Bodily Selves, Beauty Ideals, and Nature:
An Ethnographic Comparison of Cultural Difference in Shanghai, China

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a comparative analysis of Chinese and Western understandings of bodily-selves, set against the backdrop of the rise of the individual and consumer culture in Chinese society and the pervasive concern in Shanghai for 'Westernization.' Dedicated to a comparative approach to ethnography, I focus in the dissertation on two groups of young professional women, one Chinese and one Western (in their own vernaculars), who were living and working in Shanghai during my 18 months of fieldwork. While in Shanghai, I spent time with these women as they engaged in practices of eating and dieting, working out, and going to beauty salons. I found that the two groups of women had strikingly different understandings of bodily-selves, which had implications for the moral valence they attached to modifying bodies. The Chinese women I knew conceptualized their bodily-selves as subject to continuous modification by their environment and daily practices; they were explicit about the fact that modifying bodies could and should influence their success in the world. In contrast to this, the Western women viewed selfhood as a static aspect of their identities, which they often linked to unmodifiable features of the body. They saw wanting to change the body as indicating that social norms had infiltrated the self, which they considered a morally troubling acquiescence to social pressures. I suggest that in contrast to scholars who argue that bodily-based identities are becoming 'naturalized' in China's recent transition to consumerism (much as they are in the West), I argue that the Chinese women were operating with a cultural understanding of bodies that allowed them to understand their identity as bodily and yet not naturalized or essentialized.

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To my little Ellie:
You engender a depth of feeling I never thought possible.

Snapshot #1

On a cold, rainy, Saturday afternoon a few of my Chinese friends and I gathered at Mei's apartment on the outskirts of the city. They were teaching me how to cook some of my favorite Chinese dishes. As the kitchen was small and our conversation was distracting, my friends soon took over the cooking while I watched and we all discussed proper eating habits.

"So you're on a diet?" I asked Mei, our host for the day, after she had been discussing her plans to lose weight.

"Of course!" She replied. Everyone laughed. "Everyone in China is on a diet. Skinny is beautiful right now. And being fat is unhealthy. So we are all on a diet."

Our friends all nodded in agreement. Just then Zhu, who we hadn't seen in a few months came huffing through the door with her friend from their hometown (whom we didn't know). Back from a trip abroad, Zhu had clearly put on a little weight.

"You got fat!" exclaimed Mei as she walked through the door.

Zhu, still flushed from her walk up the 4 floors to Mei's apartment, replied: "I know! I've been working so hard lately for that promotion that I've gained weight. I have to go on a diet."

Mei nodded. "Yes, you'll never get promoted if you're fat."

"That's not necessarily true" I suggested. But before I could say anything further, Mei cut me off.

"Oh, you Westerners are so sensitive about your bodies. You treat them as something special when they are really just like anything else. Of course being skinny helps you at work. Just like knowing English. It's the same!"

Zhu nodded in agreement. She then introduced us to her childhood friend,

Wenjing. Wenjing, after saying hello to us inquired about the dishes we were cooking.

Mei explained they were some of my favorite.

"So she's used to eating Chinese food?" Wenjing asked in reference to me.

"Oh yes, she's used to it" Mei responded with pride. "She's been to China many

times."

Wenjing nodded and smiled with approval in my direction. Our discussion then

returned to dieting plans and I told them about a documentary I had just watched about an

obese and sick American truck driver who lost a lot of weight by confining his diet to

fruit and vegetable juice for 60 days.[1] Mei looked appalled. "His body must be so cold

now. That's a really dangerous way to lose weight." Addressing the room, she went on

"Your diet has to be balanced and include mostly warm foods. The mistake I made when

I was younger was to just eat a few things, mostly cold foods, which really messed up my

tizhi (bodily disposition). I'm still recovering. Being skinny is important but you must

also make sure you are healthy. Otherwise, you'll never influence those around you."

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[1] *Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead* (2011)
[2] Image Source:
http://www.discoverbeijingtours.com/Home_Block/2013/0527/shanghai-nanjinglu.html
[3] Image Source: www.chineseposters.net
[4] Image Source: www.chineseposters.net

Snapshot #2

After enjoying a delicious meal at a new French restaurant in town (the chef was from Paris) with my Western friends Sophie and Emily, we were perusing the dessert menu.

"Well, I can't decide" Sophie said while still looking down at her choices. "You guys want to split something?"

Emily put down her menu. "No, nothing for me."

"Really?" Sophie sounded disappointed.

"What are you thinking?" I asked. "I might have a bite or two."

"Well, the crème brulee looks good or we could do the chocolate sponge cake with raspberry coulis. Or maybe we shouldn't. I don't know."

"Why not?" asked Emily in a somewhat confrontational tone. "If you want something, get it."

"I know but…" Sophie trailed off.

"Wait, don't tell me you're on a diet?" Emily exclaimed.

"No, I'm not! But, I don't know, I just feel so fat here. Everyone is always looking at me and making comments about my body. It sucks."

"Don't let that get to you. I mean if you want dessert you should have it. If you don't want it, then that's fine too."

"Well why aren't you interested in having any, then?" Sophie shot back. "And why did you just have a salad for dinner?"

Emily, softening her tone, replied, "A salad sounded good to me. I've been craving one for a while. Also, I'm full. I don't want dessert."

I jumped in, "mmmm, the chocolate cake sounds good to me."

"Yeah, me too." Sophie replied. I've been craving chocolate all day. Let's get it! You sure you don't want any, Em?"

"I'm sure. I'm stuffed."

The waiter took our order and asked: "How many spoons?"

"Two" Sophie and I said in unison.

"Actually, make it three." Emily cut in. "I think I want some after all."

When the cake arrived we each grabbed a spoon and took a bite. "Oh god that's good" Emily said with a smile. "I guess I'll have to have a few more bites".

Sophie laughed. "That is good. We should have each had our own. You know what, fxxx society's norms. How skinny or fat we are just shouldn't matter."

Introduction

This dissertation examines and compares the way in which young (25-35) professional Chinese and Western women living in Shanghai, China pursued, conceptualized, and attached moral valence to cosmetic bodily modifications and improvements in their daily lives. Over the last decade China has seen sales of beauty products and cosmetic procedures mushroom into billion dollar businesses. From skin-whitening agents to double eye-lid surgery, from dieting advice to complete facial reconstruction, there is a seemingly endless supply of options available to those seeking to improve their bodies. Recently, thousands of upwardly mobile young Chinese have sought to change their appearance in the pursuit of career and personal advancement. And while both men and women are actively pursuing such body modifications, there appears to be more at stake—and more to gain—for young women, as indicated by the rapidly growing 'beauty economy' (*meinü jingji*) or 'pink-collar' jobs (Zhen 2000:98), in which young, beautiful women are explicitly used to promote and sell products and services (Hanser 2005, 20008; Otis 2012; Osburg 2013:144; Zheng 2009, 21-22).

As indicated in the opening vignettes, throughout my time in Shanghai, I noticed striking differences in how the Chinese and Western women conceptualized and experienced 'bodies' and how that shaped the ways in which they attached moral valence to the pursuit of better bodies in their daily lives. This dissertation is an attempt to conceptualize and understand such differences in the context of 1) post-reform China and 2) contemporary anthropological theory. Part I is a discussion of two main 'problematics' that provide important background for understanding contemporary China. The first problematic, as explained in Chapter 1, is the way that recent economic changes in post-

reform China are altering the social landscape and creating a context of consumerism and individual choice, which has implications for people's engagement with and conceptualization of bodies and beauty ideals. I discuss two of the most prominent themes about post-reform China: (1) the abrupt switch from a focus on production to consumption and (2) the emergence of individual choice and responsibility in accord with the logic of the marketplace (and how they build on prior indigenous notions). What's interesting for my research is that these same two phenomena—individual responsibility and consumerism—are often cited as the reasons that women in the West struggle with body perception and control. And the fact that the transition to consumerism in China has been coupled with a bourgeoning beauty industry suggests, for some, that women there are also struggling with body perception, body ideals, and body modifications (see, for example, Otis 2012).

In the context of Shanghai, both groups of women I knew were actively constructing their identities through (typically 'middle-class') consumption practices and were explicit about how individuals were responsible for their own success. This, however, did not mean they had similar attitudes towards bodily modifications. For example, the Chinese women were focused on improving bodily appearance but were not at all troubled by such pursuits. In fact, as Mei and my other Chinese friends explained to me, they saw the body as a legitimate site for personal, social, and economic development and thought Western women were too sensitive about their bodies. The Western women I knew, by contrast, were deeply troubled by the moral implications of modifying their bodies based on 'society's' ideals. This dissertation argues that the reason for this discrepancy has to do with how cultural understandings of bodily-selves

articulates with consumerism to influence the practices and moral discourses surrounding body modifications. In contrast to most work on body modifications, which assume that the culture of the marketplace/ western culture displaces prior indigenous cultural understandings, my work follows a long tradition in anthropology to illustrate the way that cultural difference still matters in the political-economic context of late-capitalism.

This brings me to the second problematic, detailed in Chapter 2: how to understand 'bodies' in the context of post-reform China. Scholars working on the topic of 'the body' in China often posit radically different portraits of contemporary China. In this chapter I describe two emergent 'themes' relevant for my research. First, is the way that conceptualizations of 'nature' shape understandings of bodies and bodily-based difference. On the one hand, there is an extensive literature describing how biological and market-based ideas about nature (they are assumed to inform each other)—as static and outside the influence of humans—reproduce forms of (gendered) social inequality. On the other hand, there is a literature drawing on concepts from traditional Chinese medicine that describes a radically different concept of nature and bodies—as in flux and mutually constitutive. The second theme I describe is how bodies are becoming the site of personal development and the means for social mobility in post-reform China. In my discussion of these disparate approaches, I show that scholars analyzing bodies in post-reform China all share a conceptual understanding of power as that which *naturalizes*, a term they use to indicate essentialized differences that are deemed static and outside the realm of human influence. This shapes most analyses of bodily-based social inequality in China, where 'naturalized' bodily differences are seen as "troubling and dangerous" to scholars seeking to undermine emerging gender, ethnic, and class-based social difference.

There is thus analytic slippage in describing emergent ideas about 'nature' in post-reform China and the way that scholars posit bodily differences as being 'naturalized.' I illustrate how this view of power—as operating through naturalizing relationships—relies on an understanding of 'nature' as something that is more difficult to overcome (or change) than what is 'socially produced.' As will become clear in this dissertation, the Chinese women I knew did not view 'natural differences' as more difficult to change than 'cultural differences;' in fact, for the Chinese women natural differences were much *easier* to change since they were not historically produced, cultivated through time, and embedded in social institutions. The Western women, however, did utilize a notion of nature that referred to something fixed and unchangeable, in contrast to cultural conventions, which they saw as malleable. This understanding of nature (and its structural opposition, culture) was most explicit in how they went about critiquing beauty standards: they often invoked the fact that standards change through time as a way to undermine their potency, indicating their propensity to view socially or historically produced standards as less powerful than 'natural' ones. The Chinese view suggests that far from being universal (which is often posited by such scholars) the notion of power as naturalizing—and its corollary that naturalized bodily differences reproduce social inequalities—is culturally particular.

Before turning to my ethnographic analysis, I spend time in Part II describing my methodology. Chapter three makes a case for explicit comparative ethnography, what I call 'situated comparison' (see Flood and Starr forthcoming). I argue that in the context of China, ethnographies rely on implicit comparisons of 'China' and 'the West' based on non-comparable data: local anecdotes embodied in particular times and places are often

compared to the floating abstract ahistorical concept of 'the West' (of which the ethnographer's own background is representative). To contextualize my approach I present a historical account of anthropologists' changing attitudes and approaches to comparison in different eras and national traditions. Broadly, I describe how early efforts to produce generalizable laws about cultural difference relied on decontextualized explicit comparisons; then, shifting the attention to 'being there,' Malinowskian fieldwork and Geertzian interpretation shared an epistemological framework that relied on implicit distinctions between Western ethnographer and local Other. These implicit comparisons came under fire during the 'reflexive turn' of American anthropology, when the politics of fieldwork was seen as inherently tied to imperial and colonial legacies of power relations and inequality. An essential element of this critique was a sustained attention to scholarly reflexivity and the ways that scholarly agendas were themselves culturally motivated. Responses to these critiques have been varied and I focus on the growing tension between Foucaultian-inspired genealogies, which often seek to 'denaturalize' local categories, rely on universalized notions of 'power,' and seem to eliminate the possibility for scholarly reflexivity, and ontological approaches, which acknowledge the validity of local categories but are often critiqued for their inability to engage in 'politics' (see Bessire and Bond 2014). I contend that setting up explicit ethnographic comparisons—based on directly comparable data collected in similar ways and motivated by categories of difference meaningful to our informants—enables a return to reflexivity without relapsing into the pitfalls of the implicit comparisons in the pre-reflexive turn era. Chapter four continues the discussion of my methodology and

describes the ways I collected 'data' and the relationships—i.e. friendships—that were central to the success of my fieldwork.

Part III is my comparative ethnography in which I focus on daily practices of eating and discussions about food choices in order to highlight the culturally divergent notions of selfhood, as they relate to bodies, between these two groups of women. Chapter five describes the Chinese women, for whom the two most salient topics of discussion in regards to what they ate were being 'used to' food and balancing one's *tizhi* (bodily disposition). As I illustrate, both rely on an understanding of bodily-selves that are constantly changing and being modified through time. Because of this, the Chinese women did not have an attachment to an 'original' self outside of these changes and they were not troubled by the prospect of changing their bodily appearance through dieting. In fact, as Mei indicated, being skinny is equivalent to speaking fluent English: they both take time and energy to cultivate and are important for ensuring future success.

Chapter six discusses the Western women, who, by contrast, were constantly wrestling with the fact that they cared about their bodily appearance, but they were also explicit about the fact that bodies 'shouldn't matter.' Food was central to this tension since 'eating what one wanted' was considered an important part of being 'true to oneself,' a motto these women took very seriously. But figuring out what one wanted was a complicated task because, as these women readily understood, desires were susceptible to outside influence. They thus spent a good deal of time discussing and interpreting their wants to make sure they were sincere and not an intrusion of society's body ideals influencing their choices. To do so they often invoked the idea of a craving, which, as they described, are bodily sensations that, for the most part, are impervious to outside

influence. Being 'who you are' for these women meant being as unmodified and true to your original body (self) as possible.

I conclude the dissertation (Chapter 7), with a discussion of the implications of these cultural understandings of bodily-selves for the moral valence these women attached to modifying bodies. I describe how the two groups of women discussed beauty ideals and differences between China and the West. I use this final comparison to illustrate how the assumption that bodily-based differences are 1) naturalized and 2) more difficult to overcome than socially produced difference relies on a culturally particular model of nature, bodies, and power.

Part I
Setting the Scene

Chapter One:

Consumer Culture, the 'Rise of the Individual,' and Bodies

Consumerism and the Emerging Middle-Class in Post-Mao China

As any recent publication about China will tell you, the country has undergone tremendous changes since the reform period began a little under 40 years ago. One of the most visible and drastic changes noted between revolutionary China and reform-era China is the shift in emphasis from production and the comrade-worker to consumption and the consumer (Croll 2006). Indeed, against the backdrop of the drab clothing, strict distribution of goods through one's work unit, and a complete absence of time or money for apolitical 'leisure' activities in revolutionary China, the explosion of goods, products, and state incentives encouraging citizens to shop in reform China was truly striking. In this section, drawing heavily from Yunxiang Yan's (2009) chapter, I begin with a brief historical account of the emergence of consumerism and a 'consumer revolution' in reform-era China. I then turn to a discussion of the social and economic implications of these changes and what they mean for my research.

Figure 1: Nanjing Lu, Shanghai during the early 1920s

Figure 2: Nanjing Lu in 2011, what some view as the quintessential example of consumerism in post-reform China.[2]

In Maoist China (1949-1976), influenced by Soviet models of development, the

state prioritized heavy industry and agricultural production, and reduced the production

of consumer products to the bare essentials. Chinese economic planning during this time

period included a highly centralized system of redistribution, in which the state controlled

the means of production as well as the means of subsistence (Croll 2006; Yan, Y. 2003).

In urban areas, in exchange for low wages, the government offered its citizens life-long

employment, and then subsidized their needs for basic goods, housing, and

transportation. The state saw no advantage in consumer goods production, and

emphasized savings and capital accumulation: "The more people consumed, the more the

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[2] Image Source:
http://www.discoverbeijingtours.com/Home_Block/2013/0527/shanghai-nanjinglu.html

state had to provide in subsidies, which made consumption counterproductive" (Yan 2009:210).

Figure 3: People happily handing over money to their work unit for socialist construction, contributing to the 'prosperity of the nation and happiness of the people.' [3]

The Soviet model had numerous implications for daily life: First, the strong central control of resources, coupled with a lack of incentive to produce under a planned economy, created a shortage of basic goods throughout most of the revolutionary period (Yan 2009). Second, consumption patterns and lifestyles were largely uniform; there was very little social differentiation—people generally wore the same things, ate the same things, and lived in similar housing (Davis 2000). Political orientation determined social status, not one's consumption practices. Third, consumption remained at the level of basic subsistence for almost the entire revolutionary period. There was little to no money for leisure activities, which didn't really matter since all such activities were government

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[3] Image Source: www.chineseposters.net

controlled and sponsored. In this highly politicized environment, people built social

relationships around 'work,' not play. (Croll 2006:23; see also Yan, Y. 2003). And fourth,

anyone pursuing luxury items or lifestyles for their own personal comfort was

condemned as "bourgeois" and an enemy to the revolution: "Ideologically, the state

imposed a Maoist version of socialist asceticism in everyday life, as reflected in the

leading slogan of the time, 'hard work and plain living'" (Yan 2009:211).

Figure 4: A Propaganda Poster during Maoist China illustrating the how socialist production promoted the 'good of the people:' "People's Communes are Good" "Strive for abundant harvests, amass grain." [4]

After Mao's death in 1976 official attitudes and economic policies changed

drastically. China's reformers feared the economy was about to collapse and launched

economic reforms in order to spur development. In these new policies, consumption was

viewed as a driving motor for economic development and thus became an important part

of the political agenda: "it was to rising expectations and spiraling consumption that the

government turned in its bid for legitimacy" (Croll 2006:23). Deng Xiaoping repeatedly

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[4] Image Source: www.chineseposters.net

referred to consumption as the 'motor of production' in conjunction with his motto 'to get rich is glorious.' Thus from the early 1980s, market reforms opened the space for practices of consumption and the asceticism of the revolutionary period gave way to rising incomes and the conspicuous consumption practices of the reform era. The platitude 'hard work and plain living' was replaced with '*nengzheng huihua*' (be able to make money and know how to spend it) (Yan 2009:211).

According to Yan (2009), there were three main 'waves' of mass consumption that shaped the reform era. The first wave was from 1979-1982, during which time the decollectivization of China's rural farmland provided the context for rural households to earn expendable income, which they happily spent on 'light industrial products' (Yan 2009:211), tools and appliances for the home and farm. This was the first time that rural 'peasants' had more spending power than urbanites (who were still receiving low wages and being subsidized by the state), which led to strong resentment. Moreover, the rapid purchasing power of the rural population led to rising inflation (around 6%), which spooked the government into a three-year economic retrenchment.

After the three-year lull, the second major wave of mass consumption began in 1985 and continued until the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. This period was initiated by urban reforms—the average salary of urbanites almost doubled; they now had, for the first time in thirty years, expendable income (Davis 2000). In imitation of the state's goal of the four modernizations (agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology), families were supposed to consume the 'four moderns:' color tvs, washing machines, refrigerators, and cassette players.

Figure 5: A young couple purchases a TV in the 1980s [5]

The private sector grew quickly as the demand for consumer goods skyrocketed; inflation

rose to 18.5%. In response, the state launched a reform of consumer prices, initiating a

panic in which consumers stocked up on household items (Yan 2009:213). These

reforms, among other things, incited a popular protest movement, which ended tragically

on June 4, 1989 with the violence in Tiananmen. Over the next few years, real income for

both rural and urban families decreased by nearly 3% and most observers at the time

thought that China's economic boom had come to an end.

　　　The third wave of consumerism was initiated just three years later, in 1992, with

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Deng Xiaoping's famous tour of Shenzhen, in which he proclaimed that the government

needed to be bolder with their policies for opening up China for international trade. "As if

it had broken a spell, Deng's speech quickly led to a new round of rapid economic

growth" (Yan 2009:214). As the private market continued to develop, more and more

urbanites were 'jumping into the sea' (*xiahai*), leaving their stable but low-paying state

jobs to take their chances in the unpredictable world of private business. This round of

economic reforms was also driven by consumer spending, but differed from the first two

waves in important ways: there was an emergence of a buyer's market (there was no

longer a shortage of goods) and, now that buyers had more choices, sellers had to

promote their goods and cater to their customers, opening the space for an emerging

discourse of consumer rights. In this context, consumers were no longer regarded as

bourgeois and counter-revolutionary; they were now seen as contributing to national

interests:

> Consumers who spend have become model citizens in
> China, and not only for the way they help 'depressed'
> foreign economies. They are more prized by the Chinese
> government for their value in the domestic economy, relied
> upon to spur economic growth in hard times. Stable
> economic growth is one of the most important goals of the
> Chinese government (Klingberg and Oakes 2012:196).

By the end of the 1990s, then, the dramatic shift from comrades to consumers was

completed: consumerism was the new ideology, both for government economic policies

and daily life for its citizens.

There is a growing literature describing the ways in which this drastic shift from

production to consumerism in post-Mao China is altering the social and economic

landscape and opening up spaces for individual and group identity construction (see, for

example, Link *et al* 2002; Davis and Vogel 1990; Davis and Harrell 1993; Li 1998; Davis 2000; Huot 2000; Latham et al 2006). For the purposes of my research, there are two topics central to understanding the context shaping ideas about body modifications in Shanghai. First, individual identities are emerging through consumer practices that are geared toward satisfying (and producing) individual desires. Indeed, a growth in the private sector, which operates on a market logic of individual incentives, in conjunction with consumerism, which focuses on developing and pursuing individual desires and wants, produces an environment in which the individual is prioritized over the discarded Maoist notion of the collective (Davis 2000; Yan, Y. 2003; Hansen and Svarverud 2010; Hansen and Pang 2008; Kipnis 2012).

Chinese consumers are enthusiastically embracing their opportunities to spend disposable income as a means to highlight and/or confirm individual choice and identity. Shopping has become an increasingly important part of everyday life for Chinese citizens and people have started buying things they want, not just what they need. By the 1990s most middle-class families had met the standard of owning the four moderns, and now had more disposable income and leisure time, freeing shoppers to turn their attention to personal items such as interior decorations (Davis 1989), personal computers and phones (Yan 2009), greeting cards (Erbaugh 2000), toys and clothes for children (Davis and Sensenbrenner 2000), workout machines and beauty products (Evans 1997, 2006), and tourism (Klingbery and Oakes 2012). Because there was no set standard for these purchases (in contrast to the four moderns), individualized choices (shaped by advertising and popular culture) began to drive consumer practices and Chinese consumers linked these purchases to personal happiness: "The ideology of consumerism…simply

encourages people to indulge themselves in the pursuit of personal happiness" (Yan 2009:230).

The second way that consumerism is impacting contemporary China is that there is an emerging middle-class that is often defined through consumer practices. From the beginning of the initial reforms, consumer culture introduced people to new paths other than the political through which to seek social status (Link et al 2002:3): "I became convinced that whether they are in a remote village or the prosperous city of Shenzhen, people are uniformly conscious of the importance of consumption in defining their social status" (Yan 2009:227). And while it might be the case that rich and poor alike define themselves through what they buy, the market reforms are clearly producing growing social divisions between those who can afford luxury consumption and those who cannot. In the early reforms, those who left the security of their state jobs for the world of private entrepreneurialism first, those who 'jumped into the sea' (*xiahai*), often benefited greatly from their decision. These first risk takers were typically those with the least to lose (they were poor or struggling in their state jobs) and, with their success, were part of a 'new rich,' who were often looking for ways to flaunt their wealth (Goodman 2008; Yan 2009). Once it became clear that there was money in the private sphere that was conspicuously absent in the state sector, and with government incentives encouraging leaving the 'iron rice bowl,'[6] many others followed suit, all in the name of getting rich.[7] This dramatic shift of workers to the private sector, coupled with the privatization of housing in urban areas, produced an emerging middle-class, who began to distinguish themselves based on

[6] A term indicating employment for life in Maoist China.
[7] Numerous scholars have described their surprise at the number of Chinese scholars willing to forego their academic careers in order to make more money in the private sphere. See, for example, Liu 2002: 42-3.

consumption patterns. Indeed, according to some scholars, "consumption should be viewed as the most important constitutive mechanism for the creation of middle-class identity and membership in China today" (Hanser and Li 2015:112). Whether in the form of gated residential communities (Zhang 2008, 2010; Tomba 2004, 2009, 2010) or the ability to choose foreign brands over domestic ones (Hanser and Li 2015), middle-class consumers are asserting their identities through their choices of products: "The ability to consume properly is taken not only as the measure of one's prestige (*zunrong*, 尊荣) and face (*mianzi*, 面子) but also as an indication of whether one deserves membership in a particular community" (Zhang 2010:122).[8] This is typically associated with distinguishing oneself from "undesirable outsiders" (Pow 2009:29), (i.e. rural migrants), who do not have the means for making such purchases.[9]

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[8] For an alternative perspective on gated housing, which sees it as the norm rather than an elite privilege, see Hanser and Li 2015:113, Breitung 2006, and Huang 2006.
[9] But see Zhang (2002) for an account of how rural migrants are using consumption as a means to legitimize their presence in cities and as a way to undermine the *hukou* (resident permit) system.

Figure 6: The Gated Entrance to Alley Houses in Central Shanghai

Figure 7: The gated entrance to our apartment complex in the outskirts of Shanghai

Merging individualized choice and middle-class status, consumption practices are also helping to define newly emergent discourses about gender and beauty. From fashion magazines to beauty products to notions of sexuality, consumer products and images are

shaping new forms of femininity, which stand in stark contrast to the gender-neutral

politically oriented woman of Maoist China (see, for example, Evans 1997).

Figure 8: A typical picture of 'revolutionary China' in which the men and women are wearing similar (drab) clothing and all are exemplars of political enthusiasm. [10]

While for some this emerging femininity was a welcomed response to the gender-

denial of Maoist times (see Zheng 2001), scholars often draw attention to the ways

idealized notions of femininity are producing class-based social divisions. For example,

drawing on Baudrillard, and his argument that social differentiation in consumer culture

is mediated by objects, not subjects, Evans (2006) argues:

> Contemporary femininity is fashioned through images of
> the urban-located female who has access to the clothes and
> accoutrements that urban consumption offers. The
> consuming urbanite thus functions to affirm hierarchical
> lines of distinction defined by consumer capacity and
> success (179).

Thus as consumption practices are opening up individualized choice for fashion

associated with femininity, this femininity is based on the ability to live a certain lifestyle,

in effect denying legitimacy to other (more rural or poor) forms of being a woman.

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[10] Image Source: www.worldofchina.com

Figure 9: A Fashion magazine cover in 2011, illustrating a new kind of feminine ideal in China

In sum, individual, class, and gender identities are now being shaped through consumer choices, which are altering the landscape of sociality in post-reform China. I now turn to another commonly discussed transformation in post-reform China: the rise of the individual.

The Individual and Individual Responsibility

In the context of consumerism and privatization, scholars are indicating how Chinese society is being shaped by the 'rise of the individual' (Yan 2009) and an emerging discourse of individual responsibility for success in the marketplace, maintaining healthfulness, and pursuing personal happiness. In short, far from the collective experience of Maoist China, "the meaning of life has been redefined from the

individual point of view" (Kleinman et al 2011). Depending upon one's perspective, the emerging individual is either described as being free from the previous restraints of the Socialist state or as burdened with life's responsibilities and unattainable goals. These changes have produced a social order that is no longer focused on solving social issues through the realm of politics: individualized and apolitical solutions—in the form of products to be purchased—are offered as solutions to collective problems (Hanser and Li 2015:114; see also Yan 2009; Davis 2000).

For those working in rural China, the emerging discourses of individual freedom and desires are often described in positive terms. For example, in Yunxiang Yan's ethnography of rural life in the 1990s, he argues, "while it sorts consumers into different social groups (and sometimes different spaces as well), consumerism also opens up new public spaces for individuals and helps free them from the previous dominance of communist ideology and collectivism" (Yan 2009:229). Yan describes the way in which the individual in rural contexts now has much more freedom for finding work, choosing where to live, and selecting marriage partners. This he contrasts with traditional China, in which the patriarchal family was the basic social unit, and everything (from work to marriage partners) was decided on by senior members of the family, and Maoist China, in which the state worked (sometimes through violent means) to undermine the importance of family in order to create citizens loyal to the revolution. Now that the Maoist period has ended, and the state is no longer controlling all aspects of its citizen's lives, individuals are free from both the family and the state to pursue personal interests.[11]

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[11] See Yan (2003) for a discussion of how this new freedom is creating a context in which youths, who now have purchasing power through money earned through employment, are able to shape their identities through consumer choices; these

In urban contexts, scholars are more apt to point out how in conjunction with consumerism's focus on individual desires and choices, there is also a new and troubling discourse about individual responsibility.[12] As the private sector grew, the state began to withdraw its support for its citizen's basic needs of housing, food, education, and health (see Sollinger 1995, 1999).[13] An emerging popular (and state supported) narrative promoted self-reliance and hard work as the keys to success: "Communities and individuals were urged to be self-responsible, to take care of themselves through commercial or other privatization activities" (Zhang and Ong 2008:14).

> Indeed, Chinese idioms of neoliberalism specify micro-freedoms for citizens to experiment with—taking care of the self in the domains of livelihood, commerce, consumption, and lifestyles. In the 1990s citizens were urged to 'free up' (*jiefang*) their individual capacities to confront dynamic conditions in all areas of life without seeking guidance from the state, society, of family. There were calls for people to shift from 'relying on the state' (*kao guojia*) to 'relying on yourself' (*kao ziji*). The privatization discourse was and continues to be a tool for people to engage in self-authorizing activities in uncertain times (Zhang and Ong 2008:8).

In a drastic shift from Maoist China, then, people previously viewed as revolutionary subjects, who were supported by the state in their endeavors for social change, were now considered to be independent individuals responsible for determining their own future: "In the new regime the population previously viewed as 'ordinary

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youths often have more power (based on their incomes) in the family than their parents, causing new family dynamics to emerge.

[12] Although this is certainly not limited to urban contexts; see Hansen and Pang (2008) for a discussion of how rural migrants, who are clearly subjected to discrimination (especially educational) based on their hukou (residence permit), consistently blame themselves for not doing well in school.

[13] This is also having devastating effects in the countryside, where there is almost no state support for education or health care (see, for example, French 2006).

people' (*laobaixing*) became a multitude of individuals now required to shape their own life chances" (Zhang and Ong 2008:14).[14]

The significance of this for my research is that market reforms have brought about rapid transformations in China, including the freeing of individuals from old social constraints, assigning them greater individual responsibility, along with a bourgeoning consumer culture shaping and giving rise to individualized and class-based identities. For the most part, in these accounts the transformations from Maoist China to the present are typically presented as 'ruptures,' in which there is very little continuity between the past and present (see Evans 2006 for a critique of these accounts). These transformations are relevant for my research in two ways. On the one hand, they aptly describe the context of Shanghai where I conducted my fieldwork. The women I knew—both Chinese and Western—were busy constructing their identities through (middle-class) consumer practices, which they almost always couched in terms of individual desires. On the other hand, and perhaps even more importantly, consumerism and individual responsibility are often cited as the reasons women in the West struggle with body image and body modifications in their daily lives, the topic to which I now turn.

Consumerism, Individuals, and Bodies in the West

In the Western context, many scholars link the shift from a focus on production (and hard work) to consumption during the second half of the 20th century as pivotal for producing new ways by which people understand, experience, and engage with bodies

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[14] See Hanser (2002) for a discussion of how individual responsibility is shaping the way youths search for employment and make sense of their successes and failures in the job market.

(see, for example, Featherstone 1982). Consumerism, by bombarding people with images of ideal bodies and endless products that allow the transformation of ones' body into the ideal type, promotes a new understanding of the body as 'plastic.' The body is now a 'project' which people can transform into an aesthetically pleasing entity (Bourdieu 1984; Featherstone 1982, 1991; Witz 2000; Black 2004).[15] Some scholars have even suggested that conspicuous consumption moved to the body; it is no longer enough to be surrounded by nice things, there is now the desire *to be* a nice thing (Carolan 2005).

Importantly, this is a body for which individuals are responsible and the ability for self-management and maintenance are viewed as part of one's character. There is thus a new relationship between body and self, with the body now a central aspect of self-identity (Giddens 1991, Shilling 2005, Featherstone 1982, 2010). This, some suggest, gives rise to the narcissist, who places "greater emphasis on appearance, display and the management of impressions" (Featherstone 1982:27; Featherstone et al 1991:187; Csordas 1999:179). It also induces anxiety: as consumers have more and more control over their bodies, their sense of 'who I am' becomes less certain. As Shilling writes: "We now have the means to exert an unprecedented degree of control over our bodies, yet we are also living in an age which has thrown into doubt our certainty of what our bodies are and how we should control them" (2005:8).

Following Mary Douglas (1966, 1970), in her view of the body as system of symbols that reproduces social categories and concerns, scholars point to the way that a contradiction inherent in late capitalism—between being a good consumer and a good producer—gets mapped onto experiences of the body (see, for example, Bordo 1993;

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[15] See Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (1987) for a discussion of how commodification and bombardment of images of body parts has destabilized the notion of 'a body.'

Counihan 1999; Koo and Reischer 2004). This contradiction is felt most strongly by

women: much advertising is geared towards satiating women's individual desires while at

the same time they are held to ideals of bodies that demand self-restraint and discipline.

For example, Crawford (2004) describes the ways in which ideas of self-control are

essential to American notions of 'health.' And although notions of self-control have a

long history in America—often linked to ideologies of self-determination and modern

individualism—Crawford argues the contemporary need for self-control is always

competing with its conceptual opposite: 'freedom' and self-indulgence constituted

through consumerism:

> The sign of our culture, projected on billboards and
> television screens, is unambiguous: the 'good life' means a
> life of consumption. The freedom to consume has become
> the image of the 'free world'…And if it is true that we now
> inhabit a 'culture of narcissism,' it is in large part a culture
> of consumption that has pushed aside the older values
> rooted in community, family, and communal moral
> purpose…(Crawford 2004:299).

This world of consumer culture, focused as it is on instant gratification of individual

desires, encourages a mode of being in the world that is in direct conflict with self-

control:

> Contemporary Americans are the objects and subjects of
> two opposing mandates, two opposing approaches to the
> attempt to achieve well-being. The opposition is structural.
> At the level of the social system it is a principal
> contradiction. The culture of consumption demands a
> modal personality contrary to the personality required for
> production. The mandate for discipline clashes with the
> mandate for pleasure…The contradiction in structure leads
> to a conflict in experience. As in the soft drink ads that
> portray young, athletic bodies, one must consume and stay
> thin at the same time. The omnipresent command, "Eat!" is
> countered by the moral imperative to control eating.
> Indeed, food becomes a central metaphor for our dilemma.

> Indulgence in eating is infused with guilt while denial of
> food elicits the feeling of deprivation (Crawford 2004:300).

In the U.S. then, bodies should reflect the ideal of self-discipline and machine-like workers of industrial capitalism. "But since capitalism encourages—indeed, requires— the never-ending expansion of markets and the purchase of the commodities that are produced for those markets, we are also exhorted to consume and indulge. By this logic, our bodies should be anything but self-denying and machinelike; instead, we should give in to every whim and fancy." (Popenoe 2005:19). Again, as described by Counihan:

> [Women] are educated to be passive and compliant
> but find these postures unsuited to success in the
> workplace. They want to be producers but find
> society casting them in the role of consumers and
> loading that role with more conflicts: Eat junk foods
> but don't get fat; wear sexy clothes but be a faithful
> wife. The tensions in living out these conflicts…can
> become unbearable (Counihan 1999:83).

For these scholars, then, "the central contradiction of the system inscribes itself on our bodies" (Bordo 1993:201).

In sum, scholars interested in beauty ideals, bodies, and selfhood in the West often attribute a 'paradox' or 'tension' between women and body ideals and consumerism (and its relationship to production). In addition to an inherent contradiction of capitalism, other scholars attempt to make sense of the tension Western women experience in regard to bodies and beauty ideals through the lens of the modern individual and individual responsibility (see, for example, Giddens 1991). Rebecca Popenoe (2005), in her work on beauty ideals in Nigeria, was intrigued by what she calls 'the paradox' of Western women:

> The puzzle is this: in the West, where women choose their
> own partners (and can choose to divorce them), choose

their own careers (and can actually have careers in the first place), and choose their own personal styles in clothing and adornment, why do so many feel so helpless and threatened in the face of beauty ideals? How do women with so many concrete freedoms and opportunities simultaneously feel victimized by an abstraction?…I believe the pressure women feel from body ideals in the West has little to do with the ideals themselves, as we tend to think. Instead, it has to do with the social context in which we try to live up to those ideals. Specifically, it is our culture of individualism and achievement that makes our bodily ideals feel so oppressive…In the West, where we have the *freedom* to develop an individual identity, we also have the personal *duty* to do so. It is up to each individual to determine his or her own fate, and characteristics—from temperament to appearance—are readily interpreted not as givens but as under an individual's own control and design. Thus, if a woman fails to live up to the ideal it is thought to be her own fault (Popenoe 2005:24-25).

For Popenoe, then, it is the relationship between being able to cultivate an identity and individual responsibility for cultivating it that produces an anxiety in Western women about beauty ideals. As I describe below, the emergence of individual choice and individual responsibility is considered a central feature of life in contemporary China.

In this chapter I described the way that two of the most oft cited changes in contemporary China—the emergence of consumerism and individual responsibility—are also given as reasons why women in the West struggle with body image. The descriptions of these transformations in China, when read alongside writings about bodies, consumer culture, and beauty, seems to indicate that we might expect to find (and some scholars have argued) that Chinese middle-class women (similar to their American counter-parts) are struggling with selfhood as they modify bodies in pursuit of beautification (see, for example, Otis 2012). However, as my opening vignette illustrated, the Chinese women I knew in Shanghai were not at all troubled by pursuing better bodies and instead saw

bodily aesthetics as a legitimate means for improving their social and economic standing in the world. I contend that far from producing a universalized relationship between self and body, consumerism—and the identities constructed through it—is inevitably a "culturally enabled process" (Yanagisako 2002) that articulates with culturally particular understandings of bodies and selves. And while this is sometimes hinted at in scholarship about bodies and consumerism in the West—especially the way that the contradictions of capitalism map nicely onto the Cartesian legacy of a mind/body duality—it is rarely brought into discussions about bodies and body modification practices in consumer China.

Chapter Two:

'Bodies' in Post-reform China

If, as I'm suggesting, cultural understandings of bodies shaped the way in which women in Shanghai engaged with body modifications and beauty ideals, my next 'problematic' is to contextualize 'bodies' in China. In lieu of providing a comprehensive overview, however, in this section I outline two main themes that are relevant for my research: First, is the way that conceptualizations of 'nature' have implications for how people in China understand and experience bodies and bodily differences. Interestingly, scholarly accounts dealing with this theme differ drastically. On the one hand, there's a bourgeoning literature describing the ways in which a version of nature—based on biology and informed by 'the market'—are producing an understanding of bodily difference as 'naturalized' or 'essentialized.' But, on the other hand, there's an equally extensive literature describing bodies as configured in Chinese Medicine, a medical tradition still very much a part of contemporary China, in which bodies are understood to be constantly in flux and linked to a cosmology that conceptualizes difference as being of degree, not of kind.

The second theme deals with the way bodies in China have become sites of personal development and social mobility. Scholars interested in this often focus on two topics: first, how market reforms and neoliberalism are providing a framework in which bodily *suzhi* (human quality) is the means for personal development and social mobility; and second, how consumerism is producing a gendered labor market in which women's bodies and sexuality are being commodified. In comparison with the first theme, where scholars viewed bodies as being 'culturally produced' (Lock and Farquhar 2007), work on *suzhi* and gendered-labor takes the concept of 'body' for granted.

Given the radically different accounts of bodies and bodily differences that emerge from these themes, it is striking to note that all of the scholarship is based on the same time period: Post-Mao China. I contend that even though the descriptions of bodies in these accounts differ, conceptually the scholars all share a propensity to see 'naturalized' bodily differences as the most fertile ground for producing social inequality. This relies on an understanding of nature as that which is static, outside the realm of human involvement, and *more difficult to change than what is socially produced*. When this 'nature' is inscribed on bodies, then, it is easy to coopt it for oppressive purposes (i.e. the long history of racial and gender-based discrimination in the West). As I illustrate in this dissertation, this understanding of nature was mobilized by the Western women in 1) how they legitimized the authenticity of bodily-selves and 2) the way they attempted to undermine the importance of beauty ideals. And while the Chinese women I knew shared the idea of nature as being outside the realm of human involvement, they saw 'natural' bodily traits as being *easier to change* than historically produced bodily differences.

Biologized Bodies, Naturalized Gender Difference

       Scholars often described gender difference (and oppression) in post-Mao China as being 'essentialized' and 'naturalized' in bodies, and rooted in biology. As Tiantian Zheng (2009) starkly put it in her ethnography of sex workers in Postsocialist China: "For Chinese men, biology is the ultimate explanation and justification for all violence against women" (Zheng 2009:19). This biological determinism of gender difference is relatively new in China—its historical roots are typically traced to the pivotal time period of Republican China (1912-1949). When the Qing Empire fell, and Sun Yat-sen established the Republic of China in 1912, it ended 4,000 years of Imperial rule. It also ushered in (or was symptomatic of) a period of 'unprecedented openness' (Dikotter 2008) in which all levels of Chinese society sought engagement with the rest of the world. Part of this 'engagement' included drawing on discourses of gender and sexuality from the West, which produced a conceptual shift concerning the idea of 'nature' and its relationship to human bodies: "Previously imagined as a purposeful whole, a benevolent structure which could not exist independently from ethical forces, 'nature' was now conceptualized as a set of impersonal forces which could be objectively investigated" (Dikotter 1995:8). Within this new framework, physical bodies were no longer linked to the cosmology of the universe (with the goal of harmonizing the body with nature) but instead were understood as being *produced* by 'nature' (Dikotter 1995:8). The use of medical science, and an 'objective' point of view, legitimized this new way of thinking and solidified the dichotomy between 'nature' and 'culture', a radical departure from Confucian ideology

of socially-produced ethics. The elites of Republican China, then, "began to see human biology, as opposed to imperial cosmology, as the epistemological basis for social order" (Dikotter 1995:180).

A major consequence of this new understanding of nature and biology was linking gender difference to physical bodies (Dikotter 1995, but see also Evans 1997 and Barlow 1994). This was readily apparent in literature produced in the 1920s and 30s, where discussions of gender in textbooks, childbirth manuals, popular magazines, and marriage guides, illustrated a shift to biological determinism (Dikotter 1995:14). Since the social roles of men and women were now thought to be determined by biology, it was assumed that their differences (i.e. male superiority) could be found in all aspects of their bodies. For example, as illustrated in a biology textbook, the female skeleton was smaller than the male counterpart: this was taken to be empirical evidence that she was less intelligent. Or, proper social roles were assumed to be a natural extension of the biology of bodies. For example, in one case woman was portrayed as man inside out (Dikotter 1995:23). Male was *wai* (outside), female was *nei* (inside). Thus it was only *natural* that man was the brain and the public body and woman was the womb and relegated to the private domain (Dikotter 1995:27-8).[16]

These understandings of nature, bodies, and gender were, for a short time,

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[16] See Tani Barlow (1994) for a similar argument based on an analysis of the terms for 'woman;' she describes how the emergence of the term nüxing (female sex) during the Republican era illustrated how bodies became the basis for new conceptualizations of gender difference. Zou (2006) makes a similar argument for masculinity in the Republic period, in which there was an emergence of maleness, predicated on an essential understanding of gender. This emergence of "the unclothed and essentially male body," contrasted markedly with the masculine subject of imperial times, which was often constructed through his clothing (Zou 2006:83).

undermined by the Communist Party (CCP)'s focus on producing revolutionary subjects.

During the revolutionary period (1949-1979), the notion of 'natural' gender difference

was subordinated to political struggle and the much more pressing concerns of class

difference. But since the economic reforms and China's 'opening up' (Farrer 2002),

scholars are finding a return to biology to frame gender, gender difference, and sexuality.

As Evans describes:

> The naturalization of sexual and gender difference on the
> basis of biological structures and functions is a key feature
> of post-1949 discourses of sexuality. In the name of
> science, it has legitimized a sometimes rigid code of
> normative sexual and gender conduct based on highly
> selective and didactic distinctions between right and
> wrong, normal and abnormal (1997:34).

What's unique about the current era is that there's also an emerging discourse

about human desires, rooted in bodies, that is linked to market reforms. It is thus now

common to hear people in China saying that they are just being 'who they are,' what

Rofel calls gendered, desiring subjects. In striking contrast to the active struggle of class

consciousness, post-Mao embodied desires are being defined through a logic of the

'natural.' For many Chinese, these 'natural' desires are linked to the market: "The market

economy, by relying on and promoting individuals' pursuit of self-interest, is therefore

attuned to basic human instinct. In a word, it is natural. The opulence of market-based

Western nations is seen to powerfully corroborate this thesis" (Rofel 1999:126).

Importantly, then, 'the market's' power is assumed to derive from the fact that it is

'natural.' Within this narrative, socialism is accused of hindering China's development by

impeding people's natural inclinations (Zheng 2009; Rofel 1999, 2007). It is only through

liberating such 'natural instincts' that China can catch up with the world:

> The allegory is an emancipatory story, holding out the
> promise that people can unshackle their innate human
> selves by emancipating themselves from the socialist state.
> To the extent that the state recedes, people will be free to
> 'have' their human natures" (Rofel 1999: 217-8).

In sum, there is a common narrative about bodies in China compellingly illustrating how the biologization of bodies, a framework that emerged in Republican China, is central to naturalizing gender differences and inequalities in post-reform era China. This shift included moving away from conceptualizations of bodies and nature in flux in imperial China (more on this below) towards a new understanding of nature—as something that could be objectively studied, that *produces* bodily differences, and is linked conceptually with a logic of self-interest in neoliberalism or late-capitalism. When ascribed to bodies, this understanding of nature produces narratives that normalize inequalities.

Bodies and Nature in Flux

Interestingly, there is another literature that presents a radically different account of nature and bodies in China, as conceptualized in Chinese Medicine (CM),[17] a medical tradition very much alive and well in contemporary China. In this literature scholars often posit a particular kind of socially constructed body that is constantly in flux, defies reification, and is linked to a cosmology that conceptualizes bodily differences (and wellness) as being of degree, not kind (see, for example, Farquhar, 1987, 1994a, 1996; Kuriyama, 1994, 2002; Zhang, 2007; Sivin, 1987; Ames 1984, 1993; Davis, 1996; Ots,

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[17] There is an active debate as to whether to call this type of medicine Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) or just Chinese Medicine (CM). Convinced by Scheid's (2002) argument that using 'traditional' relegates it to a lesser version of biomedicine, I've decided to use CM throughout this document.

1990; Hsu, 1999). Emerging from a tradition in medical anthropology of comparing other medical systems and concepts to biomedicine, this understanding of bodies (as 'becoming' (Scheid 2002:28)) is always contrasted with, and seen as fundamentally different from, a Western biomedical notion of static and 'naturalized' bodies. In often romanticized accounts which ignore frequent evidence of racial and gender differences in Qing and earlier writings (see e.g., Dikotter on race, 1992), scholars of this literature often follow a post-colonial critique, in which bodies-as-mode-of-categorizing (gender, race), and the social inequalities that follow (sexism, racism) are seen as belonging to a Western tradition that is not necessarily appropriate for understanding places outside of the West.[18] It is thus argued that there is a historical and cultural trajectory in China that causes people to experience and understand their bodies in fundamentally different ways from the West. These differences are often presented in dramatic fashion: "In fact, the Chinese perception of physicality can be shown to be so far removed from our own assumptions that an exploration of the differences can be an occasion to appreciate the degree to which the Chinese are truly of a different order of humanity" (Ames 1993:149).

To begin, scholars working on Chinese medicine often argue that there is no conceptual equivalency in China for the English word 'body,' founded as it is on a Cartesian divide of (physical) body and (meta-physical) mind. In China the concepts are inextricably linked, as illustrated in *shenti*, the term most often translated as 'the body.' *Shenti* is a compound word, comprised of two root words *shen* (animate body) and *ti* (inanimate body). According to Mark Elvin, *shen* is most appropriately translated to 'body-person,' implying both a lived body and a life history (Brownell 1995:16, Elvin 1993). The term *ti*, on the other hand, usually indicates a closed system or individual unit

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[18] For this general argument, see Oyewumi 1997.

and refers to the flesh of the body (Brownell 1995:16). But both *shen* and *ti* have a

subjective element; the difference is that *shen* is more abstract and *ti* is more concrete

(Brownell 1995:16-17; see also Zhang 2007:36). S*henti* thus combines the body-person

and the flesh-body together. As described by Yanhua Zhang (2007),

> When body is used [in English] without further explanation
> and definition, it evokes in readers an image of physical,
> objective, or anatomic entity separate from what is spiritual
> and social…The English body speaks of and to a dualistic
> reality. In contrast, when *shenti* is used without further
> clarification, it implies a person or self with all the
> connotations of the physical, social, and mindful
> (2007:35).

In seeming support of this thesis, Tung's (1994) analysis of verbal expressions in

Chinese indicates the ways that *shenti* was used synonymously with 'person' in daily

conversation:

> The most directly expressed theme connected with *shenti* is
> the identification of the body with the person, the self.
> Without exception, all informants explained expressions
> containing the body as meaning person. Some informants
> simply substituted 'body' in the stimulus item to 'the
> person,' 'the self,' or used a personal pronoun, in their
> responses. Others continued to use the term 'body' as the
> subject as in 'put your body in the other person's place and
> understand him' for *ti hui* (to empathize). Literally, the two
> words mean 'the body acknowledges.' Body as self is also
> frequently used in describing a person's worth, his origin,
> and his lineage" (1994:487-8)

In Chinese medicine, then, there exists a concept of 'body' that is inextricably

linked to notions of personhood and selfhood, a radical departure from the post-Cartesian

understanding of body as separate from person or mind.[19] Thus Chinese medicine is often

framed as being holistic, meaning it treats an entire person, not just a physical body.

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[19] This is illustrated, for example, in the tradition of separating physical from
psychological illnesses in biomedicine.

A second fundamental assumption about bodies in Chinese medicine is that they are constantly in flux, inherently unstable, and "refuse fixity and discreteness," what Judith Farquhar terms "bodiliness" (Farquhar 1994a:82). This bodiliness is a product of the flow of energy (*qi*) and other substances through overlapping and mutually influential bodily systems. In her analysis of CM medical textbooks, Farquhar illustrates that there is very little interest in anatomy (i.e. isolated body parts) and there is no account of what a decontexualized 'normal body' should look like (Farquhar 1994a:87; see also Zhang 2007). She writes, "Chinese medicine cares little for anatomy. Rather it has usually been characterized as a functional medicine that reads the manifestations of physiological and pathological changes without resorting to models of fixed structural relations" (Farquhar 2002:64). In this model of the body, Farquhar argues, individualized notions of harmonious flows in the body take precedence over a unitary idea of a 'healthy' body (Farquhar 1994a:91). Doctors often contrast searching for the cause of the problem in traditional Chinese medicine with treating the symptom in Western medicine. For example, instead of treating an ulcer as *the problem*, Chinese doctors will treat the 'root' of the problem by working on the flow of qi through the body (Farquhar 1994a:83). Bodily-persons are considered healthy when they are balanced and have unimpeded flows of qi, a personal condition that relies on subjective bodily and social experiences.

The instability of bodies in China is often attributed to the fluid-like boundaries between bodies and the rhythmic but constant motion of 'the cosmos' (seasons and weather, for example) (see, for example, Brownell 1995; Kuriyama 1994; Zito, 1994; Farquhar 1994a, 2010; Farquhar and Zhang 2012). In this view, bodies and nature are not static; all bodies are in constant negotiation with their environment to maintain a

harmonious existence and getting out of rhythm with the cosmos is an individualized moment (again based on personal bodily flows). Part of treating an illness in Chinese medicine, then, focuses on re-establishing a balance between the body and the cosmos and the doctor must make the remedy personal for it to have any impact (Farquhar 1994a:87). As Ma (2012) describes, this is explicitly linked to a particular understanding of nature:

> Note that the nature that CM believers talked about is both a temporal and moral process in which the physiological, the social, and the cosmic unfold together: life has its cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death; social interaction has both merry laughter and angry curses; those who misbehave will eventually get their retribution. Recognizing a temporal and moral nature does not mean yielding agency or ceasing to act; on the contrary, only when one faces head-on the ups and downs of life can one transform pathological emotions, "take up" things in an appropriate and tactful way, feel happy with and claim agency within one's life (2012:215).

While much work discussing the connection between bodies and cosmos is historical (see, for example, Kuriyama 1994 on Han China and Angelo Zito 1994 on Imperial China), Judith Farquhar (1994a, 2010; see also Farquhar and Zhang 2012) highlights how the desire for a harmonious relationship between bodies and the cosmos is still playing a central role in popular notions of health in contemporary China. For instance, at a recent talk given at the University of Virginia "Rising and Resting: Being and Time in Beijing's Neighborhoods," Farquhar (2010) argued that for residents in Beijing neighborhoods, cultivating life (*yangsheng*, 养生) includes balancing activity and rest, which must be in rhythm with the cosmic order. For Farquhar's informants, both ordering daily life (maintaining a regular schedule) and connecting this order to the regularity of the cosmos, played a central role in ideas of healthy living.

For these scholars, a conceptualization of bodies as personalized flows interacting with the ever-changing environment enables a more humane medical tradition. First, differences between bodies are always of degree, not kind. The 'normal' body is one of constant transformation in which there is continual flow of qi without blockage. So instead of having a 'healthy' body against which all 'sick' bodies are compared, bodily-selves in China are always understood on a spectrum of healthfulness:

> In the Chinese aesthetic world, a myriad of things are connected in an unceasing process of changes and transformations…such that things are recognized as different according to their *du*, the degree or position, rather than solely or mainly to any fixed essence (Zhang 2007:46).

This fact means that there are less stigmatizing labels in CM. For example, in her ethnography of treating emotional disorders in Chinese medicine, Zhiying Ma (2007) contrasts the essentializing differences (between self and other, self and body, sickness and health) fundamental to biomedicine with the more forgiving context of Chinese medicine. Here I quote at length to illustrate her point:

> Unlike the structural language of biomedicine, Chinese verbal expressions are difficult to categorize as either psychological or physical. Instead, they provide a functional and holistic account that links the bodily, the psychic, the social, and the cosmological together (Sivin 1995). This holism enables CM to see illness experiences as part of a transforming process, and thus downgrades their extraordinariness. Thus, for example, when a patient, Rong, was telling me about seeing ghosts and the resulting fear, another patient, Li, overheard and asked: "Were you having your period at that time?" Rong replied: "Sure." Li then played the role of a CM expert and diagnosed confidently: "Oh, I see. It's invasion of the blood-chamber by heat (*re ru xueshi*). [Naturally] one will be full of suspicions, and hear voices." In using the symptom pattern "invasion of the blood-chamber by heat," the CM user implied that this configuration of exogenous pathogenic *qi*

happens to many women during their menstrual periods,
and that hallucinations/delusions are just an extreme
manifestation of a common symptom pattern. The normal
self implied in such a narrative was not a unified entity
sealed off from the outside world, but a smooth flow of
energy that should generate an experience and appearance
of vitality, unfolding, and transforming rhythmically in
space and time, one that is well tuned to the internal and
external changes. In a word, if what is disordered in the
biomedical discourse is the normal state of unification and
bounded experience, disorder in the CM discourse is in the
harmonized flow of *qi* that runs through and beyond the
individual body (Ma 2007:214).

Finally, in addition to rendering Chinese medicine as a space that is friendlier to

conceptualizations of bodily illness, ethnographies of Chinese medicine almost always

incorporate a discussion of how this medical tradition enables a more humane

relationship between doctor and patient (and doctor and student) than biomedicine. For

example, in Farquhar's analysis of textbooks, she illustrates that there is not one

metanarrative about the body, nor is there a prioritized shared objective stance that

doctors use to diagnose patients. Instead doctors' experiences and positionality plays a

leading role in their ability to successfully treat patients (Farquhar 1994a:91). This has

two important implications for sociality in CM: first, it produces interactions between

doctors and their mentees that are more open to dialogue (Hsu 1999). Because doctor's

expertise comes less from objective knowledge that can be directly transmitted to the

student, and more from experiences, relationships between doctors and students tend to

take on a more personal element. Second, it opens up the space for allowing patients a

more agentive role in diagnosing and helping to cure their illness (see also Kleinman

1981):

The patients own narrative of her illness, her presentation
of it to the doctor, plays a major role in delimiting the

> nature of the illness for both doctor and patient. In a sense
> the doctor does not have the power to reject any sign
> reported by the patient; patients, I think, retain a sense of
> being experts, the authority of last resort, on their own
> illnesses (Farquhar 1994a:45).

In sum, the fact that bodies are in flux and in constant interaction with an unpredictable environment produces a medical tradition that emphasizes experience and dialogue. Thus whereas biomedicine is critiqued for its production of naturalized difference between healthy and sick bodies and experts and patients, Chinese medicine allows for dialogue and incorporates personal experiences into the medical discourse. As summarized by Zhiying Ma (2012):

> In this light, anthropologists have documented how--
> especially in the neoliberal market economy…biomedicine
> reduces the socially suffering person to biological life…the
> reduction to bare life can concurrently prevent the
> physician from caring for the patient as a person…(Ma
> 2012:55).

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is noteworthy to examine how scholars interested in Chinese medicine see it interacting with recent economic transformations in China. A pretty clear pattern emerges: scholars, for the most part, portray biomedicine and late-capitalism (or 'neoliberalism' or 'socialism from afar') as adulterating Chinese medicine. For example, the institutionalization or standardization of CM, often attributed to influences from biomedicine, is viewed as undermining its heterogeneity (Zhang 2007); or the commodification of medicine is linked to doctors' desires to get rich (a moral decline compared to the selfless barefoot doctors of Maoist China) (Farquhar 1996). In conjunction with this, authors often posit Chinese medicine as a form of resistance, either to biomedicine or to the state. For example, in Ma's (2012) ethnography of a schizophrenia ward in a renowned psychiatric hospital in southern China, she

illustrates that psychology—as an imported biomedical discourse—is unsatisfying for many patients and their families who view sickness as a holistic problem. Within the ward she demonstrates how families often discuss Chinese medicine as an alternative explanation for their family member's behavior (see also Li and Phillips, 1990). Ma contends that her informants are using Chinese medicine as a 'discursive weapon' to challenge biomedicine and the biologization of bodies and sicknesses. What she ends up showing is that in an interesting ways, local perceptions of biomedicine map nicely onto Foucault's (1973, for example) critique of it and that Western psychiatry doesn't necessarily translate well into the context of contemporary China.

Reading descriptions of bodies and sociality in Chinese medicine, which are often presented by ethnographers as humane alternatives to biology and the biomedical 'gaze,' it is difficult to see how the medical tradition could produce gendered or other forms of bodily-based inequality. While this portrayal is appealing to those wanting to critique the forces of neoliberalism or late-capitalism, it is difficult to reconcile with the strong patriarchal system of kinship—based on gender difference—and traditional ethnic categories that were prevalent throughout traditional China (see, for example, Wolf and Witke 1975 for their account of kinship; see Dikotter 1992 for his account of race in China).

In sum, the first theme portrays the way that conceptualizations of 'nature' shape how bodies (and sociality) are understood and experienced. Two radically different pictures emerge for contemporary China: one suggests that there are naturalized bodily differences emerging rooted in understandings of biology and 'the market;' the other suggests that bodies and nature are in constant flux. Scholars interested in the

biologization of bodies typically present it as part of a historical narrative that began in the Republican era and continues in market-reform China. Scholars of CM, however, recognize that these two competing notions of nature and bodies exist in the same place and time.

Theme 2: Bodies as sites of personal and social development

The second theme about bodies in China relevant to my research is the way that the context of consumerism and market-reforms is producing bodies as the sites for personal development and social mobility. In contrast to the first theme that sought to contextualize the way that understandings of bodies are 'culturally produced' (Lock and Farquhar 2007) in conjunction with ideas about nature, this work typically takes the concept of 'body' for granted, as a self-evident site for producing naturalized difference.

Suzhi, Bodies, and (class-based) Inequality

The term *suzhi* (素质) is a compound word, made up of two parts: *su*, meaning unadorned, plain, white, and essence, and *zhi*, meaning essence or nature. Before the late 1970s *suzhi* meant the unadorned nature or character of something (Kipnis 2006:297). Influenced by the newly introduced notions of the nature/nurture dichotomy during the 20th century, *suzhi* became more closely associated with essential characteristics (Kipnis 2006:297; see also Bakken 2000). The counterpart of *suzhi* was *suyang* (素养), the nurture side of the dichotomy, which was used to represent the cultivation of embodied characteristics that were developed through one's upbringing. As outlined by Kipnis (2006), since the 1970s the term has undergone three important transformations. First, it

no longer connotes the natural in the nature/nurture dichotomy; although it implies that qualities are embedded in a person, *suzhi* is something that must be cultivated. Second, contemporary usage is limited to individually embodied human qualities; it no longer includes the quality of institutions, which is now referred to by *zhiliang*. And third, while the improvement of *suzhi* is a national undertaking, suzhi is also used to stratify the population within China into grades of high and low suzhi (Kipnis 2006:297).

As related to human quality, the concept originated in the 1960s and 70s when discussions of birth control policies were focused on raising the 'quality' of the population. In the contemporary PRC, the concept of *suzhi* is conceptually powerful because "the CCP increasingly claims its own legitimacy in terms of producing a strong nation by individually and collectively raising the quality of its citizens" (Kipnis 2006:296). In the 1970s, increasing citizen's quality was seen to be dependent upon lowering population size so that greater resources could be concentrated on fewer numbers (Greenhalgh, 2008, 2010; Dikotter, 1998; Kipnis, 2006). The quality of the population en masse, then, depended on controlling quantity and initial policies were focused on limiting reproduction (i.e. the one-child policy).

In the 1980s and 90s, with market reforms and a developing consumer culture, the concept of *suzhi* became instrumental in marking social difference between an emerging urban middle-class and rural migrants. The notion of *suzhi* was:

> Extended from a discourse of backwardness and
> development (the quality of the masses) to encompass the
> minute social distinctions defining a 'person of quality' in
> practices of consumption and the incitement of a middle-
> class desire for social mobility (Anagnost 2004:190).

Raising *suzhi* became the means for social mobility and a driving force in the relentless

pursuit of ways to improve oneself and one's children (Kipnis, 2006; Anagnost, 2004,

Hsu, 2007). This way of understanding *suzhi* extended beyond the political arena to have

major effects in the everyday life of many Chinese citizens. For example, throughout the

1990s, popular magazines and newspapers were replete with advice columns and

advertisements for products promising to increase one's *suzhi*.

At the same time, the notion of 'lacking quality,' became a means for

discriminating against many, including "rural migrants, litterbugs, the short, the

nearsighted, and the poorly dressed" (Kipnis 2006:296). *Suzhi* thus describes new social

hierarchies in contemporary China, often along an urban/rural divide, with those of 'high'

quality gaining more income, power and status than those of 'low' quality. In this new

framework, raising the quality levels of rural populations is seen as a national imperative:

"national strength and the stamina of economic development more and more depends on

the *suzhi* of the laborers" (stated by Deng Xiaoping, as quoted in Yan, H.: 2003:498).

Initial government policies of population control, then, shifted to working on the quality

of the rural areas. Often times, the poverty associated with rural areas is attributed to low

suzhi levels, in effect blaming the poor for their poverty and shifting the focus away from

the inequalities inherent in recent economic policies (Yan, H. 2003).

What's important for my research is the way that many scholars describe how the

pursuit of cultivating *suzhi* is one means through which the body is understood and acted

upon in contemporary China (see, for example, Woronov, 2003; Thøgersen, 2003;

Bakken, 2000). These scholars point to the fact that cultivating *suzhi* is above all based

on the notion that it is not something inherent in bodies—it must be built into them. This

creates a situation in which investment in the body, and the body as a site of investment,

becomes an obsession (Anagnost 2004:200). What's notable for my research is the

analytic link scholars often posit between cultivating *bodily suzhi* and inequalities

particular to neoliberalism. For example, according to Anagnost (2004) the definition of a

neoliberal subject is one who views self-development as a means for actualizing *the*

body's latent potential as a means for capital accumulation. Not surprisingly, then, she

suggests that *suzhi* is most elaborated in (1) the *body* of the Chinese peasant, where it is

conspicuously absent and (2) the *body* of the middle-class only child, which is fetishized

as a site for its cultivation (Anagnost 2004:190, italics added). Anagnost is especially

troubled by how 'the body' is central to social mobility and warns of the dangers lurking

behind "opening the body to a regime of exploitation perhaps unparalleled in human

history" (Anagnost 2004:201; see also Yan, H. 2003 and Woronov 2003 for similar

critiques about neoliberalism, bodies, and the cultivation of *suzhi*). In her critique of

neoliberalism and *suzhi*, Anagnost uses a concept of 'body' that is decontextualized and

unproblematized. By doing so, she assumes that differences rooted in bodies are

naturalized, as evidenced in the following sentence: "the devaluation of labor premised

upon the low quality of the migrant body naturalizes the exploitation of labor through a

rhetoric of value coding" (2004:194). For her, this 'naturalization' lends itself to

increasing inequality. Thus whereas scholars interested in biologized gender difference

see new ideas of nature as being inscribed onto bodies to produce inequality, Anagnost

sees the body as the self-evident site for the naturalization of difference.

It is important to note that there are strong critiques of the thesis that *suzhi* is an

inherently neoliberal concept. For example, Andrew Kipnis (2007) takes issue with the

sloppy use of the term 'neoliberal.' He argues that combining Foucauldian notions of

governmentality, in which the government plays an overly active role, with economic transitions, in which the government adopts laissez faire or free market policies, and calling them both 'neoliberal' renders the category meaningless. Furthermore, as he points out, *suzhi* describes new social hierarchies in contemporary China, with those of 'high' quality gaining more income, power and status than those of 'low' quality. Within this 'neoliberal' context, then, not all individuals have the same potential for development, a central assumption of neoliberalism.

Carolyn Hsu's (2007) ethnographic account of market socialism in Harbin also offers compelling critiques of the ways that scholars conflate *suzhi* with neoliberalism. Neoliberalism, as Hsu points out, is typically about economic science, serving the self through consumption, and based on the premise that all people are equal in their ability to succeed or fail within the system. Hsu illustrates that *suzhi* is actually rooted more in humanistic philosophy and is linked to ideas of *gongxian* ('contribution') and social responsibility, which emphasizes the unevenness of the playing field (Hsu 2007:187-8). Those who have higher *suzhi* are able to contribute to society and help push China forward in its quest for modernity. According to Hsu, then, it is not just that *suzhi* discourse is not necessarily neoliberal; it is that suzhi discourse also serves as a "resistance against neoliberalism, by emphasizing the importance of social structures and by positing a moral vision of status based on contribution and culture rather than money" (Hsu 2007:188). Moreover, contrary to previous work, Hsu illustrates that *suzhi* in contemporary China is in fact a meaningful category, one that was constructed by ordinary Chinese people trying to make sense of their changing world (Hsu 2007:188). It is not an empty category produced by the state for the purpose of turning Chinese citizens

into neoliberal subjects.

Following Kipnis and Hsu in their critiques, I do not find the neoliberal interpretation of *suzhi* compelling, especially in its discussion of 'the body.' Even though Kipnis and Hsu offer compelling critiques, they do not attend to the fact that 'body' is used as a taken-for-granted concept in discussions of *suzhi*. Kipnis (2006) hints at it when he suggests that *suzhi* is no longer conceptualized as the nature side of the nature/nurture divide but, in his critiques, he moves the discussion about *suzhi* away from the body, to the realm of the 'social.' What I illustrate in this dissertation is that for Chinese women, historically produced bodily differences, rather than 'natural' differences, were important for their understanding of individual and social identity. This maps nicely onto ideas about cultivating bodily *suzhi*, which is why, I contend, it is a compelling concept for making sense of social difference in contemporary China.

Consumerism, Bodies, and (Gendered) Inequality

In striking ethnographic detail, scholars are illustrating how (1) an emerging 'beauty economy,' (2) the proliferation of 'gray women,' and (3) a burgeoning sex industry all point to the ways in which women's bodies, sexuality, and appearances are being commodified in post-reform era China. From Tiantian Zheng's (2009) harrowing account of the perils of living as a rural migrant hostess in the port city of Dalian to Liu Xin's (2002) description of the way in which hostesses in entertainment clubs mediate the worlds of officials and business men in the southern city of Beihai; from John Osburg's (2013) account of money and morality among China's new rich in Chengdu to Eileen Otis' (2012) account of how service labor in China's globalizing economy is

changing the status of women, it is clear that there is an emerging form of gendered labor

in contemporary China, spawned by consumerism, that is highly entangled with a

complex matrix of the politics of gender, sex, and social class. Similar to the work on

suzhi, in this context scholars use the term 'body' as an unproblematized concept;

moreover, there is a similar class-based social hierarchy emerging, visible in the differing

ethical configuration of women's bodies, sexuality, and economic gain. However,

whereas *suzhi* literature details how bodies of urbanites are the sites of cultivation against

which peasants appear lacking, the literature about bodily commodification typically

describes how the marginalized (peasant, rural) body is the only means (and their last

resort) for social mobility.

As Osburg (2013) illustrates, women of all statuses are caught in a complex web

of wealth, femininity, and sexuality that shapes their experiences at work and in business

practices.[20] This is perhaps most visible in the burgeoning beauty economy (*meinü jingji*,

美女经济), an extensive marketplace in which young, beautiful women promote and sell

commercial products and services (Osburg 2013:144; see also Otis 2012; Hanser 2005,

2008). These 'pink-collar' jobs are part of a 'rice bowl of youth,' a newly coined term

indicating the ways in which the fleeting concept of youth is replacing the Socialist

notion of employment for life (see Zhen 2000).

> In China the importance of young, attractive women in
> sales promotions extends beyond conventional television
> and print ads to the employment of models and female
> university students at car shows, in company booths at
> business conventions, and in public relations; (often
> fictitious) photos of 'beautiful woman authors' are used to

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[20] See also Edwards (2006) for an account of how a notion of physicality and beauty is enabling (or forcing) female politicians (e.g. Wu Yi) to negotiate their essential femaleness within the traditionally male realm of politics.

> sell books. An increasing number of businesses, from
> insurance companies to real estate developers, sponsor
> beauty contests, fashion shows, song and dance
> performances, and even underwear modeling to attract
> customers (Hanser 2005, 2008; Otis 2012) (Osburg
> 2013:144).

An important part of this 'industry' is the refashioning of women's bodies—often

through discussions of fashion—as commodities:

> Fashion transforms the possibilities of the body, and,
> following Baudrillard, summons women to treat their
> bodies as 'an investment through clothing and style…The
> notion of 'fashion' also contains a common conflation
> between the idea of a material object to be consumed, the
> desire to be beautiful, and the eroticization of female bodies
> for their own and others' consumption (Evans 2006:174).

In addition, scholars point to the way that the beauty economy relies on female

labor in which proper body management is central to producing proper gendered subjects.

Otis (2012), for example, in her account of women in service work in luxury hotels in

China, argues that managing and changing bodies is the way that employers exert control

over their female employees.

> These modes of control exert diverse effects on women
> workers' bodies and present divergent status dilemmas for
> women in each workplace—dilemmas that are felt deeply
> and whose resolutions are sought in adjustment to the
> body…I term this relationship between the workers' bodies
> and consumer markets 'market-embodied labor' (Otis
> 2012:8-9).

For Otis, the female body emerges as the site where the individual desires of customers

and global consumer capitalism are played out. The materiality of the body is central to

this because it is the site where gender difference is produced and concretized:

> To fully appreciate the centrality of the body in service
> labor, then, we must understand the body's plasticity, the
> mechanisms through which the body expresses its social,

> organizational, and historical location as well as the agency
> of the body and its material capacities. Gender and class are
> axes of inequality that enable and constrain bodily
> capabilities, leaving an indelible mark on the body…The
> body is a privileged vehicle for the formation of gender
> inequality, and body rules, which are sometimes explicit
> and at other times implicit, demarcate the boundaries of
> masculinity and femininity. Gender, then, is generated
> through the material of the body; it is performed on the
> body and becomes part of the body (Otis 2012:15-16).

Bodies, then, because they are plastic are vulnerable sites for producing

inequality. In fact, even though Otis considers bodies 'plastic,' she argues that

it is *because* these differences are inscribed on bodies that they have so much power.

Much like the *suzhi* literature discussed above, then, when differences are attached to

bodies they are seen as inherently problematic and troubling, and almost always linked to

a critique of capitalism or neoliberalism. In this context, the notion of 'body' is

universalized:

> The exploitation of the sexual appeal of young women, to
> be sure, is common to burgeoning capitalist economies and
> may be said to be a global phenomenon…The specific
> manifestation of the commodification of time revealed in
> the emergence of the rice bowl of youth is an important
> index of the ascent of the market economy and of money-
> drive values in Chinese society today (Zhen 2000:111).

Many of the women who work in the so-called beauty economy are also part of

what the Chinese feminist, He Qinglian (2005), labels 'gray women' (*huise nüren*): the

mistresses and second wives (*ernai*) of wealthy and powerful businessmen and officials

and the hostesses and massage girls who entertain them (He 2005, as cited in Osburg

2013: 143). These recognized social positions are 'gray' in that their structural status is

caught between the morally upright women in the official (white) economy and the

prostitutes of the illegal (black) economy. These women are, for the most part, rural

migrants in search of better lives (Osburg 2013; Otis 2012; Zheng 2009) and the kinds of jobs and positions they pursue offer them a chance to upgrade their lifestyle, often quite quickly, by finding a powerful businessman or official who funds their often-luxurious lifestyle in exchange for romantic interactions.

In Osburg's (2013) account of women entrepreneurs in southwest China, there is a rather rigid divide in the ways that women of different social positions understand these phenomena. On the one hand, successful female entrepreneurs (Osburg's main informants), align with Chinese media and social critics to view gray women as troublesome and an indication of "the general loss of belief and values" in Chinese culture: they break up families and lead to "an overall decline in human dignity" (Osburg 2013:144):

> They see mistresses as sex workers with better working conditions, and they view car show models and massage girls as ultimately in the same business: trading feminine sexuality for money (Osburg 2013:145).

In this narrative, gray women are accused of using their fleeting powers of youth to exploit the natural male vulnerability to beauty and sex in order to "make money…without creating anything of value for society or the economy" (Osburg 2013:144). The female entrepreneurs resent these women for two reasons: first, they see them as cheating their way to a luxurious lifestyle. Instead of working hard and using their 'abilities,' gray women are portrayed as lazy and taking the easy road to the top. Second, businesswomen often have to defend their successes against accusations that they used their sexuality to get ahead. This is doubly frustrating for the women as they see it as undermining their hard work and success at the same time that it contributes to the enormous personal cost of such success: they are no longer good candidates for

marriage.

Osburg illustrates that in response to this critical narrative, the gray women he interviewed defended themselves through two discursive moves: first, "they employed the trope of the competitive market to argue that all women, even women in marriages and legitimate careers, trade their sexuality for material comfort provided by men" (Osburg 2013:167). By viewing all gendered interactions through this trope, these women challenge the recent push by the CCP and social reformers to discourage marriages based on material transactions (Lee 2007; Osburg 2013). Second, they frame their successes as a form of ability: "Although female entrepreneurs condemn these women for their lack of ability and their low quality (*suzhi*), in many narratives the young women in the beauty economy frame their desirability to wealthy men (…) as a form of ability" (Osburg 2013:167).

Zheng's (2009) account of hostesses in Dalian seems to support this claim. She describes how a hostess, upon realizing she was short of money for her cab ride home, was considering offering the taxi driver a chance to touch her breast in exchange for a free ride home. Her friend replied: "No, that's too cheap for them. Go tell the driver, 'My ride is 6 yuan. One touch of my breasts is worth 50 yuan. So you should give me back the change of 44 yuan!' Remember, our bodies are our capital [*ben qian*]!" (Zheng 2009:185). What's interesting about this quote is that Zheng translates the word the hostess used for 'capital' (*ben qian*) but not the word for 'body,' which is not self-evident.

My research builds on and adds to this literature in two important ways: first, I provide a complementary angle for examining the relationship between women, bodies,

and success in contemporary China, especially as it pertains to women who are not economically or socially marginalized. There is often an economic determinism underlying this literature, where marginalized status is seen as a starting and ending point for making sense of how (and why!) people might 'use' their bodies for social or economic gain. As Osburg described: "[Sexual] exploitation of marginalized women is their only resource in a competitive economic environment" (Osburg 2013:148). This is often linked to the emerging markets of late-capitalism in which "The essence of entrepreneurialism [is] generating wealth out of the bare minimum of capital, one's own body" (Osburg 2013:181).

In contrast to the successful entrepreneurial women Osburg quotes, for whom the beauty economy and gray women pose a threat to their achievements (as they were often accused of using their bodies and sexuality to get ahead), the successful business women I knew saw their bodies as a perfectly legitimate site for personal cultivation. Moreover, whereas Osburg's informants worked to maintain the boundary between using one's ability and using one's sexuality in order to legitimize their business success, the white-collar women I knew saw a delimiting and strict boundary between non-material 'ability' and material 'bodies' as an imposition of Western values on Chinese ways of viewing sociality. By focusing on daily practices of body modifications outside the space of a masculinized and sexualized work environment, my work offers a way for us to broaden our scope of inquiry and examine ideas about bodies and bodily-modifications within the larger cultural discourse of China vs. the West.

Second, instead of taking the concept of 'body' for granted, located outside of any particular cultural context and necessarily the site of dangerous forms on inequality, my

work explores culturally different notions of bodies and bodily improvements, *as they shape and are shaped by consumer culture and individuality*. And while this dissertation certainly does not seek to undermine the very serious role that economic status has for many of these women, I illustrate that attitudes about bodily cultivation were influenced as much by cultural factors as they were by economic ones.

Conclusion

To recap, in this chapter I presented two 'themes' about bodies in contemporary China, which describe radically different accounts of how bodies and bodily differences are conceptualized and experienced in post-reform China. The first theme focused on differing accounts of 'nature' and how they influenced understandings of bodies and bodily-based differences. The second theme was about emerging discourses of bodies as the site for personal and economic development, whether through the concept of *suzhi* or emerging forms of gendered labor. As I indicated in the sections, each of these portrayals of 'bodies' in contemporary China contributes a crucial part to my analysis.

When read together, it becomes clear that in all of this work scholars shared the view that the 'biological' or 'market-related' version of nature—as that which is static and outside the realm of human involvement—is the producer of (or at least co-emergent with) forms of inequality. In the first theme this was often stated explicitly:

> Biological determinism suggests aspects of the new capitalism. Just as Adam Smith discovered the 'natural' and immutable laws of economics, laws that overturned the old moral order in the name of natural law, biological determinism frees men to act with impunity regardless of the consequences. If it is natural, it is right. These ideas are appealing because they are black and white. There is none of the agonizing nuance associated with moral philosophy

(Zheng 2009: 126).

These sentiments were echoed in discussions of Chinese medicine and how market reforms and biomedicine are undermining its humane and dialogue-based tradition. The same critique was equally present in the second theme, but it often took an implicit form. For example, when scholars such as Anagnost (2004) critiqued the way that 'bodies' were becoming the site of social differentiation, they almost always invoked the fact that such differences were 'naturalized.' A circular logic emerges: Biological determinism and market logic rely on a particular understanding of nature that is immutable; when ascribed to bodies, this 'nature' can have devastating effects; thus, in the context of 'late-capitalism' or 'neoliberalism,' when we see differences based on bodies, we can assume they are 'naturalized' and thus 'dangerous' and in need of scholarly deconstructing or problematizing.

There is thus analytic slippage between ethnographic accounts of ideas about 'nature' and scholarly critiques of that version of nature and its propensity to 'naturalize' bodily difference. This produces an epistemological tension in many of the ethnographic accounts: on the one hand, scholars want to present ethnographic material illustrating how 'locals' in China are beginning to use a narrative of 'nature' to make sense of who they are and what is 'right' in the present moment. On the other hand, though, these scholars are deeply troubled by this version of 'nature,' since they see it as linked to an economic system that produces undesirable forms of inequality. Thus whereas 'locals' experience this 'nature' as liberating, scholars often want to 'denaturalize' its effects, especially when ascribed to bodies as in gender and racial categories (and show that such differences are culturally and historically constructed). This makes for an awkward

positioning where scholars have to choose between taking their informants 'seriously' or maintaining a critical perspective, dual imperatives that are becoming ever more at odds.

This discussion provides the context for the rest of my dissertation in two important ways: First, I contend that part of the epistemological tension in ethnographies of bodies in China is due to the fact that much of this literature relies on *implicit* comparisons with 'the West.' In the current economic and political environment in China, whenever bodies are seen as the basis for inequality, scholars often attribute this to influences from the West: biologization of bodies as seen in biomedicine or a neoliberal or late-capitalistic model of self-management or entrepreneurialism (Chen et al 2001; see also Evans 1997). But 'the West' is almost always an ahistorical and disembodied concept, against which local embodied experiences are contrasted. For example, Judith Farquhar (1994) compares the unstable body as experienced by patients and doctors in Chinese medicine to a Western medical history, "one in which the dissected body, the constitution of a unified observer point of view, a master narrative of authoritative knowledge and the abstract norm have played a tremendous role" (Farquhar 1994:79). And even though she states that this understanding of 'the body' in the West has been critiqued and deconstructed in scholarship, she contends that there remains a 'commonsense' understanding of the body in the West as discrete, unitary and mechanical (Farquhar 1994:79). She leaves unexamined for whom this 'commonsense' notion of the body is conceptually relevant. The implicit comparisons that allow for scholarly critiques of how bodies and bodily differences are understood and mobilized in the current economic system, then, are imbalanced with regards to their data: anecdotes from locals are compared to disembodied abstract concepts or 'traditions.' I contend that

setting up explicit ethnographic comparisons not only allows us to personalize both sides
of the cultural comparison, it also opens our work up to the possibility of scholarly
reflexivity.

This brings me to the second way this chapter foregrounds the rest of my
dissertation: based on my ethnographic material, I show that the assumption found
throughout almost all of this literature—that 'naturalized' bodily differences are more
prone to perpetuating hierarchies and difficult to overcome than socially produced
difference—is in fact based on a culturally particular model of bodies and power. Indeed,
the idea that 'naturalized' bodily differences are more 'dangerous' than other kinds of
difference in their ability to produce and maintain social inequality is an assumption that
runs through much anthropological literature. To give the reader a sense of how this
argument operates, I want to briefly turn to a piece in which this theoretical move is made
explicit: Nancy Chen's (2002) "Embodying Qi and Masculinities in Post-Mao China." In
her article, Chen begins by describing her research agenda: "My intent in this chapter is
to focus on the charismatic leaders of this practice [qigong] and illustrate the ways in
which gender, specifically masculinity, becomes intertwined with power in the post-Mao
context" (2002:316). She continues:

> Though I have met many female masters, I contend that
> *qigong* masters have come to represent a naturalized
> category of masculinity, and that forms of *qigong* practice
> are gendered in the social context. This chapter explores
> how the paths to being a master tend to be determined not
> only by physiological difference but also by gender
> ideologies that shape the practice of *qigong* and official
> discourses about it. Bodies do matter, both as corporeal and
> social historical entities. The ways in which conceptions of
> bodies and their materiality are historically situated and
> experienced reveal how gender operates as an ordering
> principle. Sexual differences and dimorphism are often

explained through the body, where the natural body
becomes the generative device for gender" (2002:317).

Drawing on Judith Butler's (1995) *Bodies that Matter*, Chen is following a well-worn path for viewing gender as a "political and social performance" (2002:317) that is "not a singular act but always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (Butler 1995, as quoted in Chen 2002:322). Her task is to illustrate to the reader the ways that certain bodily traits (i.e. *qi*) have *become associated* with essentialized gender difference in the social and political context of post-Mao China. By linking her discussion of gender difference to ideas about power, Chen's political agenda is to undermine the naturalizing effect of bodily-based difference by tracing historical change, and thereby illustrating the social constructed-ness (i.e. not 'natural') origins of such difference. By doing so, she seeks to highlight the way that social norms are read or inscribed onto bodies at the same time that they are "beyond bodies" (2002:328). Importantly for my discussion, like most scholars who are invested in a similar project of 'denaturalizing' (bodily) difference, she leaves unarticulated the essential question of: why does it matter if gender difference is 'naturalized'? What's at stake when "the natural body becomes the generative device for gender" (2002:317)?

Part II
Methodology

Chapter Three:

Comparison: An Ethnographic Tool for Epistemological Problems[21]

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[21] The ideas and argument in this section have been developed in slightly different form in Flood and Starr, forthcoming.

As noted, this dissertation is an explicit ethnographic comparison of professional 'Chinese' and 'Western' women living in Shanghai during the stint of my fieldwork. They were all outsiders to the context of Shanghai. The Chinese women I knew came from a variety of provinces across China (most were from Anhui and Jiangsu, neighboring provinces near Shanghai although others hailed from the southwest). They were all Han, the ethnic majority. The Western women were all white and from the U.S., Australia, Great Britain, and parts of continental Europe. In general the two groups of women did not interact (at least not while participating in the practices in which I am interested) and my comparison is based on the fact that these women shared a historical moment in Shanghai in which the geo-political, economic, and cultural context helped shape their social positions and experiences of social life and daily practices. In setting up this comparison, I build on recent work reconsidering the role of explicit comparison within the contemporary anthropological project (see, Gingrich and Fox 2002; Herzfeld 2001; Moore 2005; Scheffer and Niewohner 2010; Viveiros de Castro 2004). I employ 'situated comparison' as an ethnographic strategy: a comparative account of 'different' groups of people living in one time and place, predicated on locally-meaningful categories to structure the terms of comparison (see Flood and Starr, forthcoming). As I illustrate, this approach enables me to bring local theories of difference into dialogue with scholarly ones; it also allows me to be attentive to the richness of informant's lives while maintaining a critical and reflexive scholarly positionality, dual imperatives that are becoming more at odds in post-reflexive turn anthropology. To explicate, I begin this chapter by describing the basis for my comparison in Shanghai. I then turn to a brief account of comparative approaches in our discipline's history—and the critiques leveled

against such approaches—in order to illustrate the way 'situated comparison' can offer some relief of epistemological issues facing current ethnographers.

'Situated Comparison' in Shanghai

The categories 'China' and 'the West' are ubiquitous in everyday life in Shanghai. They are important local categories to which the women or, more accurately, *everyone* I knew subscribed. Indeed, throughout my time in Shanghai, noting the commonly accepted differences between China and the West was a regular feature of daily life. East-West contrasts are marked in various ways, ranging from the institutional to the behavioral. Shanghai residents choose between Chinese medicine (中医, *zhongyi*) and Western medicine (西医, *xiyi*) when they visit doctors or hospitals,[22] Chinese and Western cuisine when they visit restaurants, Chinese and Western styles when they shop for clothes. Other differences are conceptualized in terms of behavior, such as ways of communicating or of being a model child. It is often remarked how Chinese use an indirect (委婉的, *weiwande*) form of speech as opposed to Westerners who are much more straightforward (直接的, *zhijiede*). Or, Chinese perceive being filial to one's parents as one of the highest moral traits whereas Western children are assumed to be much more interested in achieving independence from the family.

It is not at all uncommon for people to criticize each other for being 'too Western'

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[22] The 'option' of Western medicine is, of course, limited to those who can afford it. But nevertheless, the departments are clearly marked in hospitals and the differences between the two traditions are frequently discussed in popular media, including TV shows dedicated to healthy living styles.

(the critique usually coming from a Chinese person) or for acting 'too Chinese,'

especially if the person is Western (the critique usually coming from a Western person).

It was relatively common for my Chinese friends to make fun of me for being 'too

Western,' for instance, when I chose a boring nail color at a salon or dressed too plainly.

They would roll their eyes and urge me not to take my body or appearance too seriously,

a flaw they saw as all too common with Westerners. These were playful critiques done in

the presence of friends for the purpose of getting a good laugh. But not all invoking of

these categories were casual or playful; sometimes they were used in heated arguments

about proper social behavior.

An example of a more heated use of the categories is a disagreement about the

proper ways of behaving between my husband, Adam, and a member of his band. Adam,

a musician, accompanied me to China and within just a few days of being in Shanghai he

met a Mongolian mandolin player, Pang. The two of them started a band together and

were quite successful, playing gigs in various bars and concert venues most nights of the

week throughout Shanghai and southeastern China. Pang played bluegrass (not too many

Chinese are skilled in the genre) and he had been playing with other Westerners before

Adam arrived. These Westerners did not necessarily have the skills of professional

musicians but they were important to Pang because they had helped him pursue his

musical interests.[23] There was one such musician, Jimmy, with whom Pang had a strong

personal connection and a deep sense of loyalty. Jimmy was in his 60s and had been in

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[23] Although outside the scope of this dissertation, a common topic of discussion in the expat community was how the demographics in the city were changing: a younger, more educated and capable work force was replacing the original 'explorers.' There was a growing rift between those expats who had been in the city for a while and recent implants.

Shanghai for 8 years when we arrived. Jimmy had been extremely supportive of Pang's musical pursuits and had been a major figure in his early music career in Shanghai; he helped set up gigs for Pang and supported him financially when he struggled to make ends meet. But, unfortunately, Jimmy's musical skills were not at a professional level and he was not able to keep up with the fast tempo of the songs Adam and Pang played. For Adam, having Jimmy on stage was problematic because it undermined the integrity of the music and, since they were trying to grow interest in the band, Adam was concerned about their reputation as musicians. Adam broached the subject with Pang on several occasions and, every time he did, Pang would agree and vent his similar frustrations.[24] But, inevitably, at their next show, Pang would invite Jimmy to play with them. This was confusing and frustrating to Adam and he finally decided to confront Jimmy about his playing, which led to a heated argument. During the argument Pang remained quiet but was visibly stressed. Afterwards he accused Adam of being too Western in his approach with Jimmy. Pang argued that speaking so directly was insulting to Jimmy *and Pang* since Jimmy was his friend. Adam, on the other hand, thought that not communicating his frustrations was condescending since, as a professional musician, he was accustomed to being direct with other musicians, always in the name of improving their art. And Jimmy *was Western* after all, a fact that made Adam resent Pang's critique of acting too Western. Adam saw Jimmy as exploiting Chinese culture, especially the ideal of respecting one's elders, to manipulate Pang. While there is much that could be said about this example, my point is that the categories 'China' and 'the West' were mobilized

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[24] My knowledge of these conversations is first-hand as I often served as a translator between Adam, who did not speak much Mandarin, and Pang, who's English was not at a level conducive for complicated discussions.

frequently by Pang, Adam, and Jimmy not only to make sense of their interactions but also to critique each other's behavior.

Continuing a discussion that has been ongoing for the past 100 years, throughout my time in Shanghai there was frequent commentary on how Westernized China is or should be, in which people debated and strove to decipher exactly what *is* Western and what *is* Chinese. Certain mixings were celebrated (one of the most common arguments in favor of Chinese and Westerners marrying was the fact that their kids would be gorgeous; fusion restaurants were on the rise) while at other times the boundaries were strictly policed. For example, casually taking sips of a beverage at a banquet without offering a social 'cheers' first, a Western behavior, was condemned as being asocial and ethnocentric. For the purposes of this study, then, most people I knew in Shanghai utilized these two categories easily and often, suggesting that they were part of the common sense ordering of the local world. Agreeing with Herzfeld, then, when he suggested, "Listening to what 'informants' have to say about each other can generate important insights into the relevance of specific comparative projects for making sense of their everyday lives" (Herzfeld 2001:267), my use of 'Chinese' and 'Western' is in part motivated by and meant to draw attention to their importance for those living in Shanghai.

The second reason for framing my research around this comparison is that, in addition to being important local categories, 'China' and 'the West' are analytic categories upon which much anthropological literature is based. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this has been especially prominent in literature about bodies in China but it is certainly not limited to that topic. In fact, 'the West' is often positioned as a

categorical Other in works about personhood and self (e.g. Fei 1992 [1942]; Chu 1985; Potter 1988), guanxi (social relations) (Kipnis 1997; Yang 1994; Yan 1996). Works focusing on individualism (e.g. Yan 2003, 2008, 2009), modernity (e.g. Rofel 1999, 2007), ethnicity (e.g. Schein 2000), sexuality (Farrer 2002; Dikotter 1995), gender (e.g. Brownell 1995, 1999), and race (Dikotter 1992) all attempt to make sense of the complicated ways that attitudes and practices in China have been influenced by or are distinct from the West. Recent interest in political economy has further intensified such comparisons where scholars are grappling with how to conceptualize the expansion of late capitalism without succumbing to the conclusion that everyone everywhere is becoming Westernized. In these works, the China/West comparison is not just a part of recreating the West/Rest dichotomy but is often an attempt to critique, question, and problematize the analytic convergence of 'modernity' with 'the West' (see, for example, Rofel 2007). These scholars argue that we must not deny the impact of Western modernity on other parts of the world—it is central to the continuation of global inequalities of power. But to conflate 'the West' with 'modernity' dooms local inhabitants to the passive role of reacting to such a world order, ignoring the ways in which local processes and practices actually serve to alter and shape the global sphere (Sahlins 1988, 1992).

Although the insights generated from these accounts have greatly enhanced our understanding of China, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter the comparisons with the West are typically implicit in nature and unbalanced with respect to their data: local anecdotes from daily life serve as the basis for the Chinese side, which is then compared with 'the West,' as a floating, abstract, and disembodied historical or cultural category. In

an attempt to rectify this, while still taking these local categories seriously, my explicit

ethnographic comparison employs the same kind of evidentiary sources, e.g. the ordinary

language accounts of living informants, on both sides of the cultural comparison. The

'Western' perspective, then, instead of being something that is inherent in me the

ethnographer, or part of a sui generis rendering of a timeless cultural world, is just as

embodied in local people in Shanghai as the 'Chinese' perspective. Or, to put it another

way, setting up this comparison grounds the so-called Western perspective in actual

people (and in doing so, dissolves it into a diversity of Western perspectives, see below),

which can then be used to inform a more thorough and equivalent comparison with the

Chinese women I knew in Shanghai.

In sum, my comparison in Shanghai is based on the fact that the categories

'China' and 'the West' are important for both local and academic theories of cultural

difference. I contend that setting up the explicit comparison enables us to put these

theoretical orientations in dialogue with one another and, by doing so, it also allows for a

return to scholarly reflexivity, a somewhat abandoned focus in current anthropological

theory. To understand why this is so, I now turn to a brief account of comparative

approaches, and the critiques leveled against them.

Comparison as Disciplinary Diagnostic

Although there are a few recent works attempting to revive the comparative

tradition in anthropology, for the most part it is considered a hopelessly out of fashion

approach to contemporary anthropology. This is striking given the fact that anthropology

as a discipline is founded on making sense of 'difference' in the world (Marcus and

Fisher 1986; Stocking 1992), for which a comparative framework is essential. But because 'cross-cultural anthropology' became associated with certain aspects of our intellectual tradition called into question during the 'reflexive turn' in American anthropology—a blind belief in science and objectivity, unreflective accounts of Others—it has been largely abandoned as a respectable pursuit.[25]

In broad strokes, from Morgan and Tylor's unilinear evolutionary approach, to mid-century Structuralist accounts of innate mental processes, to Murdock's 'holocultural' school, most of the explicitly comparative projects in early anthropology were in pursuit of finding universals. While some of these methods employed more "ad hoc" comparisons than others (see Bourguignon 1978), they all placed shared traits among different societies as the basis of scientific and 'objective' generalizations about the world and human societies.[26] Moreover, these comparative endeavors were almost always pursued in the name of doing better "science." In fact, from very early on explicit cross-cultural comparisons were essential to anthropology's endeavor to be 'scientific' (impartial and in pursuit of generalizable laws) a pairing that had profound repercussions for the critiques of the so-called reflexive turn in American anthropology.

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[25] Although, it is interesting to note that even as cross-cultural comparisons are no longer formalized in our scholarship it is clear that they still play an essential role in teaching anthropology to undergraduates where a course on, for instance, globalization, will often entail comparing ethnographies of different places.
[26] One important counter-example was the diffusionist work of Boas and his first generation of students, which was based on a comparative and relativistic reading of texts and cultures against each other, but sought to reconstruct cultural histories by tracing the diffusion of these texts (see Stocking 1966). As he outlined, Boas saw comparisons as the generating force for understanding cultural process, but only after substantial information was procured about any given locale. The work of Ruth Benedict (1946), Boas's student, is an ethnographic example of a decidedly comparative but 'non-scientific' (i.e. interpretive) account of Japan and United States during WWII.

Along the way, of course, there were proposed methodological alternatives to explicitly comparative projects, most notably, Malinowskian fieldwork, and Geertzian thick description. Each of these approaches shifted the attention from ad hoc comparisons to more localized analyses. But, rather than eschewing comparison altogether, these approaches relocated the comparisons to an implicit realm, often relying on the ethnographer as tacit point of contrast. For example, fieldwork and participant observation, pioneered by Bronislaw Malinowski (1961[1922]),[27] enabled anthropologists to live and work among 'the natives' in order to understand them 'in context' (Kuklick 1997). This newfound emphasis on first-hand research displaced the accounts by travelers and missionaries previously used to produce broad ahistorical comparative analyses. Instead of viewing the anthropological project as a means to link all societies in a grand schematic way, then, in-depth ethnographies were emphatically about 'one time, one place.' But, from the very beginning, 'describing' local contexts was founded on the perceived differences between an exotic place and the lone ethnographer's own cultural knowledge, an inherently comparative endeavor.

Clifford Geertz (1973), very much reacting against the strict formalism of structuralism and functionalism, called for a new kind of anthropology, one focused on procuring meaning and understanding instead of searching for mechanistic or causal behavioral laws (e.g. 1973). He was thus representative of a more general trend in American anthropology that sought to abandon cross-cultural comparison in conjunction

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[27] Gupta and Ferguson (1997) argued that this point, although an important aspect of anthropology's foundation myth, is not an accurate portrayal of the history of how fieldwork came to define anthropology. See also Stocking (1992) for a discussion of how Malinowski's personality and charisma was a main reason this methodology became popular and was eventually attributed to him.

with growing skepticism of grand theory and 'science.' According to Geertz, the only way to understand meaning was through a decidedly non-scientific, non-comparative, interpretive process. Because of the nature of interpretation—necessarily a personal enterprise, with a situated person (the anthropologist) interpreting other situated persons—Geertz's fieldwork prescriptions explicitly removed cross-cultural comparison from the program of semiotic anthropology:

> The essential task of theory building here is not to codify abstract regularities but to make thick description possible, not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them (1973:26).

However, while Geertz advocated replacing broad comparative projects with a focus on examining the richness of local contexts, his own work drew on abstract comparisons with 'the west' as embodied in Geertz the ethnographer to highlight the differences he found—an implied corollary of his attention to interpretation. In this he shared a commonality with Malinowskian fieldwork in which implicit comparisons between 'West' and 'Other' replaced decontextualized cross-cultural comparisons.

Comparison in the Crisis of Representation

The reflexive turn in Anglo-American anthropology, beginning in the 1970s, generated influential critiques of comparison-as-method as scholars began to align their work with the interpretive humanities, developed a more critical interest in power and power relations, and wrestled with the political consequences of their work. Within this new set of priorities, anthropology became suspicious of fixed boundaries, reified differences, and conceptualizations of culture that identified an undue stability or naturalized continuity of traits—in a word, categorization. Moreover, as post-structuralist

and post-colonial (e.g. Asad 1993; Spivak 1988) scholarship began to inform disciplinary approaches, concerns about incommensurability (of both cultures and research programs) rendered comparison, for many anthropologists, an ontological impossibility (see Handler 2009). Inherent in this critique was a concern about knowledge-production that implicitly reified a self-other divide. As Said (1978) convincingly illustrated, the imagining of others was always inherently tied to both a self-making project, and consequently the maintenance of boundaries that facilitated and justified various kinds of oppression (see also Trouillot 2003). Interrogating the production of knowledge, ethnographic writing and the positioning of the ethnographic 'self' was seen as complicit (or at least entangled) with colonial and imperial expansion, especially the ways that Western academic accounts fixed and/or inscribed other cultures often without the help of indigenous representations (e.g. Abu-Lughod 1991; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1997). It was not just the content that was problematic; the very way anthropologists wrote—always in the present tense, for example—denied informants "coevalness," creating an image of an unchanging, timeless Other as compared to Western historical selves (Fabian 1983).

Methodologically, these critiques had profound repercussions within the discipline, founded as it is on an ethnographic approach that relies on the categorizing practices of the ethnographer to enable a rich, embodied sense of 'being there' in a particular time and place. On the one hand, then, the stances of the reflexive turn mitigated against the classical model of Malinowskian (or Geertzian) fieldwork, which found its validity from the ethnographer's encounter with 'difference.' But reluctant to abandon fieldwork as the discipline's defining methodology, anthropologists sought to

tweak the project in ways meant to undermine and disrupt the Self/Other or West/Rest divide. One such strategy was to eliminate the hierarchical ordering of objective anthropologist and cultural native by drawing attention to the fact that the ethnographer was a cultural and embodied being. Anthropologists, eager to illustrate how they were just as cultural as the 'natives,' began incorporating an attention to their own lived subjectivities and the ways it was shaping their research interests and agendas. An emerging facet of the anthropological project of the 1980s, then, was to decipher exactly what was 'Western' or ethnocentric about ethnographies in order to appreciate how those cultural particularities were hindering the ability to understand fundamental differences manifesting in other places.[28] Another strategy was to view ethnography as a collaboration between anthropologists and 'interlocutors,' establishing equal epistemological footing between the two sides. But again, the ethnographer was most often a 'Western' subject who became representative of an abstract 'West.' Thus aligning with the Malinowskian and Geertzian tradition, this ushered in new strategies that often meant a return to implicit comparison.

After the Crisis: (Mis)Matching Epistemologies to Methodologies

        Disciplinary responses to the normalization of reflexive critiques have been

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[28] This has led to heated debates and discussions about the nature of 'difference.' A recent articulation of this problem is found in Vivek Chibber's book *Postcolonial Theory and the Spector of Capital* (2013), in which he critiques Subaltern studies for creating an essentialized divide between East and West and argues that all humans share the same history, a history based on labor relations. Bruce Robbins (2013), in a well-written and thoughtful response (one that is very much in line with the anthropological strategies outlined above), pointed out that (of course!) Chibber's 'universal' history was actually a particular one, based on the Western ideal of the self-interested individual.

varied. For the purposes of this discussion, I focus on two prevalent theoretical

approaches that attempted to respond to the critiques outlined above, that I see as relevant

to discussions about China: Foucauldian-inspired genealogies and more particularistic or

ontological accounts of cultural difference. These two approaches—both driven by the

politics of their adherents—are becoming increasingly at odds as the discipline wrestles

with what it means to produce 'anthropological' knowledge based on fieldwork in an

increasingly visible unequal world. The decision of anthropologists to employ one of

these approaches is almost always determined by the positionality of their informants:

Foucauldian style de-facto critiques of native categories are earmarked for the powerful

and normative; particularist (and sympathetic) renderings of cultural difference are

reserved for the marginalized. The tension between the two approaches, while notable in

ethnographies in most regions, is particularly pronounced in works on China. This, I

contend, is due to the fact that anthropologists move back and forth between viewing

China as an instantiation of 'cultural difference' but also as an exemplar of the forces of

late-capitalism (and, even worse, ruled by an authoritarian government).

  Genealogical approaches aim to construct 'histories of the present' (Bunzl 2004)

by tracing the emergence and naturalization of discursive formations (Rabinow 1984).

This Foucault-inspired critical methodology[29] is intended to destabilize and denaturalize

categorization and discourses as contingent and historical. Motivated by an interest in

emergent or sustained forms of inequalities in the contemporary moment (one

characterized as 'neoliberal,' 'globalized,' or 'transnational'), illustrating the contingency

of cultural processes and histories is an inherently political project meant to disrupt and

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[29] This is an approach that Foucault elaborates in his work on madness, sexuality, and prisons: 1964, 1978, 1979, as well as in late-career interviews: 1998 (1984).

intervene in 'regimes of power' wherever they are seen to emerge (e.g. Yanagisako and Delaney 1994). As Mei Zhan (2009) articulates: "If we can think of globalization as contingent and provincial spatiotemporal arrangements, we also open ourselves to the possibilities of imagining, understanding, and even making different worlds" (2009:201). Although proponents of genealogical approaches often admit that something like 'cultural difference' matters, they typically rely on translocal forces and/or universal understandings of power to make their critique.

For example, in the context of China, there is much work delineating the production of 'naturalized' categories, be it of ethnicity, gender, or sexuality. And while the 'cultural' is included in the analysis (often in contrast to 'the West') it is typically subsumed in importance under the assumption that power operates everywhere the same in its propensity to *naturalize* categories and, by, extension, inequality. Scholars, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, are explicit in their attempt to denaturalize such categories, thus imposing their political agenda on a local context. This approach, then, leaves little room for scholarly reflexivity (i.e. an account of how our theories are themselves products of particular cultural, racial, gendered, or classed positionalities). It is predicated on the idea that we are all products of the forces associated with iterations of 'late-capitalism' at the same time that it relies on the assumption that it is the scholar who is able to see (and thus undermine) the naturalizing tendencies of such forces.

The obvious contemporary foil to genealogical approaches is the 'ontological turn,' premised on the radical alterity of other cultural worlds, and a humanistic approach to understanding it (e.g. Holbraad et al 2014; Overing and Passes 2000; Viveiros de Castro 2004 2012; see Bessire and Bond 2014 for a comprehensive critical overview). In

great contrast to the explicitly political engagement with global capitalism and its (rapidly spreading) normative values inherent in the genealogical approach, 'ontologists' typically envision their politics as establishing the epistemological validity of other cultural worlds, vastly detached from any such translocal force. In the context of China, while scholars rarely employ ontology as a trope, their ethnographies point to the same tension between wanting to be sympathetic to localized cultural difference (especially when it pertains to the unpowerful and marginalized) while also being critical of translocal forces of late-capitalism (often reserved for critiquing elites and the powerful). Based on the entangling of scholarly approaches with the positionality of informants, it was unclear to me how to proceed with my analysis comparing the two groups of women I knew in Shanghai: who was 'marginalized' and who was 'powerful' in this context? How could I impose such a distinction given the fact that they shared in their use of the categories 'China' and 'the West'? Deconstructing such categories would privilege the scholarly position at the cost of rendering locally constructed cultural worlds as a version of false-consciousness.

In this admittedly brief and incomplete narrative of scholarly commitments and critiques of comparative approaches in anthropology, I outlined the way that early (Malinowski and Geertz) alternative approaches to explicit comparisons (which were faulted for being too general or scientific) relied on implicit comparisons between ethnographers—as representative of 'the West'—and an exotic location. As anthropologists became more interested in the political implications of their work, the production of scholarly knowledge—and the Self/Other West/Rest divide necessary for it—was linked to oppressive political and imperial regimes. In the context of emerging

forms of 'post' scholarship, even the implicit comparisons were called into question as scholars became weary of any sort of categorizing tendencies. An important part of this critique was examining alternatives to 'traditional' anthropology (i.e. Western scholars writing in English for a Western audience), including 'native anthropologists' and anthropologies in languages other than English (for a theoretical discussion of the implications of native anthropology, see Yang 1994 pp. 25-31; for examples of ethnographies written by 'native anthropologists' pertinent to my research, see Fei 1992[1942] and Yan 1996, 2003). The legacy of these critiques moved scholars in opposing directions: on the one hand, critiquing categories is central to the Foucauldian approach but this critique comes at the cost of losing the ability for scholarly reflexivity; on the other hand, the turn towards 'ontology' is meant as a way to ensure epistemological validity to other cultural worlds (and categories) but is often unable to engage with the broader global context of late-capitalism. Ethnographers, then, often desire to undermine normative categories while also being sympathetic to cultural difference of the marginalized. For those attempting to deal with (comparative) encounters between the powerful and the less-powerful, or with the cultural spaces located somewhere between hegemony and oppression, it is difficult to see how these theoretical trajectories can be reconciled in the same ethnography while still allowing for scholarly reflexivity.

'Situated Comparison'

I contend that 'situated comparison' as an ethnographic strategy provides an opportunity to engage with some of the tensions described above without compromising

the important insights gained since the reflexive turn. In particular, this version of comparative fieldwork allows us to 1) avoid the temptation of situating local worlds only in reference to abstract or imagined translocal categories or forces (i.e. Neoliberalism; late-capitalism, etc); 2) avoid an implicit reliance on our own embodied cultural subjectivities as the tacit basis for ethnographic comparison; and 3) facilitate a theoretical reflexivity wherein local theories of sociocultural difference can be compared with anthropological theory on an equal epistemic footing.

As I described above, the categories of 'China' and 'the West' play a dual role in my work. On the one hand they are ubiquitous local categories that are important for how the women I knew experienced their lives and the lives of others living in Shanghai. By allowing local theories of difference to structure my comparison, I incorporate into my analysis the way that categories—a necessary part of meaning making—are central to daily life (see, for example, Keane 2003). Thus rather than focusing on how worlds are always in 'flux' based on flows of transnational forces, this opens up the space for engaging with locally defined ways of being in the world. At the same time, by taking local categories seriously, we are able to structure comparisons based on equivalent data. Following Boas (1940) and Eggan (1954) in their call for controlled comparisons, I contend that what we should be 'controlling' is the kinds of data used on both sides of 'cultural' comparisons, local people. This allows us to move away from relying on the ethnographer as tacit point of comparison or representative of the West.

I contend that rather than reifying the categories, linking them to people on both sides draw our attention to the fact that neither group is able to 'represent' the large cultural categories to which they belong. For example, when I describe my project to my

colleagues, one of the first responses is for them to point out how the Western women I

came to know in Shanghai are of a *particular* class and background. They urge me to

situate the women so as not to make the mistake of allowing them to represent 'the West'

in general. The danger, they suggest, is essentializing 'the West' as one particular

experience or manifestation of it. Importantly, because they are less familiar with

contemporary China, these colleagues did not seek the same clarification for the ways

that we might situate the Chinese women in my project. And this, I counter, is exactly the

point! By bringing actual people into the Western side of the comparison, Western

readers will be faced with the limitations of ethnography: our portraits of other places

stem from our interaction with situated persons and thus we must be cautious in our

generalizations. There is no generic 'West' or 'Westerner' just as there is no generic

'China' or 'Chinese person.' The potential for this misunderstanding is greatest when

anthropologists describe unrecognizable Others and then compare them with abstract

notions of 'the West,' which inherently lacks any nuanced inclusion of class, gender,

race, or other meaningful differences, giving the impression that (1) there is consistency

within both places and (2) that the ideas described are common to everyone. The task of

the ethnographer becomes, then, to contextualize the groups in ways that allow readers

insight into the limitations but usefulness of (cultural) categories. In sum, by situating the

women I knew and not condensing 'the West' into my own personal experiences, I am

allowing space for heterogeneity on both sides of the cultural comparison.

The other way that the categories 'China' and 'the West' are important to my

research is that they are analytic categories upon which much anthropological literature is

based. I contend that in order to make sense of how cultural differences are made and

experienced in today's Shanghai we must take into account the complex entanglements of local theories of difference, academic concerns about the epistemological production of those differences, and the politics that is fundamental to both projects. Following Kipnis (1997) I attempt to bridge the gap between 'native' categories and analytic ones by putting them into dialogue. Through a triangulating comparison of (1) Chinese women; (2) Western women; and (3) academic scholarship I am able to highlight moments when analytic categories overlap with the Western women's uses (suggesting how native categories inform academic work) as well as moments when there are disjunctures between both groups of women and my research.

My utilization of 'China' and 'the West' is certainly not meant to indicate that their contents are unchanging, timeless, or have some kind of essence. In fact, historical developments are crucial for what is happening in contemporary China, especially how 'cultural difference' is coming to define experiences in the city. But this comparison is decidedly synchronic, highlighting certain aspects of daily life and social relations in the present moment in Shanghai. Much like position and velocity in particle physics, I see choosing between a synchronic and diachronic approach as a tradeoff: the more you focus in on one, the blurrier the other becomes. Both kinds of analyses are essential for our understanding of contemporary China and thus my synchronic account is best read alongside (not in lieu of) other works detailing the historical shifts that have brought about significant changes in the recent past.

In sum, by putting 'our' theory into conversation with 'their' theory in detailed and recursive fashion and by unburdening the anthropologist as representative of 'the West,' 'situated comparison' allows us to at once attend to locally important experiences

of difference, undermine the privileged place of the disembodied category of 'the West,'

and return to a scholarly reflexivity that illustrates the way that academic theories are

products of particular cultural worlds. This is not meant to indicate that my comparison is

complete or representative. In fact, my comparison, just like all ethnographies, is

necessarily incomplete. My goal here is not to present a comprehensive portrait of what it

is to be Chinese or Western (that, in the words of Geertz, would only "court parody"

(Geertz 1973:42)); it is to highlight the way that certain cultural differences are

manifesting in the context of Shanghai, which enables us to further insight into a myriad

of ways of existing in our ever-more capitalistic, consumer-driven, and globalized world.

My hope is that my presentation is incomplete on both sides of the comparison,

highlighting the impossible yet important task of understanding differences as they

manifest in the daily lives of people without relying on universal prescriptions.

Chapter Four:

Friendship, Influence, and Collecting 'Data'

'Data' and Daily Life

My decision to conduct a comparative ethnography focused on two groups of

women, instead of a more traditional field 'site,' developed over the course of my

fieldwork. When I first arrived in Shanghai in September 2011 my intention was to use a

beauty salon as my main site, a bounded and delimited space within which I could

interact with and learn from those who were familiar with the rules and social

expectations of that space. I thus set out to find a 'home' salon, against which I could

compare other sites. But, rather quickly, I realized that beauty salons were not the most

ideal place for me to conduct my research. First, they are noisy. From hair dryers to

music to the calling back and forth between stylists, prolonged conversation is difficult.

Second, they are not especially conducive for meeting new people. In fact, unless

customers come in as a group, salons in Shanghai are not typically spaces for socializing.

And sometimes even when groups would come in together, the group members would

end up spending the majority of their time in the salon separated from each other, sitting

at their stylists' stations. Thus most customers I observed spent the majority of their time

in the salons sitting alone (or with the stylist) looking down at their phones, either

texting, reading, or playing games. If there was social interaction, it was typically

between the customer and the employees, which tended to stay at a rather surface level of

intimacy (the casual or sometimes intimate chit chat common between stylists and their

customers in salons in the United States was noticeably absent). The one exception to this

was in the 'spa' section of the salon, where women (and sometimes men) would get a

range of treatments from massages to facials. This area was much quieter and the

interactions tended to be a bit more intimate. But the rooms were mostly private and thus

I did not have access to other clients, making such spaces unsuitable for research. Finally, although my initial intention was to try to work at a salon, I was never able to move beyond the role of being a foreign customer in the shops. When I inquired about employment, I was told that all employees of the salon must go through a month long training at a center outside of Shanghai; it is only upon completion of the training that anyone is able to work in the salon. The training was not open to foreigners.

As I was struggling to find my place in the salons—and wondering how I should go about my research—my husband, Adam, joined me in Shanghai. As I mentioned above, he met a local musician and they immediately began performing together. Within a couple of weeks of Adam's stay in Shanghai, our social network had grown considerably, both with Chinese and foreigners living in the city. This had profound repercussions for my project: first, I met my closest Chinese friend, Mei, at one of Adam's shows when a fan of Adam's music, Charlie, introduced me to her. Charlie was from Ireland but had been a manager at a large international firm in Shanghai before he retired. Mei had been one of his employees and, after he retired, they kept in contact. Whenever he came through town, they would get together to catch up. On one such visit through town, Charlie brought Mei to one of Adam's shows, introduced us, and we almost instantly became friends. Shortly thereafter Mei introduced me to her friends and I started hanging out with them on a regular basis.

The second way in which having Adam in Shanghai influenced my research was that it greatly expanded my network of foreigners living in the city. Adam, upon his arrival in Shanghai, spoke no Mandarin. And since the Chinese women with whom I was

developing relationships spoke little English,[30] Adam and I began socializing with expats living in Shanghai. It was the first time that I had foreign friends in Shanghai and the people we met became very dear to us; they also became important sources of data for my project. As I got to know some of the Western women in this group, I realized that, just like my so-called 'informants,' these women were also constantly discussing their bodies—through topics like the disturbing yet intriguing white privilege they felt in the city, where to work out and what to eat, and the moral concerns of caring too much about their bodies—and struggling with the role their bodies played in their lives in Shanghai. In essence, both groups of women talked about similar topics. But, as I discovered, the two groups had drastically different ideas and opinions on these matters. This fact, coupled with the prevalent use of the categories 'China' and 'the West' in daily life, prompted me to structure my analysis as a comparison of the two groups, in order to examine how cultural difference is manifesting within the urban cosmopolitan space of Shanghai.

Slowly, as I came to know these two groups of women, I realized that moving with them through various spaces in their day-to-day lives allowed me the opportunity to examine how they talked about, worked on, and attached moral valence to body modification practices in different activities, thus highlighting the myriad of ways in which their bodies were central to their daily lives and identities within the city. The vast majority of my ethnographic data stems from times when I would get together with these women for social outings, including going out to eat or for drinks, getting coffee, taking

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[30] Although Mei could speak pretty good English, I only ever heard her use it when Charlie was in town or when she wanted to say something directly to Adam. Otherwise, I would translate her Mandarin into English for him.

walks around the city, going shopping, attending a yoga class, getting our nails done, or heading to the salon. During the week, when everyone was busy with work, family, and other engagements, it was not uncommon for me to get together with just one or two women for an evening. On the weekends, we usually planned group outings. Occasionally, the group outings would overlap, at a show of Adam's, for example, but for the most part I socialized with each group separately.[31] Of course my interactions went well beyond these two small groups of women as I was constantly engaging with the larger context of Shanghai but the most intimate details—those upon which I base my analysis—stem from my time with these women.

This project, then, follows a recent trend toward person-centered or individual-centered research, popular in medical, psychological, and moral anthropology (see, for example, Hollan 1997, 2001; Kleinman and Kleinman 1991; Kleinman 1999; Yan, Y. 2003). As Hollan initially described it, "A primary focus of person-centered ethnography is on the individual and on how the individual's psychological and subjective experience both shape, and are shaped by, social and cultural processes" (Hollan 1997:219, as cited in Yan, Y. 2003:10). For Yunxiang Yan, this meant a return to a tradition of detailed ethnography, with a new focus on "individual experience and agency rather than social structure or cultural norms" (Yan, Y. 2003:10). I employ this approach as a way to investigate how certain cultural themes or norms manifest in different activities of daily life. Moreover, by bringing a person-centered approach into an explicitly cross-cultural comparative framework focusing on daily practices, I'm able to illustrate how it is

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[31] This was mostly due to a language barrier. Most of my Western friends didn't speak Chinese and many of the Chinese women weren't comfortable speaking English in social situations.

possible to focus on cultural norms without necessarily eschewing individual agency.[32]

By focusing on the concerns and interests of these women as they went about their daily lives, I see my approach as seeking to understand what Geertz called "an informal logic of everyday life" (Geertz 1973:10). Importantly, the activities and conversations on which I concentrate were not explicitly a part of official or state policy in China. As Judith Farquhar notes, "the ingredients and rhythms of everyday life change in a somewhat different manner than the highly visible institutions and state political relations that have made the history of events" (Farquhar 2002:11). Following Hsu (2007), then, my approach enabled me a lens through which to see how the women I knew were engaging with various aspects of larger narratives in their discussions of these practices without reducing them to agent-less subjectivities produced through state or elite discourse.

Friendship in China

My social interactions with these two groups of women were typically relegated to the sphere of 'leisure' and thus our relationships were almost always defined through the concept of 'friendship.' This had important implications on how the women understood my research and the way it should or should not impact our relationships. In order to make sense of this, in this section I briefly describe 'friendship' in China—both historically and how I experienced it—and then compare it to my relationships with the Western women. This discussion serves two purposes: first, it contextualizes my

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[32] In this way I draw on a history in anthropology of using practice theory to mitigate the structure/agency divide fundamental to previous functionalist renderings of social life (see Ortner 2006 for an overview of this history).

relationships in Shanghai; second, as should become clear, there were important parallels between how the two groups of women did friendship and how they conceptualized and experienced bodies and body modifications.

In comparison to the vast amount of literature dedicated to kinship in China, there is relatively little work on friendship. This, as noted by Joseph McDermott (1992), is most likely because: "over the long run friendship never rivaled family relationships, particularly the father-son relation, in providing both a central moral relationship for the culture and a model for the basic unit of society or its state institutions" (McDermott 1992:68). Indeed, except a brief period at the end of the Ming dynasty, where literati political reformers mobilized friendship as a means to critique imperial rule, friendship was typically regarded as the least important of the Confucian five cardinal relationships (五伦，*wulun*)[33] (McDermott 1992; Huang 2007). It was distinct from the other relationships, which made it somewhat dangerous:

> Of the 'Five Relationships' in Confucianism, the five bonds that men in Chinese society were to observe and promote, it was the fifth, friendship, that was unique. The others, those that bound father and son, ruler and minister, husband and wife, older and younger brother, were overtly concerned with the maintenance of China as a *guojia*, literally a 'state-family'—a state modeled on the principles of family organization. The denoted hierarchical, obligatory bonds of mutual devotion that together formed the web of Confucian social relationships that was to provide the source of parallel devotions to family and state…Friendship was different. It was neither a family bond nor a state bond, and therefore lay outside the web of parallel devotions that bound these together. Moreover, it was voluntary…Finally, friendship was the one bond that could be non-hierarchical, and it was this feature that dramatically set it apart from

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[33] The five relationships are: ruler-minister; father-son; husband-wife; older brother-younger brother; friendship

other social relations (Kutcher 2000: 1615-16).

Almost all of the discussions are concerned with male friendships, since it was men who were able to travel beyond the confines of their homes and meet and socialize with others from outside the family.[34] This is not to suggest that these scholars were denying women their rightful place in scholarship; much to the contrary, the very interest in examining male friendships in China arose from the desire on the part of these scholars to move beyond the alignment of gender studies with women's studies in the context of China (Mann 2000). Thus drawing attention to male friendships was an attempt to provide an account of masculinity in Chinese history and to counter what Susan Mann described as a "virtual publishing industry" of work about women in China (2000:1601). But, again, there is relatively little work dedicated to friendships between women as most of this scholarship focused on their role in the family (see, for example, Wolf 1972).

The importance of friendships for men and women throughout Chinese history is still being debated but, as illustrated above, most scholars agree that since the rise of Confucianism, friendship has taken a position secondary to family relations.[35] Then, when the Communist Party (CCP) took over in 1949, their intense and often violent efforts to create citizens loyal to the state not only undermined family relations but personal or private relationships as well (Vogel 1965). During the 1950s and 1960s, having friends in China was extremely risky and most friendships came under serious strain as people were forced to criticize each other during political campaigns, small

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[34] This is not to suggest that women were never able to travel. But, in general, men had much more freedom to move about than their female counterparts. (See Kipnis 1997, Judd 1994 as cited in Kipnis 2002).

[35] The one exception to this is the knight errant, who had a morality decidedly counter to Confucian norms (see Liu 1967).

meetings, interviews, etc., and refusing to do so could result in worse punishment for both parties than admitting small wrongdoings. Furthermore, direct betrayal wasn't necessarily the most dangerous kind, as even the most innocuous sounding statement could later be used against a person as evidence of their disloyalty to the state. It was easier to remain private rather than to jeopardize oneself or another through sharing personal details. For many, then, the state managed to instill fear of any kind of social intimacy, greatly undermining the ability to trust others (Vogel 1965).

To the CCP, friendships not only threatened the relationship between citizen and state but also served to undermine the ideal of equality. Counter to the Confucian notion of friendship as a means to enter into relationships between equals, friendship in Communist China came to signify preferential treatment, which necessarily undermined the potential for equality between everyone. Instead of focusing on the immediate relationships and interactions between specific people, which was the concern of the five cardinal relationships, Communist China, in its critique of friendship, was more interested in the abstract relationship between a person and society at large. And within this context, friendship hindered the ability to treat everyone the same; it was contrasted with comradeship, which "is a universalistic morality in which all citizens are in important respects equal under the state, and gradations on the basis of status or degree of closeness cannot legitimately interfere with this equality" (Vogel 1965: 46). The Communist state was heavily invested in the cultivation of comradeship while working diligently to undermine anything that resembled friendship.[36]

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[36] This is not necessarily to suggest that friendship went away, as there are plenty of autobiographical works from this time illustrating the importance of friendship for

Scholarly discussions of friendship in contemporary (post reform) China are typically couched within the larger context of *guanxi*, which is often translated as 'social relations.' More often, though, scholars use the Chinese word and note the difficulty in translating it into English.[37] There is no doubt, however, as to its importance in post-reform China: "Conventional wisdom among Chinese and foreigners holds that in the People's Republic of China (PRC), *guanxi* is absolutely essential to successfully complete any task in virtually all spheres of social life" (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002:1). While scholars have long noted the importance of personal relations in China, the rise of the importance of *guanxi* is often attributed to the economic and social conditions of socialist China:

> In any society where goods—necessities and luxuries—are scarce, but especially in a socialist society where most goods are bureaucratically distributed, connections are vital for access to them. The reliance on instrumental personal relations based on *guanxi* to accomplish tasks in China also reveals a lack of respect for law, regulations, and for the concept of everyone being equally subject to universal standards of law and morality. As the people see it, *guanxi* is the basis for personal relations because it works; playing by the rules takes much longer—if it ever bears fruit—and is something only the very naive or inept would resort to. Thus, the crime is not to use *guanxi*; the crime is to be caught (Gold 1985:662).

But the roots of the emphasis on social relations in daily life (for those interested in a cultural reading of the phenomenon) can be traced back to traditional Confucian ethics of

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daily life (see, for example, Zhong, Zheng, and Di 2001). But even these works portray a time filled with fear where trust between people was difficult.

[37] This fact prompts Gold, Guthrie, and Wank (2002) to disagree with Aihwa Ong (1997:181) when she states that "key terms such as *guanxi*…have been constructed by Western academics to define Chinese culture" (quoted in Gold et al 2002:5). They argue, instead, that Western academics use the term because it was so prevalent in daily life.

reciprocity (*bao*) and ritual propriety (*li*) (Yan 1996:124;[38] for a discussion of the historicity of guanxi in contemporary China, see Yang 1994: 148-152).

The dimension of *guanxi* studies most relevant to my research (which, coincidentally is also the aspect that has demanded the most attention from scholars) is the way in which *guanxi* seems to encompass both instrumentality and affective ties. As Andrew Kipnis pointed out, this entangles what is assumed by (or has been asserted by certain scholars) to be best kept separate in the West:

> If one follows writers like Mauss and Polanyi (1957), the Western bourgeois revolution was precisely one of prying economic relationships out of their embeddedness in social life. Consequently, Western states that have experienced bourgeois revolutions have seen the emergence of two separate spheres of human relations: one venal and 'self-interested,' governed by contracts and the rules of the market; the other pure and altruistic, governed by emotional spontaneity and above economic consideration (Kipnis 1997:24).

In China, by contrast, guanxi relationships are "simultaneously matters of material exchange and human feelings" (Kipnis 1997:58). Scholarly accounts of *guanxi* practices, then, often focus on the ways in which these two elements work together to produce and expand networks of relations. This entanglement relies on the effective production and mobilization of *ganqing*:

> The word *ganqing* is composed of two Chinese characters: *gan* and *qing*. The second character alone connotes all three meanings of *ganqing* [sentiment, emotional attachment, and

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[38] Yan discusses, for example, "*li shang wanglai*," a Confucian saying commonly used by the villagers he knew during his fieldwork. But, he notes, the character the villagers used for '*shang*' differed from the original Confucian saying, changing what was once "the system of propriety upholds the reciprocal interactions among people" to "people interact with each other in terms of gift exchange" (124-125). Thus although Yan traces the historical roots of guanxi, he is more interested in how these ideas are manifesting in peoples' everyday lives.

good feelings]. However, the first character is not a meaningless syllable. As a single-syllable word *gan* means to feel, to experience, and to be moved emotionally. The combination of these two characters implies that *ganqing* exists only when sentiment, emotional attachment, and good feelings are felt by people involved in social interactions (Yan 1996:139).

But *ganqing* is not strictly emotional, not, at least, in the Western sense of sincere individuals:

For *ganqing* to be effective, both on the level of communication and on the level of emotional manipulation, it has to be made discernible or concrete, to be materialized in some way. But this materialization is not simply a matter of making previously hidden feelings visible--that is, 'expressing' them. Rather, it creates something not previously present. When effective, the *ganqing* generated by one person spreads to others (Kipnis 1997:25).

Generating *ganqing* does not involve the accurate representation of inner states of feeling (i.e. sincerity), but the remaking of social relationships (Kipnis 1997:27).

Good *guanxi* produces and is produced by *ganqing*, making the task of maintaining boundaries between material interest and emotional intimacy impractical and undesirable:

All practices of guanxi production either presumed or asserted an equivalence between material obligation (the obligation to assist with favors, labor, money, or other material goods at a future date) and human feeling (ganqing). Unlike economic contracts, which specify material obligations without necessarily involving human feelings, practices of guanxi production invoke a world where depth of feeling and material debt go together (Kipnis 2002:24).

Finally, as opposed to the Western propensity for valuing the emotional over instrumental gains, in China it is the relationship itself that is to be held in the highest esteem:

What makes possible this encompassing of divergent types

> of exchange relation in the same relationship is an idiom
> that acknowledges the legitimacy both of seeking the
> accomplishment of instrumental aims through friends and
> of building relationships through mutual support and
> exchange, so long as the instrumental use is subordinated to
> the cultivation of the relationship (Smart 1993:404).

In Mayfair Yang's (1994) work on *guanxi*, she argued that there is a 'sliding scale' of instrumentality with friendship at one end, bribery at the other, and guanxi in the middle. She described the way in which locals in Beijing in the 1980s drew on ideals of friendship (*ganqing*) to distinguish between the instrumentality of *guanxi* relations from completely impersonal money and bribe relations: it was the way in which people drew on an ethics of *ganqing* in their guanxi networks that makes them morally superior to monetary-based relations without any feeling.

This framing was also used to make sense of the difference between social relations in China and the West. According to Yang's interlocutors, in the West, relationships lacked the emotional depth found in China:

> A general consensus seems to exist in China that human
> relations 'abroad' (*zai guowai*), a vague zone usually
> understood as 'the West,' are impersonal, detached,
> mechanistic, and devoid of ganqing. From foreign films
> and second-or third-hand accounts from people who have
> gone abroad, many in China infer that friendship in the
> West is neither deep nor enduring (Yang 1994:121).

Nearly thirty years later, as I learned from my friends in Shanghai, theories about the key differences between relationships in China and the West had shifted. Now, the idea that all relationships are instrumental (at least in some sense) has become associated with a particular *Chinese* way of doing and understanding relationships. The notion of a relationship without any agenda or without mutual influence is seen as a naïve ideal as conceived in the West. This position was made clear to me as I attempted to assuage my

discomfort with the implications of having friends as my main informants.

Before I arrived in Shanghai, I was convinced that anthropology's strength as a discipline came from the fact that we don't attempt to 'domain out' a research site; research and day-to-day activities and relationships are entangled in an intentional way because that's how social activity works. And although I was fully aware of such research expectations—and even looking forward to this dimension of fieldwork—the intimacy of my relationships often made me pause and reflect on the moral and ethical implications of pursuing data through friendship. As I developed closer relationships with my friends and as they shared more and more intimate details about their bodies with me, I felt compelled to reconfirm that they were OK with me including their experiences in my work. For me, the idea of being 'friends' with these women meant that having a research agenda that was hidden was ethically problematic. Being upfront and explicit about my intentions was one way I attempted to resolve this conflict. But when I tried to explain why I kept asking them for consent, they often responded with contempt for my cultural insensitivity ("Stop being so direct. It is only Westerners who think relationships should be unmotivated").

In contrast to what Yang (1994) found in the 1980s, then, where Westerners were assumed to be lacking in feeling in their relationships, my Chinese friends understood *guanxi*, and the motivated relationships inherent to it, as a particularly Chinese phenomenon. Moreover, within this framework of cultural difference, they were most offended by my imposing Western standards of behavior on them, specifically being direct about my intentions. For these friends, explicitly stating one's intentions was an insult; it not only undermined the intimacy of the relationship, it also insulted the

intelligence of the friend.

It was this notion of being 'direct' about intentions that provided the greatest contrast between my two groups of friends, not, as both my Chinese friends and many scholars have argued, the ideal of keeping personal interest and mutual affection separate in the West while intermixing them in China. I found the same to be true of my Western friends in Shanghai. It was not that they were bothered by our friendship coinciding with my research agenda, as long as I was *explicit* about my interest in them.[39] For the Western women, the most important element of establishing trust was *direct and clear communication* of my intentions. They shared with me a cultural framing where friendships are and should not be based on any hidden agenda. It is through properly communicating one's intentions that others can make a 'choice' to participate (in the research and friendship) or not, thus eliminating any covert attempt to influence.

This brings me to another great contrast between these two groups of women, namely the amount of influence that was appropriate to have over your friends. My Chinese friends in Shanghai often illustrated their dedication to one another through influence—both allowing themselves to be influenced and trying to influence the behaviors of others. This often included trying to convince our friends to participate in activities they might not otherwise seek out. Giving in to such requests was one way to illustrate your closeness and, therefore, quite a bit of time was spent performing reluctance to engage in a certain activity, only to eventually give in and participate.

The practice of creating intimacy through persuasion often presented a challenge for ensuring 'voluntary' participation in my research. For instance, whenever my good

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[39] I should note that both groups of women consented to being the subjects of my research.

friend Mei introduced me to one of her friends, she would push her friend to talk to me about topics relevant to my research. Because my research focuses on bodies in daily life, the new friend would be invited to answer questions such as: "What do you do differently in your life when you're menstruating, like what foods do you avoid?" If the new friend hesitated in answering (as this could be an awkward topic with someone you just met), I would let her know that she didn't have to answer and suggest that we talk about something else. But deferring the topic in this way would have the effect, unintentionally, of insulting Mei ("Aren't we all close friends?") and confusing her ("Aren't you supposed to be doing research?").

In great contrast to this, being a friend to the Western women entailed a delicate balance of giving advice without attempting to exert too much influence over each other. In fact, most advice-giving was ended with something along the lines of "You have to do what you think is best." And, the one issue some of my Western friends had with my research was how it influenced their behavior around me. Friendship, as a rule, was a relationship that they wanted to enter into without mutual obligation or influence. They often resented having to help a friend. This is not to say that friends didn't help each other. In fact, in Shanghai, as with most ex-pat communities, friends were often the only people to turn to in times of need. But helping a friend was almost always discussed as something a person wanted to do. As soon as they felt obligated ("she's making me feel guilty" or "she keeps bringing up how she helped me"), the relationship becomes strained.

Thus the way my research might influence my friends was a concern. This manifested most explicitly in my academic friend, who, on different occasions would ask

me if I was going to include something related to her in my research or would ask if she could retract things she had previously said. She felt pulled to present herself as behaving in line with the critiques in her scholarship, while at the same time wanting to participate in certain activities that might undermine that stance (the tension, for instance, between critiquing the new kinds of inequalities emerging in Chinese capitalist society while also being interested in high fashion and desponding when something became 'too mainstream' for her to wear anymore). The quickest way to undermine the intimacy of a friendship among the Western women I knew was to attempt to influence their behavior. Again, this is not to suggest that friends didn't influence each other; but if someone was trying to influence someone else, it was best to be explicit in that attempt.

These ideas of mutual influence, interestingly, were reversed when considering strangers. For example, when walking together, my Chinese friends would rather forcefully link arms with me and would only detach if we were going to run smack into a person or object. They would walk so close and lean so hard into me that it took some physical effort for me not to fall into the street. And it is noticeably difficult to walk arm-in-arm down the narrow and crowded sidewalks of Shanghai, which were often used as parking lots, bike lanes, and shop displays, sales floors, and storerooms. But my friends seemed completely oblivious to all the maneuvering we had to do to stay connected. And they were nonchalant about the way in which we interfered with other pedestrians on the sidewalk, often forcing them to go into the street to avoid running into us. For these friends, it was clear that the immediate relationship between the two (or three) of us took precedence over any concern for strangers.

Figure 10: Sidewalks were often used as extensions of stores, making them difficult to navigate

Walking with my Western friends, on the other hand, was a much more individualized activity. In fact, we would often end up walking in a single-file line, waiting to continue our conversation until the crowd dispersed. Sometimes we would actually be quite a distance apart as one person might get caught up in a group moving at a faster pace. For this group, the focus was on not interfering too much with what others were doing.[40] When discussing dating in Shanghai, one of my friends lamented that "Shanghai is not conducive for walking hand-in-hand."

Finally, although the structure of the groups was similar, the way in which outings were planned and negotiated differed quite a bit. When getting together with my Western friends, we would typically outline a plan for our time together. It was usually just an outline, for instance, "Let's meet at the coffee shop, hang out for a bit, and then we will head to my house for dinner." It was casual and, of course, open to change but, at the

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[40] In politeness studies, this is an example of negative politeness (see Brown and Levinson 1987), a phenomenon that some have argued is unique to the West (see, for example, Goldsmith 2006).

very least, a vague outline was always suggested for our time together. When moving on to the next activity, there was always a group discussion about what we should do. It was a fairly egalitarian affair. When getting together with my Chinese friends, however, the invite was much more indefinite and I was repeatedly surprised by what we ended up doing. So, for instance, on numerous occasions my good friend would text me to ask if I wanted to go to her house for dinner. We would set a time but, besides that, very little information was exchanged. As I found out these dinner invites could mean just the two of us, us eating with her parents, me and another friend, or a large dinner party at which she invited me to give a toast to all the guests. Furthermore, once I signed up for an evening out with friends, it was typically the host of the evening who would make the decisions, from ordering food to deciding our next activity. And if I inquired about what we were going to do, my friends would ask "why, do you have other plans?"

In sum, previous work on *guanxi* has focused on the ways in which relationships in China encompass both instrumentality and affective ties, often relying on a contrast with the West, where Western social life is assumed to be oriented toward 'domaining out' economic activity from sentimental relationships. In a strikingly similar manner, my Chinese friends asserted the same cultural difference: the desire to have uncomplicated and unmotivated relationships was seen as a particularly Western way of conceiving of the world. Whereas before, according to Yang (1994), Chinese people had assumed Western relationships to be lacking in ethics as manifested in mutual feeling, my Chinese friends now maintained an ethics of cultural difference where *Chinese* relationships were inherently motivated. But the Western women were not necessarily opposed to the entangling of motivated and spontaneous relations; what was important to them was

direct communication about when the two were coming together. It was only covert attempts to influence or use a relationship that were problematic. This was in direct contrast to my Chinese friends, who were quite comfortable with each party pursuing their own interests in the relationships, as long as there continued to be mutual affection and *as long as the motivations remained unspoken*. For my Chinese friends, then, my attempts to clearly communicate intent were rebuffed as being ethnocentric and culturally insensitive, since, for them, direct communication was both embarrassing and somewhat insulting to those on the receiving end.

As my dissertation unfolds, I will suggest that there were important parallels between how these women thought about and participated in their friendships and how they thought about and moralized bodies and body modification practices.

Part III
Comparative Ethnography

Introduction

Being skinny is an undeniable ideal in Shanghai. Perhaps because of the recent

rise in obesity in China, the city can often feel like one big advertisement for losing

weight. From dieting advice, weight loss pills, massages, self-help books, gym

memberships and workout equipment to images of skinny, beautiful men and women

plastered on billboards throughout the city, everywhere you look you are reminded of the

importance of being thin. The next two chapters examine how the Chinese and Western

expat women I knew in Shanghai dealt with this body ideal, especially through their

discussions and choices about what to eat (or not eat).

Drawing on but also diverging from a well-established tradition of examining

how selves are culturally constructed in China and the West,[41] I argue that one central

difference between the two groups of women was the way they understood and

constructed 'inner selfhood' in relation to embodied experience. Scholarly accounts

typically present selves in China as being 'relational' and 'context-dependent' compared

to their more 'individual' Western counterparts. More recent work describes how the

concept of individuals 'liberated' from constraining social groups in China is producing a

naturalized inner selfhood comparable to selves in the West (see, for example, Rofel

2002). In line with this, rather than having selves that were more 'social' than those

attributed to westerners, the Chinese women I knew had a working concept of self that

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[41] The literature dealing with 'selfhood' in anthropology is immense, in part because, at least on some level, almost all ethnographies deal with the concept. For an overview of the selfhood in anthropology see Morris 1994; Sökefeld 1999; for general inquiries into culture and selfhood, see Hallowell 1955; Spiro 1993; Holland and Kipnis 1994; for discussions of the relationship between selfhood and personhood see Carrithers et al 1985; Shweder 1984; for ethnographic examples of culturally variant notions of selfhood see, for example, Geertz 1973; Strathern 1979, 1990; McHugh 1989; Kondo 1990; Kipnis 1997.

was just as personal, embodied, and persisting across multiple relationships as it was for the expat women. But importantly, this did not mean that their notions of inner selfhood were the same. In fact, rather than experience selfhood as a fixed, naturalized entity, the Chinese women I knew understood and experienced 'self' as an ever-changing and modifiable concept.

To illustrate this, in subsequent chapters I present ethnographic material from my time in Shanghai. I begin by describing how the Chinese women I knew contrasted being 'used to' a food with liking a food, and the way they relied on embodied signals to make this distinction. I then describe how the Chinese medical concept of *tizhi* (bodily disposition) was foundational for their understanding of bodily-selves that are constantly being made through the food one eats. For the Chinese women, then, food choice indicated a historically produced bodily-selfhood that needed constant attention to ensure a balanced and healthy person. I contrast this with the experiences and attitudes of the expat women, and their obsession-like focus on their cravings, likes, and dislikes when deciding what to eat each day. I outline a variety of contexts in which the Western women invoked the notion of cravings, indicating the importance of the body (and embodied experience) for these women as they worked to authenticate selfhood in the cosmopolitan mega-city of Shanghai. I show that these women had a much more enduring-through-time experience of selfhood, which they authenticated in bodily experiences they deemed outside of society's influence.

Through my cross-cultural comparison I am able to suggest that the assumption that certain economic transformations (often referred to as 'neoliberalism' or 'late-capitalism') produces a particular kind of inner selfhood—that is naturalized in the

body—is actually part of a culturally particular rendering of bodies, as found with the

expat women I knew. Moreover, the cultural differences underlying these women's ideas

about bodies and selfhood informed their moral evaluations of dieting and thinness.

Chapter Five:

Food and Bodily-Selves: *Tizhi* and *Xiguan*[42]

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[42] All translations in this chapter are my own. For the interested reader, I've provided the original Chinese as endnotes, denoted by lower case roman numerals.

'Social Selves' in China

A central tenet of selfhood in China is that it is 'interpersonal' or 'relational' in nature. As Wang and Brockmeier argue, "The emphasis on social hierarchy, interpersonal harmony and personal humility in many East Asian cultures gives rise to an *interdependently oriented* self that is fluidly defined and inextricably connected within a relational network that localizes the individual in a well-defined social niche" (Wang and Brockmeier 2002:50).[43] Malleable to specific contexts and relationships, Chinese selves are almost always contrasted with their assumed counterpart in 'the West,' individual psyches (see, for example, Chu 1985; Fei 1992[1947]; Hsu 1948; Fiske et al 1998; Nisbett 2003; Markus & Kitayama 1998).

Harkening back to Marcel Mauss's (1985[1938]) seminal work on self and personhood, this idea can be traced to his distinction between a socially defined 'person' and an individual 'self.' In Mauss's evolutionary account, the history of the person can be told in a single narrative, beginning with the notion of the 'character' or 'role' as lived by Native Americans, where each role defined one's duties and obligations; his narrative ends with the unique modern Western concept of person-as-self, a psychologized individual with a conscience, legal rights, and civic duties. As Carrithers (1985) rightly points out, although Mauss begins with a separation of psychological awareness of self from the social history of the person, his modern Western individual is in fact a conflation of the two concepts. Mauss's account can be (and has been) critiqued for relying on an evolutionary reading of human history and Western assumptions about self

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[43] See Nisbett (2003) for a psychological rendering of how these different cultural understandings of selfhood influence the ways that 'Asians' and 'Westerners' think about and engage with the world around them.

and society; but we are greatly indebted to his idea that selfhood is culturally constituted, which has been a cornerstone of ethnography since the 1970s. And although most of this scholarship moved away from attempting to differentiate a distinction between the person vs. self, his contrast between self-as-social-roles and an individualized-self has had lasting implications for our discipline, including early inquiries into selfhood in China.

Ethnographies of rural China from the 1980s and 1990s[44] overwhelmingly presented Chinese selves as continuing in a traditional vein: social in nature, malleable to context, focused on interpersonal relations, and defined by a traditional Confucian ethic of family and descent line. As summarized by Godwin Chu (1985):

> The traditional Chinese self exists primarily in relation to
> significant others. Thus a male Chinese would consider
> himself a son, a brother, a husband, a father, but hardly
> *himself*. It seems as if outside the relational context of the
> significant others, there was very little independent self left
> for the Chinese (1985: 258).

The same, he contends, would be true for women: "The idea that a woman could stand on her own, and be herself, simply did not seem possible" (Chu 1985:258). Munro (1977) supports these sentiments: "...individuals [in China] do not possess sentiments, goals, interests, skills and knowledge prior to or independently of membership in a social organization" (Munro 1977:16). For scholars who portray Chinese selfhood as socially emergent almost always contrast it with the American individual, who is thought to exist independently of and prior to any social context or relationship, is authentic, and stable. Americans, according to Chu, "tend to assert one's self rather than accommodate others and to strive for a high degree of self-reliance and independence" (Chu 1985:257-8).

The insights of these early ethnographies of China contributed to the growing

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[44] This was the first wave of scholarship coming out of Mainland China after it opened its doors to foreign scholars beginning in the 1970s.

canon in anthropology illustrating the cultural diversity of selfhood. But, as has been pointed out by numerous scholars, there were two main issues: First, these analyses did not take into account the historical or political-economic context of contemporary China. In fact, these early ethnographies presented selfhood in China as a timeless manifestation of an ancient 'Confucian' tradition.[45] Second, they were overly structuralist, leaving little to no room for individuals to have any agency in shaping or engaging with cultural norms.

Taking issue with these structural and ahistorical approaches, Andrew Kipnis' (1997) ethnography of Fengjia village sought to combine an attention to cultural difference while still accounting for political and economic context of contemporary China. Moving away from a strict definition of selfhood, then, Kipnis focused on how selves are informed by but also inform concrete relationships infused with power in daily life. By doing so, he incorporated agency—or at least agentive actors—into his analysis by examining how people negotiate, recreate, and live within cultural norms. Kipnis's analysis focuses on practices associated with *guanxi* in village life. Concerned as they are with producing both human affect (*ganqing*) and instrumental gain, Kipnis illustrates how they are a particular manifestation of the political and economic situation in modern China: they are not the continuation of a timeless Chinese tradition nor are they the outcome of Westernization or a unilinear modernization. He thus rejects "both the pregiven and unitary subject conceptualizations of mainstream social science and the decentered, agentless ones of much post-structuralist theory" (Kipnis 1997:10). For Kipnis, then, Chinese subjects are the product of their cultural and historical context, to

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[45] See Mark Elvin (1993) for a critique of conflating 'China' with a 'Confucian' tradition.

which they contribute as they negotiate their daily lives.

My work builds on but also diverges from Kipnis in two ways: First, following Kipnis, I too am interested in how selves are constituted in daily life and the ways in which culture articulates with the recent political and economic transformations in contemporary China. Practice theory—because of its ability to 'ground' cultural process in daily activities and social interactions between people (Ortner 2006:3)—enabled Kipnis to present a version of a Chinese self without relying on a timeless or uniform cultural prototype. But his analysis still very much depended upon an abstract or flattened out version of selfhood in the West, as indicated, for example, by his discussion about emotions and sincerity. He argues that sincerity is about fulfilling one's social obligations in China as opposed to matching inner emotions with outward behavior in the West (Kipnis 1997:108). He is thus guilty of producing difference that is rooted in a West/China divide, by comparing a China exemplified by local embodied experience (anecdotes of his informants' behavior) to a disembodied abstract West (see Chapter 3 for a more developed articulation of this argument).

Second, whereas Kipnis' interest in power relations and how selves are *socially* constituted is predicated on a distinction between the social and the psychological, I contend that bodies are another site where selfhood both informs and is informed through cultural constructions and daily practice. I follow Kipnis in viewing embodiment as a central aspect of selfhood in China but whereas he was interested in embodied emotions as a site of agency and practice, I show how the way embodiment relates to selfhood is culturally constituted. I thus shift our attention from a distinction between the social and psychological to examine how particular historical and cultural contexts serve to produce

embodied experiences that then become integrated into culturally defined bodily-selves.

Food and Selfhood in China

The idea that selves in China are 'social' in nature has had implications for how scholars discuss food and eating practices. Scholars have long demonstrated that food and eating—banqueting, table manners, food preparation, food taboos—are essential elements for creating and maintaining social and political relations as well as establishing group identities (see, for example, Chang 1977, Anderson 1988, Yang 1994). Relations are not only solidified through eating, eating creates a meaningful context within which relations can be established and maintained: "Food and table manners constitute a very crucial part of socialization that not only produces ties that link people together but also creates significance for the relations thus established" (Liu 2002:56).

In my experience, in (urban) China there is a highly developed and complicated discourse about eating that theorizes a relationship between the food one eats and one's character, personality, and appearance. This fact is alluded to in ethnographies of contemporary China, but scholars typically employ such examples to illustrate (once again) what is occurring at the level of interpersonal relations of power. For instance, Liu Xin (2002), described a banqueting scene where men are discussing the food they are about to eat. I quote at length to illustrate the detailed attention these men pay to the food they eat and its effect on their embodied selves:

> Although laws prohibited the consumption of many
> animals, they continued down the throats of businessmen
> and their guests. One young man who was always asked to
> accompany officials on their visits said, 'You see, people
> like rare animals because they are good for health. They eat
> rare animals not because they simply taste good, you know,

but because they are nutritious.'

'Really? But a lot of things are nutritious, such as carrots,' I said.

'Well, that is different. How long can you live? How long does a turtle live? See the difference? A turtle lives for a thousand years, but you cannot live more than a hundred. You see the difference? Then you understand why he likes turtles. You eat more turtles, you will be likely to live longer. This is what I mean when I say they are good for your health. This is what everyone believes and why everyone enjoys turtles.'

'If so, one should not eat chrysalides. They live only for a few hours, if I am right.'

'You are wrong. They eat chrysalides not for that purpose. Young women in particular like them because they are supposed to be good for one's skin. You know, you don't want to have skin like a turtle's, do you? Then you have to eat something like chrysalides for a change. Eating them helps keep your skin young precisely because they live only for a few hours. After you have enough turtles, you must have something else for different parts of your body.' He was completely serious, and he continued, 'Each animal, especially rare animals, has its own potential to increase your health. Snake, for example, is good for your kidney, and the kidney of the snake is good for your eyes. The only danger is that if you eat too much turtle, although you may live longer than others, you might also become more like a turtle in character or appearance. Don't you think that those officials look a bit like rare animals? I guess that part of the reason is that they have eaten too many such animals' (Liu 2002:58).

Surprisingly, although Liu positions his work as focusing on understandings of selfhood in contemporary China, he leaves unexamined the way in which food is linked to these men's health, appearance, and character; instead, he moves on to examine how power is operating within these banqueting contexts. He argues that rare animals symbolize power and, since only certain people are able to eat such animals that these men are literally "eating power." And while I agree that this is indeed the case (not everyone has the means to eat turtle), by focusing purely on the social implications of

these situations, Liu misses an important element of how these men construct and understand their bodily-selves through food.

Given the long tradition in anthropology of being interested in how social identity is created through food,[46] it is not surprising that Liu's work emphasized the importance of eating for creating and maintaining sociality. And while it is certainly the case that creating and maintaining sociality through eating is a central aspect of daily life in China, these works tend to leave unexamined the relationships people have with their food, including how people assess the food they eat, and how they decide what to eat, in relation to their bodily-selves. In fact, I contend that by focusing solely on the sociality of selfhood, we have overlooked an important aspect of food in China, namely the creation of a particular kind of selfhood that is intimately tied to bodies, alterable through food.[47]

Being 'Accustomed' to Food

It was often the case that if one of my Chinese friends wanted me to meet a friend, colleague, or family member, she would arrange an opportunity for us all to eat together, either at home or at a restaurant. Upon arriving at the chosen location for the evening, we would exchange an improvised assortment of Chinese and Western greeting practices— half or sideways handshakes, pats on the back, half hugs, lots of chatter— indicating both

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[46] See, for example, Carsten (1995).

[47] This is not at all to suggest that the relationship between a bodily-self and a food was more important than or separated from the social relationships being cultivated while eating. It is meant to draw attention to the fact that, for the women I knew, producing their bodily-selves was as important as maintaining their social relationships (the two things were inherently entangled) and took an equal amount of their time. The difference is illustrated by the women's asserting their individual needs when choosing to eat only some among several foods offered. The sociality of the situation is not compromised by such individual selections.

our excitement to be meeting each other and our desire to be culturally sensitive to one another. Upon sitting down to our table, inevitably my new acquaintances would ask two questions about me (sometimes directed at me, sometimes at my Chinese friend): could I use chopsticks and was I accustomed to eating Chinese food. The answer to the question about chopsticks was easy: yes, I could use them. The other question was a bit more complicated.

One of my earliest memories of learning Chinese—and the painful mistakes that come with it—is of a small banquet hosted by some of my Chinese teachers and friends. At the banquet someone asked me if I was used to eating Chinese food. Unfortunately, for a beginning Chinese speaker, the word for being 'used to something'[48] sounds a lot like the word for liking something,[49] and I thus responded enthusiastically that yes, I liked Chinese food very much. My response, greeted with embarrassed grins and a few chuckles, was clearly not quite right and my teacher clarified that the person didn't ask me if I liked Chinese food but if I was accustomed to it. "Oh." I said. "Yes, I suppose I am accustomed to it."

At the time this distinction—between liking something and being used to it—did not stand out to me as anything too significant. I didn't quite understand the difference and I assumed it was a merely a matter of word choice, not something conceptually important. But as I spent more time in China, I came to understand that being accustomed to eating a food had a particular meaning and implication for my Chinese friends. During my fieldwork, whenever the question arose as to whether I was used to eating Chinese food, Mei, my best friend, would answer with pride that, yes, I was used to eating

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[48] 习惯, xiguan
[49] 喜欢, xihuan

Chinese food (and she would add that I was good at using chopsticks too).

Most people explained the difference between liking a food and being used to it in similar terms. Being used to a food has to do with how long you have been eating it, which influences how much of it you can eat and the way you feel after you eat it. As one of my friends explained: "if you are used to eating something, you feel full after the meal and are able to go back to work immediately and concentrate on what you are doing. The food sustains you until the next meal." The amount you can eat, as I learned first-hand, is often times the main indicator of whether you were used to eating something. For example, on occasions when I didn't eat as much as my friends thought I should they would often disapprovingly say to each other "oh, she's not used to this" and then ask me if we should order something else. Their disappointment was palpable. No amount of expressing the fact that I just wasn't hungry could change their minds. The facts were right in front of them: I wasn't used to it.[50]

They described liking a food, on the other hand, as something you could tell in one bite; it was based almost solely on the flavor of the food. And, according to the women I knew, it didn't say much about who you were as a person. It wasn't that liking foods wasn't important; in fact it played a large role in being a good host. My friend's mom, once she found out that I liked a particular dish, would try to make it for me every time I visited their home. But when I asked people what was more important for getting to know someone, liking a food or being used to it, everyone agreed that being used to a food was much more significant, because it said something about a person's history. As

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[50] My inability to eat much was also understood to indicate a lack of sincerity or enthusiasm for our social relationship, thus illustrating how food and eating served to both produce bodily-selves and social relationships.

one of my friends put it, "You can tell in one bite what someone likes and so it's just not that interesting."

This distinction between being used to a food and liking a food highlights the importance of a person's history (as repeated practice) for how the Chinese women I knew in Shanghai understood their bodily-selves. For my friends, the bodily experience of 'feeling full' was not solely based on one's stomach sending 'natural' signals when it had had enough; instead it had to do with the relationship the person had with the food they were eating (*and* those with whom they were sharing the meal). In fact feeling full before one had eaten a sufficient amount was often *the* indicator that your stomach was not used to a food. Thus on the one hand, subjective sensations such as feeling satiated and being able to work immediately following a meal were indicators that one was used to a food. On the other hand, the bodily sensation of being full could not be trusted on its own as it must correspond with the amount of food you have eaten.[51] For the Chinese women, then, bodily experiences of feeling full and being satiated were 'historically' contingent (on a lifetime of experience): they were based on what one had been eating throughout one's life. And, accordingly, this said something about a person. Likes, on the other hand, were fleeting and not that important. This was in sharp contrast to the expatriate women I knew (see Chapter 6).

Tizhi: Un-essentialized bodily-selves

It was my language tutor, Li Zhang, who introduced me to the concept of *tizhi*. When I arrived in the city, I was anxious to begin work on my reading skills since I knew

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[51] In my experience, the amount of food I was expected to consume far exceeded what I thought was typical for a meal.

newspapers and popular literature were going to play a role in my research. And, furthermore, although my speaking capabilities meant I had no problem with daily conversations, I needed to learn the vocabulary for talking with people about their bodies. I thus went in search of a language tutor and Li came highly recommended.

A 28 year old from a small village in the nearby province of Anhui, Li worked at one of the many language centers in Shanghai, where native Chinese speakers teach foreigners Mandarin. They offer small courses and, for a slightly higher fee, one-on-one tutoring. Li focused mostly on tutoring and tried to cater her lessons to the interests of her students. When I explained that I was researching practices of bodily self-improvement in daily life, she became quite enthusiastic about working with me. As she put it, she had always been interested in Chinese medicine and had lately encountered some health troubles. She was adamant about the fact that she was not qualified to teach me Chinese medicine but, since she was interested in the topic, she thought it would be fun to survey some of the information available online and in books and work through the material with me.

Li described herself as conservative because she preferred a simple life to the busy, chaotic life of the city. She had worked hard in school to learn English and cultivate the proper Mandarin pronunciation and was now making a relatively good living in Shanghai. But she was worried that the stress of city life was making her sick and often contemplated returning to the village where she grew up. She was profoundly confused and disgusted by how some of her friends spent their money, sometimes blowing hundreds of dollars at a time just to purchase a purse. And she was relentlessly curious about the differences between China and the West; we often spent our time not only

reading about what was happening in China but comparing whatever we had just read about life in the United States.

Li and I worked together throughout my fifteen months of fieldwork and, over time, developed a close relationship. Some days we focused on written material and other days we spent our time chatting about her health and her recent trips to the doctor's office. We stopped meeting at her downtown office, a fairly bland space with florescent lighting and gray carpet and walls, and instead would meet at coffee shops and restaurants. About halfway through my time in Shanghai, we realized that we lived only four blocks from each other (an incredible coincidence in a city spanning almost 2,500 square miles) so we would sometimes meet in the neighborhood or at her house, where she lived with her husband and mother. Although I never met her husband, I did get to know Li's mom, who was also very interested in Chinese medicine and was absorbed with the task of figuring out how to eat healthfully. She had moved to the city to help support Li, her only child, in the hopes of one day taking care of a grandchild. Li and her husband were trying to get pregnant but were not having success and Li's health had been deteriorating. Because of this, during the time we worked together, Li and her mom became more and more focused on Li's health and well-being. Sometimes, after a session, Li would invite me to accompany her to see her doctor.

One of the very first things Li brought in for us to read together was a description of the nine kinds of *tizhi*, a concept, she said, that was essential to her own understanding of her body. She wasn't an expert in Chinese medicine, she reminded me at just about every meeting, and could only tell me what was important and interesting from her perspective. So in one of our first meetings, we read fairly brief descriptions of the nine

types of *tizhi* (described in more detail below): Balanced Tizhi; Weak Yin Tizhi; Weak

Yang Tizhi; Weak Qi Tizhi; Wet Phlegm Tizhi; Stasis Blood Tizhi; Wet Hot Tizhi;

Gloomy Qi Tizhi; and Special Endowment Tizhi. Li explained to me how a person's *tizhi*

was important for deciding what to eat, since food—which she organized based on

properties of hot to cold—affected each type of *tizhi* differently.[52] Not everyone could eat

the same thing and be healthy.

About three months after first reading about these nine types of bodies, and after

meeting and getting to know many other women in Shanghai, I was beginning to see that

tizhi was an important concept shaping how many women thought about themselves and

how they decided what to eat each day. So, on an afternoon trip to a bookstore with my

two close friends, Dandan and Mei, I decided to shop around for popular books about

tizhi.

In one of Shanghai's largest bookstores, "Book City" an immense six-story

building, each floor home to thousands and thousands of books, an entire half of the first

floor was dedicated to food, eating, and *tizhi*. Furthermore, this section of the store was

brimming with all kinds of people, including men and women, old and young. This

number of people taking an active interest in their health is not too surprising, given the

recent rise of medical costs and the elimination of most state help for medical care (see,

for example Chen 2008:127; Zhang and Ong 2008:11; Blumenthal and Hsiao 2005). As

people take on managing their own health, it is clear that food and *tizhi* are central to how

they understand their bodies and health.

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[52] For another scholarly discussion about tizhi and food, see Judith Farquhar
(2002:47-77).

Figure 11: The first and second floors of Book City[53]

As I found out that day in the bookstore, books about *tizhi* abound. They range in topics from self-cultivation and self-improvement to beauty methods and work habits. Because *tizhi* is modified through food, all of these books contain information about proper eating habits. In general, most books agree that the nine kinds of *tizhi* are the ones listed above. But certain books cater to particular demographics. For instance, one book on self-cultivation claims that for modern people living in an urban environment, there are three main kinds of *tizhi*: Weak Yin Tizhi, Internally Hot Tizhi, and Wet Spleen Tizhi.[i] There are books offering solutions to white-collar workers who are struggling with "internal heat" as well as books geared to either gender.

Besides being essential to one's health, *tizhi* is offered as an explanatory framework for why a person might be encountering social problems in the world. Consider the following blurb on the back of an introductory book about *tizhi* (translation

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[53] Image Source: http://www.idealshanghai.com/venues/10457/

from Mandarin):

> Why am I always drifting away from the group and feeling isolated?
> Why doesn't he (she) understand me?
> Why are his (her) suggestions so unsuitable for me? I'm out of strength but he (she) continues to argue with me.
> I'm working so hard so why is my performance at work mediocre?
> Lately my boss's attitude toward me has changed, what did I do wrong?
>
> There is no need to doubt yourself, you acknowledge your faults and understand the deficiencies of others.
> Every person's tizhi is different, and it is differences in tizhi that lead to all kinds of personalities, which ultimately determines how you deal with situations.
>
> Your habits do not determine your fate; your personality does not determine your fate; it is your tizhi that determines your fate![ii] (Wang 2012)

After browsing the selection for some time, I bought a few books and we settled into a nearby coffee shop for an afternoon of reading and chatting. As we were surveying our newly purchased books, Mei picked up one of mine: "Nine types of Tizhi: A Nutrition plan."[iii] She started flipping through it, nodding in agreement with what she read. The book, written by Ji Jun, was a dense 315 pages and included an introduction written by the "yangsheng expert" Wang Fengqi. The cover, full of 'official' endorsements of the author's credibility, includes the fact that 'Beijing People's Radio Station' named Ji an "ambassador of public welfare for self-cultivation and health." It has a picture of the author, clad in a Western suit, smiling with his arms crossed in a pose suggesting self-confidence. Mei said, "You found a good one" and then turned to Dandan and asked what kind of *tizhi* she had.
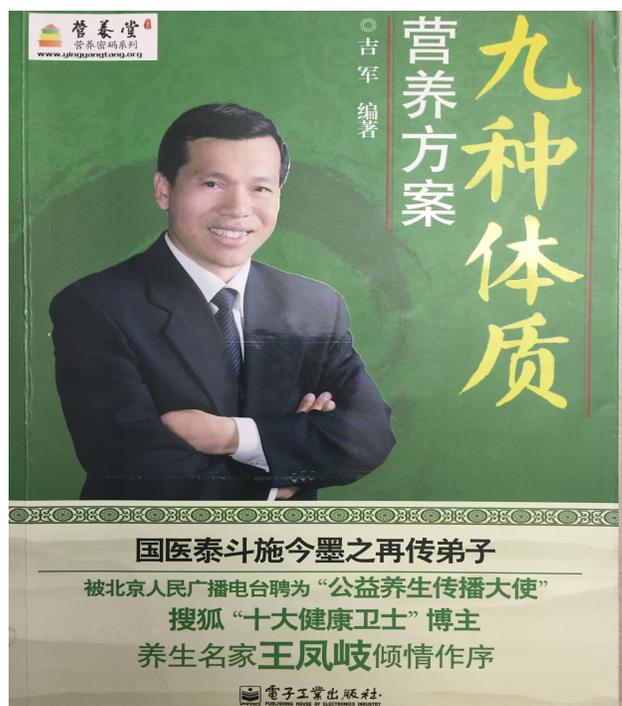
Figure 12: Nine Types of Tizhi, Nutrition Plans.

Dandan, after thinking for a moment, admitted she wasn't sure. She thought she might be lacking yang, because she was always cold and tired, but she didn't know for sure. Mei thought it was possible Dandan had a weak qi *tizhi* and decided it would be a fun task to figure it out. We spent the afternoon reading through the book together, learning about *tizhi*, and deciding which *tizhi* best described Dandan's current situation.[54]

The book begins by describing what *tizhi* is:

> When we speak of tizhi, we are pointing to what makes up
> an individual, including innate disposition and cultural
> (non-innate) lifestyle. Whereas one's innate disposition is
> the foundation for the form of tizhi, lifestyle factors

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[54] In this chapter I rely heavily on this book to describe what *tizhi* is and how it is related to self and food. I use this book because it resonated with my friends' ideas about *tizhi* and thus is a good indicator of their understandings and experiences of the concept.

> influence and change it. One's innate disposition includes things that are relatively stable, such as growth and development; the process of getting older; biological structure; function and activities; metabolism; and psychology. The environment, your habits, food, sicknesses, and medicine are all considered nurture factors. Of all of these, food is perhaps the most important factor in determining and changing your tizhi (Ji Jun 2012: 5).[iv]

Tizhi is thus a combination of both nature and nurture. And although the foundation of one's *tizhi* is inherited, one's lifestyle and habits alter and change it. The author points out, contrary to popular beliefs, bodies are much less stable than most people think:

> We have all heard the saying 'Your body (hair and skin) comes from your parents.' But actually research has shown that although the foundation of your tizhi is inherited, what you eat, the environment in which you live, your feelings and sentiments, the medicines you take, and any sicknesses you've had can all change and influence your tizhi (Ji Jun 2012: 7).[v]

Because one's *tizhi* is a combination of both inherited and lived factors and because the goal is not to return to your 'original' *tizhi* but instead to work towards a balanced and healthy body, there is not too much interest in trying to parse out what is inherited versus what happened because of your lifestyle. One is not more difficult to fix or change than the other. What is important is that food, combined with exercise and healthy habits, is the means through which you can become healthy again. Furthermore, one's gender and age also play a role in determining one's *tizhi* and, because *tizhi* is apt to change, it is necessary to constantly pay attention to your body so you know what kinds of foods are most suitable for you.

After defining *tizhi*, the first section of the book consists of nine quizzes, each corresponding to a particular *tizhi*, which are meant to help you determine which kind of body type you have at any given time. Mei, Dandan and I casually worked our way

through each one, discussing the questions as we answered them. Each quiz consists of either seven or eight questions, which you answer by circling a number, one through five (1=never; 2=rarely; 3=sometimes; 4=frequently; 5=always).[vi] For example, the quiz questions for the Weak Yang Tizhi are as follows:

(1)   Are your hands and feet often cold?
(2)   Does the inside of your stomach, back, or waist dread the cold?
(3)   Do you have to wear more clothes than other people to stay warm?
(4)   Are you less able than others to endure the cold (winter chill or summer air conditioning)?
(5)   Do you suffer from colds more than most people?
(6)   When you eat or drink cold things, do you feel uncomfortable?
(7)   After eating or drinking cold things, do you often have diarrhea? (Ji Jun 2012:16)[vii]

The questions for the Wet Phlegm Tizhi:

(1)   Does your chest/heart/mind feel melancholy? Does your stomach feel bloated?
(2)   Does your body feel uneasy?
(3)   Is your stomach plump and soft?
(4)   Is your forehead oily?
(5)   Are you eyelids more swollen than other people's?
(6)   Does the inside of your mouth feel sticky?
(7)   Do you have a lot of phlegm, especially in your throat, which gives you the feeling of being stuffy?
(8)   Is the coating on your tongue thick and heavy? (Ji Jun 2012:20)[viii]

And the quiz for the Weak Qi Tizhi includes the following questions:

(1)   Do you tire easily?
(2)   Are you often out of breath (your breaths are short, do you have a hard time catching your breath)?
(3)   Are you easily flustered or nervous?
(4)   Do you feel dizzy when you stand up?
(5)   Do you suffer from colds more than most people?
(6)   Do you like quiet spaces? Do you often not feel like talking?
(7)   When you speak does your voice lack energy?
(8)   When you exercise, do you perspire a lot? (Ji Jun 2012:23)[ix]

As we can see, these cover a range of issues: bodily sensations (e.g. being cold), likes and dislikes (e.g. quiet spaces), personality traits (e.g. being easily flustered). After

answering all the questions for each quiz, you calculate your scores based on a simple algorithm to determine which *tizhi* you are. The book then goes on to give a brief description of each kind of *tizhi*:

> 1. Balanced tizhi: People with a balanced tizhi glow with health. They are not too skinny and not too fat. Although many people in today's world suffer from insomnia and anxiety, these afflictions do not affect people with balanced tizhi. They eat well, sleep well, have a positive outlook on life, rarely get sick, and, when they catch a cold, drinking hot water is enough to cure them. They have a positive outlook on life, are easy going and open-minded. These lucky people need to be careful as many of those with balanced tizhi act too audaciously; they stay awake late at night, drink, smoke, work too hard and, as time passes, they end up turning their healthy tizhi into an unbalanced one.

> 2. Weak yin: Those with a weak yin tizhi are lacking fluids in the body. These people are typically thin but also have a 'hot fire' burning inside them: their hands, feet, and hearts are always hot; their faces are flushed; their mouths, throats, and noses are dry. It is as if all the fluids in their bodies have evaporated. These people are typically anxious and, although they understand that 'Rome was not built in a day,' they cannot help but try to accomplish everything they do as quickly as possible. These characteristics will appear in people with this kind of tizhi, which is the result of their bodies lacking water, the foundation for life. Without enough water, bodies will have all kinds of problems, eventually leading to a weak yin tizhi.

> 3. Weak yang: There is a principle in Chinese medicine of "Yin and yang balance." If your body does not have enough yang, your tizhi will eventually become one of weak yang, which has the characteristic of being too cold. We often hear the saying "All things depend on the sun,"[55] which of course includes people as well. If your body doesn't have enough yang you are always cold, especially your hands and feet, you always want to sleep and, if you drink or eat something cold you will immediately have a stomach ache. People with weak yang tizhi are typically women. Even in the summer they wear heavy clothing and

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[55] The word for sun in Chinese includes the word 'yang' which people with this kind of *tizhi* are lacking.

> don't like to turn on the air conditioning or even electric
> fans. They don't like to workout and, because of this, they
> often give the impression that they are lazy and depressed.
> If these people don't take care of themselves their tizhi will
> become even more unbalanced. (Ji Jun 2012:29-30).[x]

After reading the description for weak yang *tizhi*, Mei described how when she first came to Shanghai, five years ago, she became exceedingly ill. She was sick for quite some time and was so weak that her boyfriend had to carry her up and down the stairs to their apartment to go see the doctor. Ever since then her body had become an extreme version of weak yang. She had spent the past three years working to rebalance her body but it was still too cold. She told Dandan that maintaining a healthy and balanced *tizhi* is very important—once it gets unbalanced it takes a lot of work to make it better. Dandan agreed that you had to be careful, and promised to start taking better care of herself. She had just moved to Shanghai two years prior, after graduating from college, and was working as a headhunter for an international company. She explained that it was the busy season so she was working a lot of overtime and didn't have time to cook for herself. Hui nodded in sympathy as we continued down the list.

> 4. Weak qi: If your body doesn't have enough qi, your
> breath will diminish, and the function of your organs will
> decrease. Those afflicted with a weak qi tizhi are always
> tired. When they climb stairs, by the time they reach the
> top, they are out of breath and exhausted. They have little
> stamina so if they have to work late a good night's rest is
> not enough for them to recover their energy and the next
> day they cannot keep up with their colleagues. These
> people sweat a lot; sometimes eating just a little bit is
> enough to cause them to be soaked with perspiration. They
> have very little endurance and are always catching colds.
>
> 5. Wet phlegm: When the liquids in the body are restricted
> in movement this causes one's phlegm and moisture to
> cohere, leading to a sticky and heavy condition. "Phlegm"

is the body's water, liquid, and saliva. "Wet" includes both inner and outer moisture. Outer wetness is the humidity and moisture from one's living environment. Inner wetness is a result of poor digestion, causing one's saliva and fluids to stagnate. People with this kind of tizhi are typically overweight with oily and shiny complexions. They are often afflicted with 'rich people sicknesses,' including high blood pressure. Most people with diabetes have wet phlegm tizhi. You could say that this kind of tizhi is a hotbed for "rich people sicknesses."

6. Stasis blood tizhi: Stasis blood tizhi points to a condition where blood is not able to flow freely throughout the body, causing numerous ailments, including many external symptoms and signs. There is a saying in Chinese medicine: "When things are flowing freely there is no pain; when there is pain things aren't flowing freely." Thus for those people with a stasis blood tizhi, where blood is not able to flow properly through the body, they will encounter all kinds of problems. If you are not careful, bumping into hard objects will leave a big mark; deep lines will form on your face; your tongue will be a dark color; sometimes you will have large bruises; you often have acne; women afflicted with this kind of tizhi will have problems with their menstrual cycle. All of these symptoms are ways the body communicates that it has a stasis blood tizhi.

7. Wet Hot Tizhi: Acne is a staple of youth. But nowadays, when you look around, you can see that more and more middle aged people are also struggling with acne. This is because of having a wet hot tizhi. When we see their acne, this is a just a symptom of something else. These people are also often afflicted with oral ulcers and sores. Even though they take medicine and vitamins and apply topical creams, nothing has too much of an effect on their bodies.

8. Gloomy Qi Tizhi: As the name implies, gloomy qi tizhi is a result of enduring emotions that are inhibited, which eventually influences a person's personality. The quintessential example of a person with a gloomy tizhi is the beautiful Lin Daiyu from Dream of the Red Chamber. She is troubled, prone to mood swings, and is always sad and crying. To put it in a more modern way, her personality lacks sunshine. This is typical of a person with a gloomy qi tizhi. They don't have much of an appetite, have trouble sleeping, are absent-minded, are pessimistic, and are prone

to hysteria and the feeling of having a lump in one's throat.

9. Special Endowments Tizhi: Those with a special endowment tizhi are a unique group of people. In general, we encourage people to eat a balanced diet and discourage people from choosing foods based on their likes and dislikes or being picky about what they eat. But for this group of people, we actually suggest being selective about what they eat. That's because this group of people has a unique tizhi, based on the fact that they are lacking certain things that did not get passed on to them through inheritance, manifest in the fact that they are plagued by allergies. So in the springtime, when everyone is out enjoying the flowers, these people have to stay inside due to their allergies of flower pollen. And when their friends are busy eating seafood, these people aren't able to even get close to the table. There is only one option available for these people if they want to rid themselves of their allergies: work hard to change your tizhi. If you change your tizhi, the conditions necessary for allergies will disappear, naturally alleviating your ailments (Ji Jun 2012:30-32).[xi]

Once we had worked our way through all the quizzes and descriptions, we set about determining which *tizhi* we were. Dandan, we decided, had a Weak Qi Tizhi; Mei had a Weak Yang Tizhi, which she already knew, and I had a relatively Balanced Tizhi. The descriptions didn't fit perfectly (it is not a requirement for the descriptions to match exactly because *tizhi* is constantly changing); but according to our scores, we could tell which *tizhi* type we were closest to. For instance, although Dandan doesn't perspire nearly as much as the description of a weak qi indicates, the other characteristics were accurate, and her score indicated she was leaning toward that body type. We thus all agreed that she was most likely lacking qi. We spent the next hour or two examining the chapters dedicated to our types of *tizhi*.

The Weak Qi Tizhi chapter, for example, begins with a description of why qi is important and outlines the five different types of qi flowing through the body. As the

author details the body in such a way, he is careful to point out that this is a model

particular to Chinese medicine. He then describes why one might be lacking qi, including

the following reasons: the *tizhi* of your parents was weak when you were conceived; you

have damaged your spleen and stomach (through heavy dieting); you work too hard and

don't get enough rest; or you've been sick. All of these reasons could lead to your qi

being harmed or diminished. The rest of the chapter was a detailed description and

analysis of the kinds of food a person with that particular *tizhi* should eat, which vary

depending on the season.

Upon reaching the part of the chapter detailing which foods to eat, Mei asked

Dandan about her daily diet. "Do you ever eat hot or cold foods?" she asked, referring to

a categorization system common in China where food is organized on a spectrum of hot

to cold, referring to properties internal to the food, not temperature (although temperature

is also important).[56] The question about hot and cold foods was important because, as the

book had just explained, for people with a weak qi *tizhi*, taking care of the spleen and

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[56] This categorization schema correlates with the Chinese medical concern for balanced bodies, based on a yin/yang cosmic ordering, where too much cold (yin) or hot (yang) can wreak havoc on a person's health. Foods that are cool or cold are associated with yin and are important for those with too much yang; warm and hot foods are yang and are essential for those lacking yin (for a historical account of these properties, see Anderson 1988). The Chinese women I knew in Shanghai were especially concerned with the hot/cold distinction when they were menstruating, an extremely cooling activity. Throughout which time they would avoid all cold foods and diligently police their friend's food choices.

In addition to internal properties of hot and cold food, Chinese medicine also categorizes herbal medicines based on the five flavors (sour, bitter, sweet, pungent, and salty), which correspond to the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal, water). The efficacy of the medicine depends on the subjective experience of those flavors, which then causes certain physiological activities (sour: contrasting and constricting; bitter: draining and drying; sweet: replenishing and supplementing; pungent: spreading and disseminating; salty: softening and dispersing) (see Farquhar 2002:62-66).

stomach are essential for their recovery; it is therefore imperative that they avoid eating foods that are on the extreme ends of the hot/cold spectrum. Dandan replied that she tried not to but that she loved eating watermelon (a notoriously cold food), especially in the summer. Mei admonished, "you'll never get better if you eat watermelon! You need to focus on eating balanced (neither hot nor cold) or slightly warm foods." "Ok," Dandan responded. "My mom is moving here soon to be with me and she will have time to cook and pay attention to such things. Let's see what foods he recommends." Mei responded, "Your mom is coming? Great. That will be helpful for maintaining a healthy diet." Dandan nodded and explained that her sister lived in the city as well (they were from a small town in Jiangsu, a nearby province) and that their mom was coming to town to live with them and help support them as they pursued their careers. Returning to the page, she read out: "lotus seeds, Chinese yams, red dates, Chinese chestnuts, rice, honey, fungus, red tea, chicken, and certain kinds of fish." Mei nodded in agreement and then, pointing to another section of the page, told Dandan she also needed to be eating sweet potatoes, Chinese pearl barley, gorgon fruit, and peanuts, as they help the stomach recover.

The afternoon continued like this, with each of us garnering information about what we should be eating on a daily basis, as well as how our eating habits should vary according to the season. Mei's knowledge of the topic far exceeded Dandan's. The concept of *tizhi* was certainly not new to Dandan, she just didn't know the details of each particular type of *tizhi* or what foods would be best for her to eat with her current state. They both agreed that the only way to achieve a healthy life was by cultivating a balanced *tizhi*.

Overall the book outlined a complex understanding of the integration of one's

innate disposition, lifestyle choices, daily habits, medical history, and feelings and sentiments. And although every person is born with a particular type of *tizhi* the environment in which they grew up alters and modifies their body type over time. Everything from living in urban to rural settings, the stress of work, the type of job you have, the amount of sleep you get, if you exercise, etc., has an impact on one's bodily-self. And, because the body type you were born with is not at all important when trying to attain a healthy body, there is no desire to return to or to authenticate an original or authentic self. Everyone can attain a balanced tizhi if they follow the appropriate ways of eating, taking into account their present *tizhi*, seasonality, the needs of different organs, and the properties inherent in different kinds of foods. And eating is the most important factor for regaining a balanced *tizhi*. For Dandan and Mei, the book reinforced and filled in important details for principles that they saw as important for healthy eating, self-improvement, and understanding their bodies and personalities.

Tizhi in Daily Life

Throughout my fieldwork, I was constantly eating or drinking with my Chinese friends and thus witnessed first-hand the importance of *tizhi* for their daily food choices as well as for how they understood and attached moral valence to their health, appearance, character, and personality.

My closest friend Mei would often invite me over for dinner during the week. Mei and her husband owned two apartments in the suburbs surrounding Shanghai: Mei's parents lived in one and she and her husband lived in the other. Mei was originally from a small town in Anhui province and had moved to Shanghai to pursue a professional

career. She was college educated and was doing well in her job at an international firm. Being their only child, a couple of years after she settled in Shanghai, her parents followed her to the city (much like my tutor Li's). The apartment of her parents was much closer to her work, so Mei often stayed with them during the week. Because her mom cooked every night, this meant that, Monday through Friday, Mei was able to eat home-cooked meals. So whenever Mei invited me over to eat during the week, we would usually eat with her parents. I would often arrive early, before Mei got home from work, to help her mom cook. While cooking together, her mom would explain to me why she was cooking the particular foods each night. Her reasons were typically about seasonality and the amount of hot/cold foods appropriate for her family's health. Meat, such as beef and lamb, was almost always served in moderation, since it is a hot food and Mei's father had problems with his internal heat. Mei, on the other hand, was lacking heat (she was Weak Yang *Tizhi*) but, according to her mom, eating foods that were too hot was not healthy for her either. Balancing one's *tizhi* took time and overcompensating for the lack of one element by eating too much of it could be dangerous for her health. Thus Mei's mother tried to serve dishes that were appropriate for the season and were in the warm part of the hold-cold spectrum. She also included dishes that were meant to boost women's beauty (skin and hair), such as wolfberries and white radish. The more time I spent with Mei's family the more I realized the prominence that food and proper ways of eating had for their daily life and ways of thinking about good health.

Similar to Mei, most of my Chinese friends preferred to eat at home during the week. Over the weekends, however, we almost always met up for a meal out, which they saw as a less healthy alternative to home cooking. Because Shanghai has a seemingly

never-ending supply of restaurants, deciding where to eat was always a challenging but pleasant task. A common way to find a restaurant in Shanghai was to use Dianping.com,[57] a popular site for finding good places to eat in town, which lists over 71,000 places, organized by style, region, neighborhood, and price. In addition to cuisine from all over China, the site also includes restaurants specializing in foreign cuisine, especially Japanese, Korean, Southeast Asian, Western, Mexican, and Indian. But it doesn't include the copious amount of small noodle stalls, dumpling stores, or individuals serving various breakfast foods for a few hours each morning. Nor does it include a good portion of the restaurants not in the city center. In fact, our four favorite restaurants in the neighborhood where we lived were not listed on the site. It also does not include, typically, food courts, which are a popular one-stop way to have access to a variety of foods housed either in shopping malls or subway stations. But nevertheless, my friends and I would often look up restaurants on the site to find a good place to eat. Similar to the U.S. website Yelp, each restaurant is reviewed by those who have eaten at it, helping people to decide where to eat on any given day.

Recent scholarship on food and eating in contemporary Chinese has focused on how foreign restaurants are experienced by locals, where the food is seen as secondary to the atmosphere. For instance, Yunxiang Yan in his work on McDonald's in Beijing illustrated that most adult customers did not like the taste of the food and felt unsatisfied after eating there. But they continued to go because they were drawn to the restaurant for its ambiance and the feeling of equality among its diners (Yan 1997). This notion is echoed in Lisa Rofel's work on cosmopolitanism in Shanghai. When describing foreign

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[57] 点评, which means to advise and/or offer comment on a topic.

restaurants in Shanghai, she writes: "Their interior design signifies cleanliness, impersonality, and a world that can be carried anywhere. They foster the idea that you are what you eat. But the food is actually not the attraction" (Rofel 2007:120).

Atmosphere was certainly a factor influencing where my friends chose to eat. But wherever we ate there was always much commentary on the food that was on the table. For instance, one of our favorite Sunday brunch spots in Shanghai was an Italian/French restaurant that was impeccably decorated with marble floors and elaborate chandeliers, and with plenty of space so that even when it was crowded it felt open and airy. For brunch, the restaurant offered four or five set meals, each including 5 or 6 small portions of various breakfast foods. When ordering, my friends always made changes to the set meals based on what they could and could not eat. Sometimes this meant substituting more fruit for the meat option; at other times it involved making sure that none of the drinks came out too cold. My friends typically took the time to explain to the waiter or waitress why they were making such changes in order to ensure the changes were made. Bringing up the fact that they could not eat foods that were too hot or cold typically brought a nod of approval (or at least understanding) from the wait staff.

Figure 13: The Interior of our favorite weekend brunch spot, Chartres Garden

Regardless of where we ate, my friends were constantly pointing out which food items were good for what parts of the body, and what food items they were avoiding because they were either too hot or too cold. What we ordered was typically (although certainly not always) about what was good for us based on that particular season. Healthy choices were often individualized, based on a person's type of *tizhi*; but there was a general rule of health that all of my friends followed: foods at the extreme ends of the spectrum were considered more dangerous for creating an unbalanced *tizhi* and thus one should eat mostly foods in the middle of the spectrum.

In addition to altering one's health and appearance, foods could also modify a person's character, especially in regard to anger (stemming from internal heat) and lack of energy (stemming from a lack of qi). These bodily states were perceived to be responsible for certain behaviors: having too much internal heat could cause a person to have a quick temper, be impatient, and want to accomplish things too quickly; not having

enough qi could cause a person to avoid exercise, dislike noisy spaces, refrain from talking too much, and fail to enjoy the company of friends and family. For example, Mei's father, as I mentioned, had high internal heat. His 'food therapy' was meant to reduce it as well as his propensity for bouts of anger. Also, Dandan's weak qi made her shy and quiet. It was generally assumed that when her qi flow returned to normal, she would be more talkative. Instead of associating such likes and dislikes with someone's innate personality, then, these women often saw such personality traits as being shaped and molded through one's body and dietary choices.[58]

For these women, then, what to eat each day was dependent upon a personal body-type that was constantly changing through one's daily activities—there were no unmodified or 'natural' bodies. Among friends, there was much attention paid to each other's bodily appearance and good friends were those who helped one attain body ideals. Thus in the opening vignette, when Mei openly exclaimed that Zhu had gained weight, it was meant as an indication that Mei cared about Zhu, her health, and her successes in the world. Indeed, as my relationships developed with these women, they became more explicit in commenting on my body. Often when first seeing these women I was greeted with observations about my recent weight loss or gain, any breakouts on my skin, or changes in my skin color from tanning. And at just about every meal we shared, there was free flowing advice about what one should eat to lose weight or to improve one's complexion.

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[58] This was not always the case. The terms introvert (内向) and extrovert (外向) are common in China for describing a person and their habits. In my experience, these terms were most frequently used by academics when explaining why they or their children liked to study. For my Chinese friends that I am describing in this chapter, being too introverted was a sign that something was amiss with one's body.

Moreover, because bodily-selves were always changing, they were conceptualized through a temporal framework. This was perhaps most strikingly illustrated at a dinner party I attended at Mei's parent's home when her former boss, Charlie, came to town. Charlie was originally from Ireland but had spent much of his career in Shanghai, in a high management position at a large international firm. Mei was an employee of his and they developed a close relationship. After Charlie retired and moved back to Ireland, he frequently returned to Shanghai and would always call upon Mei to catch up and offer his help and advice for developing her career.

On one such visit, Mei invited Charlie, me, and a few of her Chinese friends to her parent's house for dinner. Crowded around their dining table with an embarrassing array of dishes, Charlie and I chatted about his recent travels and I translated the Chinese conversations happening around us. As we began to eat, Mei's friends were discussing their recent attempts to lose weight. One of the friends who attended the dinner had lost a bunch of weight and all the women congratulated her on her success. She was clearly proud of her accomplishment and began giving advice about what to eat to be successful. As she started to give such advice, Charlie, who was itching to be a part of the conversation, chimed in: "What's all this talk about losing weight? You are all successful women. I think you are beautiful just the way you are." When he finished there was anticipated silence around the table for the translation. I hesitated, not knowing the best way to phrase his sentiments. Mei took over: "He said we are 'already very beautiful' (*women yijing hen mei*)." What's interesting is that in her translation Mei included a temporal element absent in Charlie's statement, indicating how bodily-selves are always placed in time (rather than having some authentic or atemporal state of 'just as you are').

Her friends, wanting to be polite, all nodded in agreement. There was then a lull in the conversation before another friend asked: "so how did you lose the weight? I want to find a new job and I'm too fat right now. I must lose a bit of weight…"

Conclusion

In this section I've argued that the Chinese women I knew in Shanghai conceptualized bodily-selves as constantly changing through, among other things, the foods they ate. In this way, these women's ideas about bodies and selfhood very much align with literature on Chinese Medicine, and the pragmatic or functional element of attending to bodily changes for maintaining healthfulness. Thus paralleling Farquhar's (1994a, 1996, 2010) discussion of yangsheng cultivation and bodiliness, and Brownell's (1995) and Zhang's (2007) work on culturally particular models of bodies and health, these women's daily practices were shaped by a medical tradition preoccupied with change and bodily permeability. What's interesting for my research is the way that these ideas extended to the realm of bodily appearance and the implications of improving one's appearance for social mobility. These women did not view bodily-selves as existing in some authentic and/or unmodified form that bodily modifications of appearance would compromise. In fact, they saw bodily improvement as a perfectly legitimate means for improving one's social and economic standing in the world. This was in stark contrast to the Western women I knew, as I describe in the following chapter.

Chapter Six:

Food and Bodily-Selves: Cravings

Expat Cravings

For expats living in Shanghai, depending upon their tastes, level of adventure, and language capabilities, their culinary world can be either extremely varied or quite limited. The city is home to tens of thousands of restaurants, including cuisine from all over China, Asia, Southeast Asia, and, to a lesser extent, the Middle East, North America, and Europe. The majority of the restaurants operate in Chinese, making them off limits to foreigners who don't speak Mandarin. But there are plenty of foreign restaurants, most of which are clustered in select parts of town, including the former French Concession in the city center and Hongqiao, a suburb west of the city home to one of the most popular international schools in Shanghai.[59] Whether eating 'locally' or ordering delivery from McDonalds, the food choices of the expat women I knew—not at all surprisingly—were guided by their likes and dislikes. These personal culinary preferences often came to represent, both to the women themselves and their friends, an important part of their identity in Shanghai. In fact, figuring out one's culinary 'scene' in Shanghai was often akin to deciphering 'who one is' within the context of an overwhelming cosmopolitan mega-city, with very new and (according to some) strange local ways of life.

For these expat women, being 'true' to oneself was a mantra of everyday life that they took very seriously. In the context of food, this meant eating what one wanted even in the face of beauty ideals (being skinny) that made one question her wants. But these women also recognized that their wants were vulnerable to outside influence (especially the advertising that bombarded them as they moved throughout the city) and therefore much of their discussions and attempts to decide what to eat each day were focused on

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[59] This discussion is restricted to the Puxi side of Shanghai; I am less familiar with the foreign clusters in Pudong.

interpreting those wants. One of the most difficult aspects of figuring out what one 'wanted' was deciphering whether that want originated in oneself or if it was actually coming from an outside source (i.e. 'society'), mirroring anthropologist Charles Lindholm's description of 'authentic' selfhood in the U.S.: "The content of the self then consists of personal preferences based on subjective desires and revulsions. The main thing is to be sure one's preferences actually do express one's truest desires, not cultural conditioning or parental moralizing" (Lindholm 2008:66).

As I describe below, three of my closest expat friends, 'Kate,' 'Sophie,' and 'Emily,' were engaged in different expat food 'scenes' and made very different choices about what to eat each day.[60] Tellingly, though, they all relied on a similar register to legitimize their personal eating preferences: the notion of a *craving*. Cravings, as these women told me, are bodily sensations that are 'true indicators of what one wants.' And they were an important, if not the essential, way to locate a want as part of the self. Thus when trying to decide if they 'really wanted' something or not, a craving was the best evidence of support. Cravings could be trusted since they were understood to be located in a part of the body impermeable to 'society's' influence. Based on this, I contend that within the context of food, 'authentic selfhood' for the Western women, in great contrast to the Chinese women I knew, was rooted in an understanding of an unmodified (and un-modifiable) bodily-self as illustrated through the register of cravings.

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[60] In order to ensure the anonymity of these women, I've changed some of the details of their stories. These descriptions, then, are 'composites', while still remaining as true as possible to how I understood their experiences in the city and attitudes towards food.

Kate

Kate, an American from the Midwest, was in Shanghai to further her career. She worked at a US based company, hoping to expand into the Chinese market, and her boss offered her a position in their new office to help the company with its transition. The transfer was for three years, although it could be extended for as long as she liked, and included a raise, housing, and a round-trip ticket to Shanghai, perks that were hard for Kate to pass up. And since she was newly single and looking for something to snap her out of the rut she was quickly settling into, she accepted the position, excited for "something new." This would be her first long-term experience of living abroad and she wasn't sure what to expect. But since a good friend of a good friend lived there, she would at least know someone when she first arrived. She accepted the offer and within a month found herself outside of the arrivals gate at Pudong airport, standing in the hot humid air, waiting in a long line for a cab with one of her colleagues who was to escort her to her new apartment in the city center.

Before arriving in Shanghai, Kate thought of herself as adventurous—she was always up for new experiences back home or, as she put it, she "loved to be out exploring the town." She thought she would love the hustle and bustle of Shanghai and, as she tells the story, for the first week the city amazed her. So much to see; so many new foods to try and new places to explore. But, rather quickly, she grew tired of the disorienting feeling that shadowed her much of the day: she couldn't communicate with anyone on the street, so simple things like asking for directions or a quick conversation while waiting for the bus were impossible or incredibly awkward. And the city was crowded. Very crowded. And people didn't know how to walk on their side of the sidewalk. And they

were always spitting out their phlegm, which produced a cacophony of sounds she would prefer not to hear. And—her biggest pet peeve of all—no one stood in line (expect at the airport) and instead would push and elbow their way to the front of the mass of people waiting. The pushing and shoving was exhausting to her—and endlessly annoying.

Furthermore, Kate found her apartment less than desirable. She lived in the city center, in an apartment complex whose exterior looked nicer than her apartment's interior. Her kitchen was inadequate compared to what she had back home. With just one electric burner, a wok, and a few utensils—and lacking an oven—it was hard for Kate to imagine cooking any suitable meal there. Which meant that she went out for just about every meal. Again, what started out as a fun proposition—exploring the city's culinary offerings—quickly turned into a tiring chore. For all that Shanghai had to offer, Kate's culinary world was rather restricted by her limited Chinese and her hesitation to eat local food.

When she first arrived, she was eager to try the new foods Shanghai offered. In the mornings she eagerly followed her co-workers (the ones "trying to be local") out into the morning heat to taste some local breakfast cuisine. They introduced her to a variety of options, including pastries, or *bing* (figure 13), *youtiao*, or fried dough crullers (figure 14) and, her favorite, *jian bing* (figure 15).

Figure 14: Youtiao, or fried dough crullers is a common breakfast option[61]

But by the second week the excitement wore off and she was beginning to feel homesick

and longed for familiar foods. So she stopped eating like a local and instead chose to

frequent restaurants that served foods resembling what she ate back home, like

sandwiches and salads (foods that were not at all part of the local cuisine).

Figure 15: A common breakfast option on the street is 'jianbing,' a crepe with eggs, spices, and a fried crunchy dough

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[61] Image Source: http://www.sh-streetfood.org

This was easy for her at lunch and dinner since her office was in Xujiahui, a bustling shopping district (about four metro stops south of her apartment complex), known for its sparkling marbled and chandelier adorned shopping malls. Conveniently, her office was a block away from one of the biggest intersections in the city, a five-corner crossing of three major roads with two mega-malls on either side. The Grand Gateway 66, one of the two malls, was a beautifully kept massive six-story structure, with a good selection of Western restaurants and an outdoor 'food strip' with excellent patios—a place to see and be seen in the expat community.

Figure 16: Inside the Grand Gateway 66. [62]

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[62] Image Source: www.justgola.com

Just about everyday Kate would head down to the mall to sit out on a patio and eat at one of her favorite restaurants, Element Fresh or Bistro by Wagas. Both were local chains exceedingly popular with expats, since they were known to serve fresh Western style cuisine. This was a major selling point for Kate who was a bit skeptical of the food quality in Shanghai, given all the recent food scares.[63] Most days she chose Element Fresh, a Western chain that was started in Shanghai in 2002 (and has now expanded to other major cities in China) that serves organic foods, mostly sandwiches, salads, and an assortment of hot meals, including "Asian Creations" (dishes such as "Vietnamese Noodles" or "Sesame-Ginger Tofu"). But when it was too busy or when she felt like something a bit different, she would go to Bistro, another Western chain started in Shanghai, that serves a good mix of "everyday food," including coffees, smoothies, sandwiches, wraps, salads, pastas, and similar to Element Fresh, a few hot Asian dishes. Both places were always packed during the lunch hour and Kate enjoyed the "international scene" of the patio.

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[63] Some notable examples that made the news were fake eggs, watermelons pumped full of dirty water, reused cooking oil, and cardboard used as a supplement in steamed buns. The culprits were almost always street vendors, making Kate, and many other expats, wary of street food (see, for example, Tam and Yang 2005; Veeck et al 2010; Yan 2012; Klein 2013).

Figure 17: The Patio outside of Element Fresh. [64]

In sum, Kate sought out spaces that "didn't feel like China" while still enjoying

"the global feel." The patios and interiors of the restaurants resembled what one might

find back home (or even better versions of what you could find back home) and

numerous European languages spoken by customers were intermixed with the Chinese of

the wait staff. All in all, the place had an international vibe that was consistent with

Kate's vision of diversity: a North American/European upper middle-class lifestyle

sprinkled with some predictable local flavor.[65]

But, more often than not, when Kate was explaining to me why she ate what she

did, she invoked the notion of a craving as the legitimizing source. In fact, she seemed to

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[64] Image Source: www.guideofsh.com

[65] This kind of scene can also be found at more touristy sites, like Xintiandi, a newly renovated district of shikumen (stone gate houses) on narrow alleyways. The houses have been converted into boutiques and Western restaurants and bars, catering mostly to a foreign population. The narrow streets are always jammed full of people, including foreigners there for the international experience (often snapping photos of the few locals still living in the houses on the alleyways) and Chinese tourists who are curious about foreigners (and thus snapping pictures of the foreigners eating pizza or drinking beer or wine).

understand and rely on her cravings as the guiding light for determining what she should eat and how that defined her within the context of Shanghai. Thus when she spoke of eating at Element Fresh, although motivated by their use of organic foods, it was the fact that she *craved* one of their sandwiches that continually brought her back. Her body wanted it. And she was happy to oblige.

This idea came out best one day when we were discussing breakfast options in the city. We were hanging out with our friends Charlie and Amber and Charlie suddenly blurted out "soooo, I ordered breakfast delivery from McDonalds *again* this morning." Kate laughed and rather sheepishly but with a hint of pride said, "I'm glad to know someone else is doing it too! I've been ordering McDonalds for breakfast every morning for the past *two* months." She began to imitate—in a mock Chinese accent—the voice that greets you when you call the delivery number: "How many people are you ordering for today?" They both laughed. "One" Charlie said. Kate, playing along, placed her order: "I want one sausage and egg McMuffin and a hash brown. With ketchup. Keeee-tchup. KETCHUP. Tomato sauce. Fanqiejiang. For fuck's sake. Ketchup!" Frustration mixed with amusement clearly visible, Kate told us about her morning struggle to get the person on the other end of the line to understand that she wanted ketchup with her order. "I don't know why they can't understand me. I say ketchup a million times and then try the Chinese word my tutor taught me. But I know I don't say it right and they of course can't understand me so then I go back to saying ketchup. Sometimes it comes with my order, sometimes it doesn't." She continued "Honestly, I can't believe I'm eating McDonalds. I *never* eat McDonalds back home. But here it just…" Charlie jumped in "reminds you of home." "Exactly" Kate slowly nodded in agreement. "I'm not sure why.

But I can't help it. It's what I crave in the morning. It's who I am, I guess."

Throughout the time we knew each other, Kate's attitude towards her food choices changed dramatically. After her first month of being in Shanghai, she complained to me that figuring out what to eat each day was the hardest part of her life in Shanghai. She wasn't sure how to explore the food options around her, since everything was in Chinese and she was afraid of getting sick. It made her feel isolated and like a failed adventurer. But a few months later, after she discovered Element Fresh and Wagas, she was settling into her culinary choices and was much more comfortable with the fact that she "wanted what she wanted." This attitude culminated towards the end of her first year when an American Chinese restaurant, "Fortune Cookie," opened in Shanghai, serving all the Chinese foods Americans love (that don't exist in China), including fortune cookies and crab rangoon and "some of the best sweet and sour chicken in all of China." Fully aware of the irony, but not caring, Kate couldn't contain her excitement: "Finally! I've been craving Chinese food all year!"

Figure 18: "Fortune Cookie," the American Chinese restaurant in Shanghai [66]

Sophie

"Lets get Indian food" Sophie said as I greeted her at the entrance to Foreigner Street, our chosen destination for dinner that evening. "I've been craving it all day. And this place (pointing to a spot a few doors down) has a great buffet." I happily agreed, both with her choice of Indian food and the restaurant—I'd eaten there before and the food was delicious.

As we walked to the restaurant, we watched a French family with two young kids make their way down the pedestrian walkway—a rather narrow path (given how crowded the street typically was) set between the restaurants and their outdoor seating areas. The kids, one just learning to walk, were comfortably meandering down the path as it made

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[66] Image Source: The Texture Group, www.thetexturegroup.com

its way past the 30 or so restaurants (the majority of which were Western) and bars that line the 480 meter long street. The kids were attracting a good bit of attention; quite a few diners smiled and waved as the little one toddled by and some Chinese tourists snapped a picture of the family. The kids were clearly enjoying the attention. Sophie wondered aloud "I wonder what it's like to grow up here? It must be fun to be around so much diversity."

Figure 19: Foreigner Street at night

At the restaurant we sat outside on the patio. Before we could even get up from our table to get our first round of food we were approached by an elderly woman, dressed in rags and hunched over, begging for money. She approached the table, bringing one hand up to her mouth while the other pretended to hold food. As Sophie reached for her

purse, our waiter approached and shooed the beggar away. She reluctantly left and we watched as she made her way down to the next restaurant.

The Indian restaurant was tucked between one of the few Chinese restaurants on the street ("Amy's Restaurant") and an Iranian place so there was plenty of commodified cultural diversity on display for us to watch as we ate our selections of Indian food. In fact, just as we sat down to our first round of food, an Iranian belly dancer came out on the street to perform her nightly ritual of two or three dances, accompanied by loud Persian music and the unrelenting clapping of her boss. As per usual, some pedestrians stopped to watch; diners turned their heads, at least for the first few measures. Sophie and I pondered the relationship between the dancer and what appeared to be her boss: "I wonder if she wants to be dancing or if she has to" Sophie muttered as she used her garlic naan to scoop up the last of her Chicken Masala. "I mean, is that exploitative? It's a cool dance but…does she have to wear such skimpy clothes?" "Yeah, I don't know" I managed, as I pondered her reaction to them. Watching the scene unfold, him clapping, her dancing, the music blasting, my friend's skeptical but interested interpretation, Chinese tourists taking pictures, blonde kids running by, it was hard to reconcile the commodification of cultural difference with the genuine socializing occurring. People seemed to be enjoying themselves in part, if not completely, due to the diversity of the scene.

The dancing finished, our conversation turned to Sophie's recent break-up with her boyfriend back home, something he initiated. She was sad but also understood why it might be a good time to part. "I don't know. It's been more than six months since we've seen each other and I feel like I've really changed since being here. Like today. It's the

first day I've ever *craved* Indian food. Back home we never ate Indian food. And now I'm craving it. I'm finally becoming me. I know it doesn't sound like a big deal but I think it is. Anyway, it's probably for the best. I just wish there were more options for me here."

Sophie came to Shanghai to teach English at one of the many schools employing foreigners as teachers. With their rather forgiving criteria of being a native speaker of English and having a college degree (and sometimes being white), these jobs often drew young college graduates who wanted an adventure abroad. On a one-year contract, she was given a small apartment on campus and a meal card that she used for breakfast and lunch in the school's cafeteria. The school was on the northwest side of the city, quite a distance from the city center and Hongqiao, the suburb where we were for dinner. Sophie liked living in an all-Chinese part of the city; it made her feel like she was really living in China. But in the evenings she was drawn to places like Foreigner Street for their "diversity" and "international vibe." Most of the reason Sophie wanted to come to China was to have a chance to explore the world a bit before she settled down in the States. Being in China not only afforded her an opportunity to know more about the country but also introduced her to a cosmopolitanism that she longed for back home.

After picking up a couple of cookies at a French bakery, we decided to call it a night and began walking towards the subway station. Foreigner street dead ends onto the bustling Hongmei Rd, right across the street from Pearl Market, one of the largest markets for fake goods (and real pearls) in Shanghai. The market, a five story building crammed full of stalls selling anything from fake North Face jackets and Louis Vuitton bags to Chinese paintings and all kinds of stone jewelry, is almost exclusively visited by

foreigners. Bargaining is the name of the game and it is not uncommon to hear a heated back and forth between customer and vendor. The block immediately outside the market is also full of peddlers selling their goods, most notably Tibetan women selling turquoise and silver jewelry on yellow felt blankets lining the sidewalks. As we walked past one such blanket, a pair of earrings caught Sophie's eye so we stopped to look. The Tibetan woman approached us and asked if we were interested. Sophie said, "No, just looking" and we moved on. A few paces down the sidewalk we were accosted by an elderly woman asking for money. Quite aggressive with her pleas, she grabbed Sophie's arm, walked with us for half a block, all the while motioning with her other hand to her mouth, as if asking for something to eat. At first Sophie tried to shake her off but the woman persisted and Sophie eventually pulled a 5 yuan note from her pocket and handed it to her. Satisfied, she left us for the couple walking a few feet behind us. Sophie told me her Chinese coworkers scold her every time she gives a beggar money. "They tell me I'm only making the situation worse. But I can't help it. It feels like I have so much more than they do—why not give a little?" I agreed and recalled how my Chinese friends said the same thing—it is only because foreigners give money to the beggars that there are beggars.

Waiting for the subway to take us home, a young woman approached Sophie and handed her a pamphlet. We watched her walk away and hand another pamphlet to an overweight woman a few feet down the platform, and then to an overweight expat a few more feet away. Sophie looked down at the pamphlet and read aloud "Join our gym. Lose weight fast." She looked up annoyed. In the direction of the young woman, now quite a ways away, she said "I'm not fat. I'm NOT fat. I'M NOT FAT." Then turning back

towards me, she complained, "That's so annoying. I'm not fat. I work out at a gym almost everyday. I'm not going on a diet. I just want to eat what I want to eat. Ugh. I hate it how everyone is always assessing my body here. It shouldn't be that important!"

Emily

In the Shanghai expat community the Avocado Lady is legendary. A "hidden gem," she is the owner of one of the most popular places for in-the-know foreigners to shop for groceries in the city center. On first glance her unmarked fruit stand looks like any other on the tree-lined Changle Road: a small concrete stand, opened to the street by two large raised garage doors, with produce and other foodstuffs over flowing out onto the sidewalk. But if you peek in, you'll see that the store is packed with foreigners (and maybe a few curious locals), all either milling around searching the cramped shelves for their desired product (how they all fit into the stall is a mystery) or waiting patiently to make their purchases, often using their newly learned Chinese when their turn comes.

Figure 20: The Avocado Lady's stand is always brimming with foreign shoppers[67]

The story of the Avocado lady, Jiang Qin, is as compelling to her customers as her location and assortment of produce: a local heroine who overcame destitute poverty through recognizing a need in the market (foreign food goods) and then working extremely long hours (seven days a week, 19 hours a day). She's nice, humble, and eager to please her foreign clientele, something relatively rare in the service industry in Shanghai; most foreigners will bemoan lacks the 'service' they know and expect back home. Qin is originally from Nantong, a small rural town north of Shanghai. The story goes that after high school she moved to Shanghai to earn money for her family. In 1990 she was selling eggs and a few vegetables. A French chef, who lived close by and was struggling to find the items needed for his cooking, suggested that if she started selling imported goods foreigners would flock to her store. She took him up on his suggestion. One of the first foods she tried selling was avocados (hence her nickname). With the best

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[67] Image Source: http://www.healthandsafetyinshanghai.com/healthy-food-shanghai.html

prices in town (no one knows how she does it) she instantly gained a steady flow of customers.

Figure 21: The Avocado Lady in front of her food stall[68]

Based on her success, she started importing foods from all over the world, be it cheese from Europe, olive oil from Greece, or fruit from South America. Her store is stocked full of goodies expats long for, including fresh mints, tropical fruits, kaffir, lime leaves, artichokes, beetroot, shiso leaves, dill, kale, basil, bean-sprouts, tomatoes, olives, coconut oil, imported wines, whiskey, Lemoncello, long life milk, coconut water, lamb, proscuitto, salamis, tuna, Aussie beef mince, Amelia's sausages, salmon, steak, yoghurt, cheese (including mozzarella, ricotta and mascarpone), mustards, tahini, pomegranate molasses, flour, yeast, chickpeas, lentils –the list goes on and on and on.

She runs the store with her husband, her husband's business partner, and her daughter. She's notorious for working long hours, beginning her days at 4 a.m. and not

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[68] Image Source: Nicky Almasy Photography,
http://www.almasyphotography.com/Potrtaits/i-XtgM5Dz

closing until well after dinnertime. When discussing the store with expats, they typically speak appreciatively about her desire to understand their wants and her ability to fulfill them. One chef in the area told me that if he ever needs something he doesn't have he always asks her first to see if she will be able to find the desired good. Much to his delight, she almost always is able to and for much cheaper than he thought was possible.

Most expats shopping at the avocado lady's, were concerned with finding the best and most 'authentic' foods possible (olive oil from Greece, cheese from France) while still paying attention to the local scene and the environment (her best-selling produce is from Yunnan, China's southwest, known for its natural setting and exotic minority groups). Moreover, they are able to have a 'local encounter' with Qin; she has an extensive English vocabulary of food products, but she operates mostly in Mandarin and is exceptionally patient with foreigners practicing their Chinese while doing their shopping. The foreigners who shop at her store are typically those who plan to be in Shanghai for more than a year; they've outfitted their kitchens with ovens and have learned or are learning Chinese. They frequent Chinese restaurants and know all the varieties of 'Chinese' food offered throughout the city.

My good friend Emily was very much a part of this scene. Emily was working on a doctorate in history and had been researching and writing in Shanghai for more than three years. She lived with her partner, Rob, in the former French Concession, a beautiful neighborhood in the city center home to many foreign restaurants. They both spoke Mandarin and were self-described foodies. One day Emily invited me over to her apartment for an afternoon of writing (we often worked together); we then planned for our partners to meet up with us for dinner. At around three o'clock we started discussing

dinner plans. Emily gave me an assortment of local options: the small (four tables and a kitchen) but great Buddhist vegetarian restaurant right down the street, the Hunan place that has an amazing spicy fish dish, a new French bistro that opened just down the road ("the chefs come directly from Paris"), or we could cook a meal in. After a brief discussion we decided to cook—she and her partner had stocked their kitchen with the appliances and tools necessary for cooking Western food and we decided it would be fun to cook a meal together.

They lived just up the street from the Avocado Lady so we hopped on bikes and headed down to pick out our dinner menu—Emily preferred to go to the store without a list and just buy whatever looked good that day or appealed to her. Emily and her partner ate mostly vegetables, legumes, and fish; they typically didn't eat a lot of meat. When we got to the store she first grabbed a bunch of fresh spinach. Then she started picking out steaks for us for dinner. "It's so strange. I'm really drawn to the meat case. Yeah, I'm craving meat. Meat and spinach. I must need iron. Do steaks sound good for dinner?" I agreed they did and so we bought the fixings for steak and added stuff for roasted potatoes and an arugula salad with goat cheese.

Our route home from the Avocado Lady took us by Baker & Spice, a local coffee shop and bakery, and we decided to stop in for a cappuccino. To order, you wait in a line that files you past their beautiful display case of delicious in-house baked goods and pastries. As we were waiting, Emily, eyeing the case, asked "Do you want to share a chocolate croissant? Theirs are to die for. I've been craving a little something sweet all day."

"Sure" I said. "I'm always up for something sweet."

"Or maybe we shouldn't. I mean, I'm not on a diet but I probably don't need the calories. I feel like I all I do is sit all day writing and I can tell I'm gaining weight. I mean. I don't care, but…" trailing off she glanced down at the case housing the croissants.

"Let's get the croissant," I said. "We had a productive day today and deserve a little treat."

Nodding in agreement, Emily ordered the croissant with her coffee.

Figure 22: The dessert case at Baker and Spice

When we got home we started dinner prep and before long Rob and Adam joined us to help complete the cooking. When we had all finished eating (a rather delicious meal), Rob stood up to go to the kitchen. Rather innocently and without thinking he said "Em is on a diet so she probably won't want dessert. Anyone else? Coffee?" Emily, looking appalled, shot back "I am NOT on a diet. I've just been eating healthy lately. I just want to eat healthy. My body's been craving veggies. It's not a diet!" Rob, not yet good at picking up on his wife's cues, looked at her questioningly and asked, "I thought you were trying to lose weight?" Emily, getting more annoyed and embarrassed by the

minute, responded emphatically "No. I am NOT on a diet." "Ok, soooo do you want dessert?" He asked. "No, I had a chocolate croissant with my coffee this afternoon so I'm good."

Cravings and Selfhood

Although Kate, Sophie, and Emily were engaged in very different culinary scenes in Shanghai, they shared a cultural framing in which cravings legitimized their eating habits, especially as they struggled with the pervasive pressure to be thin in the city. And while there is plenty of material here for analysis—exoticizing the Other through food, cultural commodification, the local politics of eating out, foodie cosmopolitanism, etc.— for the purposes of this dissertation, I will restrict my explication to these women's shared cultural logic of cravings as it pertained to their understandings and experiences of selfhood.

For Kate, the notion of a craving was used to make sense of—and legitimize—the somewhat embarrassing fact that she was ordering McDonalds for breakfast on a daily basis. She explicitly linked her craving for McDonalds to selfhood ('it's who I am'). Sophie, in a similar manner, understood her craving for Indian food as a sign that she was finally able to be herself. Emily, in her choice of what to eat for dinner, first linked cravings to bodily needs (iron); she later invoked them as a reason for why she was eating healthily. For her, eating salads because one was craving them was categorically different from being on a diet: the former was linked to individual wants and desires; the latter to society's imposition of unreasonable and oppressive body ideals (more on this below).

There is a fairly extensive literature discussing Western women's preoccupation

with (and schizophrenic attitude towards) body size and eating (see, for example, Bordo 1993; Boskind-White and White 1983; Bruch 1973, 1978; Chernin 1981; Millman 1980; Counihan 1999:76-92 for a review of these works; Kulick and Menely 2005). In this literature, the tension for women and their eating habits is typically attributed to an unresolvable Cartesian divide between body and self, in which an uncontrollable body is conceptualized (and experienced) as an enemy to self-control. For example, Susan Bordo describes anorexics' attitude toward hunger:

> These women experience hunger as an alien invader, marching to the tune of its own seemingly arbitrary whims, disconnected from any normal self-regulating mechanisms…it is experienced as coming from an area *outside* the self" (Bordo 1993:146, italics in original).

> In this battle, thinness represents a triumph of the will over the body, and the thin body (that is to say the nonbody) is associated with 'absolute purity, hyperintellectuality and transcendence of the flesh' (Bordo 1993:147-8).

Bordo places this body/self divide in a long tradition in the West, historically rooted in Augustine's struggle of this 'two wills' (one of the flesh and one of the spirit) and Plato's vision of complete liberation as being an abandonment of body (1993:147). Similarly, Carole Counihan describes food rules among College students in the US as being about self-control, "the ability to deny appetite, suffer hunger, and deny themselves foods they like but believe fattening" (1999:114). Again 'body' is seen as something to be controlled by 'self' indicating a division between the two concepts, at least in regards to eating.

What's interesting for this discussion is that in the register of cravings for the Western women in Shanghai, bodies were the authenticating *location* of selfhood, not an

enemy to it. Indeed, when deciding whether to eat something or legitimizing one's choice to friends—be it McDonalds, a salad, or dessert—invoking the notion of a craving always confirmed one's choice and silenced any critique about it. Rather than a self/body divide, then, the cultural logic of a craving in Shanghai framed an adversarial relationship between authentic selfhood, as located in the body, and societal norms, including body ideals. It is this distinction, I contend, that made the expats resent ideals of being thin, as they were seen to interfere with one of the most authentic ways to 'be yourself'—eating what you want or in the case of comfort food, providing the appropriate therapeutic remedy.[69] Furthermore, the Shanghai context, where locals are happy to comment on body shape and size and single out those who are fat for certain diet products, exacerbates this distinction and makes the expat women especially anxious and vulnerable to critiques of their eating habits. Within this cultural logic, eating properly had more to do with eating what one wanted than eating based on health or nutrition. This is not to say that the women ate junk food all the time or that health wasn't important to them. But when they did eat healthfully, they justified it based on wants or cravings. Thus for Emily, admitting to being on a diet indicated that she was being influenced by society's norms and not being true to herself. She thus justified her healthy eating habits by saying that she wanted to eat that way (or her body 'wanted to,' as indicated by her cravings of steak and spinach for iron, p. 165), not that she was on a diet. Similarly, this is why in the opening vignette it was perfectly reasonable for Emily to abstain from dessert because she was full but problematic for Sophie to hesitate because she was on a diet.

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[69] This is consistent with the notion that pregnant women, who often 'crave' foods they ordinarily wouldn't eat, are responding to their changing bodies and having another 'being' inside the body.

Unlike the Chinese women, who were happy to comment on each other's weight loss or gain and aspects of bodily appearance that needed tending, the Western women illustrated their concern for one another by policing the degree to which one's wants were influenced by society. In short, they saw to it that one was being as true to oneself as possible. This typically included helping a friend decide if what they were eating, when healthy, was what one *really* wanted; or when deciding to eat desserts or other unhealthy foods, making sure you were abstaining because you wanted to be skinny. It is interesting to note that just as they desired clear communication when it came to my intentions regarding our relationships, their idea of an authentic self relied on 'clear communication' of bodily cravings to the self without the adulterating influence of 'society.'

Conclusion: Culturally Produced Embodied Selfhood

In these two chapters I've presented ethnographic material suggesting that the Chinese and Western women I knew in Shanghai were operating with different understandings of bodily-selves that shaped their eating practices and discussions about dieting. I began with a discussion about 'selfhood' in China and how scholars have often described selves in China as 'relational' and 'context dependent.' This, I suggested, had implications for how scholars dealt with food in the Chinese context. I then showed how the Chinese women I knew had a working concept of self that was just as personal and embodied as it was for the expat women. But, this is not to say that the understandings and experiences of the Chinese and Western women were the same or that they were all working with a cultural understanding of individual psyches. In fact, they had quite

drastically different ideas about who they were and how their bodies—or embodied experiences—were integral to selfhood, a topic to which I now turn.

In addition to the large literature describing culturally particular notions of selfhood in China, there is also recent work describing the emergence of new forms of 'inner selfhood' in China, linked to the current economic system (crudely described with terms like 'neoliberalism' or 'late-capitalism') and the rise of consumerism (see, for example, Kipnis 2012; Liu 2002; Kleinmen et al 2011; Morris 2002; Rofel 2007).[70] And although most of this work omits a discussion about bodies, Judith Farquhar (2002) and Lisa Rofel (2007) both describe the way in which inner selves in China are 'naturalized' in embodied desires. In concluding this chapter, I'd like to draw attention to how my ethnographic material speaks to their work.

Judith Farquhar (2002) begins her book with a quote from *Mencius*, a fourth century BC philosopher: 食色性也, *shi se xing ye*, which translates to "Appetite for food and sex is nature" (2002:1). As she explains, the quote comes from an exchange between Mencius and his disciple Gaozi, where Gaozi is asking about the difference between benevolence (*ren*) and righteousness (*yi*) and whether either is intrinsic to humans. Mencius uses appetites for food and sex as an example of intrinsic and universal aspects of the human condition, to which he adds benevolence. Righteousness, on the other hand, is held to originate outside of the self. Farquhar is interested in why this ancient truism is quoted so often in the contemporary moment of China. She contends that within the

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[70] For example, Morris (2002) describes how an emerging obsession with basketball is related to the notion of a 'real' self that can be fulfilled through the market and consumer desires; Kleinman et al (2011) describe the 'divided self,' wherein one's true feelings must be kept hidden in a politically volatile environment; Kipnis (2012), views the individual 'psyche' as an emerging part of modern China.

context of "socialism with market characteristics" and a growing consumer regime, "the

indulgence of appetites is a highly visible, even flamboyant, aspect of daily life" (2002:3).

One of the main tensions in Farquhar's text is navigating between meaningful

cultural difference and universal embodied experiences. She tries to do both but is caught

between the competing perspectives and is clearly burdened by the English language that

forces one to speak in terms of one or the other. In the end, she seems to decide that

cultural difference manifests at the level of certain bodily traits (habitus, attitudes) but

that underlying these are universal bodily experiences:

> It is one of the arguments of this book, made in part
> through a style of writing that evokes familiar aspects of
> bodily life (hunger, touching, fatigue, breathing, and so on),
> that where material life is concerned there is no 'Orient.'
> The daily habits, attitudes, and strategic dilemmas
> described here are extremely contingent on the events and
> conditions of Maoist and reform China; even so, I believe
> they can connect through the mundane to the experiences I
> share with my North American readers (2002:9).

She goes on to say: "I speak of modern China while hoping to build an

imaginative common ground on the shared pretext of bodies" (2002:10).

And while Farquhar is explicit about attempting to find a common ground

between the Chinese people she knew and her imagined North American readers, she also

implicitly assumes that appetites are equally naturalized as part of human nature for both

groups:

> Writing in a tradition that has shown that social and cultural
> differences run very deep, and that has made it possible to
> imagine daily lives that are radically different from those of
> North American readers, the ethnographer cannot
> comfortably resort to many self-evident or common-sense
> presumptions about what people normally want or do.
> Rather it is self-evidence, common sense, and normality
> themselves that need to be interrogated and challenged

(2002:2).

Thus what natives of China and America share is the fact that their embodied appetites are naturalized in a way that makes the scholar's job the explication or questioning of the taken-for-granted. "My first goal is to capture a certain historical moment at the level of bodies and their appetites, phenomena that are often thought not to vary much either historically or culturally" (2002:3). This, she contends, can be accomplished by historicizing and pluralizing embodiment. 'Culture' in this approach, similar to history, becomes the tool of the scholar to indicate the way in which the assumed 'naturalized' embodied experiences are actually contingent and not universal.

When examining Lisa Rofel's (2007) work on desire in 'neoliberal' China we also encounter an interest in how certain embodied traits are attributed—by locals—to a universal human nature. But whereas Farquhar linked this to philosophical interests, Rofel sees it as part of a globalizing neoliberal capitalism (2007:3). She begins in striking similarity to Farquhar: with an account of a Chinese person viewing embodied desires and the ability to express them as a universal (and thus non-cultural) 'natural' trait of humanity. In striking contrast to the active struggle of class consciousness, post-Mao embodied desires come to be defined through a logic of the 'natural.' According to Rofel's informants, they were now just being 'who they are'—gendered, desiring subjects—without the imposed constraints of the communist state.

> The allegory is an emancipatory story, holding out the
> promise that people can unshackle their innate human
> selves by emancipating themselves from the socialist state.
> To the extent that the state recedes, people will be free to
> 'have' their human natures" (Rofel 1999: 217-8).

Rofel describes her project as inquiring into how such selfhood is created. She

contrasts her approach with other Americans:

> American commentators imagine Chinese people as
> casting off socialism to find their true inner selves—
> whether sexual, possessive, or otherwise cosmopolitan.
> Rather than begin with such naturalizing assumptions, I
> ask instead just how these inner selves come into being
> (2007:6).

What is interesting is the similarity between Rofel's imagined American readers and the emergent Chinese narratives she is describing: both assume embodied desires are 'natural' meaning rooted in a dimension that is non-cultural and universal. For Rofel (and Farquhar, to some extent), the similarity derives from a common economic system: as China moves towards consumer capitalism, Chinese selves are becoming more like American selves: inner and naturalized.

Rofel, then, and very much in line with Farquhar, views her work as making visible the way in which common sense is being naturalized for her Chinese informants by taking into account culture and history. As Rofel describes,

> But rather than measure China's experiences against an
> abstract model of neoliberalism (have they arrived at the
> 'real' version of neoliberalism yet?) or a transhistorical
> figure of desire (have they learned how to have pleasure
> yet?)…we might best understand those experiences as
> historically and culturally situated (2007:7).

Her task, then, is to question the assumption that there is a monolithic and totalizing force of neoliberalism and instead portray the myriad ways in which "historical processes and heterogeneity of global practices [are] fostered in the name of neoliberal capitalism" (2007:2). And, by doing so, she is able to illustrate how what appears as 'natural' to her Chinese informants is actually power at work.

In sum, Farquhar and Rofel both position their work as illustrating how *even those*

things taken for granted at a bodily level are culturally and historically produced. And while I agree that this is indeed the case, I think their work is premised on an untenable assumption that is founded on a Foucault-inspired attention to power: that power 'naturalizes' (renders immutable). It is thus in moments of naturalization that we can see power at work. And then our scholarship, by making visible such power, becomes a means through which to challenge it. Culture, always paired with history, becomes the tool through which the scholar can illustrate what the natives cannot see. And in this way they both follow a long tradition in anthropology, as outlined by Bourdieu, that embodied culture (habitus) is 'history turned into nature' (1977:78).[71]

As I see it, there are two issues that trouble the assumption that power 'naturalizes.' First, it renders the scholarly position as the only site not clouded by false consciousness (see Chapter 3 for a more lengthy discussion of this). Second, and more pertinent to this discussion, it erases the possibility of cultural difference in the realm of inner selfhood and embodied experiences. But when comparing the cravings of the expat women I knew to my Chinese informants' notion of *tizhi* and being 'used to' a food, it becomes clear that embodied experiences were not naturalized as part of inner selfhood to the same degree for these two groups of women. In fact, although being used to a food was clearly understood through embodied sensations (being full, able to concentrate), these characteristics were understood to be created through continued and habitual eating of a certain food. And, furthermore, although this was seen as an important indicator of who one is, it was never assumed to be essential or unchanging. This is not to suggest that selfhood was less 'inner' in nature; it was just less essentialized by being located in

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[71] This is also exemplified in the "eating power" quote about rare animals from the last chapter, from Liu 2002:58.

an ever-changing bodily-self. Thus balancing one's *tizhi* had nothing to do with figuring out or returning to an original or authentic state of bodily-self, but instead hinged upon being able to read the body's signals (reflecting its current state and context) correctly to then eat accordingly. The expat women, on the other hand, relied very much on an essentialized (unchanging and deriving its virtue from being authentic) reading of selfhood through their embodied cravings. For the Western women, bodies were the site of the 'really real' because they were viewed as outside the influence of humans. Even if something changed—for instance Sophie's new-found like of Indian food—it was assumed to be indicative not of historically and socially produced selfhood but of the ability to find out who one 'really is' apart from social influences. And while other cravings come and go—Emily's iron craving or Kate's comfort foods, for example—and are thus 'historical,' these are typically understood to be reflecting changes that are 'biological' and body-based, not socially determined. These cravings—and their implications for selfhood—are thus rooted in biology in ways different from the way tizhi mixes biology and psychology. I contend, then, that the differences between these two groups of women allow us to see that it is not just bodies, embodied experiences, and inner selfhood that are culturally constituted but also the degree to which embodied experiences come to be understood as an essential part of an immutable and authentic 'inner self.'

Part IV
Analysis and Conclusions

Chapter Seven

Beauty Ideals, Bodily-Selves, and Social Identity

In the previous chapters I presented two different conceptualizations of bodily-selves that shaped eating practices for the Chinese and Western women I knew in Shanghai. I suggested that for the Western women, a register of cravings illustrated the way that selfhood was authenticated in a concept of 'body' that was unmodified and outside the reaches of society's influence. To be a good friend for the Western women meant helping each other police the extent to which 'society' influenced one's choices. For the Chinese women, on the other hand, concepts such as *tizhi* and being 'used to a food' indicated the ways that bodily-selves were always changing; there was no attachment to an 'original' or unmodified bodily-self and good friends offered advice and support needed to attain body ideals necessary for success in society. The Chinese women were accommodating social expectations, and 'incorporating' social influences, in contrast to the expat women who resisted them.

In this final chapter I consider the ways that those contrasting understandings of bodily-selves shaped the moral valence attached to modifying bodies, reflected in how the two groups of women discussed differences between China and the West and the beauty ideals prevalent in Shanghai. I use this final comparison to argue that the assumptions found in most literature about beauty—that the unmodified body is a privileged site for engaging with the world and that 'naturalized' bodily differences are more likely to be seen as bases of social inequality than socially produced differences—are based on a culturally particular matrix of understandings about bodies, nature, and power.

Individuals, Society, and Group Identities

In addition to being skinny, there were two other beauty ideals in Shanghai that garnered attention: big eyes and white skin. When discussing such ideals, the Western women I knew were deeply troubled by them for (mainly) two reasons: First, running very much parallel to their understandings of cravings, they associated certain physical traits—skin color, shape of eyes, eye color, face structure, for example—with personal identity. Importantly, the traits they most associated with individual identity were the ones they saw as being the most permanent and difficult to change; they conceptualized such traits as having an 'original' and unmodified form. As such, in their critiques of the beauty ideals in Shanghai, they often discussed what 'could' and 'could not' change about bodies. For example, after attempting—and failing—to find a body lotion that didn't contain a whitening agent, Emily and I had the following exchange:

> "Whitening products are so annoying. I just want a lotion that moisturizes my skin. Why do they all have to have stuff to whiten it? I mean, that stuff doesn't actually change your skin color. You can't *really* change your skin color anyway."
>
> "What do you mean?"
>
> "Well, skin color is skin color. It is something you're born with. Changing it with products is artificial. As soon as you stop using them it goes back to its natural color. These products are just a ploy to get people to keep buying them. Anyway, why do they want to be white? I wish they could just be happy with who they are."

For Emily, one's 'natural' skin color was what you had when you 'did nothing' to it. Doing 'nothing' typically meant sitting inside (i.e. away from the sun) and not using any products. And she associated this unmodified original form of skin color, in this case, with who one 'is.' Again, much like cravings in the preceding chapter, unmodifiable

bodily traits were, for Emily, fundamental to authentic selfhood. Not surprisingly, then, she saw wanting to change those traits as a denial of one's 'natural' self, a morally troubling bowing to social pressures.

Figure 23: An advertisement for face lotion with a whitening agent

Figure 24: Another ad for a skin whitening product

The second way that these beauty ideals were troubling for the Western women

was that they saw them as being based on a Caucasian body type (i.e. racialized) and thus

thought they were inappropriate for the context of China. In fact, it was taken for granted

by these women that the desire for big eyes and white skin was an indication that Chinese

women wanted to look Western. For example, when discussing the recent trend in China

for double eyelid surgery a procedure that produces a fold in the eyelid, making eyes

appear larger (see image 25), a frequent comment was: "It is so sad that they go to such

lengths to look Western. I think Asian eyes are beautiful. Why can't they just be happy

with who they are?" Again, for the Western women, 'who one is' was attached to a

concept of an unmodified body.
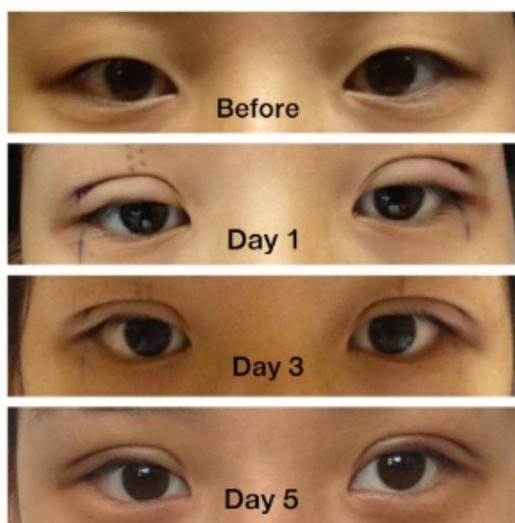
Figure 25: An image, common around the city and in magazines, illustrating the enlarging effects of double eyelid surgery.

The Western women often attributed the oppressive nature of beauty ideals to the

way that the powerful imposed their 'naturalized' standards on the rest of the world:

globalizing beauty ideals of Caucasian bodies illustrated this explicitly. These women

typically pointed to a version of false-consciousness as their proof that beauty ideals were

insidious: it was thus 'sad' that Chinese women were being made to think that their

'Asian' bodies weren't as beautiful as Caucasian bodies. Tellingly for this discussion, when the Western women in Shanghai wanted to undermine the efficacy of beauty ideals, they almost always pointed to the fact that ideals *changed through time* and thus were not, in fact, 'natural:' As Sophie pointed out to me one day:

> "There's nothing naturally more beautiful about big eyes or white skin. In fact, beauty ideals have been changing throughout history. It used to be that fat was beautiful. Everyone wanted big hips and big breasts. Now skinny's in. Who knows what's coming next. I hope we go back to big butts."

For Sophie, invoking historical change in this context was seen as a legitimate way to critique beauty ideals, which she assumed derived their power from the fact that they were natural. Underlying this, then, is a twofold definition of 'nature:' on the one hand, what is natural is most authentic (i.e. unmodified bodily-selves). On the other hand, it is because nature is unchangeable that the appearance of things as 'natural' has undeserved power over people. For the Western women, the most effective way to undermine this was to illustrate change (through time).

Conceptually relevant for this discussion is the way these women understood bodily differences as being individual in nature and thus were deeply troubled when ascribed to group difference. Racialized beauty ideals were problematic since they made certain bodies—white ones, in this case—seem superior to Asian ones. By desiring big eyes and white skin, then, Chinese women weren't just denying selfhood, they were buying into the idea that 'race mattered,' something the Western women vehemently opposed. In fact, the Western women were opposed to any conceptual linkage between group identities and bodies, which they saw as the foundation for gendered and racial oppression. This sentiment was a merging of their ideas about bodily-selves, nature, and

power: Individual identity was predicated on an understanding of authentic and unmodified bodies; when coopted by 'society' or those in power, bodily differences were ascribed to group identities to produce naturalized inequality. These ideas were illustrated by the way that the Western women were especially sensitive to the way 'their bodies' were regarded in Shanghai. On the one hand, being a Westerner in Shanghai seemed to bring undo privilege: as Kate put it "having white skin means you can do just about anything you want." The Western women, unsurprisingly, were troubled by this white privilege and saw it as further evidence of a racialized hierarchy between Asian bodies and Western bodies. At the same time, they still felt that there was a male dominated power structure, a fact made clear in how they had to contend with beauty ideals. Thus although these women were highly invested in deciphering the physical attributes of selfhood, i.e. cravings, they were adamant that gendered or racial bodily differences shouldn't matter for determining one's social status.

These sentiments are remarkably similar to literature about beauty and body modifications in Western literature, in particular how the concept of 'nature' operates. On the one hand, similar to the Western women in Shanghai, scholars often utilize a feminist theoretical framework and thus take on a critical perspective of the gendered and racial aspects of the desire to be beautiful (Negrin, 2002; Banet-Weiser, 1999; Morgan, 1991; Balsamo, 1992, 1996; Hunter, 2005; Kaw, 1993). These scholars are concerned with the political consequences of the desire to be beautiful, especially when it has the form of body modification through procedures such as nose jobs, eyelid surgery, chin reconstruction, face lifts, liposuction, breast augmentation, etc. that make certain body ideals 'the norm'. Women who modify their bodies in permanent ways are seen as

victims of oppressive, idealized standards of beauty, which make physical appearance the most important part of the self. In addition, in the global context, they see the normalization of a certain kind of ideal face and body type as a racialized practice, in which the white Caucasian face and body type are the ideal (Balsamo, 1992; Hunter, 2005; Kaw,1993; Morgan, 1991). Again, according to these scholars, women are internalizing these hierarchies and thus reproducing inequalities through their actions. In these discussions of gendered and racial social hierarchies, the majority of the critiques of cosmetic surgery seem to rely on the assumption that the 'natural' body—the unadorned, unmodified body—is somehow more authentically able to represent agency and empowerment than the altered body. In other words, much like the Western women's understanding of bodily-selves, it is the authentic unmodified body that is given priority as a legitimate site for engaging with the world.

There is also another side of this literature that at first glance seems to present a radically different picture: body modification as a means of empowerment. But typically empowerment, in this literature, means illustrating that what was taken for granted as 'natural' could in fact change (and thus undermining it). The most well-known case of this is the French performance artist Orlan, who elected to undergo a variety of surgeries "that destabilize male-defined notions of idealized female beauty" (Hirschhorn 1996, as cited in Negrin 2002:31). Using surgical modification of bodies makes the point that beauty is artificial and constructed (Balsamo 1996). Similarly, Balsamo (1996) thinks that any use of cosmetic surgery undermines neo-romantic conceptions of the body as 'natural' and illustrates the body as changeable and artificial. This sentiment was echoed in Louis Schein's (1994) analysis of white skin in China:

> For those with enough money, the Western look could be had in the most intimate way—not simply by dangling a beeper from one's belt or by donning fishnet stockings and spike heels, but by cosmetic surgery, to amend the Asian body, deracializing it in some small measure to shorten the distance between 'us' and 'them' (Schein 1994:148).

Following Mercer (1990) and Balsamo (1992), Schein understood cosmetic surgery as an empowering practice that enabled women to move beyond the impermeability of naturalized (i.e. bodily) gendered and racialized categories (Schein 1994:148).

Both sides of this literature—those who see body modifications as oppressive and those who deem it empowering—rely on a similar concept of nature: as that which is outside the realm of human influence. Thus when differences or categories are problematically 'naturalized,' the tool for undermining their efficacy is illustrating or engaging in *change*. Connecting this literature back to Shanghai, we can see important parallels between ideas about nature and bodies that are directly linked to the Western women's understandings of bodily selves; this, I contend, has implications for the way Western women (and the literature beauty and body modifications) assume an inherently problematic relationship between group identity and bodies.

The point, then, of this section has been to illustrate the way that understandings of bodily-selves as authenticated in unmodified bodies was conceptually important for the way the Western women engaged with beauty ideals. On the one hand, they were suspicious of any beauty ideal since it made people want to change their bodies and that would be a denial of the authentic self. On the other hand, racialized beauty ideals were especially problematic because they linked bodies to social identities, through which 'power' coopted the natural link between body and individual identity to create oppressive categories. In fact, according to the Western women, the problem with gender

and race was that they were bodily-based categories and they were adamant that their

social status should not be determined by bodily appearance (as professional women they

wanted to be judged on their individual qualifications, not their sex or race). One of the

most common complaints the Western women had about the Chinese women they knew

was that they didn't understand the 'politics of their bodies' as was evident in their

willingness to change their appearances based on racialized and gendered difference and

openly sought bodily-based improvements that would advance their careers.[72]

Nationality, History, and Power

Rather than representing a globalized homogenizing preference for Western

appearances (Featherstone 1991), the Chinese women I knew argued that ideals of beauty

in China were based on *national* preferences. They pointed out that if China really

wanted to be like the West, then they would share similar beauty ideals, which they do

not. They illustrated this by comparing the ideals of big eyes and white skin in China to

what they saw as common beauty preferences in the West: big mouths and tan skin. For

example, my friends would often contrast pictures of Asian movie stars in the United

States—Lucy Liu for example—with Chinese stars, such as Fan Bingbing. In most

images, Lucy Liu is portrayed with tan skin, 'Asian' style eyes, and a large smiling

mouth (see figure 1). This, they would point out, is what beautiful is in the U.S. Then

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[72] Clearly body modification practices are not limited to the context of China. In general, the Western women I knew were also dismayed by women in the Western world who sought to change their appearances, although they did not typically discuss beauty ideals in the West as racialized. Interestingly, women who do undergo cosmetic surgery in the U.S. often find themselves in a bind narrating selfhood: on the one hand, modifying their body undermines the authenticity of selfhood. On the other hand, their improved appearance is often described as a better indicator of self (see Gimlin 2000).

they would pull up a picture of Fan Binging, with large round eyes, a small mouth, and white skin (see figure 2). To them she was the epitome of beauty in China.

Figure 26: Lydia Liu's tan skin and large mouth illustrated to my Chinese friends American's beauty preferences[73]

Figure 27: Fan Bingbing's large eyes and white skin illustrated China's beauty preferences[74]

In contrast to the Western women, who understood power to operate through

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[73] Image Source: http://deadline.com/2014/05/lucy-liu-to-co-host-first-huading-film-awards-show-in-hollywood-on-june-1-736020/

[74] Image Source: http://finance.yahoo.com/news/fan-bingbing-made--21-million-last-year--who-is-she--193633785.html

making certain things appear 'natural' and outside the influence of humans, the Chinese women thought being powerful meant explicitly shaping the world around you. Or, put another way, it was obvious (and not that troubling) that being able to *influence* the world around you is what power is about. Thus when discussing beauty standards these women often were resolute in illustrating the differences in beauty ideals between China and the West as a means to suggest that China was a rising power with its own ability to create standards. These women often resented the fact that Westerners think they want to look like them: "Westerners think everything is about them. We have our own beauty standards here!"

Much like my discussion of the desire to be thin, the Chinese women I knew were completely untroubled by pursuing beauty ideals, including big eyes and white skin. Towards the end of my time in Shanghai, as I was starting to make sense of some of these differences, I asked Mei (again) if she would get double eyelid surgery. Mei, noticeably losing patience with me, exclaimed: "I already told you—of course I would! If I thought it would help me I would do it. But I've already got a great job and a supportive husband. There's nothing for me to get from it right now." Another friend echoed: "I already have double eyelids so there's nothing for me to gain in that procedure. If there comes a time when triple eyelids are popular, I'd do it!"

There was, however, one procedure that most of the Chinese people I knew were opposed to: stapling the stomach in order to lose weight. In fact almost unanimously, the Chinese women considered this procedure as 'going too far.' This, I contend, has to do with the fact that individual and group identity for these women was linked to the stomach. Indeed, much as food had the ability to alter selfhood and personality, the

Chinese women I knew often rooted differences between Chinese and Westerners in bodily dispositions attributed to food choice. For example, a commonly stated difference between Chinese and Westerners was the ability of Westerners to eat/drink cold foods without any repercussions. A story told to me by almost all the Chinese women I met in Shanghai (in different contexts and attributing it to different sources) was how Western women could drink ice water immediately after giving birth. And they found it refreshing! As Mei put it, "Honestly, I would die if I did that. Die." Our friends all agreed that it was a particularity of Westerners to be able to handle such a cooling effect when qi was already depleted.[75]

Similarly, another friend, Xueping, narrated a related difference to me one day after I attended her yoga class. Xueping taught yoga at a community center three times a week for housewives who wanted "to get out of the house and lose some weight" and she invited me to join the classes. After a day of strenuous stretching, we were walking out of class and she said, "Today must have been really hard for you." I nodded (it had been obvious based on my performance in the class). She continued: "It's because Chinese and Westerners are so different. Chinese are flexible and Westerners are strong." I asked her why she thought that was the case. "It's because of what we eat. Rice and noodles make us flexible; meat makes you strong and hard. The biggest difference between Chinese and Westerners is that our stomachs are different (*women zui da de qubie shi women de wei butong.*)"

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[75] Loss of blood and qi during childbirth has a cooling effect on the body and weakens it. Drinking something cold right afterwards is considered especially dangerous to imbalance.

On the one hand, the Western women saw their own unmodified and biologically given body as the basis for individual identity, but gender or racial identity as a culturally constructed hierarchy imposed upon their bodies. On the other hand, for the Chinese women, individual and group differences were produced through similar means: they were cultivated in bodies through time based on eating practices. Differences between Chinese and Westerners were understood as being bodily in nature, then, but that didn't mean those differences were assumed to be 'natural.' In fact, the bodily differences attributed to national difference by the Chinese women were almost always historical, mirroring their understandings of bodily-selves as historically produced. It was these historically produced bodily differences—rather than surface ones like skin color, hair color, or facial structure—that were considered more difficult to change.

The consequences of this was that in contrast to the Western women who became sensitive to the political dimensions of their bodies, the Chinese women I knew were able to enjoy a playfulness with their bodies that they felt was noticeably absent in the Western women. Thus whereas the Western women critiqued the Chinese women for not understanding the 'politics of their bodies' the Chinese women thought the Western women took their bodies 'too seriously.'

Conclusion

This situated comparison of Chinese and Western women in Shanghai allows us to see how 'cultural difference' articulates with a political, economic, and social context to shape experiences. Both the Chinese and Western women I knew in Shanghai were experiencing the stresses of a consumer-driven mega-city where individual responsibility

(for success, happiness, and bodily health) was an integral part of daily life. Based on the propositions of Popenoe (2005) (individual responsibility for cultivating identity produces an anxiety in Western women about beauty ideals) and Bordo (1993) (capitalism creates a tension between being a good consumer and producer that maps onto the body) then, we might have expected the Chinese women to be experiencing a tension between selfhood and bodies that paralleled the Western women. But, as I demonstrated above, this was decidedly not the case. In fact, the Chinese women I knew were perfectly happy to modify their bodies to meet societal expectations. This, I contend, was at least partly because their way of understanding bodily-selves—based on a system of medical knowledge where the body is constantly being modified for pragmatic purposes—articulated with an iteration of late capitalism that served to integrate bodily improvements into the larger discourse of self-improvement.

Although the idea that 'culture' articulates with political economy in locally specific ways is certainly not new, this notion is rarely applied to scholarship on body modifications. In fact, within academic discussions of beauty there tends to be a focus on agency and a polarization between views of body modification as practices that objectify and demean (see, for example, Bordo 1993; Hunter 2005; Morgan 1991) or as practices that empower (e.g. Balsamo 1996; Banet-Weiser 1999; Davis 1995; Miller 2006). These arguments tend to focus on whether the practices reinscribe the existing gender and racial hierarchy or are a means by which individuals manipulate for their own benefit the existing structure. In almost all of this work, liberation and individual agency is pitted against societal conformity and the 'natural' body is privileged over the modified body.

Thus in striking similarity to the Western women I knew in Shanghai, the authentic unmodified body is given priority as a legitimate site for engaging with the world.

Comparing the practices and attitudes about eating and losing weight in Shanghai engages with the complex entanglements of local theories of difference, academic concerns about the epistemological production of those differences, and the politics that is fundamental to both projects. On the one hand, by using local categories of difference as a means to structure the comparison, we are able to highlight how embodied differences of 'China' and 'the West' are manifesting in contemporary Shanghai, without relying on abstract or transhistoric categories. On the other hand, comparing these local instantiations of cultural difference with academic discussions about body modifications enables a theoretical reflexivity, revealing the ways in which this scholarship often relies on a particular cultural understanding of the body's place in the social world.

Within the context of globalizing capitalism (as a universalizing force), scholars contend that a particular understanding of 'nature' is emerging. In fact, according to Rofel (2007), that is exactly what neoliberalism is about: "every nation state must do its (properly differentiated) part for the universally imagined plan to produce a *new human nature*" (2007:3, italics added). Within this context, scholars often point to the way that bodily differences are being 'naturalized,' drawing on a tradition in anthropology that views the body as a particularly salient site for producing inequality in a capitalist system (see, for example, Butler 1993; Foucault 1979). As I illustrated in this dissertation, the Western women in Shanghai shared with these scholars the idea that nature—as static and outside the influence of humans—is inherently more difficult to change than 'culture.' When ascribed to personal identity it authenticates one's individuality; when

ascribed to group identity (i.e. gender, race, ethnicity) such 'naturalized bodily differences' can be used to reproduce inequality. As became clear in this dissertation, the Chinese women also understood identity as being linked to bodily-selves. However, the bodily differences that were most important to them—for both individual and group identity—were those cultivated through time. Thus the Chinese women were operating with a cultural understanding of bodies that allowed them to understand their identity as bodily and yet not naturalized or essentialized. In contrast to scholars who view 'neoliberalism' or 'late-capitalism' as a context in which 'bodies' (as a taken-for-granted concept) become vulnerable to social differentiation, then, this ethnographic example illustrated the ways in which culturally variant notions of bodies and selves shape the moral valences attached to and the experiences of bodily difference.

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NOTES

ⁱ 阴虚体质，内热体质，脾湿体质

ⁱⁱ为什么我总是游离与人群之外，总是觉被孤立？

为什么他（她）总是不懂我的心，他（她）的意见总是和我向左？

我已经没有力气和他（她）继续争吵了。

我已经很努力，为什么在工作上还是业绩平平呢？

最近老板对我的态度似乎有点儿不对劲，是我什么地方做错了吗？

不要再怀疑自己，是你对自己缺乏正确的认知，对他人缺乏真正的了解。

真是每个人的不同体质决定了形形色色的性格，最终决定了每个人的处事方式。

不是习惯决定命运，不是性格决定命运，而是体质决定命运！

ⁱⁱⁱ九种体质营养方案

^{iv} "我们通常说的体质，是指人群中的个体由于先天禀赋，后天生说方式，生存环境等多种因素的影响，在生长发育和衰老过程中，在机体形态结构，功能活动，物质代谢，心理活动等方面固有的相对稳定的特征。先天禀赋是体质形成的基础，后天因素测决定着体制的形成和转变。生活环境，生活习惯，饮食，疾病，药物等因素都属于后天因素，其中饮食对于体质的形成和转变有着重要的影响"（5）。

^v "众所周知身体发肤受之父母。其实，人的体质基础也同样来自于父母的遗传，但研究发现，除了先天因素对于体质的形成响外，人们日常的饮食，所处环境，情绪，药物，疾病等都是改变和影响体制的因素"（7）。

^{vi} 1=没有；2=很少；3=有时；4=经常；5=总是

^{vii} 1. 您手脚发凉吗？

2. 您胃脘部，背部或腰膝部怕冷吗？

3. 您感到怕冷，衣服比别人穿得多吗？

4. 您比一般的人不耐寒冷（冬天的寒冷，夏天的冷空调，电扇，等）吗？

5. 您比别人容易患感冒吗？

6. 您吃（喝）凉的东西会感到不舒服或者怕吃（喝）凉东西吗？

7. 您受凉或吃（喝）凉的东西后，容易腹泻（拉肚子）吗？

^{viii} 1. 您感到胸闷或腹部胀满吗？

2. 你感到身体不轻松或不爽快吗？

3. 您腹部肥厚松软吗？

4. 您有额部油脂分泌多的现象吗？

5. 您上眼脸比别人肿（轻微隆起）吗？

6. 您嘴里有黏黏的感觉吗？

7. 您平时痰多，特别是咽喉部总感到有痰堵着吗？

8. 您舌苔厚腻或有舌苔厚厚的感觉吗？

^{ix} 1. 您容易疲乏吗？

2. 您容易气短（呼吸短促，接不上气）吗？

3. 您容易心慌吗？

4. 您容易头晕或站起时晕眩吗？

5. 您比别人容易患感冒吗？

6. 您喜欢安静，懒得说话吗？

7. 您说话声音无力吗？

8. 您稍增加活动量就容易出虚汗吗？

ˣ 1. 平和体质: 生活中我们会遇到这样一些朋友，他们不胖不瘦，神采奕奕，强壮有力，一看就是个健康的人。现代人常有失眠，焦虑在他们身上完全看不到，吃得好，睡得香，每天都乐观向上，还很少生病，一年也就得点感冒，有的人多喝点白开水，感冒就好了，连药都不用吃。拥有这样体质的朋友实在是幸运儿，因为他们属于最健康的平和体质。不过这种幸运也要靠自己珍惜，很多平和体质的朋友任性妄为，熬夜，酗酒，吸烟，劳累过度，久而久之就毁掉了自己的健康体质，转化成了偏颇体质。

2. 阴虚体质：由于体内的津液精血等物质亏少，出现了以相关组织器官失养和身体内热为主要症状的体质状态，就是我们所说的阴虚体质。很多朋友长得很瘦，却是个"火热"的人，手脚心热，脸上烘热，口干，咽干，鼻子干，仿佛身体里德水分被过多地蒸发出丢了。这类朋友性格也很有特点，说话办事容易着急，做什么事情总希望能一蹴而就，吃饭恨不能一口吃完，工作恨不得一口气全做完，"罗马不是一天建成的"他们明白，但是就是做不到心平气和，有条不紊地境界，无论做什么都喜欢风风火火。这类朋友之所以会出现这些特征，就是因为身体里缺水了，水是生命之源，缺少了之后身体自然会表现出这样那样的问题，最后把自己弄成了阴虚体质。

3. 阳虚体质：中医讲究"阴阳平衡"，如果我们身体阳气不足，体质就会偏颇成阳虚体质，这种体质以身体出现虚寒现象为主要特征。常言道"万物生长靠太阳"，人类作为自然界中的一员当然也不能例外，如果我们的身体里阳气不够，就会怕冷，手脚冰凉，贪睡，吃点凉的东西就腹胀，腹痛，腹泻，脸色很差，也不喜欢运动，给人懒洋洋的感觉，小陈的感觉。曾经遇到一个患者，小姑娘人很漂亮，就是总怕冷，据她对我讲，她到了夏天还会穿毛衣，就这样还不敢吹风扇，开空调，看着街头别人穿着轻盈飘逸的连衣裙，火辣时尚的短裙，自己只有羡慕嫉妒的份儿，独自在角落里"望裙兴叹"。其实，这个小姑娘就是典型的阳虚体质，如果不进行仔细调理，体质会更加偏颇（29-30）。

ˣⁱ 4. 气虚体质：如果人身体内的元气不足了，就会出现气息低弱，机体和脏腑功能低下等症状，这就是我们所说的气虚体质.大家一起爬楼梯，有的朋友气定神闲地到了楼顶，有的朋友则爬得上气不接下气，到了楼上好像半条命都丢了。同样是加班，别人回家好好睡一觉，第二天照样精神百倍，有些朋友却不行，几天都恢复不了，给人感觉他每天都疲惫不堪。这种总是感觉很累，气不够用的朋友就是典型的气虚体质，他们还很容易出汗，甚至连吃个饭都可以汗流夹背，经常搞得自己狼狈

不堪，耐力也差，还总是被感冒折腾（30）。

5. 痰湿体质：身体里的水液滞留，导致了痰和湿凝聚在一起，由此形成的黏滞重浊体质状态就是我们所说的痰湿体质。"痰"是身体里水，液，津代谢障碍所形成的病理产物，"湿"则分为外湿和内湿，生活居住环境的潮湿属于外湿，内湿是由于消化系统运作不良导致体内津液停滞不化而形成的，"痰"和"湿"一起发力，就导致了痰湿体质的形成。痰湿体质很容易辨认，属于这类体质的人给人的第一印象是腹大腰圆，油光满面，痰湿体质多见于胖人。不仅如此，痰湿体质也是"富贵病"的重灾区，高血病，高血脂，糖尿病患者多是痰湿体质，可以这样说，痰湿体质为"富贵病"提供了土壤和温床（30-31）。

6. 血瘀体质：血瘀体质指的是体内有血液运行不畅的潜在倾向或者淤血内阻的病理基础，并表现出一系列外在征象的体质状态。中医里有句话："通则不痛，痛则不通"，血液淤滞住，不畅通了，我们的身体就会表现出各种不适。不小心撞到硬物上会出现"鬼拧青"，脸上出现"钞票纹"，舌头颜色偏暗，有时候还有淤斑，脸上容易长斑，女性朋友则会被痛经折磨得心神不宁，这些都是身体在用自己的话言告诉我们血瘀体质已经找上门了。

7. 湿热体质：青春痘本来是年经人的专利，长痘痘是青春无敌的标志，不过现在却不是这么回事了，放眼看看身边的人，很多四五十岁得朋友液长着"青春洋溢"的痘痘，战"痘"的队伍里出现了越来越多中年朋友的身影。年经人处于特殊的生理时期，长痘痘是正常的生理现象，可是大龄朋友也摆脱不了痘痘的纠缠是怎么回事呢？这都是湿热体质在作怪，它以湿热内蕴为主要特征，我们看到的就是满脸痘痘，口舌生疮。很多朋友长年累月被口腔溃疡折磨，吃药，敷药，吃维生素，作用都不大，这其实也是温热体质在捣鬼。

8. 气郁体质：顾名思义，气郁体质就是因为长期情志不畅，气机郁滞而形成的以性格内向，情绪不稳定，忧郁脆弱，多疑为主要表现的体质状态。忧郁之美，美则美矣，却美得很病态，美得让人心伤。就拿忧郁之美的巅峰人物林黛玉来说吧，自《红楼梦》问世以来，这位"态生两靥之愁，娇袭一身之病。泪光点点，娇喘微微"的林妹妹不知赚了多少痴男怨女的眼泪。她心眼儿小，生性多疑，动不动就生闷气，痛哭，用现在时髦的话来说就是心理不阳光，这就是典型的气郁体质。气郁久不了不仅胃口不好，失眠，健忘，悲观，失落，还会与百合病，脏躁，梅核气等疾病纠缠不清。

9. 特禀体质：特禀体质的朋友属于"特殊"的人裙，我们讲究科学饮食的时候都会提倡大家不偏食，不挑食，可是对于具有特禀体质的这类"特殊"朋友，我们则会建议吃东西要合理"挑食"。这是因为特禀体质表现一种特异性体质，是由于先天禀赋不足，禀赋遗传等因素造成的一种体质缺陷，最常见的特禀体质是过敏体质。春天百花争艳，大家争着赏花踏青，特禀体质的朋友却唯恐避之不及，因为他们对花粉过敏；海鲜味道一绝，大家大快朵颐的时候特禀体质的朋友碰也不敢碰，因为海鲜也

是他们的过敏原。过敏原防不胜防，要想改变被动挨打的局面，特禀体质的朋友只有一个方法可以以不变应万变，那就是努力改变自己的体质，过敏的土壤消失了，过敏自然不会盯上你。