era when citizens had little autonomy to generate and follow their own plans. More importantly, today's young people make use of the shifting balance of

different sectors of the economy and of different cities, and tie their own individual

career paths to the transforming urban political economy in today's China.

**Chapter Three**

**The 6pm Struggle: The Changing Meaning of Work, A Culture of Overtime Work, and Corporate Govermentality at Work**

6pm always seemed the hardest part of a workday for Catherine, a white-collar woman in her mid-twenties working for a multinational corporation in Shanghai. When she was about to leave, her boss was still working and showed no sign of leaving. Catherine would linger at the door of the office for a second, give her boss an embarrassing smile, and walked out with big steps and no looking back. 6pm for Catherine entailed a daily routine of hesitation, struggle, and determination. "I always lingered [at the door] for a second to think whether there was any legitimate reason for me to stay [overtime], but I always decided that I had better things to do." Rarely did Catherine work overtime (*jiaban* 加班), and her friends envied that she was able to get off work on time at 6pm. Yet once in a while, Catherine expressed her worry to me, "Is it really good for me to leave the office when others are still there working?"

After hearing her 6pm struggle a couple of times, I could not help but ask Catherine, "Why don't you stay a bit longer, like others?" She responded, "If something has to be done absolutely by tonight, I will stay overtime. This happens very rarely though. I think most of the time work can wait until tomorrow." "What do you think are the reasons for others to work overtime?" I continued to probe her. Catherine responded:

I have realized that some people stay overtime to make their bosses feel

impressed. In  other words, these people and their bosses believe in the equation

between overtime work and hard-work, or between hours of work and

performance. In fact, they can be less efficient during the day, and deliberately

stay late to finish whatever they should finish hours ago. Some bosses relate their

employees' willingness to stay late to an ethic of hard-work.

Catherine's daily struggle at 6pm—resolved by her leaving the office on time—

might be atypical compared to most of my interlocutors who worked overtime a lot and

felt that they had to stay overtime in offices due to various reasons that often had little to

do with the exact amount of work to be done. Yet her daily struggle exemplifies the

pervasive demand for overtime work in corporate Shanghai. This chapter shows how a

culture of overtime work was sustained and legitimated in Shanghai and how white-collar

women endured, rationalized, and accommodated it. In particular, I discuss forms of

managerial control imposed on white-collar workers and social control prevalent in the

workplace, to shed light on the formation of a kind of corporate governmentality in urban

China and its implications for shaping the personhood of workers. First, I bring readers to

the center of Shanghai's white-collar world, the Lujiazui Financial Zone of the Pudong

District, where overtime work has become a quintessential characteristic. Next, I provide

an overview of the changing meaning of work in contemporary Chinese society, and then

present how my white-collar women interlocutors valued work. I demonstrate how they

endured, rationalized, and accommodated what they identified as 'a sick culture of work'

(*bingtaide gongzuo wenhua* 病态的工作文化) increasingly dominated by vicious cycles

of overtime work. Through ethnographic materials illustrating my interlocutors'
acceptance and struggles with, as well as critiques of, overtime work and the larger work
culture behind it, I present how various means of managerial and social control in the
workplace required a reprogramming of the worker self in urban China.

**A Hub of Overtime Work**

Subway trains to and from Lujiazui are always crowded with exquisitely dressed
professional men and women accessorized with designer's bags, especially during
morning and evening rush hours. They endure being pushed around and squeezed all over
in the train. After one gets out of the train and is able to catch a breath, one needs to keep
up with the pace of fast-walking pedestrians, or gets pushed around and squeezed out
again otherwise. Those who observe the norm of standing to the right on escalators make
space for those who have to hurriedly run up for their morning meetings. Many young
people who have graduated from elite universities with outstanding academic
performances and internship experiences want to work in Lujiazui Financial Zone of the
Pudong District, the capital and commercial hub of Shanghai, one of the world's financial
centers. The three highest skyscrapers—Shanghai Tower (128 floors), Shanghai World
Financial Center (101 floors), and Jinmao Tower (88 floors)—house headquarters of
Fortune 500 and other multinational companies, large state-owned enterprises and
financial institutions, and shopping malls with luxury brands on their ground and
underground levels. Working in skyscrapers in Lujiazui is considered very prestigious
(*timian* 体面), and it is widely acknowledged that the official language in Lujiazui is
English, due to its close interactions with the global market.

Those working in Lujiazui do not always have background in finance or business from their college or post-college education, and yet many employers prefer recruiting those with diverse disciplinary and industrial backgrounds. In addition to utilizing workers' diverse backgrounds for making analyses and predictions, employers also take advantage of their willingness to commit to heavy workloads and long hours of work and overtime work. A young woman named Kate, who was working for a hedge fund at the time of my fieldwork, once said:

> The Big Four [accounting firms], for example, love to hire young people who are willing to be trained to endure ridiculous demands from supervisors and clients and work long hours. Go to the ground levels of the International Financial Center, World Financial Center, and Shanghai Center at 3am and you will see young people from the Big Four getting coffee. That's what they are willing to suffer.

Many companies in Lujiazui offer benefits such as meal reimbursements and taxi fares for those who work overtime at night. A young woman named Sabrina who was working for PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers, one of the Big Four accounting firms) told me that she always went home so late that there were no programs she could watch on TV.

Although overtime work was perceived to be pervasive in Lujiazui, some who worked there did not make clear distinctions between "work" and "overtime work" as others might. Kate once gave her own interpretation:

The definition of overtime work has to do with how you define work. For us, there is no such thing as overtime work because work is not done until you finish it. If you are more capable and finish by 6pm, you go home at 6pm. If you are less capable— due to the fact that you don't have enough background knowledge, for instance—and need more time to learn, like me, you finish at 10pm and that's when you get off work. In this sense, I work more than 100 hours a week, 8am to 10pm every weekday and a lot of hours at home or in the office on weekends. I believe that's my work hours, and there is no such thing as overtime work for me.

Kate related that her supervisors were very pragmatic in terms of evaluating work, "What bosses need are good numbers, the number of deals and amount of profits made." She speculated that not only long hours but quantified and quantifiable results caused the high level of stress in these jobs.

Wendy, a woman in her early thirties working in an equity firm in Lujiazui, hailed from northeast China to study art design in a local college in Shanghai a decade ago. "My background in art design qualifies me to work in marketing, brand promotion, and advertisement, which a lot of companies in Lujiazui need. That's why I can work here." She had worked for the equity firm for several years, and recounted her early experience of overtime work:

I used to work really long hours. Sometimes I could come a bit later than others in the morning, depending on my clients' schedules which our work schedule revolved around. When I could head for home before 10pm, I felt really lucky that

I breathed fresh air that day. Occasionally I worked for three days in a row, with only 2 hours of sleep altogether.

Although she endured several years of intense overtime work at the beginning of her career, Wendy realized that it was not good for her health and life, and more importantly, that she was "not as motivated" as her colleagues who willingly put up with heavy workloads and long hours.

I am not an ambitious person, which makes me very different from others working here, those desiring to establish a good career by working really long hours. After working in Lujiazui for a while, you can tell who is really ambitious. I have female colleagues who graduated from elite universities, and they seem always on a lookout for better opportunities to prove and hone their capabilities. They are always working long hours and working hard to move up. If getting married and having kids get in their way of committing themselves to working long hours, they delay these life stages to make sure that they climb up as quickly and smoothly as they can.

Wendy's observation points to the gendered aspects of overtime work, which I will discuss later. From much of the material gathered during my interviews with white-collar workers in the Lujiazui Financial Zone of the Pudong District of Shanghai, we can see that in the particular work environment of Lujiazui, overtime work was rendered necessary in companies that were always on their way to reaping more deals and more

profit on global markets that were running 24/7. Employees internalized the justification of overtime work that equated it to commitment, ambition, and hard-work, all necessary attributes for upward mobility on the corporate ladder. In order to understand the meaning of work and its role in lives of young people in today's urban China, we need to take a historical approach to how it has changed.

**The Changing Meaning of Work in Contemporary Chinese Society**

Based on his ethnographic observations of industrial workers, miners, and small entrepreneurs in northern Taiwan, Harrell (1985) analyzes the stereotype of Chinese people as tireless workers from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century, and demonstrates the moral forces of a culturally programmed hard-working, entrepreneurial ethic. According to Harrell (1985:216), many Chinese work hard driven not purely by economic incentives, or because they are socialized to do so, but instead are motivated by an "ethic of entrepreneurship," that is, "the investment of one's recourses (land, labor, and capital) in a long-term quest to improve the material well-being and security of some group to which one belongs and with which one identifies." Three features define the Chinese ethic of entrepreneurship. First, an orientation towards groups prompts individuals not to work primarily for individual benefits, but "the intended beneficiary of the entrepreneurial strategies throughout most of Chinese history has been the collectivity of *jia* (economic family) and all its potential descendants" (Harrell 1985:217). Second, hard-work is not as much motivated by short-term economic gain as by long-term, enduring benefits and security (Harrell 1985: 221). Moreover, security is central to the Chinese entrepreneurial ethic, that "the aim [of hard-work]…is not simply to maximize

gain in terms of money or some other currency of exchange, but to establish hedges and defenses against loss" (Harrell 1985:216).

During most of Chinese history when production was household-based as Harrell notes, *lao* (劳) covered every kind of labor activity, "from the mind work of the scholar to the field labor of the ordinary male householder to the inside labor performed by women" (Harrell 2000: 69). Regardless of subtle semantic distinctions, there was no kind of production activity that could not be included under the general term *lao*. During the socialist era (1949-1976), lao in Chinese Marxist discourse was constructed as a cultural category equated with productive activity that produced surplus value for the state. The socialist government in mid-twentieth century China set out to change the traditional gendered division of labor by moving production out of the household into the public sphere and integrating all adults—both male and female—into the public-sphere production.

Male and female citizens of the PRC during the socialist period were assigned paid jobs and became members of collective work units that not only paid wages but also controlled access to public services such as housing, medical care, and schooling (Walder 1986). Activities inside the household[12] were usually seen as signs of feudal constraints

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[12] The Communist government's attempts to reconfigure notions of work did not completely override historical household-based motivational systems. In the Maoist era, work was organized collectively or communally, and sharing returns of work from the communes carried historical continuity with sharing returns of work from the households. Yet collective labor violated long-held assumptions about the gendered boundaries of work (women "inside" set apart from men "outside"), challenged the ethic of exchange between seniors and juniors, closed down the market system on which households once depended to exchange surplus, and overrode the specialization of tasks that maximized diverse regional capacities (Mann 2000: 29). Regardless, the household as a production unit has "remained the strongest and the most difficult to penetrate of all the structures of

that held women back from liberation or of private petty-bourgeois labor opposed to the interests of the state (Rofel 1999: 76-9). Although women as well as men were expected to perform wage labor outside of households, unremunerated and undervalued household-based work continued to remain primarily the domain of women, "resulting in a kind of two-shift burdens similar to those in other industrial countries such as the U.S." (Harrell 2000: 72; see also Hochschild 1989).

Economic reforms that started in the late 1970s have fundamentally changed the landscape of employment opportunities in urban China, and where people work and what work means to individuals and the society have changed as a result of the restructuring of the economy. Before the reforms, state-owned and collective-run firms accounted for almost all urban employment; after the reforms, foreign and multinational or jointly run enterprises, privately owned enterprises, and individually or household run businesses have created many job opportunities (Henderson et al 2000: 33). Work has served as a powerful locus for producing socioeconomic status and identity in post-reform urban China, informed by cultural, symbolic, and economic capital people accrue from the experience of working (Freeman 2000: 48–9). The social value that is accorded to different forms of work is inseparable from subjective experience that imparts meaning to work (Upadhya 2016:14).

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work inherited from the past" (Mann 2000: 29). The household responsibility system in the reform-era has tapped onto traditional ideas about gender, household, and work.

**The Value of Work and Economic (Wo)men**

"I work so that I don't have to spend the time staying at home and taking care of my one-year-old," Tina's response to my question "Why do you work?" sounded as if she was joking, and yet I found out during my fieldwork in the office that many women chose to work overtime so that they did not have to return home early. This kind of motivation for work—as a refuge from domestic obligations—revealed by women like Tina stands in contrast to Harrell's (1985) presupposition that Chinese women work for the long-term gains of their uterine families established by ties between a mother and her children (Wolf 1972). Some married women in the office did interpret their undertaking of more projects at work as financial contributions they were making to their families, especially to their children's future. For instance, I asked Mabel who had worked until 4am the night before why she could put up with such long hours, and she responded:

> Although I am not compensated very much, I still make more than if I refused to work overtime. All of my hard-work is for my kids. I want them to have a comfortable life, and I am working for their future.

As we can tell from Mabel's motivation to work overtime, young people were facing a great deal of economic pressure, usually in terms of paying back housing mortgages and paying for childcare and education.

Mabel was not a representative of many other women who worked late for the purpose of coming home late. Catherine once shared her observation of a married female colleague:

She stays in the office until 9 or 10pm every night, as a mother of a boy at the age of kindergarten…Her son is mostly taken care of by his grandparents, both paternal and maternal, who take the kid to kindergarten and back home every day and cook for him. Since the elders live close by—what people call 'distance of a bowl of soup' [*yiwantang de juli* 一碗汤的距离, one can carry a hot bowl of soup to another's place just in time before the soup gets cold]—she picks up the boy from the grandparents' every night after she comes back from work. Sometimes she even goes back to work after putting the kid to sleep, and on weekends…She does not find it problematic to work long hours as a mother of a little child, because there are grandparents always available for childcare, something she herself probably feels less interested in compared to working in the office.

Catherine narrated in a tone that expressed some perplexity as to why a young mother would prioritize work over child: "Maybe there are people nowadays who value work more than family and think it is worthwhile staying for a few more hours in the office. She might have felt happier working overtime than coming home early."

What would women face when they came home from work? To list a few: crying babies, dirty laundry, dinners to be served, and husbands who were too busy playing computer games to help. A tired mother fled the world of unwashed dishes and laundry and unresolved quarrels with her husband—who resisted being more helpful by sharing childcare and chores—so that she could be surrounded by the orderliness, achievement,

and harmony at work. The friction-laden and labor intensive environment women found at home pales in comparison to the sense of purpose, accomplishment, and camaraderie offered by the workplace (Hochschild 1997). Work and overtime work served as a refuge from home for many married women.

White-collar women like Tina who escaped home by working overtime in the office contrast with the Japanese women in Creighton's (1996) work, who are deterred by the rigor of Japan's career employment system. Its demanding work ethic, characterized as 'disregard-the-clock-come-early-stay-late', makes them wonder whether a career is worth dedicating their lives to. Tina's response resonates more with Hochschild's (1997) observation of American women caught between home and work, as they compete with their husbands by spending more time at work and less time at home. In Hochschild's study, children bear the real loss of this gender war over time, by living on corporate time at home. Tina's response to my question reminds me of her first reaction to my interview request. "I don't know whether I would be a good person for you to talk to…I mean, I am not a qualified mother, with all these hours I spend at work," Tina felt embarrassed about all the hours devoted to work rather than childcare, putting crying emojis in her messages to me. She could have felt stressed out and guilty due to long hours in the office that took her away from her family, while being ambivalent about cutting back on office hours to make more time for home. Growing numbers of white-collar women, like Tina, worked hard to hold onto their places at work that provided them with a powerful sense of security, pride, and value.

Many white-collar women—both married and unmarried—I worked alongside claimed to gain a sense of achievement through work. A co-worker of mine named Sarah

in her mid-twenties was one of them. After leaving work and returning home only to lie on her bed, too exhausted to sit up, Sarah still excitedly shared with me the importance of work for herself:

> I like going to work, because it can constantly give oneself something meaningful to do. If you are not working for a while, you get really bored and your life becomes meaningless…Also, no matter how much I earn from my job, at least I have a right to spend what I earn. When I want to go out or go shopping, nobody has the right to restrict me. Also I just feel really satisfied when my fruits of work get recognized and appreciated by others.

What made work meaningful for Sarah included opportunities for self-improvement, economic agency, and a sense of satisfaction from other people's recognition of her work. That was why no matter how exhausted she got from work and overtime work the night before, Sarah would always cheer herself up the next morning and get to work on time. Other married women also emphasized the importance of having a job and earning one's own income, so that their partners would not have the right to interfere with their spending.

In addition to expressing her own devotion to work, Sarah expressed her dissatisfaction with someone on her team who did not "take work seriously" as much as she did:

We just hired a new employee on our team. She is very young, and I feel that she does not take work seriously enough. There is much for her to learn as a new employee and I have given her all the resources I have and expressed my willingness to teach her whenever she wants to learn, but she seems not to care. I don't know what she spends all her days on, perhaps chatting and shopping online… When we ask her to hand in assignments, she just looks at us with a confused face, like she does not even know what we are talking about!

In contrast, Sarah not only took great responsibility for her own work assignments, but also seized opportunities to learn at work by helping others. Once a colleague approached her before lunch break to ask a question. Although Sarah was not responsible for the particular project behind that question at all, she spent the entire lunch break looking for resources and learning, before she taught her colleague how to solve the problem.

Married white-collar woman who valued staying late in the office more than coming home early embodied the image of the economic (wo)man, or *homo economicus*—the calculating, self-interested actor (Ong 2006)—when they weighed the costs and benefits of working overtime and laboring at home. Given that the elders were willing to undertake housework and childcare to help and support working young couples, those women made an active choice to work overtime so that they could impress their bosses to get a better job evaluation, and more importantly, get a better sense of purpose and accomplishment through work rather than less fulfilling domestic labor. According to Foucault (2008:12), the figure of the *homo economicus* transforms the emphasis from exchange under liberalism to competition under neoliberalism (Read

2009: 28), and for those women, competition took place between home and work. When laboring at home was not only taken for granted and unassisted by their partners but also under-appreciated and uncompensated, what women could achieve working in the office came to outweigh the cost of returning home.

**A Sick Culture of Long Hours: Managerial and Social Control in the Workplace**

Despite all the benefits of work that women especially appreciated, I often heard them complain about a "sick" (*bingtaide* 病态的）culture of work, in which one could not survive or thrive in the workplace without working overtime. Videos that narrated what people missed by working overtime: dates with partners, spending time with children, or sitting on the bedside of a dying family member, spread quickly and were shared widely. Online blogs reveal the notorious work schedules of Chinese tech giants. These companies officially promote a 9-9-6 schedule: working from 9am to 9pm every day and 6 days a week. In fact, employees would have felt blessed if their real schedule was anywhere close to 9-9-6. The article tells the story of a twenty-two-year-old employee who, after having worked for 12 days in a row under a great amount of stress and without any sleep at all, passed out in the middle of a work meeting, and was taken to the hospital and diagnosed with medium depression and attempted suicide. Highlighting that overtime work is especially pervasive among tech companies, this article mentions one of the public speeches made by Jack Ma (CEO of Alibaba), where he said that Alibaba never *asked* employees to work overtime, and yet being willing to work overtime was the *right* attitude to work embodied by good employees.

Tech companies like Alibaba view ambition and shorter hours as mutually exclusive, and instill a belief among their employees that as long as they are doing valuable and innovative work, long hours are necessary. Companies like Alibaba take advantage of a culture of work in which humanity is believed to become meaningful only through long hours of continuous work. Although my ethnographic fieldwork did not take place in the tech industry, I spent many hours at night and on weekends working overtime alongside my interlocutors. We were sometimes ordered to come to work on Saturday mornings, when we did not leave work until 11pm on Friday nights. Spending so much time working together brought me and my interlocutors closer, and many of our conversations about work revolved around what they identified as a 'sick' culture of long hours.

Upadhya's (2016) ethnographic study of Indian IT workers delves into the mechanisms behind a culture of overtime work, stating:

There are several reasons for this pattern of overwork. First, long hours are practically built into project contracts. Companies routinely try to minimize their project bids by underestimating the time that will be required for the job. A 'man-day' is defined as eight hours, so if the number of man-days required is underestimated in the contract, engineers have to put in extra hours to complete the work according to the timeline…Second, the project cycle has periods of great and less intensity. Even when a project is well planned, there are inevitably crises when deadlines are looming due to unfinished work or unexpected problems. During such periods all team members are expected to stay late at the office and

to work for as long as required in order to keep to schedule…A third reason for long working hours is the time difference between India and the client site: conference calls tend to take place in the evening when the working day in the US begins. System maintenance projects in particular may require employees to keep late hours, and some projects even work in shifts so that someone is available around the clock (Upadhya 2016: 140-141).

Similarly, I demonstrate below the forms of managerial and social control taking place in the workplace that justified, legitimated, and naturalized long hours of work in corporate Shanghai.

Corporate means of control that subject workers to long hours of hard-work have already taken place widely in factories, illuminated for instance by Ong's (1987) ethnography of how Malaysian village women were transformed into industrial labor under factory discipline. Ong (1987:161) observes that within the export-oriented factories, control over workers was effected through "relations of production," especially the imposition of Taylorist[13] methods and schemes of disciplining techniques, to produce docile working bodies and sustain modes of gender and ethnic domination in the factories. In addition to forms of labor control and discipline imposed by the managerial personnel, women were closely regulating behaviors of themselves and each other, partly through gossiping as a mode of social control (Ong 1987: 191).

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[13] Taylorist techniques of managing labor and subjugating it to capital focus on repetitive performance of decomposed tasks and surveillance as a modern, pervasive form of discipline. These means of labor control ultimately lead to progressive deskilling of labor and extreme fragmentation of production.

"Flexible time," a corporate policy which was originally intended to cut down hours and lure more young people who valued flexibility and disliked clocking in and out, ended up creating more excuses for overtime work. For instance, if one had to work until 10pm the night before due to a pressing deadline, h/she would be allowed to come to work the next day later than others. If work got piled up facing multiple pressing deadlines, h/she would have to keep working late at night, and much of the overtime work was uncompensated or under-compensated since it was considered as part of work. Also, I observed that the Chinese social media Wechat was widely used in the workplace, as a means of communication among employees and between them and supervisors. Since it was assumed that people were always on Wechat, either chatting with friends, families, and colleagues or checking other people's "moments" (similar to facebook's newsfeeds), employees were expected to respond to work-related messages from their supervisors as late as mid-night.

Salary was not proportional to the hours we spent in the office, but reflected our overall work performance that was itself evaluated based on our involvement in each project for each client. When a team was budgeting a client's project in advance, no one would have estimated how much time each person on the team would actually devote to each task. Whether work was done efficiently or not, everyone had to work on multiple projects to serve multiple clients at the same time, facing immediate deadlines all the time. Long hours seemed inevitable, partly because the workload was simply too heavy and partly because the heavy workload was not distributed in a fair and efficient manner. Although overtime work was considered part of work and therefore uncompensated or under-compensated, the notion that long hours of work demonstrated our selfless

devotion to the company and became an important part of work performance necessary for promotion was passed down from the managerial level.

The most impressive case of overtime work was revealed to me by a co-worker named Tara, who was an account manager serving as a bridge between clients and the company. After our long meeting with a client—a famous Japanese cosmetic brand—one day, Tara complained to me while we were waiting for a taxi outside of a shopping mall in Pudong:

> I am a slave for all these clients, a real slave. They expect us to work for them 24/7…We have to eat dinners and go to concerts with them to 'know more about our clients and build good relationships with them'; we have to respond immediately to their assignments regardless of how late they send us their commands. We have to meticulously record what we do every hour at work and submit our workbooks to them. When they see from your workbook that you are not working for them but doing something else at particular times, they boss you around as their own employees. They call you to ask very impatiently when you can get everything they need done, and scold you hard when you can't finish by their ridiculously pressing deadlines.

I asked Tara whether anything could be done to change her "enslavement" to clients, and she responded disappointedly:

There is nothing you can do about it. Those are the clients whom the company tries its best to maintain a good relationship with. Many of them pay an extraordinary amount of money every year to buy long-term services from us. Although they don't pay me directly, which by the way they should always remember, my job exists because of them. My supervisor will not argue for me and piss off our clients. We can't lose our clients, and I will just have to put up with working as a slave for them 24/7.

Tara dealt with four or five clients simultaneously, with whom she shared the record of her workload every week. She seemed to exert no control on her work assignments or hours, which were completely at the mercy of her clients. Tara's complaints about her work situation could not represent all white-collar jobs, and yet uncompensated overtime work became justified in a highly competitive market dominated by the service industries whose creed was to treat clients and customers as God (Liu 2017).

Catherine's quote at the beginning of this chapter alluded to the demand for employees' to manage their impression on each other and supervisors, a demand that was expected to be fulfilled by one's decision to stay overtime in the office. In other words, working overtime was not about getting substantive work done (that supposedly could not be finished within regular hours) but about being seen by others to be present late at night in the office. Similarly, Upadhya (2016: 147) stresses that visibility figures significantly in overtime work among Indian IT workers, stating,

While long working hours are usually enforced through persuasion and other subjective methods, employees are acutely aware that indirect monitoring of their use of time affects their performance appraisal, for which 'visibility' is a key factor…The organizational structure and performance appraisal system reinforce this competitive desire for visibility.

In the context of my field, a similar desire for visibility of a hard-working worker-self grounded in overtime work pointed to the fact that besides managerial control, forms of social control were prevalent in the workplace to distinguish those who worked overtime from those who did not and drive the latter to conform to the former. For instance, when someone consistently left the office on time, even if that could mean this person worked more efficiently than others during regular hours, others would question behind her back whether she was hardworking, ambitious, and desired to be promoted or leave for another job. This prompted white-collar women around me to constantly examine themselves, which was the reason behind Catherine's daily struggle at 6pm that I described at the beginning. When she was about to leave work for home, Catherine always made sure to check whether her boss was still working and whether her colleagues showed any sign of leaving. I saw many people feeling embarrassed to leave work on time and pressured to conform and stay in the office. Facing pressure from both managerial and social control, employees regulated their own behaviors to make good impressions that were aligned with expectations from others such as bosses, colleagues, and clients.

Yolanda, who worked for many years in a Fortune 500 company, pointed out the systematic and collective characteristics of a culture of overtime work:

Work is always very stressful in a multinational corporation and I felt that I was going to burn out any minute. You were always required to work overtime, always, and that was what I hated the most. Why couldn't we just finish our work within normal hours and why did we have to stay in the office overtime? There were times when I finished my work earlier enough to leave on time, but other people did not leave and it made you feel that you should not leave either. If the boss was staying and other colleagues were staying but you wanted to leave, they would think that you did not have enough work to do.

Yolanda's narration of her experience reveals that employees had no choice but conform to expectations and behaviors of others, especially their supervisors, which ensured that a culture of overtime work persisted and expanded. In retrospect, Yolanda considered overtime work due to inefficiency ("Why couldn't we just finish our work within normal hours") and impression management as an unnecessary burden. "After I was promoted to be a mid-level manager, I was kind of expected to work overtime all the time and would feel embarrassed if I left work earlier than my colleagues." She regretted working overtime only to satisfy social expectation in the office, and wished she could have been more courageous to say no to it.

When the managers took the lead to spend more hours in the office at night, others working for them could not help but internalize the shared expectation for

overtime work, which created a vicious cycle. Snow, a woman in her late twenties

working for an insurance company in downtown Shanghai, recounted the time when her

boss taught the whole team that it was unacceptable for an employee to leave before a

boss. Snow narrated:

> There was one time when our boss left for a meeting half an hour before 6pm. She
> did not come back by 6pm, and everybody just left for home. Shortly after we left,
> we received a message on Wechat from our supervisor that said, 'I just went to a
> meeting, and after I came back, every one of you was already gone.' Although she
> did not explicitly scold us, the message implied that the boss expected people to
> leave only after she did. Our boss did not like the fact that we left earlier than she
> did. I learned my lesson, and since then, I have always made sure that I leave the
> office later than my boss."

Snow's experience brings to light a work culture that foregrounded hierarchy, authority,

and conformity, so that the work habit and ethic of a supervisor could directly be imposed

on behaviors of employees who wanted to please their supervisor by presenting a

commitment to long hours.

**Rationalizing an Ethic of Work: Equating Hard-Work to Overtime Work**

A short moment of excitement descended on the cubicles as a few young women

were seizing a precious break from work to order dinner with their phones. They were

expecting a delicious meal to recharge themselves after a long day and before staying in

the office for a few extra hours. Before then, their eyes could not help but keep closing in front of their computer screens, and their hands aimlessly floated on the keyboards instead of assertively tapping them as during the day. The whole world felt as if coming to a halt, until one woman texted a message to others on Wechat: "A famous entrepreneur once said, 'When you are young, you should put yourself in hell and then you will reach happiness. If you do not endure sleepless nights when you work until you burn out, you won't be able to experience the ultimate happiness'." After picking up their phones to read the message, other women in neighboring cubicles nodded and gave encouraging smiles to each other.

The entrepreneur that Sophia quoted connected overtime work to hard-work and then to virtue, resonating with Weber's (2009) argument about the role of the Protestant ethic in the comprehensive worldview of the rising middle class that spearheaded the emergence and development of capitalism in the West. Jackall (1988:6-7) draws on Weber (1958: 172) to state the following:

> The term Protestant ethic refers to the set of beliefs and, more particularly, to the set of binding social rules that counseled 'secular asceticism'—the methodical, rational subjection of human impulse and desire to God's will through 'restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling'…The enduring significance of the Protestant ethic was due to the way it linked the probation of self, work in the world, and eternal salvation…This rational and methodical pursuit of a worldly vocation, when it was crowned with economic success, proved a person before others…This powerful intellectual construction, this ethic of ceaseless work

combined with ceaseless renunciation of the fruits of one's toil, provided the economic and moral foundations for modern capitalism…This pragmatic bourgeois ethic, with its imperatives for self-reliance, hard work, frugality, and rational planning, and its clear definition of success and failure, came to dominate a whole historical epoch in the West, even in time among sectors of the middle class that eschewed classical Protestant theology as such.

Weber observed among Protestants that the ethos of working hard and delaying gratification for an imagined future in heaven laid the ground for a work ethic of capital accumulation in the here and now. In similar ways, Sophia's message downplayed the cost of working overtime in the here and now, and instead emphasized its benefit for the future success of young people. The message in essence transformed overtime work as a practical must for meeting deadlines to a moral necessity for future success, and thereby motivated these women to work late in the labyrinth of cubicles.

Uncompensated and undercompensated overtime work is widespread in East Asian societies, epitomized by the lives of Japanese salarymen (*sararīman*). Allison (1994:95) observes that the "excessive and strenuous work schedule" comes not just as a result of companies' expectation or policy but of "an attitude toward work that… a worker… should have been able to display." The discourse of overtime work shifts responsibility from an institution to its workers (Gagné 2018), and uncompensated and under-compensated overtime work becomes justified as the nature of work. Along similar lines, during my fieldwork in Shanghai, I often heard women in the office consider coming to work on weekends as "just part of my job."

Ho's (2009) ethnography of American investment bankers on the Wall Street illustrates the normalization of and justification for the practice of overtime work, to the extent that work dominates the lives of bankers. She identifies such work culture as a "white-collar sweatshop" (2009:240). Highlighting the symbolic value of overwork in the formation of a particular subjectivity of workers, Ho (2009:289) states:

> Investment bankers often use the culture of overwork as a site to reinvigorate workplace hierarchies, to use the infamous American work ethic to judge and segregate not only among themselves but between front and back office, as well as between investment bankers and the rest of corporate America.

Through overtime work, investment bankers in front offices demonstrate that they are a qualitatively different kind of people than nine-to-fivers (those working for back offices) who are unintelligent and uncreative at work. Yet this characterization of nine-to-fivers against which bankers position themselves is a straw-man argument; in fact, nine-to-fivers have their own ambitions and work ethics, and bankers themselves spend much time doing unintelligent and uncreative work (Ho 2009: 295).

Investment bankers in Ho's ethnography see themselves embodying a particular combination of intelligence, ambition, and hard-work, legitimating their dominant and privileged position vis-a-vis the financial market and corporate America. They interpret overtime work as a sign of knowing how to "get things done" and as a proof of their smartness, "in contradistinction to the masses of complacent, less capable workers out in the 'real world' who therefore need to be restructured to more efficient use" (Ho

2009:293). Although they work overtime to do quite insignificant tasks that by no means add value, investment bankers uphold a "culture of smartness" defined by selfless devotion to work as well as "motivation, exposure to greatness, risk-taking, and entrepreneurial resourcefulness" (Ho 2009:294).

Should overtime work be ideologically equated to hard-work, as endorsed by Wall Street investment bankers? White-collar workers in Shanghai gave various answers to this question. Similar to investment bankers in Ho's ethnography, some white-collar workers in Shanghai made distinctions between two kinds of workers: those who worked overtime and therefore were considered hardworking, and those who left their offices on time and were seen as taking work less seriously. Overtime work was interpreted as an individual choice made by those who were willing to take on more responsibilities and challenges for pursuing long-term professional development and "a meaningful life" defined by the ethic of hard-work. The equation between overtime work and hard-work set different kinds of worker subjects apart from one another, and overtime work in turn justified the meritocratic practice of training and promoting certain employees who spent longer hours working in offices than others. I once interviewed a woman entrepreneur who ran her own real-estate advertisement company in Shanghai. She allowed each of her employees to choose how much workload h/she would like to take and whether h/she wanted to work overtime. She told me:

How much you earn is determined by how devoted you are to work, basically how many hours you spend at work. There are some young people who choose not to work overtime as much as others. Usually those are local Shanghainese

who have inherited apartments from their parents and live under much less

financial pressure than their peers who are from outside and making everything

from nothing. Many young people from outside of Shanghai have to pay rent or

mortgage…Financial burdens get much higher when they want to buy a house and

start a family in Shanghai, which requires them to work longer hours and earn

more income. I always let those who are willing to work overtime undertake more

projects and those who aren't leave the office at 6pm. To work overtime or not is

completely their own choice. Ultimately, they get what they work for.

This entrepreneur distinguished between two types of workers—those who

worked overtime and therefore worked hard in her eyes and those who did not— and

such distinction in terms of worker subjectivity corresponded to that between local

Shanghainese and non-local *waidiren* (外地人 outsiders). Based on different levels of

financial burden of living in the city, these two groups of young people displayed

different attitudes to work by spending different amounts of time at work. Local young

people were thought of as living comfortably without the need to work long hours,

because they could depend on family inheritance and parental support. Young people

from outside were seen as having no choice but undertake heavy workloads to earn more

income and establish themselves and their families in Shanghai. This entrepreneur's

observation at her own small company could not be generalized, and I met local young

people who worked as much as, if not more than, others who came from outside. What is

noteworthy in this entrepreneur's observation is that whether one was willing to work

overtime signaled whether h/she worked hard, a perception that justified and perpetuated long hours of work.

## Ways of Accommodation

People can be motivated to work hard and overtime, either for generous financial rewards that high positions bring, the freedom to define one's work role with some latitude, the chance to gain power and exert one's will on others, and the satisfaction of a deep hunger for the recognition by one's peers (Jackall 1988: 43). Besides, overtime work constitutes an important aspect of teamwork (Jackall 1988: 51), serving as a psychological necessity to relieve the anxiety of those who would otherwise feel responsible for what h/she cannot control (Jackall 1988: 71). Although white-collar workers in Shanghai shared similar motivations for work and justifications for overtime work, they saw themselves trapped in a 'sick' culture of work that perpetuated endless cycles of overtime work. The potential of overtime work for self-development—manifest in Sophia's message to the group—did not stop some from critiquing the inefficiency of work and the demand for impression management that made long hours inevitable in the first place. Catherine once complained:

Sometimes you just stay [overtime] for the sake of it, pretending that you are such a diligent and hardworking employee. I can see some of my colleagues wasting time during the day chatting or doing things slowly on purpose, and they stay late at night…If people work more efficiently, it is likely that we won't have to stay overtime. I was once asked by my boss to stay late, and ended up waiting for

hours for others to finish their work and tell me what to do! Sometimes people procrastinate so much that they have to stay late. We should work much more efficiently!

The inefficiency of work combined with the demand for impression management in the corporate context became clear when people deliberately worked slowly during the day to stay overtime at night, so as to give the right impression in an environment where everyone was expected to and expected others to work late. Catherine questioned whether overtime work would in fact contribute to the growth of a company and its employees. She valued time after work very much:

> It is really important to not only have my own life after work but also learn new knowledge and skills. Working overtime at night due to inefficiency during the day takes such learning opportunity away from me. That's why I try my best to leave at 6pm.

After calculating the real cost of overtime work, that is, sacrificing her time for learning new knowledge and skills, Catherine's daily struggle at 6pm was resolved mostly by her leaving the office on time. Nevertheless, we could say that Catherine left work on time to come home, bringing demands of self-improvement for good employees from the workplace to home and continuing to work on her skills. In that sense, she was not resisting the kind of 24/7 work culture she was critiquing.

Feminist anthropologists of work (e.g. Ong 1987; Freeman 2000) have investigated women's technologies of power and modes of resistance in globalized production. In comparison, I observed acts of accommodation rather than resistance in my field. Once I met with Tina and Luna for dinner on a plaza near our office building. I noticed that neither of them brought more than a cell phone, and guessed that they may need to head back to the office afterwards. I expressed my sympathy for their long hours of work, and Luna responded when waving her hands in the air, "It is okay. We need to head back but we don't want to finish work by tonight. Otherwise, they will expect us to work like this all the time." I asked Luna, "What do you mean? Who are 'they'?" Tina responded, "It is our clients who always give us work-related commands around dinner time and expect us to finish by night." The workload of employees working for a contractor was always at the mercy of their clients, and could easily be extended well beyond regular hours. Tina and Luna decided to take control of their work hours: Not finishing tasks by the deadlines designated by clients became a mechanism through which they attempted to prevent overtime work from being normalized on the part of their clients.

During my time in the office, a young woman whom I never met reportedly rebelled in front of her boss, and became a legendary figure. The story was narrated to me and my co-workers by Sarah during a lunch break, who tried to lower her voice but could not withhold her excitement: "Can you believe what that girl did?! She was on this team that worked until midnight for three months. She could not stand it any longer, and stood up to her boss and refused to work overtime altogether!" "How did she refuse? What did she do?" We asked one after another. Sarah continued to narrate excitedly:

For many nights she had to grab a taxi at 1am heading home from the office. Even taxi drivers kept telling her to stop working so late, since it was so dangerous for a young woman to go home that late. One morning she came on time, and went to her boss and declared, 'I am not going to put up with the long hours any more! From now on, I only work eight hours a day and leave at 6pm. I meet with you in the morning and discuss my assignments for the day. I will tell you exactly how much time I need for completing each task and how many I can do on one day. I refuse to stay in the office longer than eight hours, and I sincerely believe that it is unfair to keep us working for such long hours without hiring extra hands for the team.' That's what she did.

"Wow, good for her! She is so brave!" The listeners responded in awe. Everyone expressed their admiration for the heroine of the story, as well as their concern with how her supervisor was going to deal with her rebellion. We were not supposed to talk openly about such behavior, which would reinforce the reputation of a difficult employee like her. Nevertheless, we secretly asked around to follow what happened to the woman: It turned out that the supervisor of another team heard about this story and gave her a thumb-up, and her own supervisor had no choice but to give in.

Compared to forms of resistance in Malaysian factories (Ong 1987), such acts in a white-collar office were far from subversive, but instead accommodated the work culture. Though discontented with vicious cycles of uncompensated and under-compensated overtime work, most white-collar workers, as I observed in the field, endured it and were

resigned to it. The woman who courageously declared to her supervisor that she would not work longer than eight hours did not quit her job or leave the environment altogether; instead, she found a way to accommodate it by confronting her supervisor and holding on to her right to an eight-hour work day. One could say that her act was a latent critique of the work culture, so was that of her co-workers who enjoyed secretly talking about her confrontation with her supervisor. According to Ong (1987), Malaysian women workers capitalized on beliefs widespread in the factories about women's emotional instability and susceptibility to male power, and reacted to intolerable demands in the following ways:

> Crying was a common response to verbal abuse which could deflect disciplinary action. Some…deliberately slowed down their normal pace of work, became careless in the assembly of components, or simply lost their temper (Ong 1987: 203).

More importantly, women resisted labor discipline in the factory through outbreaks of spirit possession among them. Although spirit possession provided female workers the guise to launch attacks on male staff and labor control in the factories, it did not effectively challenge male authority on the factory floor and beyond. Ong (1987: 210) contends that women workers who were possessed by spirits enacted a form of "ritualized rebellion" that ultimately refrained them from confronting the real cause of their distress. Instead of serving as an effective form of resistance, spirit possession tended to reinforce existing unequal relations which were "further legitimized by

scientific notions of female maladjustment" (Ong 1987: 210). Thus, the cumulative effects of episodes of spirit possession, evidenced by defects in the workflow, constituted "an anonymous protest against mounting work pressures rather than a collective action with specific demands on the management" (Ong 1987: 211). The brave woman who confronted her boss to demand normal hours in my story protested against overtime work as an individual, but there had never been a collective action calling on the management to overhaul the work regime.

**Corporate Governmentality and Making of the Self at Work**

Governmentality refers to the range of knowledge and techniques directed at managing the self (Ganti 2014: 95), a particular rationality of governing—the conduct of conduct—whose power-effects lie in "guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (Foucault 1991: 221; see also Dean 1999). Central to the concept of governmentality is a form of power that works out everyday practical arrangements by which individuals govern themselves, and ultimately, everyday practical arrangements become more effective than any intention or strategy of the state or the ruling class. Theoretical discussion of governmentality and technologies of the self in the work of Michel Foucault (1997, 2008) and Foucauldian theorists such as Dean (1999), Hindess (1996a ; 1996b ), Gordon (1987 ; 1991), Rose (1992, 1998, 1999), Rose and Miller (2008), and Brown (2015), instead of focusing on the retreat of state governance in standard neoliberal discourse, see it as central to the project of producing liberal, responsible, governable, and entrepreneurial citizens, as well as properly functioning markets (Kipnis 2007: 385).

In the case of my fieldwork, it was corporations that actively worked out practical arrangements of work to exert their power on employees and affect workers' everyday conduct, so that they could endure, rationalize, and accommodate overtime work. Corporations promoted the policy of "flexible hours" to the effect of making employees stay in the office later at night and of normalizing such late-night presence at work. Instead of hiring more employees and calculating the time each worker would devote to a project in advance, corporations instilled the belief among workers that no matter how much time and effort they devoted to work, it was always part of their job, and that not the specific number of work hours but the impression one's work performance left on a supervisor would determine an employee's salary and promotion. Moreover, in a competitive economy driven by the growth of service industries and business-to-business transactions, corporations transferred the obligation and burden of developing and maintaining good relationships with their clients to individual employees. Furthermore, corporations encouraged a social media platform running for 24/7 to be popularized as the tool of communication among employees and between them and supervisors, which legitimated overtime work at home in what was supposed to be leisure time.

Through all those means, managerial control exercised by corporations on employees perpetuated and legitimized the equation between overtime work and hard-work. Yet there is more to the culture of work than unilateral normative control imposed on workers by managers, as is well illustrated by Kunda's (2006:21) study of a tech firm:

> Managerial ideology and management action designed to impose a role on
>
> individuals are but one side of the question of control—they are normative

demands…Members are active participants in the shaping of themselves and of others. They may—at various times—accept, deny, react, reshape, rethink, acquiesce, rebel, conform and define and redefine the demands and their responses…they create themselves within the constraints imposed on them.

Workers, at once agents and subjects of control, may have well internalized demands from the managerial level for them to work long hours. Sophia who sent a motivating message to her team late at night attributed a moral imperative to working overtime that was essential to shaping one's character. The quote from a famous entrepreneur in her message emphasized the value of sleepless nights and working until exhaustion for young people: Hard-work was interpreted as a necessary step to making someone a better worker and successful person. Sophia tried to convince herself and others that all the hours we spent in the office, albeit not directly and proportionally compensated by money at the moment, was a choice that we made and responsibility that we took for achieving future success.

Corporate governmentality shapes how workers are transformed into particular kinds of self, producing implications for reconfiguring character and personality (Rose 1992; Bauman 1998, 2007; Sennett 1998; Beck 2000; Rose and Miller 2008; see also Gooptu 2009: 45-6). Forms of managerial control and corporate governance require a complete re-programming of the self. As Berardi (2009) argues in *The Soul at Work*, the more work is rendered as something meaningful—a means to express one's "true" potential—the easier labor is to be exploited.

**"I Want to Have a Life": Impact of Overtime Work on Lives of White-Collar Women**

I witnessed how a culture of justified overtime work impacted the lives of white-collar women in Shanghai, during my immersive fieldwork in a white-collar workplace setting. In the office where I worked, a female co-worker named Mabel once asked other female co-workers to share her workload so that she could go home earlier to take care of her twin boys at night. Despite their good relationships, others declined her request for help due to their own long hours and obligations at home after work. Overtime work not only threatened the family life of married women but also prevented single women from "having a life" outside of work. Sophia, a single woman in her late twenties, was once thinking about renting an apartment closer to the office than her current one, but expressed her hesitation to me:

> I know that moving closer to the office would save me a lot of time commuting to and from work, but honestly, I don't want to give my boss a legitimate reason to ask me to stay in the office past 6pm. People would think that I should put up with overtime work better than others because I live closer. I really don't want to work overtime. I want to have a life.

Once a young woman named Summer leaned over to my chair and whispered her complaints in a very low voice. Occasionally she looked around to make sure that no one else was paying attention to her complaints:

I have worked for very long hours day after day... I often leave the office at 10pm, sometimes past midnight, and also work on Saturdays and Sundays. My period has never come in my time here, and my neck hurts so badly that I feel really dizzy standing up. But if you put your head down on the desk for like five minutes here, you will get scolded... I have no time talking to my boyfriend or seeing him at night or on weekends. He was very upset and we almost broke up. I am done with this kind of life here. I am leaving.

In nostalgic tone, Summer reminisced about her former job at a foreign pharmaceutical company in Shanghai, where expensive coffee machines and dessert platters filled almost one third of the work space, and people could lie down on the couches whenever they needed a nap. She stressed that it was rare to find such a comfortable work environment where people could also leave for home on time. It did not take long for Summer to quit her former job and come here, because, as she said, "Despite all the comfort and nice hours, I was not paid well; nor was I able to improve my skills or learn anything new at the job." Summer weighed the pros and cons of her former job against those of her current one. Although she was not sure where to go next after quitting this job, Summer was clearly aware that overtime work would be unavoidable in many job opportunities, especially good ones that would allow her to learn and practice new skills.

**Chapter Four**

**"You've Got to Have Core Muscles": Cultivating Hardworking Bodies**

It was a hot summer afternoon when the burning sunlight shone through the window, making the office air-conditioner work in vain. Several women desperately wanted some cold smoothies, and gathered themselves around the cellphone of someone willing to order for the group. "Hey, would you like one?" Hardly did Chen have a chance to answer her smiling colleague before the female boss walked in. "I like your top very much! You know, we can see your core muscles out there… They look really good!" The boss's praise directed everyone's attention to Chen's belly that was intentionally bared for us to see by her short top. "It is so impressive that you *just* finished breastfeeding your newborn baby, and you've already regained your core muscles. How are you able to do that?" Someone asked in a tone of admiration. Chen responded in a tone that clearly showed her sense of pride:

> You know, I started to train my body as soon as I could, after giving birth and breastfeeding…I used to have perfectly shaped core muscles, and then I was out of shape for a while. I did not want to say goodbye to the core muscles I had before childbirth, and really wanted to have them back. They are now back!

Chen regained her core muscles not simply by wanting to "have them back," but through a process of bodily training that required a tremendous amount of hard-work and self-discipline.

During my fieldwork in Shanghai, I observed white-collar women working hard and overtime in offices (Chapters Two and Three), and also saw them embody an ethic of hard-work beyond the workplace. Hard-work for them demanded physical endurance and strong bodies. As Upadhya (2016:13, 15-16) claims, labor becomes entangled with cultural practices and social structures beyond the world of work, which encourages an anthropologist studying white-collar work to take seriously the social context of workers' lives beyond the workplace, explore how workers draw on various cultural resources to manage their working lives, and more importantly, trace how work is invoked in individual projects of self-constitution and social mobility.

I found in Shanghai that white-collar women treated their bodies as an important site for disciplined training, and that they employed bodily training as a legitimate means for cultivating an ethic of hard-work amenable to upward mobility. Success for them was not only quantified by the hours one spent in the office and the amount of annual income one could earn, but was also signified by the existence and shape of one's core muscles (*majiaxian,* 马甲线 a popular Chinese slang referring to their ideal shape similar to that of a corset). Rather than their functional strength, core muscles were important as visual indexes of discipline and spaces of their training became sites for developing the virtue of hard-work. Moreover, women *collectively* cultivated hard-working bodies, and self-discipline among them was achieved in groups.

I begin this chapter with obsession with the body, both among my informants and in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, to rethink the relationship between the mind and body. Then, through ethnographic materials gathered from participant observation of young white-collar women training their bodies after work in pilates classes in downtown Shanghai, I show the kinds of bodily technologies employed and networks formed. Rather than adopting an individualist approach to cultivating the perfect body shape and embodying an ethic of hard-work, young white-collar women constructed a social space where encouragement, advice, admonition, and help was exchanged as bodies were trained and self disciplined collectively.

Next, situating women's bodies between their productive and reproductive roles, I discuss the historical development of a particular kind of women's bodies—muscular, robust, and productive—in modern China. The robust body of a woman working in the fields in the socialist era celebrated her entry into the traditionally male-dominated domain of production, while the bodily training carried out by my white-collar informants in Shanghai challenged the naturalization and commodification of femininity prevalent in the service industry of post-socialist China. Particularly, I connect the value of core muscles to the prevalent discourse of having it all among working women in today's urban China that shaped my informants' hard-work both at their jobs and on their bodies. Efforts that these women made to cultivate the perfect body shape contributed to their cultivation of a disciplined, hardworking self that enhanced productivity in all domains of their lives. When facing challenges that reproductive labor brought to their career and bodies, some women made extra effort to keep their right to work and body in shape, while others expressed backlash against a discourse that in their eyes set

unrealistic standards that imposed unbearable burdens on the bodies of working women. I

end the chapter reconsidering the framework of the body beautiful, rejecting a

consumerist approach to the body and situating women's bodies between production and

reproduction.

**The Body as an Obsession: Rethinking Mind-Body Dualism**

The marketing service company where I worked for several months in Shanghai

had a gym inside its building, located right below the company's cafeteria and

surrounded by big, transparent windows. We often found ourselves eating lunch while

looking below at those colleagues who seized the precious lunch hour to work out:

running on treadmills, lifting weights, and cycling. Women in the office often lamented

how quickly one could get out of shape if she spent too much time sitting at her desk and

too little working out. Conversations like the following occurred often during lunch:

"So-and-so goes for a run every day at 6am, no matter how late she comes back

home from work the night before…"

"Wow! I admire her perseverance!"

"So-and-so's body is fatter now than before. She used to go to the gym every day,

but her weight bounced back after she stopped going."

"We need to exercise; otherwise, sitting in an office for all these hours everyday

will really make you out of shape."

As Brownell (1995) points out, body talk in general and fat talk in particular is

socially acceptable in China, since comments on bodies are not taken as direct personal

attacks but as expressions of concern about well-being. She suggests that the acceptability of body talk in China, in comparison to its avoidance in the U.S., indicates the more "fluid boundaries" between Chinese bodies versus the more fixed boundaries between American bodies (Brownell 1995: 241). Body culture occupies an important place within Chinese cultures as a whole, and the body is always integrated into a dynamic relationship with the mind and society. The kinds of body talk exemplified by conversations above showcase standards of the ideal body shared by a community of white-collar women, and more importantly, bring forth collective anxieties about the body, particularly the fear of physical degradation engendered by the modern office (Saval 2014). Bodies loomed significant not only in the lives of those white-collar women obsessed with keeping fit but also in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology.

Instead of taking a naturalist approach to the body as biologically given, a number of theorists have defined the body as a sociocultural construction and historical process (e.g. Goffman 1968; Mauss 1979; Bourdieu 1977; Elias 1978; Foucault 1979). Reviewing this rich and varied literature, Reischer and Koo (2004) recognize two primary theoretical orientations toward the body and its relationship to the society: 1) the symbolic body approach that focuses on the representational nature of the body as a conduit of cultural meanings; 2) the agentic body that highlights the role of the body as an active participant or agent in the social world. An example of the symbolic significance of the body in its relationship to the society lies in Mary Douglas's groundbreaking work *Natural Symbols* (1970), where she argues that there is "a strong tendency to replicate the social situation in symbolic form by drawing richly on bodily

symbols in every possible dimension" (Douglas 1970: vii). As an example following

Douglas, Farquhar (2002: 124) contends that economic excess and deficiency are

"pervasive tropes for understanding modern national dilemma", as she connects the

discourse of bodily depletion and repletion in ancient Chinese medical theories to the

history of Chinese political economy in the twentieth century. In this light, appetite

speaks to the transition from "Maoist asceticism" in the socialist era to the "capitalist

boom" in the post-socialist era (Farquhar 2002: 121).

Drawing heavily on Bourdieu's (1977) notion from his practice theory that the

body structures how we act and perceive, other theorists have pointed to the body as a

fundamental aspect of the acting self—a self that acts on the world through the medium

of the body—and an important tool for social action (e.g., Comaroff 1985; Scheper-

Hughes & Lock 1987; Csordas 1990, 1993; Frank 1991; Haraway 1991; Lock 1993; T.

Turner 1994). Agency of the body is often described by the term "embodiment" that

theorizes the capacity of the material body to embody the self and act on the world

(Csordas 1990; see also Reischer and Koo 2004: 307). The body not only reflects cultural

values and signifies social reality, but also has the capacity to challenge them and serve

as a vehicle for social action. In the Western Cartesian paradigm of mind-body dualism,

"the mind is alienated from the body, resulting in both a theoretical and practical

division" (Spielvogel 2003: 86), and such "antagonism between mind and body" is not a

universal problem (Spielvogel 2003: 143), especially in Asian cultures. For instance,

scholars often note that there has never been a radical separation in Japanese philosophy

between body and mind. Instead a unity of the corporeal and spiritual is illustrated in the

concept of kata that are standardized postures and movements accompanying spiritual or aesthetic activities (Miller 2006: 10).

Scholars of China have argued that the Cartesian duality between the mind and body does not apply to Chinese notions of the bodily self. Exploring the conflation of body and self in the Chinese language and traditional cosmology, Elvin (1989: 213) contends that the human body is never seen as having its own intrinsic physical attributes but "a peg-doll whose role is to be a carrier of corporeal and/or sartorial attributes." The corporeal attributes of the body-person express the psychological field of force in the heart-mind that attempts to control the body and reveals itself in physical structure and posture, hence the integral relationships between *shen* (translated as "body-person") and *xin* ("heart-mind"). Palmer (2007: 9) finds it problematic to speak of the body through a binary distinction between the mind and flesh, when interrogating Chinese bodily traditions such as qigong. He states, "For want of a better word, the term 'body' is used here in a non-dualistic sense, close to Chinese conceptions, as englobing all interconnected human functions, including thinking, feeling, moving, breathing, desiring, ingesting, digesting, and so on" (Palmer 2007: 8). Therefore, Chinese bodily practices do not objectify a physical body separated from its mental functions or from one's individual persona.

This Chinese framework, which relates self and body in a way that rejects Cartesian dualism, seeks to transcend the dichotomy of the former as subject versus the latter as object. Moreover, techniques of the body in Chinese cultural contexts, have been for centuries the subject of specialized and highly elaborate discourses linking individual bodies and paths of life to larger social forces. Palmer (2007) shows that traditional

Chinese bodily technologies are never an end in themselves, but one element of other social practices and systems including religion, government, and medicine. The Chinese tradition of embodiment in medical contexts is explained by Kleiman and Kleinman (1985) who coin the term "somatization" to refer to the ways social tensions are expressed in bodily idioms and calls for their resolution center on healing and strengthening the body (see also Brownell 1995: 22-23).

Chinese bodies do more than carry signs of inner qualities, but bodily practices also realize broader cosmological forces, social relations, and political projects. Two cultural concepts integral to the classical Chinese body are elaborated on by Zito and Barlow (1994:10): 1) *li* (ritual) that produces and reproduces subjects by the tangible forms of the language and its gestures; 2) *qi* (energy) that patterns the organism of the body within the cosmos and situates self in the cyclical feedback between the social microcosm and universal macrocosm (see also Hay 1984). The proper training of the body in classical China, through fasting and meditation for instance, was a prerequisite to participation in rituals that fostered social cohesion through harmonious movements of bodies (Schipper 1993; Zito and Barlow 1994; Zito 1997).

Also, there existed a correspondence between the body of the emperor and the body politic, and between the principles of the government and flows of *qi* in individual bodies. The political status of bodily technologies began to change in the first half of the twentieth century, when China faced the introduction of Western values and started to construct itself as a modern nation-state. This sociopolitical shift privileged a mechanical, disembodied ordering of the world in the emerging society that came to emphasize atomized, individual bodies and material technologies leading to rational ends.

Traditional body technologies were rendered irrelevant to the ends of modern

bureaucracies and institutions that produced and mediated between knowledge and power

(Palmer 2007: 10-12).

Although the existing literature on the Chinese body that I have just reviewed

challenges dichotomies between mind and body, self and other, individual and society,

and so on, to be truly disciplined among my white-collar women informants in Shanghai,

the mind must take complete control over the erring, wayward body. In the office

women's comments targeting colleagues who in their eyes lacked perseverance and

discipline and therefore failed to maintain their bodies in good shape, were indicative of

their belief that laziness and fat could be banished if only one put one's mind to it. Based

on ethnographic materials that I show below, I would argue that discourse and practice

around the body among my informants in Shanghai demonstrate the role of mind-body

dualism and power of the mind over body in a contemporary, urban Chinese context.

**Training Core Muscles: The Embodiment of Hard-Work**

I met some white-collar women interlocutors at a yoga/pilates studio that offered

bodily training classes in downtown Shanghai in the evenings and on weekends. During

class, they rarely took breaks in the form of lying down or exiting the room temporarily;

nor did they give up on difficult postures and exercises. When the teacher asked us to rest

at the end of a class, some still kept trying the last—often the most difficult—posture or

exercise. "You should not force yourself, but you should definitely try your best" was a

common saying shared by more experienced trainers to the less experienced, and they

stressed "try your best" far more often than "do not force yourself." Some women made

reservations for two or even three classes in a row, spending hours training their bodies and getting the best out of their time away from work.

In their locker room conversations after class, women compared how much each had sweated and suffered during class. "My underwear is COMPLETELY drenched!" one said proudly to the other when wiping sweat off of her body with a towel. They emphasized how much their muscles suffered from soreness, self-possessedly pointing to their waists, thighs, and arms. "My muscles are so sore that I do not think I am able to come to class tomorrow…In fact, I might not even be able to go to work tomorrow!" Their somewhat exaggerated expression of pain echoed one another to form a symphony performing an admiration for bodily hard-work. I always saw those who were "too sore to come" the day before excitedly showing up in class on the next day.

Valentina, a pilates teacher, well understood that those women came here to train their muscles through physical suffering, and she never hesitated to push them to work harder on their bodies by asking them to hold a certain posture for longer or to do a certain exercise five more times. "You know that you are working hard here to build your core muscles," the teacher said assertively when walking around to check whether anyone was slacking off. "Wow, look at your core muscles. Very nice! Everybody, five more times!" When she saw a role model with perfectly shaped core muscles, Valentina increased the demand for the whole class. Under such circumstance where the teacher imposed standards that came from a model body, other women in the class uttered "Oh no!" in a tone tinged with appreciation as they continued their exercise.

I have described experiences of soreness, pain, and suffering that young women endured in their bodily training classes, which they bragged about without any sense of

self-pity. Miller (2006: 6) acknowledges in her study of the beauty industry in Japan the commonly held assumption that women were willing to suffer in order to be beautiful when subordinating themselves to beauty norms. What gets obscured by this assumption of the 'natural' inclination for women to suffer for obtaining beauty is "how a patriarchal culture of male desire has a role in the sexualization and commodification of female bodies" (Miller 2006: 6). Nevertheless, this line of feminist critique heavily relies on a model of the dichotomy between the oppressor (male) and oppressed (female) to position women as being unaware and powerless in privileging male desires (Bordo 1999).

Rejecting such an oppressor/oppressed model, Miller (2006: 10) insightfully argues that Japanese women's investment in the beauty industry relates to "the folk model of beauty work as a form of socially sanctioned self-improvement" and the ability of the beauty industry to capitalize on long-standing Japanese notions of the body and ideas about self-development and discipline. For instance, dieting, albeit tied to beauty ideals, is enacted as a cultural behavior that rewards discipline and effort and connects to traditional Japanese notions of perseverance and struggle (Miller 2006: 160). Miller (2006: 10) states,

> The culturally salient notion of *gambaru* (effort) as the drive needed for continuing self-development is ubiquitous in daily life. The lexicon of self-help and mighty exertion usually reserved for moral development has been adopted by the beauty industry, where women (and men) are urged to work hard at aesthetic progress.

The constant act of making effort treats the body as a 'project' that requires attention and work (see Featherstone 1991).

In his history of Western self-cultivation regimens from classical antiquity to the present, Foucault (1988) defines technologies of the self as what "permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (Foucault 1988: 17; see also Palmer 2007: 8-9). For my informants, technologies of the self were technologies of the body: They valued their bodies to the extent that extreme hard-work and extreme fitness went hand in hand. They could tell whether someone was a hardworking person by looking at her body, in particular the 'core' area surrounding her belly. Hard-work and self-discipline for them was embodied, in that it demanded efforts of the body and reflected its results on the body.

Core muscles were not something to be worshipped for their functional strength, but they were indicative of one's personality and work ethic. When everyone had to work overtime, those who were disciplined enough to get up at 6am for a run, go to the gym during lunch break, and drag their exhausted bodies to pilates classes at night were believed to be worthy of upward mobility and success. Recall the tendency to make a moral judgment about someone who failed to persevere in her bodily training during lunch time conversations among women in the office that I brought up earlier. Along similar lines, Starr (2016) observed that white-collar women in Shanghai treated their bodies as "a perfectly legitimate site for personal cultivation," a perception that challenges "a delimiting and strict boundary between non-material 'ability' and

material 'bodies'" (Starr 2016: 43, 61). My informants regarded success as not only measured by one's income and career position, but more and more importantly embodied by one's core muscles. Moreover, similar to cubicle dwellers' desire for visibility and impression management when it came to their overtime work (Chapter Three), a hard-working and well-disciplined body was supposed to be on display, such as by pictures of young women in bodily training classes and their sculpted abs that they posted on social media. In the following section, I look at the social experiences of women training hardworking bodies together.

## Embodied Self-Discipline and Bodily Self-Cultivation in the Accompaniment of Others

On our way back to the cubicles from eating in the dining hall and observing people working out below, Tina whispered to my ears, "I know you've been interested in core muscles, and let me tell you, I HAD them before!" Tina went on to vividly describe her 'six packs' of muscles in the area of her stomach and upper and lower abdomen, before she sighed and stated in a tone of nostalgia,

> I don't have them anymore, after I gave birth to my son and started breastfeeding. You know that it takes a lot of discipline to regulate your diet—almost free of sugar and carbohydrates—and to keep exercising, before you can have core muscles. I could be that disciplined before I had the kid, but it is now so hard to discipline myself. I need to eat whatever is good for producing milk, and more

importantly, I don't have the time or energy to monitor what I eat and how much I exercise, with the heavy workload of being a working mother.

By the time we arrived at our cubicles, Tina declared to me in a decisive tone, "Immediately after I finish breastfeeding, I am going to regain my core muscles! The flag is raised." Her expression of determination to regain core muscles employed a popular slang among Chinese young people, "to raise a flag" (*li yige 'flag'*) that refers to one's resolute will for carrying out a plan and making change happen without any hesitation.

Women in the office constantly let each other know what they ate and how and how often they exercised. They did not aim to be skinny for the sake of it, because as they said, "It can be ugly to look too skinny, like a stick." They believed that their bodies would look nicer with muscles in certain areas such as "the core." This resonates with Spielvogel's (2003:142) finding that fitness clubs in Japan urge members to exercise to build muscles and emphasize muscles over thinness and fat loss over weight loss, which runs counter to pervasive cultural standards of feminine beauty that emphasize youth, good proportions, shapely legs, and above all, bony skinniness. If I kept asking them why they believed that having muscles in the core area would make a nice body, they would be confounded by my question that in their minds only pointed to the obvious. The taken-for-granted value of core muscles was hegemonic in that it was not discussed, questioned, or debated, but legitimized and naturalized (Adrian 2003: 147).

Training for core muscles demands a complex set of technologies of the body including proper ways of eating and exercising. When we were ordering lunch delivery to share, some women always made the conscious choice of getting as little rice and as

much vegetable as possible (because rice was believed to be rich in carbohydrates).

Others tried ordering salads for themselves, and made remarks about combating hunger

only an hour after having a salad for lunch. Rarely did anyone starve herself through

lunch break and just not eat, but women in the office tried to eat just enough to keep

themselves energized for the whole afternoon. Verbal exchanges happened often, where

one woman noticed that another ate very little for lunch and the woman being queried

responded that she had a big or late breakfast and was still full by lunch time. As I

mentioned earlier, some brought their workout gear to make use of the office gym free of

charge during lunch breaks[14].

Women's pursuit of the beautiful body through exercise could be a collective

endeavor. During a pilates class where I participated and observed, women formed pairs

to do exercises such as the following: A was lying down on the mat, grabbing the ankles

of B whose feet were placed on two sides of A's head. A repeatedly lifted her leg straight

up, supposedly by engaging her core muscles, while B kept pushing A's legs back down.

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[14] China's transition from socialism to post-socialism has brought individual desires, appetites, and indulgences back into public discourse (Farquhar 2002:3). As China's economic reforms expanded and economic development consolidated, under the slogan "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the indulgence of individual desires became highly visible as part of the growing consumer regime. Much of the pleasure and enjoyment in a new consumer culture is contingent upon "the gratification of indulging in pleasures that were once forbidden, even imaginable" (Farquhar 2002: 28). As a response to the heightened consumerist culture that encourages people to indulge their appetite for material satisfaction, Chinese people who practice life-nurturing (*yangsheng*) seek to balance *jing* (essence), *qi* (energy), and *shen* (spirit) and to regulate desires (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 149-164). My white-collar women informants knew best about their desires, such as craving for bubble teas and desserts in the middle of the day. Instead of relying on quenching their desires for indulging in fattening foods every time they craved them, they devoted their time and energy after work to training their bodies.

My training partner was very keen on lecturing me how important it was to engage my core muscles to get the best out of this exercise.

"Don't use your butt or your back. Focus on your core muscles, engage them, and use them to lift your leg straight up. You will feel really nice if you use core muscles. Otherwise, you get tired easily and the exercise becomes pointless."

When my lack of core muscle engagement failed to please my partner, she asked me to pause and put her hand on my belly. She patted to test whether my belly was firm— an indication of whether it was properly exercised—and reminded me that I should make it work harder.

After twenty-five repetitions of leg lifting, I could not move any more. Although my sweating face and body, distorted smile, and hands that were grabbing her ankles tighter and tighter were sending the message to her that I had worked out until exhaustion, she did not show any sympathy but urged me to keep going. In return, she expected me to help her in the same way: She asked me to pat her core muscles to see whether they were engaged enough and to push her legs down to the mat harder. Her hands that were grabbing my ankles got so sweaty that they kept falling down onto the mat. Our sweat stuck on each other's bodies, and we exchanged satisfactory smiles as we rolled up our mats and got ready to leave.

There existed a buddy system, by which women formed pairs at the end of classes to help each other work on muscles. Once after class, the teacher demonstrated on a woman how one could "massage" her buddy's muscles on her legs and waist. It was not a

typical massage that would make one feel relaxed but one that would made muscles feel very sore as a result. My buddy let me try on her legs first. I found the right muscles, but was hesitant to use my strength to push and squeeze them, for it felt too much of an intimate physical contact between us. I kept asking how she felt, and she giggled and said, "Nothing! You should try harder, because I am supposed to feel soreness!" Her eyes were encouraging me to make her suffer more. As I tried harder and harder, her trembling voice and struggling smile indicated that I was doing a good job. Then we switched, and it was her turn to make me suffer. She started gently, and gradually added force to her hands "massaging" my waist, thighs, and legs. I felt the warmth coming from sweat in her hands and being transmitted onto my waist and thighs. The glints of pain that I suffered, making me shout "ouch" once in a while, seemed to please her. "I am doing a great job of helping you build muscles!" A smile of pride emerged on her glowing cheeks. After the teacher called the end, I looked around and saw a few other pairs still "massaging" each other, and the high-pitched and loud "ouch" was proudly telling the class how hard-working they were. The collective sense of accomplishment from our workouts, spiced with our sweat on the mat, floor, and each other's bodies, infused the whole room.

The symbolic value of core muscles for my informants, apart from its connection to certain beauty ideals, originates in the shared value of self-discipline and Chinese traditions of bodily practice that gets connected to the cultivation of the self which is by no means individualistic but irreducibly social (Ames 1993: 149). The lived body is one dimension of the social self that communicates with and imparts meaning to other members of the community. In classic Chinese philosophy, the body constitutes a world

order by its ritual action that reconfigures both persons and communities. The body is integral to the holistic Chinese conception, or symbiosis, of self-other cultivation (Ames 1993: 151). Along similar lines, Palmer (2007) finds the term 'self-cultivation' problematic in the sense that it obscures the social process of the transmission of embodied knowledge from a master to his disciples, in the case of *qigong* mass group practice. Although there was no master-disciple relationship formed in the strict sense of the term in my field, my ethnographic materials demonstrate that technologies of bodily training involve sets of movements and forms transmitted from the more experienced to the less experienced.

*Individual* women train their muscles, control their diets, and regulate their thoughts, which are simultaneously *social* practices whereby bodily techniques (such as how to engage core muscles for a certain exercise) and interpretive frameworks (such as the symbolic value of core muscles) are circulated and reinforced in a network. A classical Chinese view of the body grounds it in a social world constituted by connections among people and between them and the surrounding environment (Brownell 1995: 241-3). These interpersonal connections are expressed by the symbolism attached to the substances that flow between individual bodies and between bodies and the outside world. The most important bodily fluid that flowed among women in their collective training of core muscles was sweat. Individual bodies were interrelated when one person's sweat remained on another's body. An individual's body being trained was not entirely her own, but was subjected to the regulative regimes of her sweating buddy and collective demands and pressures that constantly challenged the notion of individual autonomy on her body.

Even though they did not know each other well, women participating in the pilates class were eager to admonish each other after indulging in guilty pleasures, advise on what, when, and how to eat and exercise, help correct body postures and carry out exercises, and encourage each other to persevere despite the sweating, soreness, and suffering that permeated every minute of the trainings. These collective acts in turn came to affirm and reinforce the socially shared value of core muscles that in their eyes not only shaped a beautiful body but also substantiated a well-disciplined, self-regulating individual worthy of upward mobility and success. In the neoliberal era when individuals are increasingly expected to take full responsibility for his/her own success and failure facing the market's caprice and competition, scholars have investigated the disintegration of traditional kinship, breakdown of human sociality, and an increasing trend of solitude (Lasch 1991; Putnam 2000; Harvey 2004, 2007; Bellah et al 2007; Gershon and Allison 2011; Turkle 2012; Allison 2013; see also Bar 2013). Rather than witness the dilution of social relationships, I have described the formation of a sociality when sweating women in bodily training attempted to discipline self and other together.

**Women's Productive and Reproductive Bodies in China: Past and Present**

I have illustrated in previous sections how the bodily training of core muscles among my white-collar women interlocutors in Shanghai came to affirm the mind/body dualism and oppose the self/other dichotomy. In addition, the opening story of Chen proudly exhibiting to her colleagues her core muscles—as a new mother who just went through breastfeeding—speaks to another dichotomy at play with respect to these women's valuing and training of core muscles, that between production and reproduction.

Before discussing young women's struggles between their productive and reproductive

roles in today's urban China, I turn to the robust, muscular women's bodies under

socialism.

*Robust Women, Androgynous Bodies*

Chinese nationalism, since China's encounters with the West in the late 19th

century, has grounded itself in body politics, so that individual acts of strengthening their

bodies would be viewed as leading to the salvation of the nation (Brownell 1995). This

rhetoric persisted during the Maoist era when bodies were shaped in militaristic manners

to contribute to and protect the socialist state. Socialism demanded bodies and persons be

reshaped: Slogans from the 50s and 60s highlighted forging, tempering, and 'steeling'

(*duanlian* 锻炼) the body through both work and physical exercise, showcased "the

newly released vigor of the liberated body at work," and reinforced "the desirability of

the 'iron body'" (Chen 2003b:365). Images of socialist realist art dominant in the 50s and

60s gave male and female bodies biologically unrealistic proportions, to highlight the

symbolism of specific body parts—muscular forearms and calves for instance—for the

strength of peasants and workers united and for the power of the people in a socialist state

(Chen 2003b: 362). Textual and visual rhetorics of peasants and proletariats distinguished

laboring bodies in the present from those in the past, and the socialist body was redefined

as a starting point for social change (Chen 2003b: 365).

The genre and visual representations of model workers, particularly women who

moved into new areas of public work, comprised a central theme of the socialist body

politic. Robust female bodies, especially the highlighted spectacle of muscular arms and

calves—challenged strict gendered delineation of occupational space and facilitated the

social movement to include women in the labor force (Chen 2003b: 367). Thanks to female model workers taking the lead and mobilizing other women to labor in traditionally male-centered domains (Hershatter 2000, 2011), the CCP sought to pursue "a proletarian-based socialist female subjectivity that reconstructed gender and social relations" (Chen 2003a: 268). Among the most widely circulated icons of the socialist era, the female tractor driver— a young peasant woman with a glowing sunburned face and a stalwart body confidently holding the wheels atop a tractor and gazing ahead—was used by the CCP to replace ideals of womanhood and women's bodies that had previously circulated in China.

Individual woman model workers embodied achievement of goals championed by the CCP since 1921, and represented "the new Chinese body politic" and constituted a new iconography of the state (Chen 2003a: 270). Propaganda materials from the socialist era featuring women who were officially recognized as the first to perform traditionally male occupations regularly discussed transformations to and hardening of the body. Working women who felt empowered by the universal de-sexualized body—despite its implicit masculine ideal—saw themselves as embodying historical progress toward gender equality (Chen 2003a: 271; Chen 2003b: 367).

Such socialist discourse of the body politics that touted gender sameness and equality culminated in the iconography of the Iron Girls (Honig 2000) who embodied the belief that women could labor in the same fields as men with the same level of physical strength. As the socialist state imposed the call for women to fully participate in production, the discourse of gender sameness and equality in fact took male gender as the standard to which women must conform and female difference must be suppressed.

Although women were expected to approximate male standards of clothing and work, gender difference was not completely erased in socialist China. As Yang (1999: 41) writes, "The term male and female remained in use in everyday parlance; state discourse deployed the category of women in its discussion of women's liberation, and traditional prejudices and discriminations against women continued in less overt ways." Regardless of how much progress was made in the realm of gender equality by the socialist state, Chinese women from the era of socialism to that of post-socialism have experienced struggles between their productive and reproductive roles, struggles that have intensified in today's urban China.

*Productive Bodies Facing Reproduction: Training Core Muscles as Part of Having It All*

Once in the middle of a pilates class, the teacher shouted into the ears of women participants, "Think of this exercise as your JOB! What are you going to do when facing difficult tasks at your job? Will you quit? WILL YOU?!" Later I asked these women what they thought of the teacher's admonition that likened their performance of pilates exercises to that of their job, and some commented half-jokingly, half-seriously that it made them feel if they failed this exercise, they would equally have failed their job performance at work. Others commented on the vexing penetration of a work ethic into all aspects of their lives. For instance, a young woman named Maggie complained that she not only had to respond to her boss's work-related messages after coming home from work at night, but when she finally had the time to do what would seem unrelated to her job—bodily training at a pilates studio—she was still reminded by the teacher that she was essentially working. "You can't do anything about the fact that you are working,

24/7, whether it is in the office, at home, or in the gym, and whatever you do, it's always work."

To understand the changing configurations of discourses about women's bodies in China, I argue that it is vital to situate women between work and home, production and reproduction, and the public and private sphere in particular historical and cultural contexts. The women I am talking about worked at white-collar jobs in private, state-owned, and multinational corporations in Shanghai. As ambitious, hard-working career women, many of them felt the pressure from a discourse of 'having it all': A successful woman commits herself to work with high performance, adopts an alpha-woman image at work and acts as a 'virtuous wife and good mother' (*xianqi liangmu* 贤妻良母) at home, and last but not the least never gets out of shape.

Yolanda, a former HR manager at a German company in Shanghai, attributed the ascent of the having-it-all discourse among urban Chinese women to the celebrity named Yinuo Li who is admired by growing numbers of young people on social media. Li got her Ph.D. in Mathematics from UCLA and joined the consulting giant McKinsey. Having climbed up the corporate ladder all the way to become a global partner within only 6 years, Li left for an executive position at the Gates Foundation. In recent years she has established an alternative-style school in suburban Beijing and made herself a socially responsible entrepreneur in the education industry. If you ask my informants to give an example of a successful Chinese woman, many would name Li. Common characterizations of her one could find on social media include "a working mother with 3 children and perfectly-shaped core muscles," and common visual presentations include

pictures of her working on her phone at the backseat of her car when holding three kids with two hands.

The prevalent discourse of having it all notwithstanding, many professional women in Shanghai have been delaying marriage and reproduction, a significant demographic challenge to other East Asian metropolises such as Seoul and Tokyo as well. Those who eventually got married and had children found themselves struggling to balance work, family, and workout, creating a time bind as exemplified by Tina's 'flag-raising' that I recounted earlier. If we compare Chen, the woman in my opening story who managed to regain her core muscles after months of disciplined training and dieting immediately following months of breastfeeding, to Tina who missed her core muscles but struggled to find the time to work out, we get a sense that the importance of core muscles for white-collar women revolves around their struggles between production and reproduction.

Earlier generations of Chinese women may have cared less about their body shape after childbirth, but that may not be the case for young women nowadays. Quite a few women who were preparing for pregnancy or pregnant during the time of my fieldwork expressed worries about getting out of shape. My cubicle neighbor Lucia saw herself gaining weight fast during her pregnant months, and often complained to me, "It is not just my belly getting bigger and bigger but my whole body has been getting a lot bigger than before!" She nostalgically showed me pictures from her wedding last year, a time when she was "thin and beautiful." She specifically directed my attention to the pointed chin and the size of her waist and legs in those pictures. Lucia lamented, "I used to look

like a model, but when I started to have double chins, I went on this journey of becoming a fat pregnant woman!"

As a pregnant woman who thought of her eating as feeding the fetus Lucia could not go on a diet. She tried to walk as much as she could by taking the metro every day, instead of being driven by her husband to and from work. Before maternity leave, Lucia announced to me her determination to adjust her diet and sign up for a gym membership after giving birth. When I was conducting participant observation at the pilates studio after work, Lucia always texted to ask how my own bodily training was going. She often asked whether she could join after childbirth, "It would be so nice to have core muscles. I believe your belly would look really nice with them. I might have had them when I was much thinner, but it has been a long time."

In addition to worrying about her growing size, Lucia felt anxious that her boss would take her less and less seriously as a member of the team as she got more and more pregnant. During her last month of working before maternity leave, Lucia was not given much work by her boss, and had to muster a great deal of courage every time she asked her boss for assignments. Lucia often expressed her worry to me, that she would not be able to return to the same position when coming back after several months. Reproduction brought challenges to women like Lucia whose professional upward mobility stalled and bodies grew larger at the same time. As average women faced challenges to have a career, family, and nice body at the same time, role models of "having it all" such as Yinuo Li promoted the belief that hard-work must be taken-for-granted in all domains of a woman's life: office, home, and gym. For Li and her followers, a lean, muscular body was a disciplined one that regulated desire and embodied a cultural ethic shaped by hard

work, dedication, and perseverance (Carolan 2005: 97). A fit body signals a woman's productivity outside of the household, and substantiates her mobility up the corporate ladder.

Those who believed in the value of core muscles belong to a particular generation. Observers of Chinese cities have been drawn towards elderly women dancing on public squares and in public parks in the mornings and evenings, but would not hear anyone of them relate their dancing to training core muscles. By attributing symbolic value to core muscles—a pretty visible part of women's bodies that reveals the physical consequences of reproduction and ageing—young women seemed to be making efforts to distinguish their bodies—robust, fit, and productive—from those of the elderly women dancing on public squares that show signs of a lack of physical activity, productivity, and potential.

Debating in front of me about whether young women should have it all, Yolanda once shared her attitude of resignation to such discourse:

> As a professional woman, or just as a person in general, you cannot set everything as your priority. You can only have one [priority] at a time, and cannot do everything at once: gain success at work, run your household smoothly, and have the ideal body shape. I used to be very ambitious and want everything, but now I just keep asking myself, 'do I really have the ability, and how hard am I willing to push myself?'"

She continued to share her perspective on the kind of having-it-all women represented by Li Yinuo and her followers,

"Many of my female friends really admire Li Yinuo and want to eventually be like her. I just think that the goal of having it all is very questionable. I understand that she represents the voice of many Chinese working women who are capable and ambitious. Many of them do not have privileged family backgrounds or long-lasting beauty that they can rely on to move up. These women always want more, both career and family, and last but not the least, a perfect body shape…Perhaps they think having it all means happiness, but I don't believe it is normal life. I was working with alpha women who wanted everything and worked hard for everything, and maybe I was one of them for a period of time. But now I don't desire it. How can someone be that motivated to work hard on everything in her life?"

Yolanda was talking with me at a time when she had quit her HR manager job at a German company and had just started a freelance career. She was experiencing difficulties adjusting to a new culture of work that did not promote having-it-all alpha women that was widespread at her previous workplace. Yolanda never got interested in the kind of bodily training that emphasized core muscles, and refused to conform to the discourse of women having it all, including core muscles.

Women's bodies become a subject of debate in the public domain when issues of productivity and reproductivity are contested. I have witnessed in my fieldwork that more and more Chinese women have sought to make their bodies productive and maintain such productivity—even when challenges from their reproductive role may hinder their

contribution to production—by working hard at their jobs and on their bodies at the same time. Of course not every woman was invested in such pursuit, or interested in having it all. Women like Yolanda questioned whether it was even possible to have it all and whether women were bearing too much burden of having to conform to the socially shared standards of success. As part of her refusal of the discourse of equating having it all to success for women, Yolanda did not buy the value of core muscles as indicative of self-discipline, nor did she consider training her body and making it suffer during training as part of her self-development.

**Rethinking the Body Beautiful: Situating Women between Production and Reproduction**

Scholars have investigated how the shift from a focus on production to consumption during the second half of the 20th century has produced new ways by which people understand, experience, and engage with bodies (e.g. Featherstone 1982). People are increasingly bombarded with images of the ideal body that is supposed to reflect the ideal inner self, and are taught to believe that the body is something plastic, or a 'project,' that people can work on to transform themselves into ideal beings. Thus, we attribute growing importance to managing and maintaining our bodies that have become a central aspect of our identities and the impressions we make on others (Featherstone et al 1990). Body image matters a great deal, as it has become a mental image of one self. Although this body of literature provides rich analysis of how discourses and practices revolving around the body are shaped by and shape a consumerist economy, what it does not do is

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interrogate the relationship between production and reproduction when it comes to the woman's body.

It is often assumed in a consumer culture that people attend to their body image in an instrumental manner, as status and social acceptability depends on how a person looks (Featherstone 2010). Commenting on one's failure to maintain a body shape could be a moral judgment, in the context of a consumer culture that obsesses over one's ability to regulate desires. The body is seen as a malleable cultural product whose fitness determines one's status in society (e.g. Featherstone et al. 1990; Giddens 1991; Bauman 1992; Shilling 1993, 2005; Turner 1996[1984]). In an era of conspicuous consumption surrounding oneself with "nice things" has become increasingly insufficient in our quest to display status and power. Rather, we are progressively striving to become the "nice thing" ourselves through "conspicuous bodies" that act as status symbols (Carolan 2005: 82). A fit, exercised, and well-regulated body symbolizes a personal triumph motivated by rationality and control over impulses of consumption. Only by overcoming tensions between the dual imperatives of consumer capitalism—production and consumption, work and play, and self-discipline and self-indulgence—can we achieve the ideal body of beauty, productivity, and superiority (Carolan 2005: 91-92).

In a market economy marked by regular cycles of control and release, production and consumption, and work and play, we increasingly bear witness to what happens when one part of these cycles dominates the other, such that excessive control results in anorexia and excessive release in obesity, and in the case of bulimia, the body becomes the site of both forms of excess (Bordo 1993: 201). Anxieties about the body, discussed by the literature on obsessions with slenderness (Millman 1980; Chernin 1981; Kulick

and Meneley 2005) and various forms of eating disorders (Bruch 1973, 1978; Boskind-White 1991), result in attempts to control it through dietary regimes, exercise management, and even cosmetic surgery. Dietary regimens and exercises for constructing a beautiful body refashion personal identity, and the outward appearance of one's body has become the key to judging whether one is worthy of belonging, companionship, love, admiration, success, etc. Therefore it is believed that bodily adornment, modification, and enhancement through a range of technologies can be used to construct a beautiful appearance and thereby a beautiful self (Grosz 1994; Reischer and Koo 2004).

Ideals of the beautiful body may be read as a primary site for the social construction and performance of ideals of gender (Reischer and Koo 2004: 299). The body becomes the site at which women, consciously or not, inscribe dominant meanings of the ideal beauty circulated in popular culture (Balsamo 1996:78). Moreover, a woman's fit and well regulated body can suggest her ability to shape her life through willpower, energy, and control (Bordo 1993). Recognizing the body as a medium of communication that sends messages about the inner self of a woman, Bordo (1993: 195) contends that the size and shape of one's body has come to signify the moral state of an individual including capacity for commitment and self-control. Although for both women and men alike the fit body symbolizes not only an aesthetic ideal but also the internal discipline necessary to achieve it, women in their pursuit of this ideal have particularly subjected themselves to extreme regimens of diet, exercise, and other forms of physical self-improvement (Orbach 1978; Chernin 1981; Vertinsky 1987; Nichter & Nichter 1991; Wolf 1991; Callaghan 1994).

With a large proportion of women participating in the labor force and working away from home, it is important to look at how demands for women's productive roles in the public domain and reproductive roles in the domestic domain influence their ideas and practices of bodily training, such as the training of core muscles that I observed in Shanghai. In contrast to the elderly Chinese women who came of age in the era of gender sameness and androgynous ideals of the body under socialism, the younger generation of women grew up in an era when women's bodies, femininity, and sexuality have been commodified and capitalized on to make profits particularly in service industries. Chinese popular terms including the "rice bowl of youth" (*qingchunfan* 青春饭) and "beauty economy" (*meinu jingji* 美女经济) refer to a competitive market where only the young and beautiful succeed at selling goods and services on the frontline of service jobs (Zheng 2004; Hanser 2005, 2008; Otis 2008, 2011; Osburg 2013). When young and beautiful bodies of women service workers become the object of gaze among rising middle-class consumers, the physical attractiveness of white-collar women in corporate China is rendered productive and taken advantage of by employers to sell products and services to clients, a practice that ultimately tends to commoditize and sexualize women's bodies at work (Liu 2017). Only those who put in effort to maintain their youth, shape, and beauty are deemed productive bodies, in profit-making terms in the burgeoning service industries.

In a society where productivity is paramount and an unproductive body is deemed unfit among women (and men), "the idealized female body, young or old, serves distinct political, social and economic functions that benefit the state" (Spielvogel 2003: 198). Feminine attractiveness defined by standards about the ideal body shape became the body

ideal representing the Chinese nation-state during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. As the media reports,

> The medal presenters and attendants, who are called *liyi xiaojie* (which can be literally translated as etiquette misses), were selected based on strict criteria regarding their height, weight, age, body shape and appearance... The chosen few [were]…under strict training so that they [could] represent the oriental beauty. (Li 2008)

I did not see the kinds of beauty standards celebrated in the 2008 Beijing Olympics influencing what my informants considered as the body beautiful. Those women whose body parts were strictly measured for the Olympics committee to represent the nation were "too skinny" in the eyes of my informants. They repeatedly told me that they did not want to be skinny. "It is ugly to look as skinny as a stick. Women should have some muscles. You not only look nicer but also are stronger and healthier," I was often told. They were more concerned with a healthy fat percentage, not weight, because muscles could weigh heavier than the same amount of fat. Although two people may be the same weight, the one with more muscles and less fat would be viewed as healthier and more beautiful. Asking my white-collar women informants why they made such impressive and exhausting efforts to train their core muscles would normally yield answers such as "Your body looks nicer with them" or "I want to look good."

The desire for "having a nice body shape" often got intensified when my interlocutors were facing challenges that pregnancy and childbirth could pose to their

bodies. Recall Lucia's nostalgia towards her fit body in her wedding pictures and worry

that she was "getting big very quickly" in her pregnant months. Also, recall Chen's pride

in gaining core muscles immediately after finishing breastfeeding her son and her

colleagues' envy of her flat belly that was intentionally left bare by her short top.

Women's reproductive roles are so much emphasized that protecting their ability to

reproduce becomes an excuse for limiting their participation in sports:

> [N]ot only is the female body irrevocably tied to a culturally constructed
>
> obligation of reproduction, but also, through the association between femininity
>
> and 'the wound,' the female body is coded as inherently pathological. Limiting
>
> women's participation in sport and exercise functioned both to control women's
>
> unruly physiology and to protect them for the important job of species
>
> reproduction. (Balsamo 1996: 42-3)

Many young Japanese women, who are delaying marriage and childbirth and

working outside of home, resist their association with reproductive roles through acts of

dieting and food refusal. These acts are used by them as defiant reactions and resistance

to the self-less and other-oriented construction of femininity" pervasive in Japan

(Spielvogel 2003: 195)). Dieting and the pursuit of thinness for many Japanese women

becomes emblematic of the ambivalence over gender roles and tensions between

production and reproduction among women in Japan. As much in urban Japan as in urban

China, women's pursuit of the ideal body can tell us a lot about their roles, status, and

power in a society, and become more than just a psychological and biomedical matter if one situates the performance of femininity within the particular context of patriarchal capitalism.

**Chapter Five**

**Spreadsheet Couple and Project Child: Professionalizing Family Life**

At the very beginning of this ethnography, I introduced Lucia, a woman in the office who was pregnant during my time there. We rode the metro together every day, and I was always impressed by her precise calculation of time. She was clearly aware of the fact that it took her longer than others to walk to the metro station from home, transfer from one line to another, and eventually get on the shuttle that would take her from the final metro stop to the office. "I get to the metro station near home by 9am, get on Line 12 at 9:05, transfer to get on Line 9 at 9:15, get off Line 9 at 9:30, and finally get on the shuttle to office by 9:40. And I always know *exactly* which cabin of a train is the closest to the escalator for transferring from Line 9 to 12." She reported her regimented movement in time and space, from home to work every morning and from work to home every night, in a tone that was infused with a sense of pride. Riding the subway with her left such a deep impression on me that whenever I think about the kinds of work, personal, and family lives these white-collar women were leading, a picture of Lucia trying to catch up with time and moving swiftly from one space to another lingers in my mind.

I start this chapter with a young white-collar woman who used an Excel spreadsheet to visualize and quantify the domestic labor of her and her husband. As bizarre as it may sound, the spreadsheet showcases how urban middle-class homes reproduced notions of efficiency and rationality that women transplanted from the

workplace. Then, narrating this same woman's experience in the workplace, especially difficulties she encountered at work due to her pregnancy and motherhood, I demonstrate women's struggles between reproductive and productive labor in today's urban China. Despite women's own ambitions and societal expectations that they do well in the workplace, the intense domestic and reproductive labor expected of wives and mothers— at a time when the state has retreated from socializing these forms of labor through public institutions—has served to potentially pull them away from work. The next section introduces a soap opera popular during the time of my fieldwork that dramatizes the failure of a middle-class housewife and the triumph of her return to the workforce. Upholding the assumption that the only form of valued work for women is outside of the domestic domain, when at the same time femininity is bound to wifehood and motherhood, the show throws into relief the choices, struggles, and dilemmas Chinese women face when torn between their productive and reproductive roles. After presenting scholarly debates about whether perception of gender and femininity has been naturalized in an increasingly consumer-oriented economy in contemporary China, the chapter culminates in a description of professional women's professionalization of motherhood as they turned their children into projects that were managed in ways similar to those used at work. I argue that as women faced setbacks in the workplace, i.e. in the domain of production, they used conceptual and practical tools from the workplace to transform their domestic labor in the domain of reproduction. Ultimately, any perceived division between production and reproduction, strictly defined, dissolved as women professionalized their family lives.

**A Spreadsheet Couple**

"I feel like fighting a war every morning," Beth stated assertively after a sip of coffee at a cafe near work. As a young working mother of a one-year-old boy (who was taken care of during the day by Beth's mother-in-law; more on grandparents in Epilogue), Beth's time before leaving home for work and after leaving work for home revolved around the three most time-consuming activities, "cooking baby food, feeding him, and getting him to sleep." She could easily relate to other colleagues in her office who were also working mothers, just by commiserating together over how much time it took each of them to get a kid up, dressed, and fed, before they could finally leave the house. Beth was eager to tell me what a typical day of hers looked like, hence our date over coffee.

Beth narrated her typical day in a rhythm that I suspected she used to capture the actual rhythm of her busy life:

I get up at 6 in the morning, every day, and start pumping milk right away. I feed the baby some and leave the rest in the fridge at home, for feeding him after I come back from work. Then I take out all the food materials I prepared the night before, for making supplementary food for the baby, and cook them. I leave home at around 7:30 to be able to get to the office by 8:30. You know, morning traffic…My mother-in-law takes care of the baby during the day…Throughout the day in the office, I have to leave my desk and pump milk a few times, once every three hours or so I believe. Sometimes I need to pump milk right after a meeting that ends right before lunch time. In that case, I will have to ask my colleagues to bring me some food on their way back, so that I can take a few bites before my

afternoon work starts. I have to swallow quickly so that I can save some time for pumping milk after lunch.

Prior to this conversation, Beth had elaborated her reasons and motivations for breast-feeding, despite the inconvenience of carrying a milk pump to and from work and carrying it from her desk to the restroom once every three hours every day.

Throughout our conversation, Beth repeatedly reminded me: "Make sure you check out our nursery rooms and bathrooms in the building. The bathrooms are such nice places for me to pump milk in that I don't need an even fancier nursery room!" Although she often expressed her concern with professional development after childbirth, exemplified by her worry that her boss would not take seriously an employee who left her desk so many times during a workday, Beth felt satisfied with the "hardware" that the company provided to show its support for working mothers. "With the nice bathrooms and nursery rooms, what can I complain about?" Beth directed the question at herself. What she also felt less prone to complain about was her husband whom she often addressed as "teammate." As a point of contrast, she mentioned the widespread phenomenon of the "absence of partner/father" among couples with children in urban China, that indicated men's lack of involvement in the domestic labor of homemaking and childrearing.

"Want to see our teamwork?" Intrigued by Beth's question I wondered what kind of evidence she could produce to demonstrate her partner's collaboration with her at home. Much to my astonishment, Beth took out her phone to show me an excel spreadsheet that quantified and visualized their labor at home. The spreadsheet consisted

of two columns—one for her and one for her husband—and rows and rows of numbers, or more precisely, points that each person got. As she was scrolling down, Beth explained that she instituted a point earning and redemption system for her and her husband, shortly after their son was born:

> We had a lot of fights after our son was born, and came to realize that we were in fact always arguing about whether somebody was doing more for the family than the other and by how much. We knew deep inside our hearts that both of us were devoted wholeheartedly to caring for the kid and contributing to the family. Then I started thinking about developing a system that could keep a record of who did what for the family, and therefore I came to Excel.

Quickly glancing up and down the spreadsheet, I did not find any category by which Beth and her husband labeled their points. Beth explained that one would get the same number of points for doing anything "for the good of the family," particularly defined as taking care of the child. She provided the following example: she could get five points for putting the baby to sleep and her husband could get the same number of points for washing the baby's diapers or doing their dishes (while she was attending to the baby). I assumed that Beth's points could easily exceed those of her husband, since she pumped milk many times a day and spent even more time making supplementary baby food after work. Those were the things that her husband "could not do," and to make the race even more difficult for him, he was obligated to work overtime at night.

After realizing the bug in her point system that could disadvantage her husband—who was "working very hard to support the family" in her words—Beth appended a rule that making financial contributions could also earn someone points, as long as that person did not work overtime consistently. In Chapter Three, I present some white-collar women who worked overtime in the office to escape responsibilities at home, when they were simultaneously exploiting the help from parents and parents-in-law. Beth wanted to forestall the possibility that one of them would keep working overtime to both earn points and dodge laboring at home. Beth stated assertively,

> I don't want either of us to have an excuse for not coming home from work at night, because you know, it is a whole lot more work taking care of a one-year old who does not sleep but cries all the time. Also, I don't want either of us to have the mindset that making money could count as one's only contribution to the family. I mean, it is important for us to contribute to the family financially, but that does not mean it is the most important or the only thing we do for the family.

What she said was implemented on the spreadsheet by adding points when someone was making extra income by working overtime and removing points when the overtime work stood in his/her way of caring for the child.

I asked Beth whether she enjoyed greater authority than her husband in assigning and removing points, and she answered by directing my attention to the phrases "nagging too much" and "starting a fight" in her rows. "My husband could take my points off if I

do these," Beth giggled. "Did you also say that you can redeem points?" Beth responded in a tone that reminded me of the host of a game show clarifying rules for participants:

> Having a one-year-old in a family is really exhausting, you know. Everyone wants to slack off once in a while, which is completely understandable. That's where point redemption kicks in. You can redeem points if you want to occasionally slack off. For example, if you value having time just for yourself, you can use earned points to buy a night out, say, to go to a concert with besties and probably also get a drink afterwards. If he wants to spend time with his friends, or just alone reading or working out, he can redeem his points for these activities.

Beth added that points could also be redeemed to spend night hours in one's office doing overtime work, an activity that could feel more fulfilling and stimulating than attending to a crying baby.

Beth revealed that she had been "improving the point system" so that the couple collaborated with each other more than they competed against each other. "If he absolutely has to come home late from work, I can make sure that I stay at home and take care of the baby and that I don't think about redeeming my points in the same way." At that time, Beth's husband was preparing to start a new company with his boss, and needed to fly to different areas of China to look for other business partners. To ensure that the baby got well taken care of by at least one parent at all times, Beth was willing to make the compromise that she could spend more time at home as her husband was away at work. She kept emphasizing throughout our conversation that there was a lot that a

husband could do at home, such as changing diapers, feeding the baby, cooking for the adults, doing dishes and laundry, and cleaning, if he was willing to. In other words, a husband could potentially have many opportunities to "earn points by doing work for the family," to use her vocabulary, even if his work obligations would reduce the amount of time he spent at home.

Beth felt contented with her husband as her teammate, and as a reward for his teamwork, she encouraged him to spend more time on his own doing what he was really interested in outside of work and family obligations, such as reading history books in his study. She also treasured the limited amount of time left from childcare and domestic labor so that she and her husband could together go to a gym, see a movie, hear a concert, and take a walk: all for the purpose of maintaining their "couple's bubble." When I asked whether she had any time left just for herself, Beth completely ignored my question, and instead, immediately took out her phone again and shared with me photos of her baby eating, sleeping, laughing, burping, hugging, smiling, and so on. "With such a cute baby around, I feel that all of my hard-work pays off, although sometimes he is hard to deal with, like when he refuses to eat or sleep. I am the happiest woman ever!" Beth scrolled down his photos on her phone, as her lips and eyes smiled into a half-moon shape.

Beth attempted to ensure that everything at home was running according to a tight schedule and that time was not wasted at any moment, to the extent that she could "make the best of 24 hours like a day had 48." This calls to mind Hochschild's (1997) observation in American families that family time has become increasingly accommodated to scheduling and time pressures, similar to what we see in the workplace. What distinguishes the Chinese case from the American one is that the post-socialist

Chinese state has privatized domestic labor compared to the communal services of the socialist era (see Introduction), while the state and society has continued to demand women's participation in the public domain of production. The more professional women attach themselves to the world of work, the more its cycles, deadlines, and paces shape their family lives, so much so that family time has increasingly succumbed to the cult of efficiency associated with the workplace. Moreover, Beth set aside time for family trips—to a garden nearby or a faraway tourist destination—and also for intimacy. She hoped to spend quality time with her husband so that it could compensate for their lack of contact due to their day jobs in different parts of the city and childcare responsibilities at home at night. Yet the existence of quality time needed even more scheduling on her part, which made Beth's home a place to plan, hyperorganize, and sometimes rush to get everything done.

Beth tried as much as she could to finish work before 5pm every day, since overtime work meant not being able to go home early and take care of her son, which she valued a great deal. Occasionally she had no choice but to stay in the office to work past 8pm, and after coming back home, Beth sadly found that she had missed her opportunity to kiss her son goodnight after his grandmother had put him to bed. Whether she took on overtime work or not, Beth recognized how much time she was away from the baby because of work on any given day. "I make up my time away from him by cooking supplementary food for him, according to the recipes I have learned from online classes," Beth declared when proudly showing me pictures on her phone of all the baby food she made. When she finally came home from work only to find the baby fast asleep, Beth's disappointment with herself turned into motivation for making baby food. Furthermore,

through her social media advocacy, Beth tried to promote among young mothers that home-made food supplementing breastmilk was one of the nicest things a working mother could do for her child. When her friends who were also working mothers showed interest in trying the recipes of baby food she shared online, Beth followed up with them to provide more of her experiences and encourage them to make cooking for their kids a long-term effort.

Working mothers like Beth were wrestling with a time bind (Hochschild 1997): As the first shift at the workplace took more time, the second shift (at home) became more hurried, which caused working mothers to solve such time constraints by noticing, understanding, and coping with the emotional consequences of the compressed second shift. Breastfeeding and making supplementary baby food mattered not only because of their health benefits for kids, but also their emotional and moral valence for working mothers who felt that they needed to do these things to be able to claim they were doing a great job at home. As the title of one of Beth's online blogs suggested, working mothers should first and foremost muster the courage to set goals for themselves to do "little nice things" like breastfeeding that would turn into a long, challenging, and exhausting path of childrearing. I asked Beth what she thought of those mothers who fed their babies powered milk and let grandmothers cook for their babies, and she sniffed and said, "If they are not willing to do what they should do as mothers, they cannot avoid blame for the lesser quality of care that their kids receive."

Beth's excel spreadsheet detailed the amount of labor required by good functioning of an urban, middle-class household and performed by her and her partner. More importantly, given that excel is commonly used for purposes of budgeting,

calculation, and estimation in the corporate world, the excel spreadsheet visualized new forms of domestic labor that reproduced notions of efficiency and rationality common in professional settings. When Beth was running her household like an office with the help of excel, what was she going through in the office?

**"You Cannot Have Your Cake and Eat It": Women's Struggles between Productive and Reproductive Labor**

My time spent with Beth, a young working mother whose excel spreadsheet I described earlier, in a restaurant on the ground level of the Shanghai Tower felt like a whirlwind. Although time always seemed to fly by when I was in the Lujiazui Financial Zone of Pudong District (see Introduction), Beth brought an even faster pace of life into my sense of Lujiazui. On the day of our interview, she texted me at 7am to ask, "Hi, we are having lunch today right? Could you get to the restaurant early so that we could avoid the crowd?" I assured her that I would arrive 15 minutes before 11:30, the official start time of her company's lunch break. I sat down in our designated restaurant at 11:15, and immediately got another text from her: "Sorry, still pumping my milk. Be there in 10 mins. Heading from the SWFC [Shanghai World Financial Center]." She continued to text me on her way to let me know that she would arrive soon, and despite the fact that she had to take escalators and walk up and down, I could not beat her speed of typing. A series of short texts were shot into my phone from hers like bullets: "It's going to be crowded soon. Please order for me", "I have no food allergies. Anything will do", "You have ordered for us, right?"

Immediately after she sat down and caught her breath, Beth initiated the conversation by asking, "So what are you going to ask me?" As always, she expressed eagerness to cut right into the theme of our meeting. Before I was able to provide an answer to her question, Beth continued:

I know you are interested in issues of work and life among professional women. Let me tell you, you need to be a very strong woman, both outside and inside, to be able to have both, family and work. With everything that pregnancy and childbirth brings to you, you need to have a strong mind and body to deal with its impact on your work and family life.

"What kinds of challenges do you face?" I asked. Beth quickly took a sip of water and went on:

Having a child impacts your career and your marriage in so many ways. Take me for example, I was not doing anything substantial in my job for almost two years, although I did not lose my job… My career was stagnant for two years because I had a kid. It is probably going to be like that for a while.

What Beth said reminded me of an old Chinese saying, "You cannot get fish and bear palm at the same time" (*yu he xiongzhang buke jiande* 鱼和熊掌不可兼得) that would be translated into English as "You cannot have your cake and eat it too." One big hurdle that Beth saw in her career development after becoming a mother was the time and energy she

could devote to work. She was worried that her boss would not be happy to see her leave the office once every three hours to pump milk, a sign of a lack of devotion to work. "Although she breastfed her own baby a few years ago, my boss only did it for a month, and she would not see the point of me doing it for eight months. My boss is probably upset to see me get so distracted at work," Beth sighed.

Regardless of her boss's reaction to her time-consuming activities irrelevant to work, Beth held fast to her belief that breastfeeding should be a nice and important thing that a mother could do for her baby. Never did Beth complain about having to carry milk-pumping equipment to work and back home every day. What's more, she wrote blogs and shared them on social media to broadcast the specifics of her breastfeeding as freely given advice for mothers-to-be. Articles such as the one entitled "The Bravest Thing I Have Done for You is this Little Thing Called Breastfeeding" attracted crowds of social media friends to praise her perseverance. In her public blog posts, Beth did not mention any of what she told me, about how breastfeeding in the middle of work could be seen by her boss as a distraction and indication of her lack of devotion to work.

Unlike other young working mothers who initially refrained from revealing their pregnancy in the workplace to avoid (or more precisely, postpone) unjust treatment, Beth never wanted to intentionally withhold news of her pregnancy from her colleagues who did not notice her growing belly in the first several months. This changed on one day when they were asked to move to another office building, and Beth told her colleagues that she could not stand the smell of construction materials in a newly renovated place because she had a baby inside her. "I could not think of an excuse, but had to tell the truth," Beth lowered her head and voice. Although her supervisor promised her that she

would come back to the same position after childbirth, Beth underwent significant changes to her career trajectory:

> Gradually, colleagues and supervisors stopped assigning important tasks to me, although I kept going to work until the day before labor. I would only occasionally meet with clients, and could feel that my colleagues did not want a pregnant woman to be there. After I came back to the office in January this year, I found that people who used to be my interns were undertaking more and more responsibilities and moving up quickly. That's what I meant when I said that childbirth brought my career to a halt.

To her disappointment even more, the whole department reorganized its personnel during Beth's months of absence, including her postpartum "sitting the month" (a Chinese tradition for a new mother to rest for a month at home or in a reproductive health facility). She came back after the structural change was made, and,

> Everyone who was there during the restructuring phase picked a new job that they wanted to do, and I came back after everyone was well resettled. Then I thought I came back and nothing good was left for me, and luckily, another department's director appreciated my capabilities and picked me for a different job there. It was nice, but it also meant that I had to start from square one in a completely new environment.

Without a promise from her new supervisor that would allow her to stay in the new environment free of worry, Beth made a promise to herself that she would work really hard to establish a long-term career in the new department.

"To be honest, it is very hard for young working mothers to have careers. With all the changes that have happened so far to my job during and after childbirth, I just don't have much faith." Beth then revealed that her annual bonus before childbirth was 15 times more than after childbirth, because no matter how hard she was willing to work, her boss did not want to assign heavy workloads and important tasks to a pregnant woman or a woman who needed to pump milk once every three hours. "I think this is it. I can see that my career is just going to be stuck from now to when I retire, and I can pretty much see the end. Perhaps I should just remain grateful for the fact that I even have a job, and just stop having any kind of ambition," Beth repeated this statement a couple of times during our interview, an attempt to internalize the assumption others held for working mothers that they were too busy taking care of their children to be serious about their work, let alone be hardworking and ambitious workers.

At the end of our interview, Beth shared her advice with me: "Have a baby later in your life. I had him early because my husband is much older than me and he faced a lot of pressure from his parents, and I love kids anyway." After talking with Beth, I asked other married white-collar women whether they were worried about similar career setbacks due to childbirth. Lucia, the young woman who was my cubicle neighbor and pregnant during the time I was doing fieldwork in a multinational company, once explained to me in detail how she could get paid during her official 124 days of maternity leave. "The company is going to pay for some portions of my original salary, and the rest

will be pretty much covered by the birth insurance provided by the Shanghai government." Nevertheless, she took for granted that her career development would be put in jeopardy by having a child no matter what. I could tell from women like Beth and Lucia that the real worry was not money but people's assumption that working mothers were less serious workers.

Studies of numerous sectors and industries have documented job discrimination against women during the reform era, associated with perceptions that women's household and childrearing duties incur extra costs for work and make women less productive workers, or even that women properly belong in the domestic domain (Hooper 1984, 1988; Robinson 1985; Honig and Hershatter 1988; Jacka 1990; Woo 1994; Brownell 1995; Croll 1995; Gates 1996; Riley 1997; Evans 2000, 2008; see also Hershatter 2007:66-8). Across sectors of the economy, employers' rationale for cutting down on the numbers of female workers not only stems from the different labor protection measures required for women, but also in a more general way, feeds off "a reinforcement of the traditional notion that women's primary responsibility is to rear children and do domestic work and that paid work is secondary to this" (Jacka 1990: 12).

Jessica, a former white-collar woman and current entrepreneur, presented herself to me as both an ambitious career woman and a devoted mother, the latter of which sometimes proved more challenging. Every day at noon, Jessica dragged her exhausted body from the office back home, and the first thing she asked her seven-year-old son after opening the door was, "Have you finished your homework yet?" Before responding to his mother's question, the boy ran from wherever he was playing—at the dining table, on the floor in the living room, on his bed, and so on—to give his mother a big hug. His head

rested on his mother's belly for a long minute, and he answered quietly, "No." "Did mom tell you to finish your summer school homework in the morning, so that I can check it when I am back from work?" Jessica spoke in a soft voice, probably to not hurt his feelings. The boy kept silent, and went to the dining room for lunch.

Jessica usually finished lunch more quickly than others (grandparents and her husband), so that she could watch TV for a short moment before turning to supervise her son doing homework. I was initially puzzled by the fact that she was always holding her phone and talking to it, and later found out that teachers from her son's summer school gave mothers' assignments on Wechat. "We were asked by the teacher to record our kids' reading of this paragraph and share the recording with the whole group [made up of the teacher and other parents]," Jessica said to me while pointing to a Chinese paragraph from a workbook full of characters that in my eyes were too difficult for a seven-year-old. Jessica was embarrassed to ask for my help, saying, "My mandarin is not as standard as it should be, because you know I am from the south. I am afraid that I would teach him the wrong thing."

She grabbed her son from the dining room after he finished lunch, and asked him to sit next to her and read the paragraph together. After leading her son to read out loud a few times, with several interruptions to check the correct pronunciations of certain characters on her phone or with me, Jessica asked her son to read after me. The buzzing of her phone served as an unwelcomed background noise during our reading together: it was from other parents who were sending their kids' recordings to the Wechat group one after another. Getting a little anxious, Jessica's hands started to sweat as she held the book for me, and urged her kid to read faster. "We have read so many times so far and

you are still not fluent," Jessica lowered her pitch to sound more serious, putting her sweaty hands on her son's shoulder and glancing at her watch constantly.

Eventually, after a series of actions including recording the kid's reading, sharing with the group, and immediately deleting the recording that turned out to sound less satisfying than she expected, Jessica had to leave home for work. "Mom has to go. Do you want to miss this homework *again* or what?" Sounding impatient, Jessica could not afford the time to scold her son on the spot. The boy lowered his head, and started reading by himself again, more fluently this time than ever before. "My good boy! Let's record, so that mom can go to work!" Jessica happily finished one of her many tasks for the day, and mentioned on our way to work that there were more waiting for her at night. "I check his homework, and read to or with him at night, sometimes until almost midnight. I get up really early the next day to finish my own work, and everything starts over again for the day." It seemed that she was also constantly communicating with her son's teachers who expected mothers to undertake most of the supervision of their children's education.

Jessica worked the same number of hours, if not longer, compared to her husband, and yet she undertook most of the childrearing labor at home. Jessica occasionally questioned her husband's lack of involvement at home in front of me, and as far as I observed, her husband spent more time with his phone (making phone calls to clients and emailing project proposals, for instance) than with the kid when he was home. Without her husband's share of the childrearing labor at home, Jessica had no choice but to squeeze time out of her busy work life, such as lunch break and time before bed, to supervise the kid's education. She said,

I am always very committed to my work. I used to work overtime a lot and even

pulled a lot of all-nighters, but stopped doing so after I had a kid. I had to figure

out other ways to get my job done when raising a child took up so much of my

time away from work.

During the socialist era, women joined production by working in the fields and

factories, undertook political responsibilities in the public sphere by mobilizing other

women to work outside of the household, and also did most of the domestic work of

cooking and spinning for the family (see Introduction). Like her predecessors in the

socialist era, Jessica was working multiple shifts, but the shifts themselves had changed.

In addition to her full-time job outside of home, Jessica shouldered most of the

responsibilities at home that ensured that her son would perform well in schools.

Comparing the past and present, I would argue that Chinese women—driven by their own

hard-work and ambition and the society's expectations for them—have always worked

multiple shifts to get closer to the ideal of high-performance workers and virtuous wives

and good mothers. I will also discuss later that the pressure of schooling in an era of

education for increasing the quality of Chinese population has intensified the role of

mothers as tutors, different from the socialist era when mothers themselves were less

educated. The intensified domestic and reproductive labor for wives and mothers in the

post-socialist era—when the state has privatized such labor—has contributed to the

forces potentially pulling women away from work.

**"I Need to Work": The Melodramatic Failure and Triumph of a Housewife**

"Chinese women nowadays have to be presentable to others in the living room and cook for their families in the kitchen[15]. She should be able to punch a tiger and fight a mistress who sleeps with her husband[16]." Jessica uttered these words in the rhythm of a woman's high-heel shoes tapping the ground during rush hours on the streets of Shanghai, fast and crisp. During the time when I was working in her fashion company, Jessica invited me to have lunch at her home every day, and we always spent half an hour after lunch watching an incredibly popular soap opera, *The First Part of My Life*.

The show is adapted from a novel by a popular Hong Kong writer Yi Shu, whose work features white-collar women in the 1980s Hong Kong and has been well received among woman readers there and in mainland China. The soap opera resets the scene in 21st century Shanghai, and as the novel does, starts its plot with the divorce of the heroine, a middle-class housewife named Luo Zijun. Her husband, who works as an upper-level manager at a consulting firm, has fallen in love with a female colleague of his, as he has been experiencing more and more difficulties putting up with his wife Luo. The mistress, a divorced, middle-aged, and unattractive woman, attracts the attention of Luo's husband with her hardworking ethic (to earn money to raise her son) and caring personality. Many viewers who wrote comments online characterized her—in a half-joking, half-serious tone—as "the textbook for all mistresses." Although she expresses no interest in Luo's husband's money at the beginning, the mistress reveals her true self—greedy and unsympathetic—after Luo's husband moves in with her.

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[15] *shangdeliao tingtang xiadeliao chufang* 上得了厅堂，下得了厨房
[16] *dadeliao laohu, doudeliao xiaosan* 打得了老虎，斗得了小三

To prevent her husband and his parents from taking away her right to raise her son, Luo is convinced by both her best friend Tang and her divorce lawyer, that she should become an "independent woman"—both financially and psychologically—and demonstrate her independence in front of the court. Although they have been friends for many years, Luo can never relate to Tang's professional ambition as an incredibly attractive and yet unmarried career woman. Luo's mother once comments that Tang could have divorced a hundred times and still live a comfortable life without relying on any man, in contrast to Luo who cannot support herself. When everyone around her questions her ability to achieve financial independence, Luo surprises them by successfully landing a salesperson job in a shoe boutique that she used to frequent as a rich housewife. Up until her divorce, she has stayed at home and been away from the job market for 13 years. In order to keep her job and salary, Luo contains her emotions as she serves her husband's mistress, squatting down and putting new shoes on the mistress's feet, a moment of victory for the mistress and humiliation for Luo.

After she gets her first job, Luo keeps impressing her co-workers, employers, and viewers with her determination and hard-work that secures better jobs and higher income. Luo's path to independence as a woman who has been cheated on and divorced, on the one hand, has garnered empathy and admiration from viewers, and on the other, has raised debates about the work and value of housewives. In the novel, Luo takes care of everything in the house, from making travel plans for the family to overseeing the education of her children. Yet in the first episode of the TV show, Luo is presented as a woman obsessed with expensive shoes and bags during the day and interrogating her husband about the hot young girls at his firm at night. Also, she is portrayed almost as

illiterate, not able to answer a science question raised by her first-grade son and nonchalant about the importance of learning math.

"If I were her husband, I would have divorced her many times already," says another male character in the show. Jessica, a former white-collar worker and current entrepreneur, interpreted this seemingly harsh judgment as justification for Luo's fate of being cheated on and divorced, "What's good about a stay-at-home housewife, who has to depend on her husband for everything and adds no value to the family?" Some of my interlocutors, however, questioned the characterization of a middle- or upper-middle class housewife in the show that in their eyes was far from accurate. A young white-collar woman who called herself Coco said to me:

> Men who are breadwinners of their families do not merely support their housewives, and their wives do not have to depend on their husbands fully. Also, the everyday workload of a housewife is no less than that of a full-time white-collar worker or even manager. Many people think feminism promotes the kind of professionally successful women, but I don't agree with it. I think feminism is about knowing what women want for themselves and what they feel entitled to enjoy. Some enjoy establishing a career for themselves; some enjoy making a sweet home for their husband and children. No matter what you do as a woman, you are successful when you do it well.

Such debates about the value of housewives and women's work in the domestic domain calls into mind the general narrative about the gendered division of labor in

Chinese history that "begins with classical formulations of 'women's work' or 'womanly work' (*nügong* 女工) and notions of the separation of the sexes" (McLaren 2004: 170). Neo-Confucianist thinkers in imperial China stressed subordination of women to men and the domestic to the public, and Chinese reformers and foreign observers in the late 19th and early 20th century rendered the domestic space—in which women lived and performed unpaid but essential labor for the family—as "a site of seclusion and dependence" (Bray 1997: 263). After the communist revolution, women on the one hand participated in production at unprecedented rates, and on the other, still bore the main burdens of domestic and reproductive labor either at home or at public institutions such as daycare and birthing centers (Hershatter 2000), when the family and other 'traditional' institutions were challenged and the state attempted to socialize domestic and reproductive labor. In post-socialist China, when the state no longer actively attempts to socialize domestic and reproductive labor through public institutions to the same degree as in the socialist era, both housework and childcare have been promoted as women's work.

Although much of domestic labor falls onto the shoulders of women, a housewife who only labors in the domestic domain "is regarded as someone of considerably lower status, who has no experience or ability to obtain work outside the home" (Goodman 2004: 24-25). That is how Luo, the heroine of *The First Part of My Life* is portrayed: She has been a housewife for more than a decade with no experience working in the world outside of home. When viewers along with her find out that she is cheated on and loses her husband to his female colleague, many of them tend to justify her failure by the assumption that she has already failed on the day when she decides to stay away from the

workforce and stay at home. In contrast, a 'non-working wife'—the description that wives of the new rich prefer to that of 'housewife'—is seen as "someone who has the ability to obtain work, and may at some time have been in the workforce, but now because of the family's wealth…chooses not to work" (Goodman 2004: 24-25). This is not an unimportant distinction, beneath which 'work' is very much conceptualized as paid employment outside the home and those women who have never worked outside at all are held in contempt.[17]

The tension at the core of this TV show—between working outside and staying at home—reflected in the heroine's story resonates with lives of contemporary Russian women. Utrata's (2015) ethnographic study of single mothers in neoliberal Russia presents them as strongly committed to paid employment, contrary to the claim that many Russian women today do not want to work outside the home and are eager to be housewives and mothers, letting a strong, breadwinning man lead the household. Single mothers in Utrata's (2015:112) ethnography argue that women who stay at home become "degraded and less interesting, letting themselves go, whereas work stimulates women to be at their best," leading her to claim that participation in the labor force has long been and remains to be critical to Russian women's sense of identity. In an era when paid work receives more status and value for both men and women, autonomy and independence are

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[17] The triumph of a former divorced housewife returning to the workplace culminates, in both the novel and TV show, in her meeting Mr. Right as the happy ending of the plotline. Some of my interlocutors who were viewers of the show found it ironic that Luo remains attached to marriage and family after she has launched a journey to independence. Viewers had different conceptions of independence and debated about what it meant for women, especially whether it should be seen as derivative of work and career and antithetical to marriage and family. Yet the story made all of them wonder whether a woman becomes a better person—when betterment is defined by having a job and supporting herself— *only to* meet a better man.

prioritized in neoliberal Russia among women as well as men. Utrata (2015: 139) observes that single mothers tend to distance themselves from self-sacrifice and selfless caregiving mapped onto and associated with the bodies of older women, which further entrenches care work as undervalued women's work inside the domestic domain. Instead, single mothers are keenly aware that their social value under market capitalism comes from economic success in what is often described as a "man's world of work" (Utrata 2015: 140). Through earning money or attempting to do so, they prove their worth as good persons— not anyone's burden or a social problem—and demonstrate that they are adapting well to post-socialism on their own.

The novel and TV show throw into relief choices, struggles, and dilemmas Chinese women face between their productive and reproductive roles in the post-socialist era. The widely observed upward mobility of white-collar women in urban China (e.g. Liu 2017) suggests that despite appeals to traditionally appropriate femininity closely tied to women's reproductive roles in the domestic domain, women have been trying to live with potentially conflicting narratives of what is desired in post-Mao times: being a "virtuous wife and good mother" and being a high-quality and upwardly mobile professional subject (Hoffman 2010: 130; Chan 2017). Many white-collar women whom I interacted with felt a dilemma between dreams of developing themselves into talented professionals and conforming to traditional ideals of femininity embedded in wifehood and motherhood.

**Women Returning to the Kitchen? : Debates on Naturalization of Gender in Post-Socialist China**

During the era of economic reforms and opening up, starting in the late 1970s, trends of state policies have continued and intensified that treat women as a source of surplus labor, rather than an always integral component of economic production (Riley 1997; see Introduction and Chapter One). In times of economic restructuring such as in the 80s and 90s, China's high-growth economy created millions of jobs annually, and yet many women workers found themselves left behind in the category of 'surplus labor'. Disproportionate numbers of women were laid off or forced to retire prior to the legal retirement age, because their restructured employer could no longer keep their jobs. Gendered layoffs reached new magnitudes in the late 1990s, which coincided with the magnitude of structural changes in China's industries, and women reportedly 'returned to the kitchen' and retreated from the public to the domestic sphere as a result (Jacka 1990). Women were not only bearing extra burdens as a negative consequence of the economic reforms (Wang 2003: 160-1), but their increasingly limited participation in the labor force was further hindered by continued gender-typing, which stressed distinctive male and female characteristics suited for different jobs. Women's inferiority and subordination to men was justified in terms of their biological capabilities and personality features which then tracked women into less-skilled, lower-paying jobs (Hooper 1984: 322).

Gender-typing was exacerbated by the state's retreat from previous attempts to socialize domestic and reproductive labor through public institutions (see Chapter One) and its current stress on women's domestic role. Women's roles as wife, mother, and

caregiver for those who participated directly in non-domestic production were highlighted in the reform era (Jacka 1990: 12). Emerging notions of femininity in the reform era, when the state gradually withdraws from the regulation of both family life (except for birth planning policies) and public welfare, emphasize gender difference, women's appeal to and dependence on men, women's proper place in the domestic domain, and the image of the "virtuous wife and good mother" (Hershatter 2007: 48). In the post-socialist era, a discourse of gender difference and sex essentialism has arisen, rejecting an earlier commitment to eliminating gender distinction and hierarchy as an ill-conceived attempt to alter human nature (Yang 1999; Otis 2011). With rapidity and ease, a more overtly patriarchal culture has reasserted itself as China has been privatizing its economy and opening itself to the global market.

Amidst the rising consumerist economy, post-socialist China has witnessed the emergence of a biologized, naturalized, and essentialized understanding of gender (Hanser 2008). Scholars such as Woo (2004) argue that socioeconomic policies have created conditions which impose on women and men sex-differentiated roles in reproduction and production, respectively, and have sustained the traditional definition of women as household laborers and reproducers. Compared to the Cultural Revolution slogans that emphasized gender sameness, "protective" legislation in the post-socialist era have reinforced biologically-based differences between men and women. For instance, while some laws make an effort to accommodate women's reproductive needs in the workplace, they also reveal that "women's problems" are increasingly discussed as a matter of biology, and less as social problems.

Scholars (e.g. Croll 1995; Rofel 1999; Yang 1999; Chen 2003) have also identified a societal trend towards the sexualization and commodification of women's bodies, a trend viewed as a significant departure from both the rhetoric and practices of gender sameness[18] in the Maoist era and from more traditional conceptions rooted in earlier Chinese history of the complementarity of gender categories (Barlow 1994; Bray 1997; Furth 2002). I should point out that the post-socialist naturalization of gender emphasizing women's domestic roles and subordination to men is not new, but overt discussion of the sexualized woman and abandonment of the gender sameness narrative (common in the socialist period) in mass media representations is striking. Yang (1999, 47-50) writes:

> [T]he new consumer culture is based on a fundamental gender bifurcation, and the exaggeration and celebration of gender difference and sexuality. However, this bifurcation of gender is also an asymmetrical construction, so that there is the knowing and controlling male gaze and the female object of contemplation and desire…[I]t is not so much that the meaning of woman is expressed through sexual difference, as the meaning of woman comes *to be* sexual difference. In this sexual economy, women are invested (literally and economically) with the quality of 'to-be-looked-at-ness,' and their function is to provide a contrastive

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[18] Gender difference was not completely erased in socialist China. As Yang (1999, 41) writes, "The term male and female remained in use in everyday parlance; state discourse deployed the category of women in its discussion of women's liberation, and traditional prejudices and discriminations against women continued in less overt ways." In many social situations, gender became an unmarked and neutralized category, whose role as a vessel of self-identity was greatly diminished and significance for politics lost.

background against which male subjectivity is foregrounded and brought into

sharper relief.

The effect of making women palpably visible is to simultaneously make viewers

identify with the subject-position of the male gaze and make male subjectivity and its

power unmarked and invisible. It may be astonishing to see the rapidity of the return of

gender differentiation, the ascendancy of the male gaze, and masculine sexuality's

domination of a public sphere vacated by the state (Yang 1999: 50). Yet from gender

erasure under state socialism to gender differentiation under post-socialism, no critique of

the underlying equation between women and the domestic sphere and between men and

the public sphere ever emerged, despite women's presence in and contribution to

production. As a big-step departure from the Maoist ideology of gender sameness,

differences between men and women are conceptualized as grounded in biology. Revival

of a naturalized view of gender has undermined young women's participation in

education and employment, because femininity has been seen as oriented to the domestic

sphere (Hooper 1984: 319).

Many Chinese people in the post-socialist era believe that the repression of gender

difference under the socialist state's ideologies ignored naturally formed sex distinction

and obstructed economic development, by preventing women and men from working in

jobs suitable to strengths and limits of their bodies (Honig and Hershatter 1988: 234).

The socialist belief that men and women shared basic physical and mental capacities has

been replaced by the widespread presupposition that women's biology poses fundamental

limits on their physical strengths and professional and intellectual abilities (Rofel 1999;

Yang 1999; Otis 2011). In the wake of China's economic reforms and industrial restructuring, women were more likely to be laid off and excluded from a growing number of occupations based on such presuppositions (Jiang 2004).

In many Chinese work settings, essentialized gender categories still serve as a means to justify discriminatory practices and inequalities between women and men (Ong 1987; Lee 1998). The state and society's endorsement of a naturalized view on gender—emphasizing the role of biological difference in producing gender distinction and social hierarchy—in post-socialist China finds its parallels with post-communist Eastern Europe, where people have witnessed a return to traditional sex stereotypes (Verdery 1996; see also Wylie 2004: 44). Verdery (1996) observes that while state socialism upheld women as worker-mothers who were expected to fulfill their roles as producers for the state and also as reproducers for the nation, in post-socialist Europe the state's "previous usurpation of familial patriarchal authority" has given way to "recovering men's lost authority in nuclear families and compelling women back into nurturing and care-giving roles 'natural' to their sex"[19] (Verdery 1996: 65).

Whether gender is (re)naturalized in post-socialist China compared to the socialist era is interpreted as a question of how the past is looked at from the point of the view of the present. Rofel (1999: 217-9) observes a "post-socialist allegory of modernity" that portrays Maoist women's liberation and ideal womanhood as a transgression of innate femininity and repression of gendered human nature, and portrays women coming of age

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[19] Through examples of former socialist East European societies, Verdery (1994) argues that socialist states take a much more proactive role than other types of states in championing women's liberation, by encouraging women to participate in the labor force, erasing gender difference in the media, and weakening the traditional family structure in order to replace family patriarchy with a new state patriarchy.

in the post-Mao era as turning to a politics of the body in which they embrace ideas about innate femininity, marriage, and motherhood that explicitly reject earlier practices of womanhood. Rofel (1999: 30-2) argues that regardless of generational characteristics in shaping expectations and understandings of gender, representations of the "nature" of women and men have always operated powerfully in political discourses of both the socialist and post-socialist era. Nevertheless, the post-socialist imagination of the socialist past, irrespective of actual differences between it and the present, gets wrapped up into how modernity and progress is perceived in the post-socialist era. Critiques of the socialist era for inappropriate gender sameness have attempted to legitimize new forms of gender inequality that the post-socialist state, far from receding in this process, actively involves itself in naturalizing. Ultimately, identities and categories, such as those of gender and kinship, that may seem natural are in fact culturally produced. The apparent naturalness of those identities and categories—that sustains social structures of inequality—is a consequence "of the way they are made real through the institutional arrangements and discourses people encounter in everyday life" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995: 10-11, 19).

I would argue that there have always been unchanged assumptions about women's (and men's) essential characteristics and naturalized social roles, and what makes the public discourse of the post-Mao era differ from previous times is the resurgence of both embodied gender difference and certain notions of femininity that have essentialized the domestic, familial responsibilities of women and naturalized femininity as motherhood and wifehood. Until the state is able to shoulder more responsibilities for providing social welfare in the realm of reproductive labor, women's

"essential character" is seen to lie in their domestic/familial duties of serving husbands, in-laws, and children (Evans 2008: 12). One could argue that the trend of naturalization of gender in the past several decades in China has sought to extend social roles from biological differences between men and women, to legitimize men's dominance in the public/productive/outside sphere and women's association with the domestic/reproductive/inside. Nonetheless, what I have observed in the homes of my interlocutors is that women—as wives and mothers—professionalize their domestic life in ways that transplant conceptual and practical tools from the workplace. As they reproduce notions of efficiency and rationality at home, they turn spaces of home into work and transform the inside into outside.

**Professionalized Motherhood and Project Child**

Recall Beth's excel spreadsheet from the beginning of the chapter: She meticulously quantified and recorded every piece of domestic labor that she and her husband did, transformed their labor into numbers in ways appropriate to the intensity and duration of the labor (as she saw it), and allowed her husband and herself to redeem the points whenever they wanted to justify a break from home. She was very proud of the system that she designed, with the approval of her husband, because it proved efficient and rational to them. They fought less and less over questions like "Who is giving more to the family" and "Who is not doing what h/she is supposed to do." More importantly, Beth used the system to manage quality time that the couple could enjoy together, a long deserved break after both had been performing well as measured by the spreadsheet.

Although she could never control when the one-year-old would wake up and cry, Beth felt that she was in charge of the house as a capable and devoted wife.

Recall Beth's struggles that she experienced in the workplace due to her role as a mother. Starting in her months of pregnancy, she had no choice but face reduced workload, for instance when others in the office did not want to take her to meet with clients. After childbirth, she found herself not coming back to her previous position at work, and found her interns having climbed up to ranks equal and above her in the corporate ladder. I could not help but wonder whether the excel spreadsheet Beth instituted at home was her response to the stagnation she was undergoing in her career. She felt very frustrated about "being stuck in career," and hopeless about it when her kid demanded so much of her time and attention every day. With the use of an excel spreadsheet at home, Beth rationalized for her and her husband what each party should be doing for the family, the reward h/she would get, and how h/she could take advantage of the reward. Time spent arguing with each other would also be saved under such an efficient system of visualizing and quantifying domestic labor. Spreadsheets that resembled how white-collar workers managed team projects in the office—budgeting, keeping track of workload distribution and workflow, and calculating each team member's contribution—was what Beth transplanted from her workplace to shape her family life. She showed me the spreadsheet as an indicator of how well she was running the household, at a time when she, as a new mother, was frustrated that she may have missed the chance to advance her career.

White-collar women not only brought practical tools from the workplace—such as the excel spreadsheet—to run their homes efficiently, they also instilled in their homes

a work mentality. Jessica and her seven-year-old son seemed to have a special bond formed by the fact that they were facing difficulties together, the former in her career and the latter in his schoolwork. Once when we were having lunch at her home, Jessica showed me the homework from her son's cram-school that targeted first-graders about to enter second-grade. "Look at all these poems that he has to read and essays he has to write every day for his Chinese homework," she said while anxiously flipping through his workbook. "Even I cannot recognize all these characters! What kids learn nowadays is so hard!" Jessica exclaimed, and I could not agree more, after having failed to answer a question raised by the little boy just minutes before.

Hearing his mom's words, the boy mumbled "so difficult" and started sobbing and wiping tears off his face with his hands. "Oh my sweet heart, are you crying? Don't cry." Jessica put down her chopsticks and bowl, and waved her hands to ask him to come to her arms. With the boy's head in her arms, Jessica comforted him when patting on his head. She said to him in a gentle voice:

> My sweet heart, when we are facing difficulties, we cannot escape them. We need to face them upfront and overcome them. If we cry or complain, the difficulties will stay there and won't go anywhere. But if we overcome them, we will grow up and be better persons. If you do not work hard at overcoming these difficulties, if you don't experience hardships or suffering now, you cannot enjoy life when you are a grown-up. You understand?

The little boy nodded, and silently took his homework from her hands and went back into his room.

Against the backdrop of an ever-growing "educational desire" (Kipnis 2011) in contemporary China, manifest as a competitive race among parents to raise outstanding children and among teachers to produce outstanding students, urban-middle class families have been increasingly concerned that "A child should not lose at the starting line" (*haizi buneng shu zai qipaoxian shang* 孩子不能输在起跑线上). This tenet, popular among middle-class parents, is telling of an increasingly stratified educational system both situated in and productive of an increasingly stratified society (Kuan 2015: 12). Particularly, Chinese urban, middle-class mothers internalize norms of good parenting—measured by children's academic performance—to simultaneously produce the high-quality child and the good mother. As mothers get more and more uncertain of their children's future in an increasingly competitive society, maternal labor gets intensified in the realm of supervising children's education, as showcased by Jessica's story.

Jessica's pep talk for her son could not help but remind me of a work meeting I participated in with her. Once during a staff meeting, Jessica, as the team's leader, spent half an hour passionately narrating critical moments in her career. Sleeves rolled up on her arms and hands stretched out on the table, Jessica stared into our eyes and asked affirmatively, "If it is 3am and the project is due in a few hours. Nobody thinks you can finish. You don't have anybody around to help. What do you do? Do you give up? Cry?!" She raised her volume and pitch, and continued her passionate speech:

There is nothing you cannot do; there are only things that you haven't thought of doing...We are now in an era with many opportunities to create heroes…I hope that every one of you treats your job as your career, striving for our shared aspirations and dreams. A few setbacks and difficulties? Not a big deal. Stand up from where you fall, and carry on!

Although she never made a similar speech in front of her son about her heroic career history, Jessica conveyed the same message to her son—as what she delivered to her colleagues—that one shall not give up in the face of setbacks and that hard-work is always the key to success. Young parents like Jessica taught their children to work hard because the bitterness one ate today would taste delicious when the children would see the future return on their hard-work. Facing a highly competitive educational system, mothers invested much time in emotion-work (Kuan 2011) centered on the necessity of self-discipline, endurance, and hard-work that was perceived necessary for the younger generation to become future middle-class citizens.

Chinese working mothers have come a long way from taking their children to factories and attending to them during work breaks (Honig 1986). In contemporary China, mothers are becoming agents of their children's education (Yang 2018). As the Chinese educational system has become more and more competitive, parents enroll their children in cram school and enrichment courses offered by the market outside of the formal schooling system. The phenomena of 'tiger mother' (*huma* 虎妈) and 'competitive education mothers' (*jiaoyu pinma* 教育拼妈) has become a hot topic on social media (Jin

and Yang 2015). Yang (2018: 87-88) provides a detailed account of how middle-class working mothers in Beijing used professional tools common in the workplace to develop and maintain social networks, research the needs of targeted schools and services provided by various actors in the educational market, plan individualized learning strategies and schedules, and integrate all kinds of information and resources, to ensure that their children receive a good education. Children's education is treated by mothers as a long-term project, and some working mothers that Yang (2018) studied conceptualized their role in children's education as resembling a project manager in the workplace.

Yang (2018) investigates the intensification of motherly labor in urban China, not only in terms of how much time they devote to children, but also the *full* responsibilities they are expected to take for the success or failure of their children's education. They observe that from early childhood education all the way to the college entrance examination, mothers cannot slack off at any moment but should always work hard to ensure that their children are not losing the race. In my own fieldwork, I observed that young working mothers, whose children were well below school age, had already started gathering and sharing resources related to education on social media. For instance, as someone who had put her trust in the "knowledge economy" and was willing to pay for online courses and in-person workshops on childcare and education, Beth had been eagerly sharing what she learned through these venues with other working mothers around her. "When someone poses a child-related question on Wechat, either in a group chat or on her Moments [similar to Facebook's Newsfeeds], I will always try to answer if I have the knowledge. I like sharing what I know with other mothers," Beth said when scrolling down on her phone the answers she posted to other mothers' questions, the

series of workshops she participated in, online courses she was following, as well as research articles in English she collected from academic databases.

Both in Yang's (2018) research on middle-class mothers in Beijing and in my encounters with white-collar working mothers in Shanghai, women acted as nodes of connection in a larger social web constituted by mothers who were anxious about their children's upbringing and were shouldering most of the responsibilities involved in it. Seeing this social world of mothers who were constantly in conversations with one another to share information and resources, one might wonder whether anyone of them would want to hoard their knowledge so that their kids could get ahead of other kids. As children were competing against each other in both the formal and informal schooling systems, there was in fact another competition taking place among mothers who gained a sense of superiority to others by sharing what they knew. By acts of sharing, some mothers established their authority in social networks, because other mothers would look up to them as teacher figures. Beth once commented on other mothers that she knew were different from her:

> There are mothers who don't know anything and don't bother to learn. They rely on others to tell them answers. I am the opposite. Whenever I don't know something, I research it and learn. There are so many resources online and so many experts you can consult! You can read lots and lots of books and articles about childrearing and education, which I think is very important for mothers like myself.

Before working and getting married in Shanghai, Beth attended a prestigious business program in Beijing and received a master's degree in business from Hong Kong. She resembled the middle-class mothers in Beijing that Yang (2018) studies, who are so well-educated and professionalized that they treat maternal labor as a form of work that engages the qualities and research skills promoted by the workplace. Motherhood could even be a path for a woman's professional development: Some of Yang's informants had quit their white-collar jobs and started new career trajectories selling their expertise on the educational market. When I mentioned this to Beth, she said that if she could not get promoted in the near future, she would consider quitting her job and starting an educational consultancy for mothers. "Other mothers really look up to my ability to gather and filter information and to integrate knowledge gained from different channels. Those who benefited from my help on social media had encouraged me to open a blog." Beth proudly declared that other mothers showed willingness to pay if she decided to open a blog and charge readers.

The specific forms of domestic labor performed by urban middle-class women in today's China seem drastically different from that of their predecessors in the collectivist era, who came back from work in the fields or factories only to spend night hours cooking, weaving, and cleaning. Fertility rates were higher in the socialist era that made women's roles as mothers burdensome; in contrast, urban Chinese women today are dealing with one or at most two children at home, and yet the pressure to produce high quality offspring exaggerates women's reproductive role in an era of low fertility rate. The state during the collectivist era made brief attempts to socialize domestic and reproductive labor through establishing public institutions such as dining halls, daycare

centers, kindergartens, and schools. These public institutions still exist in today's China, and yet the educational market has been bombarded with innumerable resources and private options for parents to choose for their children. In this context, mother's educational credentials and professional expertise in particular have become all the more critical to children's education in urban middle-class families. Pressure to improve children's academic performance remains high, and heightens societal and familial expectations for mothers to invest more and more time, money, and energy in their children's education.

Jessica repeatedly told me that she provided everything she could for her son, so that he could have the best resources among his peers and "stand on a higher ground than his parents." As a non-local originally from outside of Shanghai, Jessica worked hard to pay for his education at international schools, since he could not get into any public school as his family lacked a local household registration (*hukou* 户口). Yet that was far from enough. She did not want her son to fall behind other public school children who were also sent to cram schools during summer. She showed me an hourly Excel spreadsheet schedule for the summer that the administrative manager in her company made for her daughter. Jessica shivered looking at all the color-coded columns and rows, and said,

> These public school kids are learning so much outside of school. His international school education is fun, integrating study and play. But too much fun is not good for him. He needs to learn to *work as hard* as those public school kids, who

manage such a big amount of homework from their schools and cram-schools every day!

Many working women like Jessica carried double burdens of working full-time jobs to contribute to the household income and improving their children's educational performance and competitiveness. Mothers who had the means were competing to get the best teachers for their children. Once during a workday, Jessica ran to my desk hurriedly to ask for a favor. Out of breath, she told me that the English teacher from Britain that she had tried to get for her son for private lessons in the summer finally wrote back and said that there was a spot open. "One of his students was traveling with his parents abroad. He texted me saying that he could teach Austin [her son's English name] on Wednesday afternoons," Jessica could not withhold her excitement, and blushed when asking me, "Can you please write him back for me, since my English is so poor?" Following Jessica's exquisitely detailed instruction for expressing gratitude to the teacher, I translated what she was saying to me into a long text message in English. Later in the day, Jessica came to my desk to share her good news, "Austin can finally have someone correct his English accent!" I was astonished to know that a seven-year-old boy should worry about his English accent.

For working mothers who continued to do well after childbirth (like Jessica) and those who were facing career setbacks (like Beth), their labor as mothers intensified as the society and family put more pressure on them to take full responsibility for raising and educating children. Facing educational competition among the younger generation that was getting all the more fierce, working mothers—ambitious and hardworking at

work and home— transplanted capabilities and experiences from the professional world to reconfigure their labor of motherhood in the domestic sphere. Ultimately, any perceived division between production and reproduction, in the strict sense of the terms, would dissolve as women professionalized their family life and motherly labor. This change to family and motherhood was happening when the state was privatizing social services and placing more responsibility on individuals, especially when it came to the responsibility of mothers for the education and future of children.

**Coda: An Anxious New Mother**

In our phone conversation after she gave birth to a little boy, Lucia—the young woman that I started my ethnography and this chapter with—said, "It is very difficult to both keep one's career and be a good mother, unless you have the elders of your family around to help you." I asked whether she would start looking for a new job or come back to the one she had had, and Lucia responded,

> I would really like to have an easier job with fewer hours than the ones I had before [childbirth]. Perhaps in the state sector…You know, it is okay to have the elders around to help you when the kid is little. But after he goes to primary school, grandparents can be a help only in the day-to-day living, and won't be able to help with his education. That's a mother's responsibility.

What kept grandparents from being helpful after a child got to a certain age in her mind was that the elders tended to spoil the youngest generation in the family, something that Lucia had observed and experienced herself and worried about in regards to her son:

> In fact, grandmothers occasionally discipline the child, because they have raised their own children as mothers. So when a grandchild does something wrong, the grandmother wants to teach him a lesson. Grandfathers may spoil the child unconditionally, at least that's what I see in my own family. Grandfathers try their best to satisfy whatever children want. The elders, especially the grandfathers, can be a big hurdle to disciplining (*guanjiao* 管教) a child. From what I see in my family, kids always get what they want from grandfathers at least and often also from grandmothers.

In her eyes, spoiling a child was not only done by the elders, but also the child's father: "If it is a boy, he becomes his father's buddy. If it's a girl, she becomes her father's little princess. If a father has to travel for work, he spoils his child even more because he does not get to see the child as often as he wants to."

Lucia believed that she herself would be the best educator and disciplinarian for her child: "As a mom, I don't think anybody else in my family will do a better job raising *my* kid. I am not the best mother in the world, but I will try *my* best to discipline [*guanjiao* 管教] and educate him at home." Otherwise, she stated:

If a child does not have a good mother around to discipline and educate him at home, he won't study well. If he is not a well-educated person, in a society that puts a lot of emphasis on education, he will not have a good future. This creates a lot of pressure for working mothers, because no matter how much they want to develop their career, they will need to spend a lot of time on their kids. It is a tradition of several thousand years in China, that women are in charge of managing homes and raising kids, which is very hard to change. Unless you make more money than your husband and he is willing to stay at home.

Lucia giggled at the end of her comment, making me feel that the scenario of a woman progressing faster than her husband in the professional world and persuading him to stay at home was just fun to imagine.

"Taking care of, disciplining, and educating a child takes up so much time and energy. Will you consider staying at home as a full-time housewife so that you can be a good mother?" I asked. Lucia immediately waved her hands and said:

No, no. With our economic conditions, we cannot afford to let one person stay at home and not contribute to the family financially by working outside. It is so expensive to raise a kid nowadays. During those months when I was pregnant, we spent a lot of money on everything the kid would need…I asked a friend of mine to buy powered milk from Hong Kong, of international brands, because I just don't trust the baby food in the mainland…As parents, you always want to get the best stuff for your kid. When he grows up, he will need to go to schools, and then

it becomes even more expensive to raise a child. Only by earning a lot of money can you afford to buy an apartment in a district with good schools, so that you can register your kid's *hukou* [household registration] there for him to get a good education. You see people spending a lot of money buying houses near good schools not only in Shanghai but also in second- and third-tier cities. Everywhere in China, raising a kid costs a lot.

Although she had just given birth recently, Lucia often calculated how much it would cost her to raise her son for 18 years. What she was about to say would happen even later in her son's life and be a worry for her. "In the future when he starts dating a girl and has a serious relationship, I will need to start saving money to buy him a conjugal apartment [*hunfang* 婚房]. It is not just for boys, but I have seen many parents of daughters buy houses for their daughters, so that when they get unfairly treated by their husbands and in-laws they can have their own places to go to." Her calculation up to that point—when her son would get to his mid-twenties or even early thirties—discouraged her from having a second child, which the government had been encouraging couples to do under its two-child-per-family policy.

 At the end of our conversation, Lucia took a sudden step back from her anxious envisioning of the future as a new mother, stating:

There is an old saying in China, that a boat will go straight when it comes near the head of a bridge [one will see what to do after something happens]…As a new mother, I am always worried whether I can provide the best for my kid as he is

growing up. I think as time goes on, I will realize that I can't always do that. But maybe that's fine. Rich people have their ways of raising kids, and poor people also have their own ways. As long as you as a parent try your best, it does not matter whether you are rich or not… I believe my anxiety comes from competition, whether my own kid eats better food and wears better clothes than other kids, and whether he goes to better schools and earns better grades than other kids. Maybe this kind of competition can wear out both parents and kids. It is likely that parents work their asses off to provide the best for their kids, like buying an apartment near the best public school for instance, and yet the kid still has no interest in studying.

Our conversation had turned into a therapy session for her, when I suddenly heard her son crying loudly. "As much as I love him, when he cries so loud, I just want to throw him out of the apartment window." Lucia yawned and said, before she left me to attend to her crying son, "I miss work and I really want to go back to work."

**Epilogue**

This ethnography has so far focused on white-collar women who were deeply influenced by and embodied the work culture in cubicles, bodily training studios, and at home in Shanghai. This epilogue brings to surface life experiences of those around the women that have been my main characters.

**Husbands**

There were two phrases frequently used in women's conversations with me and on Chinese social media, "having a marriage as if a woman had no husband" (*sang'ou shi hunyin* 丧偶式婚姻) and "raising a kid as if h/she did not have a father" (*sang'ou shi yu'er* 丧偶式育儿), indicating a husband's lack of involvement in the domestic sphere. Beth—the young woman who instituted a spreadsheet in her family—proudly broadcast among her woman friends how collaborating and self-sacrificing her husband—whom she happily addressed as "teammate"—could be. Wendy, a young woman working in an insurance company in downtown Shanghai and mother of two toddler boys, appreciated the care her husband provided for the kids when she was studying for graduate school entrance exams. Wendy's husband's involvement in childcare had in general allowed her to spend more free time outside of the house, compared to other young mothers who "devoted almost every waking hour to either work or children." Wendy stated,

It is very easy to let childcare swallow every minute of your life, and there are many working parents around me who devote all the time away from work to taking care of and educating their kids. I cannot understand or follow that. With two kids, I feel an even greater need to have my own life, including leisure activities outside of the home like coming here to have coffee with you and learning about anthropology.

In addition, Wendy emphasized her need to hit the gym several times a week, having gained weight after two pregnancies.

"Maybe it's all because I am married to a Shanghainese man," Wendy, a woman originally from northeast China, humorously evoked a regional stereotype that Shanghainese husbands took on many more responsibilities at home than husbands elsewhere. Switching to a serious tone, Wendy declared, "Even though my husband is really great, compared to a lot of other husbands who do almost nothing at home, I still feel that working women definitely have to do a lot more." It was not only the second shift (Hochschild 1989) that women undertook at home but also the double standards that people around Wendy used to make judgments about a good husband/father and wife/mother that made her frown. She illustrated the double standards with the following example:

After my second son was born, I decided to get a professional master's degree, and started preparing for the entrance examination. I really wanted to go back to school and learn more. My husband willingly shared a lot of house chores

and childcare responsibilities, and even spent time taking care of the kids all by himself. Whenever he took the kids out for a walk and posted pictures on Wechat, our mutual friends on social media would leave comments like, 'Best husband and dad ever!' 'So jealous of Wendy for marrying such a wonderful husband!' I know that many families suffer from the lack of husbands' or fathers' involvement, but I still believe that it is his job as a father to take care of the kids and take them out to play. As a father, he should spend time with his own kids. I don't understand why people make such a big deal out of a father performing his own duty. I kept telling my husband, 'You *should* be doing these as a father, so don't brag about it.'"

Wendy's narration was sprinkled with facial expressions vividly imitating the envy expressed in these comments by other working mothers whose husbands may come directly from working in offices to playing video games at home.

A young woman named Ying, who worked as a web designer for a small private enterprise and a mother of a one-year-old son, often said to me, "I feel like having two spoiled babies to attend to at home, one of them being my husband!" Although it sounded funny, Ying was not joking but quite serious. She told me that her husband was "a spoiled child growing up with his grandparents," because his working mother was too busy working outside to spend time taking care of him as a little boy.

His mother does not let him do anything when we visit her in his hometown, and sometimes you just can't believe that he is a thirty-some-year-old adult. I feel that he expects me to do whatever his mother does for him when he visits her. Whenever dinner is ready, he just sits there at the table, and his mother scoops rice into his bowl and passes it to him. He doesn't even have to get his own rice! Now he expects me to do all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry. He doesn't prepare dinner at all, or put dirty clothes away…I don't even *expect* him to do laundry; I just want him to not throw dirty clothes everywhere! I come home from work late, only to find dirty clothes stacked up on the couch and nothing prepared for dinner, and I often yell at him, 'I am not your mother!'"

Ying confessed that she had very low expectations for men in general, and that she would get really happy when her husband was willing to share a tiny bit of housework. Lucia would agree with Ying's expectation for how much work a man would willingly do at home. When she was visibly pregnant and working in the cubicle next to mine, some women around expressed envy of Lucia's lunchbox that her husband prepared for her everyday: "Your husband cooked lunch *again*?! And he is *also* going to cook dinner?!" Lucia attempted to shrug off her husband's willingness to cook for her every day and make it less worthy of other women's jealousy than it appeared at first sight: "You know, he worked much closer to home and could get home earlier than I did and start preparing diner. And, lunch for today is leftover from dinner last night, so it's really not a big deal for him to prepare two

meals a day." "But still…I heard you say that your husband's company has a cafeteria that provides lunch, so he really cooks all these just for you!" Other women's envy could not be easily suppressed. Lucia continued to explain that it was not time-consuming or difficult for her husband to make some vegetables and soups, hoping that her effort to explain what her husband cooked would make other women feel better. Underneath her effort to sound humble, I could sense Lucia's appreciation of a man who came back from the office and went right into the kitchen because he wanted his pregnant wife to always eat home-made food.

It may not seem significant that a husband was willing to cook for his pregnant wife, and yet in Lucia's case, the fact that he *chose* to take care of her instead of letting her stay with her mother back in their hometown was worth noting. After she found out she was pregnant, Lucia asked her husband whether she should move back to stay with her mother in Yangzhou (a city several hours away from Shanghai by bus) after she became too pregnant to go to work. "I suggested that my mother take care of me, and that he could keep focusing on his work and not worry about spending time looking after me." Lucia revealed that it was a common practice in her hometown for a wife to stay put and take care of herself and the children and parents in the family while the husband would work in a big city nearby.

Lucia's husband was aware of the arrangements that Lucia was accustomed to, and yet he announced upon hearing of her pregnancy that he wanted her at home with him. Comparing herself to her mother, aunts, and cousins who lived separately from their husbands working away from their hometown, Lucia felt fortunate that she was well taken care of by her husband.

Growing up seeing my mother do everything in the house, I did not expect my husband to do much. Now he cooks for me almost every day, and even if he does not on a particular day, I really don't blame him. If I were to cook for someone two meals a day, I would have wanted to take a break sometime. So on weekends when he does not want to cook, I cook or we eat out.

Unlike in Lucia's home, some women actively advocated for fair distribution of labor between a husband and wife, justifying it by the fact that both they and their husbands worked outside to earn income for their families. "I don't see any legitimate reason for a man to just sit back and relax after he comes back home, when his wife also works really hard outside and earns a salary for the family. He needs to take responsibility for housework too," said Tina, a married woman in the office who appeared in Chapter Three. Tina reflected on what she understood to be historical changes to the gendered division of labor in China:

The generations above us valued sons over daughters. Men were breadwinners, providing for the family, and got used to doing nothing at home. There is more gender equality now than before in China, especially given how many women work outside of home and how hard-working they are. Working women are still expected to undertake a lot of domestic work after they come back from work, which is unfair. I often tell my husband, 'I work and earn money just like you do, and so there is no reason for you to not share housework.' I keep

working and ask myself to never become a dependent housewife who does everything at home.

Women like Tina believed that their participation in the labor force outside of home should justify men's contribution to the labor inside.

**Mothers and Mothers-in-Law**

Grandma opened the door a few seconds after I pressed the door bell. She was wearing an apron and I could smell the delicious Sichuan style dishes she had been cooking before she let me in. After opening the door, grandma glanced at the table in the living room, full of toy cars, planes, and transformers that the seven-year-old boy in the house left behind half an hour ago. He had been playing there for almost the whole morning, before grandma took a break from cooking and admonished him, "Your mom is going to be back from work in half an hour and you haven't got much, or any, homework done!" The little boy came out of the dining room where he had just started doing homework, upon hearing the door open, and showed relief when seeing me instead of his mother. He grabbed my hand and dragged me towards his homework on the dining table, "I thought you were my mom! This homework from my English summer class is hard! Help me!" I encountered this kind of crying out for help almost every time I was there for lunch.

Grandma started bringing food from the stove to the dining table, turning to the boy once in a while and saying, "Now you finally are doing homework, when we are about to have lunch." Her tone was tinged with teasing. The door opened; it was

Jessica who had come back from work for lunch. The little boy ran to her arms, and she kissed his forehead before immediately asking in a relatively low pitch, "Have you finished your homework yet?" That was always her first sentence after coming in. The boy stood straight, blushed, and remained silent for a few seconds, before Jessica put her hands on his shoulders and spoke in a louder voice, "You are home all morning and you don't do anything. It happens every day. If you keep doing this, what will happen at the end of the summer? How far behind will you be compared to your friends?"

After we finished lunch, grandma stopped me from bringing dirty dishes back to the kitchen sink. "Go to the living room and rest a bit," grandma encouraged me to join Jessica's only entertainment for the day, watching soap operas after lunch. Grandma wiped the dining table clean, washed the dishes, and retrieved the boy's clothes and socks from his bedroom. When the boy was sitting next to his mother watching bits of one soap opera after another, grandma was crouching on the floor nearby, her face a few inches away from the boy's feet, and asked the boy to stretch out his feet so that she could put his socks on. The boy and his mom sat comfortably on the couch and laughed constantly at the soap operas. "Okay, it is time for your classes!" Jessica switched off the TV, turned to the boy, and asked him to get ready to head out. Hardly did grandma have any time to sit down properly after cooking and cleaning, when she rushed through the living and dining rooms searching for the boy's textbooks scattered all over the apartment. As she was stacking them into his backpack, grandma complained to me, "He doesn't finish his homework every day before going to these classes!"

During our elevator ride to the garage, a neighbor looked at the boy's bulging belly and politely commented on how cute he was. After we got out of the elevator, Jessica massaged gently around his belly, as if measuring its size, and turned her eyes to grandma, "Grandma uses all her cooking expertise to feed you, right?" Grandma replied with a more serious look on her face than Jessica's, "I might have fed him too well." "Aha! Grandma finally admitted that your belly was her fault!" Jessica, in a joking tone, spoke the truth that everybody in the family knew. Grandma spent most of every day in the kitchen, cooking snacks and desserts in addition to the three main meals.

This scene showcases the generational division of labor in a multigenerational household where help and support from working women's mothers and mothers-in-law for raising their children enabled them to keep working outside of home. Ying left her one-year-old son with her mother-in-law in Hunan province, where both she and her husband were from, so that she could keep her full-time job in Shanghai while her son was well taken care of. Mothers and mothers-in-law—often considered as less educated and professional than working women—were usually expected to help with traditional forms of domestic labor such as cooking and cleaning, illustrated by the case of Jessica's mother, while working mothers were expected to act as agents of children's education and development given their own educational background and professional experience (Chapter Five). Some of my informants who were married with kids did not live with their parents or parents-in-law but relied on them for childcare on weekdays. Weekends for those working parents were regarded as precious time to bond with children, who were also taken by parents to English,

math, swimming, piano lessons, just to list a few, when grandparents were preparing meals and doing domestic chores.

Many grandparents left their places of origin to migrate to big cities to help young working parents, and sometimes they had to share bedrooms with grandchildren due to limited living spaces in Shanghai apartments. Beth's mother-in-law who had moved from her hometown in central China to Shanghai, cooked three meals per day for Beth and her husband and kept their apartment tidy, while Beth juggled between her job and a series of motherly duties such as pumping milk and breastfeeding, making supplementary baby food, putting the boy to sleep, and taking him out to play on weekends. "I admit that it is a lot of work for her [Beth's mother-in-law] everyday, like cooking all the meals for us and cleaning the house. I would not be able to continue working after giving birth, were it not for my mother-in-law's efforts to move all the way here to help so much." Beth recognized that her mother-in-law might feel exhausted and lonely, and therefore hired a middle-aged woman to help and accompany her for two hours a day. In addition, Beth organized family trips so that her mother-in-law could take breaks from domestic labor and see the suburbs of Shanghai.

Conflicts between Beth and her mother-in-law broke out once in a while, and Beth attributed them to the fact that she and her mother-in-law belonged to two generations that upheld different childrearing practices. Beth's mother-in-law had always lived in a small city, while Beth and her husband were most comfortable in a cosmopolitan metropolis after many years of studying, working, and living in Shanghai. While her mother-in-law relied on folk knowledge of childrearing from a

different time and place, Beth who was much more educated and professionalized by comparison disagreed with her on many issues concerning what would be the best for the child. I asked whether Beth had considered bringing her own mother from her hometown to Shanghai and whether that would reduce the amount of intergenerational conflict. Beth responded:

> Many women have told me that their own mothers are much more helpful than mothers-in-law and much easier to interact with. I don't think this is my case. Last year during a national holiday, I took the baby back home to visit my parents. They took care of him for a little bit, but I felt that they were not as detail-oriented as I am. I don't think I can rely on their help, and sometimes I felt more exhausted when they were around trying to help but not in the right ways…My mom is always astonished by how much work it takes to raise a child these days, as she observes in my life, and how complicated and time- and energy-consuming motherhood is today. She even told me that how she raised me was nothing compared to how I am raising my son. She admired my ability and effort to learn, and sometimes felt intimidated by it. She is impressed by my perseverance and hard-work, and sometimes feels a bit sorry that she could not be more helpful according to my standards.

Given her rifts with her mother-in-law, Beth had been persuading her friends—who were also working mothers—not to fully depend on grandparental care. She said to me:

It is fine for the elders to provide help in the house, but the kid is a mother's responsibility. When I look at those young mothers around me who leave their kids to be completely taken care of by grandparents, I think in that case they should not complain about the elders' lack of knowledge or expertise. They have no right to complain, because it was the elders, not them, who were doing the work and taking the responsibility. They willingly give up what they should have done themselves, and they should not be discontented with the elderly helpers. Otherwise, they should just learn and do childcare themselves.

Beth believed she had the best knowledge about anything related to the child compared to others in the family, given that she read books and articles, took classes, and participated in workshops, as I mentioned in Chapter Five. When I was telling other informants about Beth, they used the term "mothers who have injected chicken blood" (*jixie mama* 鸡血妈妈) to label her. 'Injecting chicken blood' (*da jixie* 打鸡血) is a Chinese slang referring to a hyper-energetic person, and in the context of parenting, it refers to those parents who invest a great deal of time, money, and energy raising their children and hold high standards for childcare and education.

Wendy's Shanghainese parents-in-law did not live with her and her husband, but visited them a couple of times each week to help with domestic work and childcare. Wendy appreciated their help that gave her opportunities to go out, meet with friends, and work out in the gym, as well as freed her when her own parents came from northeast China to visit her in Shanghai or when she went up north to

visit her hometown. Wendy attributed the luxury she had of "having a life" outside

of motherly and wifely duties to her parents-in-law's help. Yet their help could

sometimes cause conflicts in the house, especially when she saw them spoil the kids.

Wendy once narrated to me:

> I think it is perfectly normal to let kids cry until they stop themselves, but my
>
> parents-in-law never let them cry. Kids sometimes cry to get attention, which
>
> parents know all too well. But whenever the kids' grandparents, my parents-in-
>
> law, are around, they always immediately go to hug the kids and give all the
>
> attention the kids need, a second after they start crying. I understand that the
>
> elders love the young and have a special bond with them, but I don't think
>
> that's always good for children. Children need to be disciplined! I have asked
>
> my husband to talk to them about it, but he is either unwilling to confront his
>
> parents or he can't get the message across.

Once when Wendy's parents-in-law immediately went to hug and kiss the

crying toddlers who got into a fight, Wendy could not withhold her disagreement any

longer. She tried not to explode, and said the following to everyone present, her

husband and her parents-in-law:

> They are my kids. They were part of my body and came out of it. I love them
>
> more than anybody else in the world. But I also know that it is my
>
> responsibility, as a mother, to educate and discipline them. If the kids are not

well-educated or disciplined, people will blame me, their mother, for not

raising them well.

When the elders were not around, Wendy would say to her husband, "Your parents are offering tremendous help for us, but eventually, they won't be able to. In the long run, who do you think bears the main responsibility for raising the children? If they don't turn out fine, who do you think will be punished?"

Utrata's (2015) ethnography of single motherhood in contemporary Russia emphasizes that grandparental support for young working mothers in terms of domestic labor and childrearing has become even more important during the post-Soviet transition to market capitalism (2015: 124). In contrast to the ideology of intensive mothering that is child centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor and capital intensive and predominates among U.S. white, middle-class households, extended mothering in Russia is "family-guided, socially integrated, and based on informal networks" (2015: 126). The professionalized motherhood that I have described in Chapter Five sheds light on intensive maternal labor in urban Chinese families, while this Epilogue brings to surface how extended mothering—care work provided by grandmothers—underpinned the intensive mothering undertaken by young working mothers. Many Russian grandmothers in Utrata's ethnography help their adult daughters take care of children and perform household chores, which is especially needed by working single mothers who are going through critical moments of transition and ironically present themselves as relying on nobody but themselves in their transition. A "leisure gap" between single mothers and

grandmothers persists, especially when the latter are still working and providing financial support on top of their domestic labor (Utrata 2015: 135). Utrata (2015: 138) argues that the gendered transition to capitalism playing out in Russia heavily depends on grandmothers continuing to shoulder much of society's unpaid care work.

With cutbacks in state support for families and childcare and single mothers' increasing difficulty in maintaining a foothold in the workforce, the state and society are free riding on Russia's older women, many of whom not only work long days after retirement but also face tremendous pressure to provide unpaid care work. Russian grandmothers are called on to "replenish a deficit simultaneously essential and devalued…feminine care and self- sacrifice" (Utrata 2015: 148). In urban Chinese families, grandparents, from both the paternal and maternal sides, also actively carry out parenting tasks for the young working population (Goh 2011; Ma et al 2011), and sacrifice their leisure to perform domestic labor and childcare. Perhaps the statement "We've always worked" refers not only to young women's multiple shifts in offices, gyms, and homes, but also to those of their mothers and mothers-in-law whose lives I plan to look into in future research projects.

**Conclusion**

Recall Lucia's story at the beginning of this ethnography: a rumor circulated in the office that she intentionally withheld news of her pregnancy from her job interviewers in order to get the job and revealed it to her boss after starting the job. As I was writing this conclusion, it was reported in the news in China that several ministries in the Chinese central government (including the Supreme People's Court, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the National Women's Federation) announced new policies to prohibit gender discrimination in job hiring and workplace practices. The announcement first praised the status quo of gender equality and high rate of women's participation in the labor force in today's China, before stipulating that it would be illegal to restrict women's career choices based on gender, ask about marriage status, require pregnancy tests before hiring, limit reproductive choice as a condition for hiring, and use hiring standards to discriminate against female candidates. Overall, these ministries together sought to strengthen the regulation of hiring in the job market and enable violations of gender equality to be reported and punished. Some responded to this announcement with excitement and hope, while others became even more worried that it would raise the cost of hiring female employees and companies could always find ways to sidestep such regulations.

Recall Lucia's story at the end of this ethnography (coda to Chapter Five), especially the expression of her desire "I want to come back to work." Throughout this ethnography, it seems that my white-collar women interlocutors had to make a choice between being a hardworking, dedicated worker and becoming a mother who was often

considered less serious about working. Regardless of how hiring has been regulated by the local and central government, young women in today's China seem not able to experience what their predecessors —mothers and grandmothers—experienced in the socialist era: women could be both high-performance workers contributing to economic development and virtuous wives and good mothers raising the next generation of citizens and workers. Although it is debatable whether Chinese women have indeed "always worked" outside the home in all times—the complex picture of which is presented in Chapter One and Two—the nostalgia conveyed by the statement "We've always worked" is worth analysts' attention. In preceding chapters, I have sought to connect spheres and domains of production and reproduction in women's lives through my ethnography of white-collar women in Shanghai, particularly taking the perspective of labor and work to look at women's domestic, reproductive lives and bodily practices.

China celebrated its fortieth anniversary of the launching of economic reforms and opening up in December, 2018. Chinese economy and society have come such a long way from the late 1970s that the term 'post-socialist' seems outdated to characterize today's China because the transition happened in the past[20]. Scholars of China have been interacting closely with those of other East Asian societies—Japan and Korea and Taiwan—in academic conferences and publications, and it is almost taken-for-granted that we compare China to other places in East Asia to better understand it. What if it

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[20] Another reason why the transition from socialism to post-socialism would seem irrelevant lies in a perception common among some people belonging to the elder generation that China has always been and will always be a socialist society. My own father-in-law, an academic trained in economics, once frowned upon my use of the term 'post-socialist' in my description of this research. "We've never been and will never be *post*-socialist," said he in a quite serious tone.

remains relevant—after four decades of transition from socialism to what's perceived as late or post- socialism—to situate China among other post-socialist societies in a comparative light?

The statement from her mother that Lucia quoted, "We've always worked," points to what her mother and she perceived as continuity in terms of women's participation in labor from the socialist to the post-socialist era. Numerous studies from earlier generations of scholars have interrogated transitions from socialism to post-socialism in China, East Central Europe, and Russia, pondering whether significant societal transformations have happened to these societies and how they have influenced people's everyday lives. For instance, Yurchak's (2006) work on the last Soviet generation explores the paradoxes at the core of the late Soviet system that made its collapse appear to its citizens "as both completely sudden and unexpected and yet completely unsurprising" (Yurchak 2006:35). Despite popular depictions of socialism as immoral and corrupted in the West and beyond, Yurchak traces lines of continuity in both discourse and practice from socialism to post-socialism.

Dunn's (2004) research on the baby food industry in privatized Poland shows that designers of post-socialist economic reforms believed that if only the constraints of communism could be removed, "natural tendencies toward capitalist economic rationality, profit maximization, entrepreneurship, work ethic, and consumption patterns" would have ensured successful development of a market economy that would in turn have allowed those natural tendencies to be expressed in economic behaviors (Dunn 2004:3). Yet the successful creation of a market economy in Poland required changing the very foundations of what it meant to be a person and people's economic behavior, and

Polish firms not only changed patterns of production and investment, but also instilled "new ideas about different kinds of actions people of different ages, classes, and genders supposedly can do" (Dunn 2004:5). Different categories of persons were made, in congruence with what socialism and capitalism was perceived to entail for personhood: Production workers were seen as "persons of socialism" and associated with all the attributes of backwardness of socialism, while salespersons were seen as representatives of the progress of capitalism. Production workers did not simply accept such differences or leave them undisputed, and yet used their own experiences of socialism to challenge the stereotype of workers as simple and inflexible. Hanser (2008:4) observes something similar in China, that socioeconomic conditions reconfigure social relations in the reform era, and that social inequalities are increasingly understood through a discourse that depicts the rise of the market and market values as positive and inevitable while portraying socialism as representing the backward past. Although workers reinterpreted socialism in an attempt to break up their associations with it that had put them at a disadvantage, when simultaneously appropriating parts of the powerful ideology of Western business and capitalism (Dunn 1999: 135), one can hardly pinpoint clear distinctions between socialism and what came to replace it in this context.

Transition is never a unilinear process of moving from one stage to the next, but instead evokes unevenness and generates multiplicity of trajectories. Rather than presume progressive development coming out of post-socialism, one should recognize both "regressive" and "progressive" dynamics involved in the shift to a market economy (Burawoy and Verdery 1999:14-5). Transformations in the countries that have emerged from socialism have produced a variety of forms, some of them approximating Western

capitalist economics and many of them not (Verdery 1996: 16). Hertz's (1998) study of the stock market in Shanghai in 1992, at a height of market reforms in urban China (Chossudovsky 1986; Meaney 1989; Modern China 1992; Perry and Wong 1987; Solinger 1993), illustrates how the burgeoning market economy sustained the tributary and petty capitalist modes of production[21] inherited from imperial times (Gates 1996). Drawing on Gates's analysis of state power in traditional and contemporary China, Hertz (1998: 13) investigates how the economic and ideological framework by which the new Chinese stock market operated was set up beyond the terms regulators in both the regional and central government had set up. The stock market may have served to tap individual savings of petty capitalists among the masses, and more importantly, it sought to ensure that cadre-turned-capitalist managers of state-owned enterprises would maintain "a sufficient degree of dependence on the state tributary system to guarantee their loyalty and obedience" (Hertz 1998: 24).

Continuity and change in the transition from socialism to post-socialism shape lives of women and gender relations. Gal and Kligman (2000:5) identify the broader features of socialist gender orders as follows:

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[21] According to Gates (1996: 7-8), the tributary mode of production (TMP) refers to a class of scholar-officials transferring surpluses from the producer classes (peasants, petty capitalists, laborers) by means of extraction, and the petty capitalist mode of production (PCMP) refers to a set of norms and practices by which producers transfer remaining surpluses among the commoners by means of wage labor and hierarchical kinship and gender systems. Through the PCMP, goods are produced for market exchange and production depends on the labor of "a finely graded spectrum of blood kin, married, adopted, or purchased members, apprentices, and waged labor" (Gates 1996:7). Gates argues that the PCMP among the commoners is produced by and produces a deeply rooted and subtly effective resistance to the TMP regulated by the ruling class.

There was an attempt to erase gender difference…to create socially atomized

persons directly dependent on a paternalist state...Women's full-time participation

in the labor force was dictated by the state, on which women were more directly

dependent than they were on individual men…[S]ocialist regimes were often

characterized by contradictory goals in their policies toward women: they wanted

workers as well as mothers, token leaders as well as obedient cadres. While

officially supporting equality between men and women, the regimes countenanced

and even produced heated mass media debates about issues such as women's ideal

and proper roles, the deleterious effects of divorce, the effects of labor-force

segregation…and the fundamental importance of 'natural difference.' These

debates revealed the paradoxes and contradictions in official discourses, as well as

more general tensions in both policy goals and the system of political-economic

control.

In focusing on gender as an analytic category and on discrepancies between discourses,

practices, and subjectivities, Gal and Kligman (2000: 120) suggest that ideas about

gender sameness and difference are often recruited to construct both continuity with and

rupture from the past that can then be used to gain authority for post-socialist actors and

institutions.

The former socialist states of East Central Europe and the Soviet Union, just like

socialist China, attempted to resolve what they saw as the 'woman question' by economic

means: "After the abolition of private ownership of means of production, women's

participation in the labor force was not only the necessary but also the sufficient

condition for their 'emancipation' from the tyranny of patriarchy and the confines of the family" (Einhorn 1993:9). Meanwhile, socialist regimes attempted to transfer aspects of childcare, housework, medical caregiving, and care of the elderly to the public sphere that in other societies had been chiefly the job of women in the private sphere (Verdery 1996:65). Among the consequences of women's mass participation in the labor force— supported and encouraged by the state—was "increased relative authority within family units" (Verdery 1996: 64). Thus, socialist state policies for women's 'emancipation' focused exclusively on employment, resulting in an unprecedentedly high level of female labor force participation and a highly educated female workforce. Socialist states had gone a long way in attempting to create conditions for women's mass employment and support women's dual roles as mothers and workers.

Women in socialist states internalized expectations for them to fulfill the dual roles of both worker and mother, never one at the exclusion of the other (Ghodsee 2005:35). Socialist states' attempts to guarantee employment to all, safeguard women's reproductive rights, and place social caring of the young and elderly under the umbrella of the state suggested that ideologies about gender equality were very much visible in public discourse, although they were sometimes deficient in implementation (Pine 2002:99). Under state socialism, women's undertaking of dual roles was predicated upon the delivery of socialized services which, in many parts of East Central Europe, remained inadequate. To the contrary, in socialist China especially during the Great Leap Forward in the late 50s, the state made great efforts to socialize domestic labor and thereby mobilize women to work outside of home. Nevertheless, state policies with a narrow focus on women's paid work excluded broader gender issues such as the domestic

division of labor (Einhorn 1993: 20) and the division of social labor along gender lines that feminized certain kinds of work institutionally in the name of women's work (Verdery 1996:65).

Women under state socialism in East Central Europe did not see their jobs as unambiguously beneficial and worth defending, and yet the right to work for them was imposed by the state as an obligation for all citizens—men and women—to contribute to social production and nation building and thereby became taken-for-granted. As their counterparts in socialist China, work for women in socialist East Central Europe subjected them to experiences of exhaustion, lack of career satisfaction, and feelings of guilt and inadequacy towards their children, and their attitude towards work was often marked by ambivalence and hesitation (Einhorn 1993: 114; see also Hershatter 2011). Meanwhile, the family was reborn as the 'socialist' family with its responsibilities towards the wider society and state, where worker-mothers were expected to be fully committed to bearing and rearing future citizens (Einhorn 1993: 32). Women performing both productive and reproductive duties under state socialism were in fact shouldering triple burdens—work, housework, and participation in the public sphere such as local or central government, union politics, or school or neighborhood committees—which drained their energies and overburdened them to the point that "it is understandable if many of them perceived—or perceive, in retrospect—the right to work as yet another obligation, rather than a right on which they might pride themselves" (Einhorn 1993: 117). This stands in contrast to the motivation behind the statement "We've always worked" from my fieldwork, as women felt their right to work was put in jeopardy by their reproductive role.

Official and unofficial discourse in state socialism attributed to the private sphere very different meanings. According to Einhorn (1993: 7), the official focus on women's labor force participation devalued reproductive labor in the private domain and rendered gender inequalities within it invisible. Unofficial discourse about the private sphere in socialist East Central Europe invested it with a value opposing state strictures, "the over-politicized and didactic, exhortatory nature of the public sphere" (Einhorn 1993:6). This stood in contrast to feminist interpretations of the public/private dichotomy in the West, where "the private sphere was pilloried for its disadvantaging of women in under-valued, un-remunerated, isolated and largely invisible spheres of work" (Einhorn 1993:7). Contrary to that many women in East Central Europe did not resist confinement to the private sphere and welcomed it as a respite from the rigors of the double or triple burden to which they were subjected to under state socialism, Western feminists have called for freeing women from the confines of the private sphere and facilitating their presence in public spheres of work and politics.

State socialism exhorted women to participate in the public sphere of work, and by contrast, women who were full-time housewives received official disapproval and a low status both economically and socially (Einhorn 1993:6). Part of Chapter Five of this dissertation presents a popular Chinese soup opera that bemoans the failure of an urban middle-class housewife and celebrates her return to the workforce and ascent up the corporate ladder. As a notion and value judgment inherited from the socialist era, the only form of valued labor is that performed outside the home and paid. The private sphere under state socialism was overall undervalued, though exceptions did occur: "[W]hen the need for reproduction of the future labor force seemed endangered by the

stresses emanating from women's dual role, that prevailed over the need for women's labor power in the workforce" (Einhorn 1993:7). Similarly, I have shown in Introduction and Chapter One that during periods of economic slowdown in both socialist and post-socialist China, women were called on to retreat from their paid labor in the public domain back to performing domestic and reproductive labor in the domestic domain (see also Dunn 2004). The discursive rejection of women's double burden as workers and mothers under state socialism in favor of their identity as wives and mothers (dependent on male breadwinners) signals a significant transformation from socialism to post-socialism, especially given how much the state has withdrawn from the provision of public welfare.

Since 1989, economic transformations in East Central Europe and China have been displacing women from participation in the labor force and planting them back in the family perceived to be their "primary sphere of responsibility" (Einhorn 1993: 5). This is because the array of economic rights that women enjoyed under state socialism has been construed as making women more expensive to employ and therefore have operated against their interests in the market (Einhorn 1993: 9). Privatization and marketization combined to produce high levels of unemployment due to the closing of inefficient state-owned enterprises, and in this process in both East Central Europe and China, women were the first to go. Thus, the very rights that women did enjoy under state socialism operated against their interests as employees: For example, women were dismissed as 'unreliable workers', precisely because of the extended, paid childcare leave that they had been entitled to under state socialism (Einhorn 1993: 130). In resemblance to unemployment among women following market reforms in East Central Europe, state

sector enterprises in China in the 80s and 90s that were being restructured for better economic efficiency laid off women workers as a consequence, which shifted ideological constructions to emphasize women's role in the domestic sphere.

Promises of socialist states to provide public welfare had been taken for granted as part of daily life and entitlement by women, and later when the state retracted to leave a void in these areas of provision, women found their universal entitlement replaced by market-driven criteria of individual eligibility (Pine 2002). While both men and women were hit by restructuring of the socialist economy, the gender order in post-socialist contexts shifted to exclude many women from full participation in public work and emphasize their domestic contributions of caring for children, the ill, and the elderly (Pine 2002: 103). Verdery's proposition (1991) for studying the transition from socialism to post-socialism points out the effects of the introduction of market forces in producing mass unemployment, a problem particularly acute for women who "had made considerable strides in the workplace under socialism" and stood to lose disproportionately relative to men (Verdery 1991:434)

Transition from socialism to post-socialism did not always make women fare worse. In her ethnography of women's work in the tourism industry in Bulgaria, Ghodsee (2005) demonstrates that many women were able to adjust to capitalism precisely because they were using interpersonal, educational, and material resources instrumental to survival under socialism, and therefore did not end up being negatively affected by the transition. Bulgarian women's high rate of labor force participation particularly in the tourism industry came as a result of their ability to take on multiple shifts of home, work, and the public sphere under socialism (Ghodsee 2005: 113). With the advent of

capitalism, women's relatively high levels of cultural capital that they accumulated in the socialist era, combined with the perception of their 'natural' suitability to tourism under the socialist regime, solidified their employment opportunities at a time of rapid institutional changes and economic restructuring (Ghodsee 2005: 114). Nevertheless, as the socialist period faded further into the past and the generation of women that came of age under the old system retired, patriarchal discourse resurged and fewer and fewer women were holding managerial positions to resist it. Younger generations of women were less convinced that they had always worked and should always work, vulnerable to the gender disparities that inevitably seemed to accompany capitalism (Ghodsee 2005: 157).

So far I have focused on issues of women's roles in production in societies that have transitioned from socialism to post-socialism. Douglass's (2005) volume on the population "implosion" in Europe—that fertility levels in European societies have dropped below replacement level fertility—includes chapters on post-socialist east European societies that are worth reviewing in comparison to what has happened to reproduction in China in the last several decades. Douglass (2005: 15) states:

> [W]omen in Eastern Europe under communism had always worked alongside men. The state encouraged having children by offering free childcare and other direct payments for families. The 'transition' to market economies, however, has been accompanied by the curtailment of family services which were widely available during the socialist era. At the same time as those prior benefits have been withdrawn, fertility rates have plummeted.

China shares with post-socialist east European societies the retreat of the state in socializing reproductive labor and providing social welfare to secure women's participation in production in the public domain.

Erikson's (2005) chapter in the volume on the political economy of fertility in re-unified Germany interrogates state policies and market forces in shaping experiences of fertility and cultures of reproduction and motherhood. She states:

> Before re-unification, East German women were usually able to return to the same or a similar job…most West German women with children who worked outside the home were employed part-time, and there was a general tendency to have a career and children *sequentially*, rather than simultaneously as was common in East Germany. (Erikson 2005: 60)

Gabriel's (2005) chapter on patterns of childbearing in post-Soviet Russia reveals the medical approach that emphasizes the cultural desirability of early childbearing: it is assumed by both medical professionals and the general public that older mothers (aged above 28 years) have significantly more complications in pregnancy and labor than young mothers and therefore higher risks of giving birth to undesirable babies. Although this culturally informed medical construction of appropriate childbearing age perpetuates the low birthrate in Russia, Gabriel contends that it makes sense when considering grandmother-provided care, the most common childcare solution in a country afflicted with slow economic growth and high rates of male mortality.

Stoilkova's (2005) chapter on the demographic crisis in post-socialist Bulgaria argues that although in its statistical sense the decline of birth rates that occurred after the fall of socialism is related to mass emigration, such statistical perspective does not take into account particular conditions and experiences that the post-socialist generations had to confront as they redefined their social and gender roles. She points out that the birthrate decline in Bulgaria, aggravated by the fall of socialism, had already been in place during the preceding decade, and heightened interest in demographic issues in public discourse came to express critical societal concerns about the deteriorating conditions of life after socialism. This chapter shows how demographic shifts and changes to family-making among Bulgarians represent their adjustments to economic, cultural, and social upheavals in Bulgaria both before and after 1989, involving new definitions of both gender identities and what it is to be 'modern'. Such moral and ethical coding of reproduction appears also in Nash's (2005) chapter on the economy of birthrates in the Czech Republic. It juxtaposes lowered birthrates as indicative of future social and economic problems—a worry shared among journalists and quantitative social scientists—and not having children as establishing responsibility for the self (rather than taking social provision) and contributing to the transition out of socialism and into post-socialism, a view shared among young Czechs who value opportunities to work, study, and travel previously unavailable under socialism. Nash notes that the elder generation growing up under socialism felt that they had missed opportunities for self-development and therefore expressed support for the young generation to delay having children. In addition, Nash presents class-coded differences emerging from discussions of reproductive behaviors among the low-income in the Czech Republic: class and ethnic

distinctions are made to denounce the reproduction of disadvantaged groups as not solving the problem of social reproduction.

Transition from socialism to post-socialism or capitalism is itself a gendered process, well illuminated by Utrata's (2015) ethnography of single motherhood in Russia that pinpoints its key paradox of being everywhere and nowhere: "between the ubiquity and utter normalcy of Russian single motherhood and the lack of agreement as to who counts as a single mother and what it means to be single in the New Russia" (Utrata 2015: 10). The former Soviet had only paid lip service to gender equality, "relying on women's paid labor…[and] underpaying women for their work," and it was the grandmothers who stepped in to compensate for the state's inadequacies in supporting women to work outside and providing public welfare for domestic, care work (Utrata 2015: 23, 46). Young women, who have been used to the absence of reliable men and the state as well as help from their mothers in both the Soviet and post-Soviet era, have become "savvy post-socialist subjects" (Utrata 2015: 105), demonstrating to others that they will not fall back onto men's or the state's promises. Mothers may find it more manageable to work on transforming the self rather than "tackling the systematic change that might better accommodate their responsibilities as workers and mothers" (Utrata 2015: 122). Russian women have long been holding households together when also working outside, and the rise of an ideology of independent self-reliance in the new neoliberal Russian encourages them to embrace reliance on the self as a kind of heroism, no matter how ironic such heroism is, given the lack of alternatives.

Utrata (2015: 153) insightfully argues that distinctions among women based on marital status are not necessarily meaningful, and that single motherhood functions as a

metaphor in a wide range of women's lives, a metaphor for how supported (by grandmothers) or unsupported (by men and the state) women feel as mothers regardless of marital status (Utrata 2015: 16). Given the retreat of the state and socioeconomic pressures single mothers face, brandishing of self-reliance highlights personal competence and autonomy which is especially important for single mothers (Utrata 2015: 124). Similarly, in post-socialist China, the state has downplayed traditional forms of governance and social welfare, and has instead stressed neoliberal modes of governmentality: making individuals and families solely responsible for their own successes. *"We've Always Worked"* has tried to understand how women respond to and put into practice neoliberal values highlighting self-enterprising, self-disciplining, and self-regulating individuals in their everyday work and family lives.

Ethnographic materials presented in this ethnography find their resonance with the reality of working women across the globe today. For instance, in an article entitled "Japan's Working Mothers: Record Responsibilities, Little Help from Dads" and published by the New York Times (February 2019), Japanese women who are well-educated and have had experiences working outside of home are swamped by onerous domestic tasks that constrain their participation in the work force at a time when the country says it desperately needs more from women. While Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe has advocated for "womenomics"—energizing the nation's stagnant economy by elevating women in the labor force—and boasted that an unprecedented rate of 67 percent of women were working in Japan, many of those women were bearing disproportionate burden at home and finding themselves stuck in limited roles in the workplace. This ethnography shows that urban professional women in China are clearly

aware of challenges brought by their reproductive roles as wives and mothers to their productive roles as workers, which is one of the many reasons why the two-child-per-family policy has not received as positive of a response from women at reproductive ages as policy-makers expected. When the state and society have been putting pressure on women in both productive and reproductive terms, facing fertility decline and economic slowdown, women find it more and more difficult to balance demands from different domains of their lives that they see at odds with one another. I hope in my future research to look into changing patterns of fertility in China in the past several decades, in comparison to other parts of the world.

**Glossary**

*nüxing* 女性

*funü* 妇女

*tongchi tongzhu tonglaodong* 同吃同住同劳动

*nei* 内

*wai* 外

*laodong* 劳动

*jiawu huo* 家务活

*wuhua* 五化

*tiefanwan* 铁饭碗

*ziwo fazhan* 自我发展

*bailing liren* 白领丽人

*nü hanzi* 女汉子

*danwei* 单位

*hukou* 户口

*chiku* 吃苦

*bei-shang-guang-shen* 北上广深

*jiaban* 加班

*bingtaide gongzuo wenhua* 病态的工作文化

*timian* 体面

*yiwantang de juli* 一碗汤的距离

*waidiren* 外地人

*majiaxian* 马甲线

*duanlian* 锻炼

*xianqi liangmu* 贤妻良母

*qingchunfan* 青春饭

*meinu jingji* 美女经济

*yu he xiongzhang buke jiande* 鱼和熊掌不可兼得

*nügong* 女工

*haizi buneng shuzai qipaoxian shang* 孩子不能输在起跑线上

*huma* 虎妈

*jiaoyu pinma* 教育拼妈

*guanjiao* 管教

*hunfang* 婚房

*sang'ou shi hunyin* 丧偶式婚姻

*sang'ou shi yu'er* 丧偶式育儿

*jixie mama* 鸡血妈妈

*da jixie* 打鸡血

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