

Displacement, Differentiation, Difference: The Reproduction of Culture and Space in Globalized China

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Photo: *Business Week*

One of the most engaging and productive debates on globalization that are of interest to people both inside and outside academia concerns the survival and identity of local or indigenous cultures under the impact of the global flows of capital, information, ideology, values, and technology. Some critics maintain that globalization essentially means the unification or Americanization of the world's culture; some insist that globalization is not necessarily the story of cultural homogenization or Americanization but instead encourages and creates cultural diversity and protean difference. There is a general anxiety behind the debate: the fear that the ongoing processes of globalization are threatening to level or erase various historically formed local cultures. Each side in this particular debate seems to be resistant or opposed to the perceived prospect that indigenous or local cultures will disappear. Difference and differentiation always promise emancipation from a certain cultural, ideological or political hegemony, and over the past three decades the different and the local have been celebrated worldwide as the loci of counterhegemonic agency and praxis.

Actually, ever since its advent, modernity has been a contradictory process with regard to difference. On the one hand, modernity champions the creative and rebellious

spirit which is always at pains to "[break] with the world it has hitherto inhabited and imagined" (Hegel 6); on the other, its instrumental reason and thorough-going rationalization relentlessly veer towards the standardization and unification of social and economic life, strangling the ideals of freedom, individualism, and autonomy upheld since the Enlightenment. The conflict between the desire for difference and its ruthless negation becomes exacerbated in the postmodern age. It is arguable that, over the past few decades, the desire for difference, for an alternative modernity, and for indigenous sovereignty, has led to the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc, the emergence of smaller nation states, the coming into being of various political, ethnic, and interpretive solidarities, and manifest heterotopias in previously homogenized societies. At the same time, however, postmodern capitalism is evolving into a global system, catapulting into different areas of the world what Leslie Sklair calls "transnational cultural and ideological practices" (62), threatening to eradicate cultural, social and economic differences of the local, subjugating nations and individuals to one singular orbit of modernity. To secure an enabling mapping of globalization, one needs to keep in view the two contradictory aspects of capitalist globalization and ascertain at what levels it differentiates and at what levels it homogenizes.

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai argues that electronic media and migration have caused an epochal rupture between the modern and the postmodern, creating transnational, transterritorial, and translocal solidarities of taste, opinion, and pleasure, and radically weakening the control of the nation-state over subjectivities and discourses that are decentered, mobile, and deterritorialized in nature. Globalization is not the story of homogenization; modernity at large is modernity fragmented, differentiated and uncontainable by definitive boundaries. Part of the implications of Appadurai's notion of modernity at large seems to be that vast numbers of historically formed cultural and ethnic localities and identities constantly brought into contact and conflict with one another by media and migration have created a stampede of uncontrollable micro- and macro-modernities. Like the figure of Derridean difference, the trope of modernity is susceptible to infinite splitting or protean transformation. Appadurai's conception of globalization as a process of radical fragmentation or differentiation of modernity recalls Jan Nederveen Pieterse's assertion that globalization, a process of hybridization which gives rise to a global melange, constitutes "the framework for the amplification and diversification of 'sources of the self'" (45, 52). In Pieterse's view, "there are as many modes of globalization as there are globalizing agents and dynamics or impulses" (46). Appadurai's and Pieterse's definitions of globalization are somewhat echoed by John Gray, who argues that capitalist modernity "does not inaugurate a universal civilization, as both Smith and Marx thought it must. Instead it allows the growth of indigenous kinds of capitalism, diverging from the ideal free market and from each other. It creates regimes that achieve modernity by renewing their own cultural traditions, not by imitating Western countries. There are many modernities and as many ways of failing to be modern" (195).

We find the view of globalization as a story of fragmentation and differentiation shared by these critics illuminating and misleading at the same time. For although differentiation and fragmentation unmistakably constitute certain levels of the empirical

reality of the world today, and the desire for difference informs various kinds of counterhegemonic projects across the world, there is a risk of glossing over the Zeitgeist of capitalism if difference and differentiation are overemphasized. For what globalization globalizes is the economic and cultural logic of global capitalism itself. Among those critics is a shared determination to refute cultural homogenization or unification and a shared desire for difference. However, to see globalization primarily as a process enabling differential modernities is to underestimate the levelling forces of capitalist globalization.

The twentieth century was dominated by passions for alternatives to capitalism and for alternative capitalisms. The end of the Cold War put an end to the first pursuit: the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist bloc seems to have made the world decide that socialism has totally failed and will never work again. Intellectual and academic attention then turned to focus on the more relevant and urgent question of the possibility of alternatives to capitalism. Aware of the irresistible processes of capitalist globalization and apprehensive of the impact of consumerist culture-ideology on non-Western cultural practices, theorists and critics of globalization begin to imagine alternative capitalisms which supposedly allow former third- and second-world countries to be modernized technologically and economically without being affected by what is regarded as the depthless, hedonist postmodern mass culture that has dominated the West for a few decades. Ultimately the globalization debate is reduced to one big question: can there be differential local cultures in a world characterized by economic and technological globalization? Critics like Fredric Jameson and Leslie Sklair have articulated strong doubts about this proposition, for in their view, capitalist globalization necessarily disseminates a global capitalist consumerism, the culture-ideology of which "both neutralizes and reinterprets cultural traditions in a way that stifles popular opposition."¹ Within global capitalism, the distinction between economics and culture has disappeared, for "commodification today is also an aestheticization."² If it is true that economics and culture are inextricably intermingled with each other in the consumerist age, then is it possible for any geopolitical space to maintain a divergent indigenous culture while immersed in capitalist economic productions?

True, digital telecommunications have thoroughly deterritorialized and decentered our geographical sense of the globe; electronic media and migrations have created vast numbers of borderless, transnational and transmigrant communities, diasporic, mobile and uncontrollable. Global flows of commodities, information, finance, biopower, images, and technology have triggered no end of displacement, differentiation, and hybridization. Western spatial, commercial, discursive, political, and ideological language is transported into non-Western spaces; non-Western or indigenous cultural resources, craftsmanship, and images are consumed in the West. Theory, ideology, and technology are translated, and transplanted. Spaces, images, and concepts are displaced and differentiated. However, all these displaced and differentiated ideas, images and commodities, one can argue, oftentimes amount to little more than manifestations of the same economic and cultural logic. In *The Seeds of Time*, Jameson remarks that, in the postmodern age, the same persists through absolute difference, and absolute change equals stasis. Identity and difference are no longer oppositions; they constitute an

antinomy. Global difference today is the same as global identity, for difference today has become standard or standardized in that difference is being (re)produced uniformly and standardly (Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* 17-19). Differentiation is not equivalent to difference and differentiation does not necessarily create difference. This is the paradox of postmodern globalization. For, as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have pointed out, global capitalism rules through strategies of displacement, differentiation, mobility, and fragmentation. It feeds on difference, for "[m]arketing itself is a practice based on differences, and the more differences that are given, the more marketing strategies can develop. . . . Every difference is an opportunity" (152). If global capitalism deploys and depends on the strategy of differentiation to penetrate the world market, then what it globalizes is, among other things, ultimately consumerist culture-ideology and capitalist contradictions. We argue here that displacement and differentiation in the age of capitalist globalization do not lead to difference but breed sameness at the level of consumerist culture-ideology, which is reproduced wherever capital goes. We present this argument through the optic of the reproduction of Western cultural spaces in contemporary China.

In "The End of Production," Jean Baudrillard notes that the postmodern age is at the end of production and everywhere one encounters reproduction, a process that is no longer forward-looking but a looking unto itself. Labour is no longer productive, but purely and simply reproductive, for production today has passed from the commodity law of value to the structural law of value and what is produced no longer coincides with real needs of society. Both consumption and production have become "a process unto itself, pursued for itself alone" (*The Revenge of the Crystal* 113). When the medium has become the message and the McLuhanist "cool" signs are manipulated with indifferent ease and aloofness, semiotic or linguistic production only reproduces itself and the rules of the game. In much the same way, money comes to be defined by the "indeterminate fluidity of structural manipulation of signs" as well (115), for money no longer serves as a medium of commodity circulation but has become circulation itself. According to Baudrillard, the most dismaying instance of social reproduction is located in the human sciences in which "*no one [is] productive anymore, but simply reproductive (that those who [teach] science and culture [are] themselves bearers of the general reproduction of the system)*" (122-23). Since the 1960s one sector of society after another has been "falling from the rank of *productive forces* to the status of *reproductive forces* pure and simple" (123). In all the above-mentioned Baudrillardian registers of reproduction, one detects a general indifferent, irresponsible, passive effort of simulation, which ironically betrays a self-referential proliferation of the self, which ultimately goes to reproducing the present, the hegemonic system, precluding the vision of a utopian future or what Raymond Williams calls alternative or oppositional culture. What Baudrillard's structuralist analysis of postmodern cultural and social production shows is not only that all is reproduction, but that there are no longer places for the production of genuine difference. What goes under the name of differentiation is more often than not a proliferation of the same. It is in this Baudrillardian sense of "reproduction" that we contend that wherever capitalist globalization is taking space differentiation is a mere strategy to create market opportunities, and that the social and economic modernization in erstwhile third-world countries can be best taken as reproduction of culture and space

or consumerist culture-ideology prevalent in the centres of capitalist globalization. As mentioned previously, we base our argument on our lived experiences and our observations of globalized China over the past two decades.

To talk about China's engagement with globalization is certainly first of all to speak to the displacement of the Chinese from their traditional ethnoscapas, technoscapas, financescapas, mediascapas, and ideoscapas, to speak to their geographical, social, and cultural, and institutional deterritorialization. Global capital is penetrating every social and political space, and China is becoming "a fully capitalised society" that has been completely brought "into the global capitalist mode and relations of production (Wang 26). Never before have the Chinese been so awe-stricken by the West's perceived superiority in technology, economy and ideology, and never before have they been so anxious to give up their centuries-old cultural, ethical, and political legacy for the eternal now of consumerist jouissance and fulfilment. Global capitalism, unlike erstwhile forms of capitalism, is conquering China through multinational capital and through the complicity of its people's uncritical acceptance of Western culture. There is a general, multiple displacement and deterritorialization happening in China: Geographically, tens of millions of the population are moving from the country to the city, becoming the lumpenproletariat -- the mobile, shifting, homeless, placeless, and faceless *liumin* (migrant workers); tens of thousands of Chinese are immigrating to the West, and in both movements, the Chinese have finally cast off their centuries-old east-or-west-home-is-the-best ideology in choosing space over place, to borrow terms from I-fu Tuan, cosmos over hearth, freedom over security.³ Culturally, the Chinese find themselves radically shocked out of and displaced from their previous horizon of imagination and expectation, their previous modes of feeling and representation, their conventional literary and artistic repertoire and topography. Politically a radical rupture in their political imaginary has displaced them from the Maoist project of modernity. Socially, they find themselves displaced from their traditional and familiar spatial, communicational, communitarian, interpersonal language, discourse, and relations. All of a sudden global capitalism sweeps the Chinese off their feet with their long-repressed desire for consumer commodities, throwing them staggering into the geopolitical and geocultural space of global capitalism, decentered, deterritorialized, disoriented, and displaced. The past two decades have witnessed the coming back or emerging of all kinds of cultural practices, ideologies, modes of production, religions, customs, and modes of representation in contemporary China, and all these incompatible phenomena are reconciled and unified by one desire and one logic -- the desire for profit; the logic of capital.

Global capital towards the end of twentieth century is wiser than the British warships in the 1840s. It knocks open the Chinese door not with cannons but with Canons; it invades the country notorious for its center mentality not with troops, fleets, and artillery but with ideas, images, and consumer goods. It customises, modifies, and renames itself to make it welcome to the Chinese. When Coca Cola and Pepsi were first imported to China, for example, few people liked them, for they taste so different from Chinese tea, which has been China's national soft drink for over two thousand years. Then transnational capitalists had Coca Cola and Pepsi transliterated into "*Kekou Kele*" and "*Baishi Kele*," which respectively mean in Chinese "good taste and great joy" and "all

enjoyable." Then they quickly became popular in China, because the Chinese set great store by sounds and names of things -- what Western cultural critics call "symbolic wish-fulfillment." All such adaptations to a differential locality are, again, strategies of globalization invented to open the door of the Chinese market. To say that capitalism feeds on difference is to say that capitalism grants areas, nation-states, and communities of different races, cultural practices and ethnic traditions uniform memberships in the capitalist club, to subsume them into the global Empire of capital, and ultimately to integrate plural trajectories of modernity into one single route of development. When we talk about capitalism feeding on difference, we refer to those concrete strategies and practices of customizing commodities to suit local preferences and tastes, of building Chevrolets, Toyotas, BMWs, Boeings, Airbuses, Toshiba laptop computers, refrigerators, Nippon Electronics Corporation products, and computer software to meet local needs and likes, of fostering capitalists and technocrats with different racial features, wearing different ethnic costumes, and eating different ethnic foods, of creating the America- or West-centered structures of feeling and commodity fetishism in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Tibet, Taiwan, Indonesia, Canada, Columbia, and Yugoslavia.

The McDonald's Corporation today has 25,000 franchises in 115 countries, and every day there are 1% of the world's population eating at Macdonald's. Those overseas franchises are locally run and conform to local needs. They regularly modify their regional menus to conform to local tastes. McDonald's in Egypt, for example, serves a McFefafel; McDonald's in Japan offers "seaweed burgers"; India's McDonald's deletes beef from their menus. Some French McDonald's restaurants serve rabbit.⁴ Up to now there are 460 franchised McDonald's restaurants in 74 large and medium cities in China. The first one started in Shenzhen in 1990 and the second, and perhaps the largest one in the world by then, appeared in Wangfujing, the busiest shopping and commercial district in Beijing. McDonald's in Beijing serves Sichuan spicy chicken, red bean porridge, and other local things. In tandem with McDonald's are KFC, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks in Beijing and other cities in China. They all regularly alter, or we say customize, their menus to attract local customers. At Pizza Hut in China, for example, one can have Peking Duck served in the same manner as in Quanjude Peking Duck restaurants in Beijing. The displacement of McDonald's and other American fast food corporations causes differentiation or localization not only in terms of the menu but in social value and function. McDonald's and KFC in North America, for example, are truly ordinary fast food restaurants. But in China, they are now symbolic urban spaces where ordinary people have their affordable taste of America, and to many of the Chinese who survive on one American dollar a day, it is a once-in-a-while treatment -- the fulfilment of some deep-seated desire, the amorphous, primordial desire for the new, the modern, the exotic, the access to some kind of social and symbolic capital. Starbucks is becoming a popular place in Chinese cities frequented not only by foreign tourists but as well by local Chinese, to whom it is another place for gleaning symbolic or social capital, since a cup of coffee there costs 30 yuan and a glass of orange juice 35 yuan whereas millions of city people in China earn only 300 yuan a month. The most interesting instance of what is called glocalization is perhaps the Starbucks located within the Forbidden City in Beijing, where tourists can enjoy authentic Starbucks-recipe Colombian or Brazilian coffee and purchase traditional Chinese artefacts at the same time. Western wines and liquors to the

majority of Chinese do not taste as palatable as their familiar Chinese counterparts, but they are voraciously consumed for the symbolic capital attached to them; served in a Chinese manner, a French or Californian red wine, for example, would go with ice cubes in it, something unimaginable in Europe or North America. Indeed, as John Short says, "while the same images and commodities are found around the world, they are interpreted, consumed and used in different ways" (11). So much effort has gone into altering the architectural style of those displaced spaces such as McDonald's, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks, modifying their menus and recipes, and redesigning their interior, but underneath all these surface modifications and diversifications runs the same logic of global capitalism.

Western consumer or mass culture is indeed penetrating the world's largest market. In cities such as Beijing and Shanghai holidays like Spring Festival and among the younger generations Christmas have become big consumer seasons, when the stores, especially the joint-venture ones, make efforts to promote consumer spending. All kinds of consumer stratagems such as lottery, gift packages, coupons, and special sales prevalent in the West are being quickly reproduced in China. John Bull Pub, Ha'agen Dazs, Paul's Steak and Istanbul, BBC eggs, as well as BBC American Cowboys, Hum-Phry, eminu, I'go tm, JeansWest, Metersbonwe, rise Paris, etc., all these spaces have been transplanted into Beijing and Shanghai. Trendy brand names such as Gucci, Polo, Adidas, Fendi, Louis Vuitton, Burberry, Jones New York, Ralph Lauren, Nike, and Reebok catch everyone's eye, though poor people can only enviously look on. What is particularly significant is that "knockoffs" or imitations or "pirate versions" of famous brands are running rampant across China and in many cities there are huge markets for such imitations, the largest of which probably being the Hongqiao Market in Beijing. What Baudrillard calls "sign value" is best articulated in those imitations, for the consumers know that, even though they are imitations, they consume them purely and simply for their sign value and the social capital derived from them. If the consumer commodities of sign value Baudrillard refers to in his discussion of the image society are simulations of values, these imitations of the Europe- or North America-originated consumer goods are simulations of simulations. Those exotic restaurants, fashion stores, and imitations are exemplary Western cultural spaces and consumer commodities displaced and differentiated, but they all carry the same consumerist ideology, the same commodity fetishism, and the same underlying recognition pattern that are met elsewhere in the world.

True, contemporary Chinese forms of mass culture such as Karaoke, MTV, televised soap operas, gongfu, and sex-and-murder fiction are widely divergent from their Western counterparts in terms of medium, setting, content, plot and motif. What further differentiates the Chinese version of mass culture is the incongruous conglomeration of global capitalism's cultural imaginary, the Maoist revolutionary cultural legacy, and the indigenous Chinese heritage of folk traditions and customs. But, again, most of the products of Chinese mass culture today are unmistakably defined by what Jameson terms depthlessness of meaning, eclipsed historicity, and the repetition of sameness. Films and videos celebrate nihilistic hedonism, parade consumerist values and images, appeal to the audiences' innermost desire for bloody violence, fill them with dystopian nostalgia, and

immerse them in the oblivious moment now. Although many of the faded revolutionary images, neglected Maoist songs, and traditional folk art forms have come back, they are displaced, recontextualized, and recruited or incorporated primarily for the sake of commercial profit. They are incompatible with contemporary mass cultural forms, but capitalism itself is the magic and rationale for bringing incongruities and incompatibles together, reconciling nonsynchronic temporalities by the logic of commoditization and consumer fetishism.

The radical changes in the Chinese social, political and cultural imaginary can be best registered in urban space. As Anthony D. King and Abidin Kusno note, for China to become part of the world of global capitalism is "to accept, and contribute to, the same urban symbolic language, to participate in the same symbolic economy, to speak in the same architectural and spatial terms, as exists elsewhere in that global economy, and especially in the United States" (59-60). Over the past fifteen years or so, about 70 percent of old streets and neighbourhoods, traditional public spaces, and pre-modern buildings in Beijing, for example, have been cleared by real-estate developers to make way for high-rise apartments, office buildings, and shopping centers. In adopting a spatial language to formulate its modernity, the Chinese not only borrow Western spatial language and architectural codes but fervently reproduce Western urban spaces. A catalogue of the names of apartment buildings -- such as Manhattan Garden, City Plaza, Parkview Tower, Global Village, Rich and Famous, Golden Land, Green Lake Garden -- and of villas -- such as the American, the Nordic, the Baroque, the Mediterranean -- simply points to a "crossing-over of certain Euro-American urban artefacts, such as the skyscraper office tower, the luxury apartment building, and the suburban villa, to the urban space of China" (King and Kusno 43). They feel like urban and architectural forms "cut" from Western cities and cultures and "pasted" into Beijing and Shanghai and then "edited" to be localized transnational spaces in these cities (47). Those transnational spaces as well as the imported architectural styles, images, and names, which mark China's full entry into the geopolitical and geocultural space of capitalism, are indicators of multiple displacement -- they have been dislocated from their original experience and context, and from their original psychological and ideological investment. These regional mimics have an effect of constituting difference due not only to their re-contextualization, but to their architectural modifications and altered symbolic significance and functions. Many of the office towers in Beijing, for example, are capped with Chinese-styled domes, and their interior furnishings and decorations are localized as well. But these local modifications do not hide the fact that traditional Chinese places are being superseded by uniform postmodern spaces. If "[the] heart of a culture involves attachment to place, language, religion, tradition and customs," and if "the identity of self, group and nation is bound up with ideas and representations of particular space" (Short 11, 17), then such places or culture-specific spaces are becoming history in Beijing and elsewhere in China. Most of the Beijing-specific *siheyuan* (a compound with houses around a courtyard), *hutong* (lane or alley), and teahouses or other traditional public spaces have disappeared. In the newly built streets, hotels, apartment buildings, supermarkets, etc., what one encounters are consumer commodities, seductive advertisements, and transnational images. One can argue that what is happening in major globalized Chinese cities is first of all a reproduction of spaces already produced in the

centers of global capital. The reproduction of space as such immensely contributes to the reproduction of consumerist culture-ideology.

The most striking example of reproduction of the same via differentiation or localization in China is perhaps advertising, where one identifies the most explicitly ideological break with the Confucianist and the Maoist pasts. All kinds of consumerist ideas and stratagems prevalent in the West are being quickly reproduced in China. TV commercials, commercial billboards, and advertisements in all media emerge everywhere -- in the homespace, streets, shopping centres, stadiums, airports, and all kinds of public places. Advertising is the practice that is the most rebellious and contradictory in relation to China's pretended communist ideology and propaganda. The universal commercial advertisements at the airports, in the streets, and on TV screens in China give international tourists a strong feeling of familiarity and globality. It is those tall, seductive, aestheticized, commercial billboards that create a sense of zero distance and cultural homogeneity. Whether they are foreign designs to promote imported products or native designs to promote China-made products, all the advertisements are invariably governed by a universal advertising grammar or display a formal or structural universality. Regardless whether the advertised items are Nokia cellphones, Toshiba laptops, Chevrolets, tennis courts, Chinese liquors, Longjing teas, or Chinese border-town landscape, and regardless whether the models appear to be Chinese or European, all those advertisements, visually imposing and spatially conspicuous, aim to transform the individuals into consumers for the moment, to promote various commodities as signs of social prestige, position, and success, and to shape consumer needs and channel desire into various products, fashions, and life-styles. They all one way or the other create desires and seduce individuals to buy commodities that they do not really need, creating a commodity self which sees buying and consumption as a solution to problems of life and consumerism as a way of life.

Another site of reproduction of consumerist culture-ideology is the embodied space, the human body. The body is what Baudrillard calls the "finest consumer object," an object of "salvation," of narcissistic fetishism. If the rediscovery of the body is a newly emergent event "after a millennial age of Puritanism" in the postmodern West, then the same can be said of its revalorization in China except that the Puritanism that has to be removed for the emergence of the body has endured there for five thousand years. To many people in and outside of the country, the memory is still fresh of a 1960s and 1970s China where everyone in the unique space of Maoist ideology was dressed and fully covered in black or blue and female and male faces looked the same because uniformity and economical living was promoted. In ancient China the body was heavily clothed by Confucian ritual and ethics; in Maoist China the body, along with other private space, was closely guarded against what was called "bourgeois spiritual pollution" when six hundred million people shared one heartbeat and one goal of life -- to follow the Party in building socialism. Today, the body is being represented as both capital and fetish in China as in the West. Dazzling fashion designs, hairstyles, body salons, cosmetic surgeries, fancy dresses, tattoos, and jewellerys are all used with a vengeance to produce attractive images of the body. It is now highly fashionable among youngsters to make themselves look Western through plastic surgery, the slogans being "the more European

the better; looking international is bankable." This embodied revolution certainly can be looked upon as a self-conscious call for greater individual freedom and autonomy, a radical break with Maoist and Confucianist ideologies (they are two different ideologies, but they do have something in common as regards the embodied space), but it is better regarded in the first place as an effect of burgeoning consumer capitalism in China. In a globalized society characterized by fierce competition and utter insecurity and instability, the individual has to present him- or herself as a persuasive object, "*as the finest of objects, as the most precious exchange material*" (Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society* 135) in the processes of production and consumption of exchange values. S/he has to offer his/her embodied exchange value in the best possible light.

The reproduction of the same has much to do with technology as well, which in the postmodern age is so much intertwined with ideology that the two often seem hardly distinguishable. What is called communication technology is perhaps the most exemplary case of technology turning into ideology through its interference in daily life and its impact on the mode of production and exchange of commodity. Communication technologies interpellate individuals, impose mandatory ways of surviving, and transform their users into obsessed subjects or subordinates. As J. Hillis Miller notes in a different context, "New communication technologies are making a quantum leap in the generation and imposition of ideologies. . . . These technologies, it might be argued, are in a sense ideologically neutral. They will transmit whatever they are told to say. Nevertheless, as Marshall McLuhan notoriously said, 'the medium is the message.' I take it this means . . . [that] 'the medium is the ideology'" (130). Technology in the postmodern day not only appears as ubiquitous as ideology but demands as devoted a passion and dependency of its subjects as ideology does. Anyone who has read Judith Butler writing on the formation and subordination of the subject in her 1997 book *The Psychic Life of Power* will probably agree that the way ideology works seems to be exactly the way postmodern technology works. According to Butler, "no subject emerges without a passionate attachment to those on whom he or she is fundamentally dependent . . . the formation of primary passion in dependency renders the [subject] vulnerable to subordination and exploitation, a topic that has become a preoccupation of recent political discourse" (7). It is precisely with the same intensity and effectiveness that technology subjects individuals to its power. It not only interpellates individuals and transforms them into its subjects, but induces in them a passionate attachment to the apparatuses they are subordinated to. It is everyone's observed experience that nowadays people are so possessed and obsessed by technology that mobile-phone and Internet communication has become a major part of their routine life, and that life itself would be impossible without those postmodern apparatuses. This is especially true in China. Foreign tourists in China are often amazed at the omnipresence of Internet technology and mobile phones throughout the country. By the end of November, 2003, the total number of Internet users has exceeded 78 million and, by the end of 2004, the number was estimated to reach 130 million. The average Internet user spends 13 hours per week emailing or cybersurfing; there are more than 30 million networked computers. According to a survey of over 500 key domestic enterprises, 98.6% of them have been connected to the Internet, 83.7% having established their own websites. The number of networked computers increases at a rate of 200% each year. The Internet has become a major means of communication for individuals,

government departments and businesses.⁵ The same goes for telephones in China. Today there are two hundred million house phones in the country and in large cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen, mobile phones have become a daily necessity for 60% to 80% of the population.⁶ The access to the Internet and the cell phone has not only improved people's life quality and work efficiency, but has changed their lifestyle, mode of thinking, and manner of work. It has totally altered their concept of time and space, communication, education, and business administration. People use mobile phones not only for business contact, but also for sustained private conversations, season's greetings, and for circulating subversive political jokes. So what emerges is a digital empire to whose power subjects are subordinated with passionate attachment. In this digital empire people follow the same rules of the game, share the same mode of commutation and communication, and consume the same commodities, fashions, ideas, images, and narratives.

Appadurai is correct that electronic media and migration have caused an epochal rupture between the modern and the postmodern. The epochal rupture has occurred not only in epistemology, as Derrida declares, but in our structures of feeling, in the modes of communication, representation, and material production, and in what Henri Lefebvre calls the everyday. Every encounter between self and other displaces both self and other at the same time. And every displacement catalyzes a moment of differentiation. Culture is always a concept of Otherness. Identity is difference and difference is contrastive identity. Every nation, culture, community, and individual has undergone displacement, differentiation, and hybridization. But, paradoxically, displacement, differentiation, and hybridization engender sameness instead of genuine difference in the age of capitalist globalization. All seems to hinge on the concept of the economic and cultural logic of capitalism. If the whole world today is a transnational space of global capitalism, and if the transnational images, goods, information, fashions, and technology are globally consumed, then how can local cultures remain unaffected by consumerist culture-ideology? True, the nation-state has lost much of its control over the mobile, shifting populations and, because of collapsed or porous national borders as well as digital telecommunications, people have become virtual global citizens beyond any nation-state's ideological and political regimentation. Equally true, postmodern differences assume the form of mobile, deterritorialized, diasporic solidarities of experience, opinion, taste and pleasure, which are trans- or post-national in kind, uncontainable by nation-states and subversive to totalizing powers. While all these processes of infinite displacement, differentiation or splitting certainly give rise to increasing cultural diversity, they end up, ironically, engendering a universal consumerist psychology and ideology. For no matter what ethnic passport one carries, no matter where one is located in the networked global space, as long as one is involved in the capitalist processes of production and consumption one way or the other, one is within the sphere of the cultural logic of commodity reification and fragmentation, production for profit, and work for money, which is the true supranational law, pointing to a supranational, virtual empire. All this was best described by Marx and Engels 150 years ago: "In one word, [capitalism] creates a whole world after its own image" (*Manifesto* 47). So what is being globalized in the day of global capitalism are capitalist contradictions as well as consumerist culture-ideology. Such unification of the world by capitalism logically results in what Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri call a new Empire, a transnational, deterritorialized, interconnected Empire of capital. However, global capitalism, as we have seen, is much more thorough in both differentiating and homogenizing our social life than perceived by critics like Hardt and Negri. While creating and feeding on differences, global capitalism's ultimate goal is to eliminate all times and spaces of Otherness.

The case of globalized China examined in this article shows that economic globalization and cultural globalization go hand in hand. The city space and urban planning in China is a rich documentation of the reproduction of Western cultural and social spaces in the former socialist country. However, to argue that postmodern globalization disseminates capitalist social relations and consumerist culture-ideology is not to passively follow or surrender to global capitalism, nor to contend that hegemonic capitalism has already colonized the entire world to leave no spaces of genuine difference. What we have described is a hegemonic system that is aggressively expanding and not one that has totally dominated the world. For no matter how dominant any social system may be, "it cannot exhaust all social experience, which therefore always potentially contains space for alternative acts and alternative intentions which are not yet articulated as a social institution or even project" (Williams 252). As Edward Said wrote in analyzing travelling theory, "even under capitalism reification itself cannot be totally dominant" (240). While acknowledging the brilliance of Lukacs' account of reification and the necessity of upholding a critical consciousness beyond the reach of reification, Said takes Lukacs to task for his inability to see that no dominant social system is totally dominant as to be unlimited in its strength, for "if reification is totally dominant, how then can Lukacs explain his own work as an alternative form of thought under the sway of reification?" (240).

Over the past fifteen years or so, there have been no end of debates and discussions over possible alternatives to West-centered global capitalism in China among government officials as well as intellectuals. Confronted with fierce contradictions of capitalism and social problems created thereby -- widening gaps between the poor and the rich and between the city and the country, economic development at the cost of social stability, and rapid urbanization achieved through the unprecedented exploitation and marginalization of the rural populations -- many of the Chinese are rethinking the legacy of Maoist socialism, which, for all its shortcomings and problems always prioritized the interests and rights of the broad masses of ordinary people, and which, rejecting economist modernity, practised the theory of high accumulation and low consumption, ensuring the wellbeing and basic welfare of the workers and peasants. Despite low living standards and material poverty, there was no socio-political unrest because the government managed to provide basic food and overall medical care, which was complemented by the practice of barefoot doctors in rural areas. (Ironically, it was with this health system in those hard times that the schistosomiasis was extinguished whereas today it is coming back when China's economy is "booming.") In Maoist China there were no employment, no official corruption, no prostitutes, and no drug addicts, and serving the people devotedly was not only a politico-ethical slogan but a lived credo. Today, while China is merging rails with the global system, and its miraculous economic successes are being approved by the capitalist West, millions of rural people have been

reduced to the status of the lumpenproletariat hired as wage workers by transnational corporations, millions of *liumin* (migrants) are emerging in coastal or metropolitan cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, struggling for a ghostly, placeless, homeless existence in the margins of capitalist modernity, and millions of women are becoming displaced, commodified, and economically and sexually exploited. It is such a gloomy, scary picture of social contradictions and problems of reinstated capitalist modernity that has inspired many Chinese, especially the Chinese New Left, to question, interrogate and critique private ownership and market economy with their derived liberalized social and legal institutions, calling for efforts to imagine an alternative modernity outside of the mainstream capitalism via deploying the Maoist legacy of socialist theory and practice.

Anyone who has visited social heterotopias such as the Nanjie People's Commune in China will probably agree that it is an experimental form of such alternative modernity. Self-consciously practicing socialism after socialism has been all but eliminated, the Nanjie villagers champion a reinvented form of the People's Commune, in an attempt to blaze a trail of alternative modernity. While the world beyond the bounds of the village is flooded by dazzling consumer goods, areas of instability due to massive unemployment, social problems triggered by abolished free medical care, and gaping gaps between the poor and the rich, Nanjie people live in equality, simplicity, and relative self-sufficiency, refusing to import postmodern cultural spaces and consumer commodities. This enclaved space of reformed socialism that came into being after China had declared its veiled capitulation to capitalism serves as an inspired pointer to hopes. The village reinvented itself as "a communist new village" in 1981 when the commune system in China was declared obsolete and abandoned and all the land was allocated to individual households, which in a sense marked the beginning of the process of privatization. Following the socialist principle of "from each according to their ability and to each according to their need," every family in Nanjie is granted over 20 different coupons for free daily necessities including meat, rice, vegetables, spices, drinks (including beer), and every family is provided the same housing -- a three-room apartment with a living room for a family of three generations living together and a two-room apartment with a living room a family of two generations, equipped with furniture including a TV set, refrigerator, washing machine, desks, sofa, and a bookshelf and all are free of charge. The village owns over thirty enterprises, and each working person, no matter what his/her job is, is paid 250 yuan per month for his/her personal preference in dressing or minor house decorations. On top of that is free medical care and free education. It is well arguable that the socialist Nanjie Village figures a reinvented Maoist collectivity in the day of global capitalism. The fundamental difference between Nanjie and the world beyond its borders is that its economic production is all based on the actual needs of the people and enabled by free cooperation. And in the village there is, unlike in the rest of China or the world, no commodity fetishism, no commodification of human relationships, and no exploitation of man by man.

The socialist practice of Nanjie powerfully testifies to Said's point that there are narratives beyond imperialism, and there are perspectives and social practices outside the leviathan of capitalism. Nanjie's successful resistance to capitalism at the moment when

global capital is penetrating every corner of the country eloquently speaks to the world that capitalism is not everyone's dream, that there are imaginable alternatives to globalizing capitalism, and that we can and must change or remake the world according to our own desires and visions. Today there are millions of people thinking and writing against capitalism, millions of people choosing to live in ways alternative or opposed to what is prescribed by consumerist culture-ideology, and, from Seattle, Prague, Genoa, Goteborg to Mexico City, Porto Alegre, Manila, and Daqing, the wretched and disinherited of the earth, in their tens of millions, are fighting local battles against the global system. Over the past twenty years or so, alongside an explosion of varied insurgent discourses in the domains of cultural and socio-political thought and representation, there have emerged hundreds of anti-capitalist globalization movements of various scales. These are unmistakably spaces of hope, to borrow a term from David Harvey. Indeed, one would have to agree with Harvey that "there is a time and place in the ceaseless human endeavour to the change the world, when alternative visions, no matter how fantastic, provide the grist for shaping powerful political forces for change" and that "we are precisely at such a moment" (195).

Notes

1 See Leslie Sklair, *Globalization: Capitalism and Its Alternatives*, 170, 171.

2 See Fredric Jameson, "Globalization and Political Strategy," 53.

3 According to Tuan, space and cosmos are associated with freedom whereas place and home give the peasantry give a sense of security. Moving into the city, into the space of freedom, one gives up one's place-rooted customs, habits, and ways of life. For more discussion of space and place and their differentiation and significance in Chinese culture, see I-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, 3; *Cosmos and Hearth: A Cosmopolite's Viewpoint*, 1-2.

4 See Radley Balko, "Globalization & Culture: Americanization or Cultural Diversity?" January 19, 2004. <<http://www.aworldconnected.org/article.php?id=486&print=1>>.

5 Huang Kangsheng and Ren Tao, "Networks Enhance China's Development," *People's Daily* (Overseas Version), 11 Dec. 2003: 4. "Household," *People's Daily* (Overseas Version), 18 Dec. 2003: 6.

6 Feng Xiaofang, "Let Informational Technology Enter Every Household."

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