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Liu Kang/Globalization and Cultural Trends in China

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Introduction

Fundamental structural transformations are taking place in Chinese culture and society. The watershed in China's recent history is widely regarded as Deng Xiaoping's *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up) project that began in 1979. Unlike the now almost forgotten perestroika of Gorbachev that led to the collapse of Soviet-style socialism, *gaige kaifang* has succeeded in bringing high-speed economic development and material prosperity while managing to maintain the political status quo under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The last two decades, however, witnessed not only phenomenal economic growth but also spectacular political crises and unrest (which culminated in the Tiananmen events of 1989) and profound social, ideological, and cultural changes. These crises and changes are fundamental and structural, first because the political mechanism of the state and the CCP has become increasingly dysfunctional in the course of the reform, and the country faces imminent danger of disintegration. Second, the revolutionary ideology and its discourses, which legitimated the rule of the CCP in the past and are still being used by the post-Deng regime today, have lost their legitimating power. Changes in political, social, and cultural spheres are taking place in spite of the ruling power's resistance. Even though the fate of *gaige kaifang* is unpredictable, it is certain that China's political and social life has entered a postrevolutionary phase, even if only in a narrow, chronological sense. Practices that existed under Mao for thirty-odd years have become irreversibly outmoded, and there seems no possibility of returning to the past.

New political and social formations, new sets of values and beliefs, new social identities, and new subjectivities have emerged. These emergent formations, transformations, and reformations cannot be understood merely as the result of China's unique experiments, or "socialism with Chinese

characteristics” as they are labeled by communist ideologues. Instead, they must be seen within the broad context of globalization. Globalization is not simply a new international or global conceptual framework by which China’s changes can be understood. Rather, it is both a historical condition in which China’s *gaige kaifang* has unfolded and a set of values or ideologies by which China and the rest of the globe are judged. Only immanent knowledge or “cognitive mapping” seems to be capable of deciphering the intrinsic tensions and contradictions of globalization while offering alternative visions by way of a critique. Tremendous intellectual efforts across the world have been made to find ways to comprehend globalization. These inquiries and discourses invariably reflect divergent cultural and ideological positions. Attempts to map out the variants and possible alternatives of globalization must henceforth take the self-reflexive and immanent critique as a priority, calling into question the political and ideological agendas and historical baggage underlying one’s own intellectual inquiries. Moreover, given that globalization as a historical condition refers to a significant ascendancy of culture, especially in relation to the now dominant production of information and symbolic commodities, assessments of cultural changes are much needed.

This book analyzes cultural trends in China in the 1990s within the context of globalization. It examines intellectual debates in China about globalization and contemporary Chinese culture and society, and it investigates popular culture, literary movements, and Internet communications. The observations and comments offered here are by no means comprehensive or conclusive. Rather, they are preliminary sketches of a few aspects of contemporary Chinese culture that I find significant in identifying current major trends. The book is part of an ongoing project that considers some aspects of the historical movement in an analytical mode. As an essential area of globalization, culture nevertheless remains peripheral in China’s debates and policies, which focus primarily on economic sectors. Similarly, China studies in the West concentrate largely on the political and economic consequences of globalization. Cultural studies in the West in general pay scant attention to China, leaving it to area specialists who are further fragmented by disciplinary divisions within the social sciences and humanities, despite recent clamor for more interdisciplinary approaches.

This book takes a comparative, theoretical, and interdisciplinary approach, integrating literary theory and criticism, social and political theories, and historical studies. It draws on current models of cultural studies formulated in the English-speaking world, particularly the critical para-

digm that studies the dialectic tensions between institutional formations and intellectual trends. Such an approach helps unravel China's current cultural contradictions, which arise largely from the nation's rapid economic modernization and increasingly obsolete ideological formations. I ground my research on historical evidence, guarding against any theoretical and ideological foreclosure. Given that the book is part of a larger project that aspires to parallel the historical movement from a critical perspective, the conceptual framework and analytical tools that I employ are, of necessity, evolving and adjusting continually to changes in social reality. Likewise, the writing of this book is an evolving process that began in the mid-1990s and ended early in the new millennium. Several chapters were initially written to address specific issues in contemporary China, such as the intellectual debates about China's modernity, postmodernity, and alternative modernity, as well as issues of popular culture. In the course of writing the book, however, I have insisted on a dialectical and historical approach, with an eye on critiquing the present while searching for future alternatives. I believe that engaging in cultural critique and searching for alternatives are both my intellectual obligation and my choice of social commitment. My inquiry here as an academic critic into this subject is a continuation of my previous studies of modern Chinese culture from the early twentieth century to the 1980s.¹

The central thesis of this book is that globalization constitutes a fundamental paradox in the sphere of culture—a tension between the trend toward cultural homogenization through global cultural production and distribution (media, popular culture, and entertainment industry), and the opposite trend toward cultural diversification in terms of local, ethnic, and national cultural projects and agendas. The paradox reveals globalization as a new phase of capitalism that tends to penetrate and dominate every corner of the globe and all social life with unprecedented intensity and velocity. Global expansion of capital has resulted in the erosion of political sovereignty of the nation-state and national economies and has brought about dynamic cultural interactions as well as new schisms between the global and the local, between the center and the periphery, between the developed West and the developing world, and between the intellectual elite and the public. Cultural changes in China, especially in the 1990s, are the result of these interactions. Since China has abandoned its revolutionary legacy and is recovering its traditional values, a new cultural formation is emerging as the nation further integrates itself into the world-system of capitalism. This new cultural formation cannot be simply defined as socialist, capitalist,

modern, or postmodern. Instead, it should be understood as a hybrid postrevolutionary culture that embodies the fundamental tensions and contradictions of globalization.

Although it is debatable whether globalization will result in the ultimate triumph of capitalism, the global expansion of capital has unquestionably become its defining feature. China's two decades of *gaige kaifang* and its ideological and cultural consequences ought to be seen as its choices, strategies, and, indeed, struggles vis-à-vis global capitalism. With its revolutionary legacy and with socialism still its state-sanctioned ideology, China's struggle is more with capitalism than with other aspects of globalization. This struggle is, after all, between capitalism and its ideologies and cultural practices on the one hand and whatever might constitute, or have once constituted, alternatives on the other. These alternatives and experiments have either been completely rejected and abandoned in the former Soviet bloc or radically altered in China.

Given that the economy of China has not become as thoroughly globalized as the economies of its East Asian neighbors such as Japan and South Korea, the impact of economic globalization on China cannot be overemphasized. Yet China is perhaps the most enthusiastic of all about globalization, from its leadership to the general public. It seems to many Chinese political, intellectual, and other powerful elites that globalization promises to lead China out of its political and ideological impasse, to eliminate the last vestige of revolutionary culture, and finally to allow China to embrace capitalism without rekindling the ideological warfare of socialism versus capitalism. My focus here is on globalization precisely because I want to address how capitalism and its ideologies challenge China today.

Whether China's cultural transformation will yield some constructive solutions to the contradictions of globalization is of crucial significance not only to China but also to the world at large. To invent new democratic forms, institutions, and beliefs, it is necessary to reintegrate the goals of socialist experiments in current historical transformations, so that the destructive and oppressive tendencies of global capitalism can be effectively curbed. Yet creative cultural reinvention in China (and elsewhere) remains only a possibility under the current conditions of existence, and to make that a reality requires unyielding commitment and ceaseless endeavor.

At present, though, one can see more tensions and crises in China's cultural scene than promises of creative transformation and reconstruction. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China abandoned Mao's revolutionary idealism and adopted an economic developmentalism in order

to build a modern, market-oriented postsocialist nation. This postsocialist modernization project has inevitably resulted in intellectual and cultural diversification and pluralization in the last two decades. The “Deng Theory,” or developmentalism, is a highly pragmatic and expedient policy, focusing exclusively on economic sectors while willfully neglecting changes in political, social, and cultural spheres.² Mao’s revolutionary ideological hegemony has been deradicalized, and its meaning and content have been made hollow, but its discursive formations and rhetoric still provide the legitimation for the post-Deng regime.³ The legitimating discourse is simply incommensurable with the economic policies, because the discourse is predicated on Maoist ideologies of revolution, mass democracy, and egalitarianism, which are diametrically opposed to the endless accumulation of capital as the utmost aim of capitalism. Consequently, the ideological and legitimation crisis has haunted China since the beginning of the reform.⁴

The crisis of ideology and legitimacy in China today reflects the paradoxes and contradictions of globalization, which are “localized” in a conflicting way both within China’s revolutionary and socialist legacy and with its present modernization project. Globalization is first and foremost the global expansion of capitalism, and it has constituted new global structures and systems in political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Roland Robertson conceives of globalization in terms of its paradoxical movement of homogenization and diversification in a new time-space compression or continuum. Yet the paradox, alternately referred to by Robertson as “globalization,” is only a symptom of the profound contradictions of global capitalism.⁵

By Immanuel Wallerstein’s account, the contemporary movements and countermovements of the capitalist world-system faced three pressures that created a structural crisis. Wallerstein identifies the first pressure as the increasing demand of the working class for better wages and the resolution of global capitalists to keep relocating production in lower-wage areas. A second pressure comes from the capitalist strategy of “externalizing the costs,” that is, relocating toxic wastes and environmental pollution to shed the responsibility of corporations. A third pressure is caused by a growing popular demand for democratization, in terms of better education, health care, social security, and so on, which calls for reform of taxation, social services, and civil bureaucracies. Wallerstein argues that presently social and economic resources and options are almost exhausted and that the capitalist world-system can no longer offer viable solutions. Thus, capitalism “enters its terminal crisis,” which, Wallerstein predicts in an apocalyp-

tic tone, “may last up to fifty years.”⁶ Nor does he see any possible alternative in postrevolutionary regimes (including China) for “reducing worldwide or even internal polarization to any significant degree.” Overall, Wallerstein perceives a “monumental disillusionment with the anti-systemic movements,” that is, with the various socialist experiments of the twentieth century. A visionary critic of capitalism who has always based his analysis on dialectic and historical reason, Wallerstein nevertheless calls on “free will” to counter the “recklessness” of global capitalism.⁷

Others may not sound as pessimistic as Wallerstein, but they generally echo his sentiment in perceiving globalization as an all-encompassing conquest of the world by capitalism with no systematic alternatives visible on the horizon. Leslie Sklair, for instance, draws up a “global system theory” with three “building blocks.” The building block in the economic sphere is the domination of transnational corporations. In the political sphere, it is the emergent transnational capitalist class, which tends to increasingly disempower the subordinate classes and deprive them of democratic participation in political life. In the cultural sphere, the culture-ideology of consumerism resorts to an all-inclusive strategy in order to co-opt and preemptively eliminate all counterhegemonic resistance of the subordinate classes. Although maintaining faith in social movements that may disrupt the efficiency of the dominant forces, Sklair nonetheless concludes that “no social movement appears even remotely likely to overthrow the three fundamental institutional supports of global capitalism.”⁸

From a philosophical and contemplative perspective, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri view globalization as a sprawling “Empire,” a deterritorialized, decentered, ever-expanding network or apparatus of rule. They contend that a new kind of global sovereignty, borderless and limitless in its economic, political, juridical, and ideological reach and trespassing traditional boundaries of the nation-state and of nationalist and modernist projects, has fully emerged and taken hold of the world. Like Sklair, Hardt and Negri prognosticate a “counter-Empire” that may be engendered from within the Empire and that may call for the “multitude” to “invent new democratic forms and a new constituent power that will one day take us through and beyond Empire.”⁹

In a way, Hardt and Negri parallel Wallerstein’s “free will” by resorting to a Spinozian strategy of immanent humanism vis-à-vis the new transcendental ideologies of capitalist modernity, either a Hobbesian-Rousseauian model of contractual politics or Adam Smith’s free market liberalism. It is telling that Hardt and Negri invest in prophetic visions for future change in

what they perceive as a genealogy from Spinoza to Machiavelli and Marx-Engels, and they reinvent this genealogy by weaving a close relationship between the subject (the multitude or the working people) and object (democratic life) in a “process of self-production.” Quoting Spinoza, they assert the need to reinvent a “materialist teleology”: “the prophet produces its own people.”¹⁰ Such an assertion reiterates a modern Marxist emphasis on ideology and consciousness in bringing about social revolution and systematic transformation. There is a genealogy, proceeding from Lenin to Lukacs, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School, and Louis Althusser, that serves as a pivotal theoretical basis for the reflections of Hardt and Negri. Undoubtedly, Mao Zedong’s thought figures prominently in this modern Marxist genealogy. Mao’s notions of cultural revolution and of instituting revolution in ideological realms to bring about “people’s democracy” and alternative modernity are indispensable components of the revolutionary legacy from which Hardt and Negri draw their sustenance.¹¹

Now that some important reflections on globalization by the Western Left have been canvassed schematically, it is instructive to return to cultural and ideological terrain in considering China’s dilemma. China’s relationship to globalization can perhaps be seen as the success or failure of China to reconfigure its conceptual and ideological paradigms of the modernization project, which in turn may or may not constitute a viable alternative vision to lead the nation through and beyond globalization. For roughly half a century (1930s–1970s), Mao drew a revolutionary blueprint for China’s modernity or alternative modernity under the conditions of Western pressure and China’s own historical tradition of the old empire. Mao recognized the centrality of culture and ideology in the revolution. Over decades of political struggles leading to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and, in the ensuing years, the struggles to reconstruct a modern state and society, a revolutionary ideological hegemony was constituted. This revolutionary hegemony served effectively as a legitimating force for the rule of the CCP, bringing social cohesion and consensus, often by brutal coercion and suppression of the dissent of the intellectual elite and mostly by gaining the broad consent of the working classes—both peasantry and urban proletariat. Even during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), when political and social norms and structures were disrupted, the revolutionary hegemony survived, buttressed by the iconicity (often dubbed the “personality cult”) of the Great Teacher and by revolutionary idealism. The peasants and urban workers, who were the majority of the population, embraced the revolu-

tionary ideal of building a strong, egalitarian, and socialist society through collective, self-sacrificing efforts. To some extent, Mao's revolutionary hegemony incarnates Spinoza's prophecy that the prophet (the Great Teacher) produces its own people. But then the crucial question arises: can the prophecy sustain itself? Or to put it differently, what are the material and institutional infrastructures that guarantee that the revolutionary vision is translated into a real, sustainable, and renewable practice of democracy and does not remain merely a prophetic, phantasmagoric vision? History suggests that Mao's prophetic vision had a limited sustainability and encountered grave difficulties in materializing itself.

Mao's project of alternative modernity, however, should be seen as still enmeshed in a modernist epistemology, susceptible to a teleological, deterministic logic of progress and development. For Mao believed that the principal contradiction of modernity—that is, the contradiction between the productive forces and the relations of production that hinders historical development (or modernity)—can be resolved by changing the relations of production through political and ideological revolution. Thus Mao privileged “revolutionary theory” and “cultural revolution” over economic development of productive forces. The dialectical reversal of political and ideological revolution vis-à-vis economic development, however, did not give birth to an antideterministic and dynamic conception of history that could serve as a new epistemology for the alternative modernity. Over the years, Mao increasingly subscribed to an ideological and cultural determinism, from which he envisioned the Cultural Revolution as necessitated by the Hegelian-Marxian “inevitable law of history.” Furthermore, cultural revolution as a heuristic and self-productive, self-educational initiative largely lapsed into an instrument of political manipulation and domination, especially in dealing with estranged and dissenting intellectuals.¹²

Post-Mao China under Deng Xiaoping's *gaige kaifang* witnessed the debunking of Mao's cultural and ideological determination but not of the deterministic and instrumental reason that Mao had enacted during his reign. Only the “content” of determinism was reversed, as it were, from a cultural ideological determinism to a resolute economic determinism. Mao's intrinsically modernist deterministic epistemology and its discursive formations were inherited by Deng Xiaoping. The economic policies of Deng's *gaige kaifang* were at first the revised versions of economic reconstruction that the Eighth Congress of the CCP (1956) put forth as China's modernization plan. As the CCP's general secretary at that time, Deng Xiaoping was a major designer and executive of that modernization plan.

Deng's developmentalism is also to a significant degree a continuation of the modernization plan during Mao's reign. Developmentalism in the West assumes the forms of development theory as well as underdevelopment and dependency theories. The Chinese modernization plan under Mao took the form of self-reliance and autonomous development, akin to the delinking and isolationist notions of dependency theories and underdevelopment theories. *Gaige kaifang* rejects the premises of isolationist self-reliance and adopts the hypothesis of development theories that development in China, as in other developing countries, will follow the same pattern of modernization as in modernized countries in terms of marketization and full integration into the world-system. On the one hand, developmentalism is only a partial rejection of Mao in that it never renounces the modernist epistemology underlying Mao's project. On the other hand, Deng's *gaige kaifang* is a thorough renunciation of Mao's project by the total abandonment of the revolutionary idealism that animated the discourses and social practices of the Mao era.

The complex relationship between *gaige kaifang* and Mao's legacy can be seen in the differences and parallels of Deng's and Mao's strategies toward capitalist globalization. Granted, it was during the Deng era that globalization came into full swing. Yet Mao's vision of alternative modernity—which was primarily based on ideological and cultural revolution, economic self-reliance, and a political system of one-party rule sustained by so-called democratic centralism—can be seen as a powerful antisystematic, counter-Empire movement during the formative years of globalization. Mao's universalist vision of global cultural revolution and global insurgency reverberated throughout the world in the 1960s. Moreover, his strategic formulation of the “three world” division and Third World national liberation and guerrilla warfare (as a possible reenactment of the Chinese revolution) on a global stage through the encirclement of developed urban centers (the First and Second Worlds) by the underdeveloped countryside or periphery (the Third World) was inspirational. It posed a real threat to the geopolitical hegemony of the two superpowers during the cold war.

It is now clear that *gaige kaifang* rejects Mao's counterhegemonic revolutionary strategies as an alternative to capitalist globalization and fully embraces the logic of the market and accepts the rules set forth by the dominant power of global capitalism. Ironically, though, this full integration into the capitalist world-system has ineluctably reintroduced the nationalist agenda into China's social discourses on the sovereignty of the nation-

state and the nationalist project of modernization, whereas during Mao's relatively isolationist reign the ideology of universalism and internationalism always preceded any nationalist or regionalist interests. Two famous slogans during the reign of Mao reflect his revolutionary globalism. One is "Never forget that two-thirds of the people in the world are exploited and suffering today." (A variant is Mao's paraphrasing from *The Communist Manifesto*: "The proletariat can liberate itself only by liberating all of humanity.") The other slogan is related to the highly centralized economy and political life: "The whole nation is a single chessboard." It was effectively employed under Mao's rule to diffuse complaints in the relatively industrialized and prosperous regions, such as Shanghai, which allegedly had to sacrifice wealth and prosperity to the national interests. Moreover, an egalitarian idealism and collectivism served as the backbone to Mao's project of alternative modernity. Deng's slogans, by contrast, are "Getting rich is glorious" and "Let a part of the population get rich first." While insisting on widely opening China to the world, the post-Deng regime has increasingly seen the need to assert China's national sovereignty and interests in economic sectors as well as in multilateral international relations. This paradox cannot be simply attributed to an internal change from Mao's utopian vision of revolutionary globalism to Deng's nationalist agenda or an emergent "China threat." Rather, it should be construed as a result of China's full integration into globalization and, as such, a symptom of the fundamental contradictions of globalization. It should also be noted that Maoism has a complex and contradictory legacy in that it was at once a revolutionary ideal of egalitarianism and mass democracy and an ideology of a strong, monolithic, one-party state. Mao's legacy has been quite active and alive, contributing further to the paradoxes of the Deng era. Although revolutionary idealism has been all but abandoned, the notion of a powerful state never loses its attraction to the power holders at the moment when state power is being irrevocably eroded and enfeebled.

The discrediting and debunking of Mao's revolutionary idealism and globalism can be seen as prompted by the altered historical circumstances of globalization that outdated Mao's strategy of economic self-reliance and by the delinking of cultural and ideological warfare, which was formulated during the interlude between the two world wars and culminated at the apex of the cold war. By the same token, the economic determinism and developmentalism of the Deng regime, as well as its nationalist assertions, appear as a strategic reorientation and, indeed, a structural adjustment to the movement of the capitalist world-system. *Gaige kaifang* coincided with

globalization, or the moment of historic transition as the cold war came to an end and new structures and forms of political domination and economic activity came into being. Along with the globalization of politics and economy, ideological visions of capitalist globalism triumphed under the various guises of consumerism, neoliberalism, and neoconservatism. This ideological triumph is bolstered by the dominance of global communication and information systems, a global entertainment industry and popular culture, and a global intellectual marketplace.

China's integration into globalization can be seen both as a strategic move, initiated by Deng's *gaige kaifang*, and as an inevitable and irreversible passage of history set in motion during Mao's reign. This historical passage actually stemmed from the revolutions, the civil wars, and the Sino-Japanese War that occupied the entire first half of the twentieth century and constituted a significant part of China's struggles for modernity. In retrospect, Deng's developmentalist strategy was to integrate China into the capitalist world-system only in the economic and technological sectors. In political, social, and cultural spheres there was never a clearly articulated acceptance of the norms and values of global capitalism. Integration into globalization, therefore, was never conceived as a total submission to capitalism in a strategic sense. However, the last two decades have clearly shown an inevitable trend toward full-scale integration into globalization simply because the modernization project itself cannot be parceled out into disjunctive segments, and globalization, by virtue of its omnipotent sweep, makes the fragmented, piecemeal way of reform implausible and untenable. To be precise, China can never remain only "partially globalized" and must come to terms with all aspects and complexities of the consequences of globalization.

Deng Xiaoping's *gaige kaifang* is a strategy of modernization and globalization without a real alternative vision. It retains only the discursive forms of Mao's revolutionary hegemony, but not his revolutionary globalism, as its ideological core. Capitalist globalization, by contrast, has both a vision (in a variety of ideological guises) and enormous material and institutional power. Yet the neoliberal vision of the free market, the dominant ideology of globalization, cannot rationalize and camouflage the ever-increasing rifts between the wealthy and the dispossessed, between the powerful and the disempowered, which are, in the final analysis, the fundamental and irreconcilable contradictions of globalization. The global/local, universal/particular, or homogenizing/diversifying dichotomies or paradoxes are different manifestations of this fundamental contradiction,

which can be solved neither by a Hegelian dialectic of synthesis nor by Mao's handling of the "principal contradictions" by means of a univocal and totalizing move. In an overdetermined and enormously complex situation like the present globalization, there seems to be no singular means of resolution but rather plural and multiple movements and countermovements. Such a situation begets possibilities for multiple alternatives and for creative initiatives and experiments that can ultimately confront global-scale injustices and inequalities and construct new forms of democracy, equality, and justice. In Deng's project of modernization, however, such alternatives and initiatives are absent.

Bereft of a real alternative vision to capitalist globalization, China's *gaige kaifang* has failed spectacularly to reconstruct a new cultural and ideological counterhegemony. One may wonder whether any explicit, state-sanctioned ideology is necessary in this post-cold-war era. However, ideology—understood as primarily a symbolic, discursive practice by which signs, meanings, and values are elicited to reproduce and reinforce social and political powers—cannot be discarded in any given historical circumstances, regardless of the clamors of the "end of ideology" and the "end of history," which are nothing more than ideological statements themselves.¹³ Although deprioritizing the ideological and political struggle has served the *gaige kaifang* policies of the Deng and post-Deng regimes, the absence of a clear vision of social and political values and meanings of *gaige kaifang* in China has only intensified its legitimation crisis. The crisis lies precisely in the incompetence of the state in reproducing social cohesion and a broad alliance of the general public in the face of widening social and economic polarization.

Postrevolutionary cultural and ideological formations cannot but celebrate their hybridity and diversity and assume a certain postmodern multipositionality in tackling vastly complex issues. When China seemed to finally reach agreement after prolonged negotiations with the wealthiest and most powerful to join the club of capitalist globalization—the World Trade Organization (WTO)—a complacent Chinese government and state-owned media eulogized it as a triumph of *gaige kaifang*, opening China ever more widely and accepting an "international standard" (or, in a Chinese idiom, "joining the international track") as the only viable way of modernization. By contrast, as the tension between the United States and China has grown in recent years—with U.S. arms sales to Taiwan and the deployment of National Missile Defense (NMD), charges against China for "human rights violations" and for alleged "Chinese spies" among its diasporic com-

munities, and NATO's bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade, to name only a few issues—there have been rising nationalist sentiments to recall the old-fashioned, protectionist principles of the nation-state. In addition, the specter of Mao looms large, amidst ardent calls for revival of neo-Confucianism and against crusaders of Hayek-style antitotalitarianism and neoliberalism. But Mao seems to serve largely as an enfeebled, remote icon of nostalgia and romantic rebellion deprived of its revolutionary core. In the terrain of popular culture, nothing seems to be capable of supplanting a pleasure-oriented, ego-centered consumer cultural fashion shaped by the global information circuit and the entertainment industry, which has become a central component of capitalist globalization.

Today's Chinese discourses and debates about globalization reflect this state of uncertainty and hybridity.¹⁴ Viewing globalization primarily from the perspectives of economic and technological development, many in China celebrate it as a golden opportunity for China's modernization. This is the mainstream view endorsed by the government, for it corresponds to the official ideology of developmentalism. Yet the Chinese, from the standpoint of a Third World developing country burdened by an enormous population and low per capita economic productivity, are also aware of the double-edged nature of economic and technological globalization. This awareness is heightened particularly in light of the increasing tensions and conflicts between the United States and China, a relationship seen by most Chinese as pivotal to China's position in the global order. Concerns over China's national security and interests in globalization, legitimate as they may be, are often asserted in and along with emotionally charged nationalistic discourses, which tend to complicate further the precarious status of China as an emergent power within the dominant capitalist world-system.

Nationalism, contrary to its generally negative characterization as an irrational and regressive movement that poses a threat to the world order and hampers domestic development, is a complex ensemble of discursive formations that serve a variety of purposes in different historical circumstances. What is really disquieting at present in China is not so much the emotional outburst of nationalistic sentiment of the Chinese public but rather the purely reactive invocation of nation-state sovereignty and other outmoded ways and practices from the earlier phases of capitalist global expansion. In other words, it is no longer a tenable option for China to practice the ways of nationalism that belong to the capitalist modernity prior to the current globalization. The absence of a real alternative vision can only exacerbate the conflict of geopolitical interests in which China is inevitably

embroiled by fully submitting itself to the world order of global capitalism. Although ideological state apparatuses today still have to insist on some sort of socialist position solely for their legitimation, the assertion of the principles and advantages of socialism vis-à-vis capitalism in the age of globalization has become largely vacuous and irrelevant.¹⁵

The multipositionality and hybridity of the cultural and ideological scene in China stem from its complex interaction and entanglement with globalization and its ideologies of global capitalism. Yet these new trends and formations are not necessarily equivalent to multiple alternatives and initiatives that can engender new democratic forms of social life. The current formations are primarily an amalgam of responses and reactions to the ideologies of capitalist globalization. Visions of real democratic transformation have not yet emerged. In addition, China faces the daunting task of laying material and institutional foundations for the new social and cultural formations under globalization. While tensions are mounting in China in social and cultural spheres, particularly between the need for normative regulation of state rebuilding and the demand for democratic participation of the people in a public sphere, no solution can remain local or localized, nor can it be imported from purportedly “universal” models of the West or globalized versions of social and cultural formations. By the same token, no Chinese practice and experiment of resistance and restructuring can remain within its own boundaries in this radically deterritorialized globe and therefore must have far-reaching global implications.

The role of the state in China’s integration into globalization remains contested and controversial. From the neoliberal, free market positions that von Hayek embodies, any move to strengthen the role of the state is reminiscent of the Stalinist-Maoist brand of “totalitarianism.” But others, who refuse to accept neoliberalism at its face value and find themselves greatly alarmed by the enfeeblement of the state’s role, especially in China’s economic life, call for serious rethinking of the role of the state today, not only in China’s national security and integrity but also in the construction of state-managed social welfare, social security, and public education systems.¹⁶ The centrality of nationalism and the state to capitalist growth is keenly felt in China’s modernization and globalization drive as nationalism, and state-sanctioned nationalism in particular, seems to have steadily risen in political and social life.¹⁷

As a Third World country with its own economic, political, social, and cultural specificity, China may justifiably insist on its local, regional, and national projects of modernization in globalization, but such projects must

come to terms with an omnipresent and all-encompassing globalization on its own immanent dialectic and logic. Resistance to the economic inequality and political injustice of the new alliance of power elites—global capital, technocrats, and neoliberal and neoconservative ideologues—ought to confront the oppressive forces of domination both inside and outside the national boundaries. In short, an alternative vision must be established. But Deng Theory, or developmentalism, offers little in terms of effective critique and resistance to new forms of domination and oppression. Nor can the discourse of Maoist revolutionary ideology, which were used by Deng and post-Deng regimes merely for legitimation, simply reinvent itself as a more viable alternative vision to developmentalism and capitalist globalism.

The absence and disarticulation of an alternative vision at present, however, by no means suggest a state of paralysis or dullness in China's cultural scene, nor do they signal dwindling hopes for democratic struggles. On the contrary, the dynamic, sometimes quite chaotic currents and trends in China at this historical conjunction abound with aspirations and clamors for a more democratic public life. Initiatives, experiments, and critical reflections are springing from all walks of life in a growing and diversified public sphere. The young generation, seizing on Internet communication as a new venue, is seeking extensively to articulate new visions that may transform China's revolutionary legacies and traditional values in innovative and constructive ways.

Inevitably, any present endeavor to reinvent socialist idealism can be scornfully discounted and brushed aside as hopelessly quixotic; down-to-earth pragmatism and commodity fetish are the order of the day. It is nonetheless important to state clearly what I believe are the possibilities for China and for the world, following what Fredric Jameson calls the "ontologies of the present," which "demand archaeologies of the future, not forecasts of the past."¹⁸ I attempt in this book to engage in a symptomatic reading of the cultural politics and political culture of China in the 1990s, not to present a value judgment of what happened in the past but to argue for the necessity of remaining hopeful and idealistic for social justice and equality in the future, particularly for the dispossessed and the disempowered. Throughout this book, a critical mood prevails concerning the ascendance and seemingly inevitable dominance of global capitalism and its ideologies in China. With respect to China's own revolutionary legacy, my position may at first glance seem rather ambivalent. Although I remain sharply critical of the debacles and human tragedies of the Mao era, I insist on the his-

torical necessity of revolution and revolutionary idealism. I hope it will become clear in the course of this book's analysis that this insistence is not simply a matter of personal indulgence or nostalgia about the revolutionary legacy. I want to demonstrate that the revolutionary legacy is deeply ingrained in the everyday life of China's populace and is still active today. Moreover, it may remain relevant in the future, despite the formidable currents opposing it. Apart from the concrete practices of that revolutionary tradition, I firmly believe that there is an immanent need for maintaining at some level the utopian idealism and goals of the revolutionary culture, not only for China's own cultural identity as a modern country (since revolution is an integral and significant component of China's modernity) but also for the hope of checking the excesses of global capital. At present, however, I do not see any reason to be euphoric about the future for socialist revival or about China as the place for renewed socialist experiment, nor any reason to be utterly pessimistic about the global domination of capitalism. By the same token, rather than celebrating or lamenting the "death" of revolutionary culture in a simplistic fashion, unrelenting cultural critiques (including my own) can at least help document the historical relevance of revolution and its complex and difficult transformations. It is perhaps in understanding China's revolutionary legacy that the most visible difference between my view and others lies, yet I consider this an opportunity for honest debate rather than for showcasing ideologically contentious and self-righteous polemics.¹⁹

This book's structure reflects both the chronology of events in the 1990s and my own thinking and writing during those years, but the chapters are structured thematically rather than following a strict time line. The first chapter raises the main questions that the book is concerned with and sketches out my observations from a theoretical perspective. The central question is whether there is any alternative vision to capitalist globalization. I address this issue by examining Chinese intellectual debates about "alternatives" in the first half of the 1990s, primarily in the fields of literary theory and criticism, history, and philosophy, but also in other areas of the humanities. The account of the Chinese debate is meant to challenge the dominant views of globalization, modernity, and postmodernity. The chapter focuses on nationalism, postmodernism, neohumanism, and a hybrid discourse on neoconservatism and radicalism. I first make some preliminary comments on the discourses on nationalism that bloomed in the 1990s by situating the issue of nationalism within the historical context of China's searches for modernity and alternative modernity. I emphasize the

issue of the Chinese revolution and China's revolutionary ideological hegemony in the historical formation and function of nationalism, contrasting it to nationalist discourses and practices engendered by capitalist modernity. I then examine, respectively, the "localized" ideology of New Confucianism and "national learning" as an attendant academic program, and postmodernism and the related theoretical discourse of postcolonialism as imported global intellectual discourses. The analysis is intended to demonstrate the complex interrelationships of these indigenous (or local) and exogenous (or global) discourses with the material conditions and intellectual fashions under globalization, unraveling the contradictory assumptions and agendas of these discourses. Next, I comment on a politically engaged, hybrid position that blends both neoconservative authoritarianism and radical strains reminiscent of Maoism, as articulated in a best-selling book, *Third Eye* (1994). This last strain reminds us of the powerful influence of the revolutionary legacy and of the need to transform that legacy into a constructive alternative, which *Third Eye*, representing a significant public sentiment, and other intellectual debates all failed to deliver. The centrality of "revolution" in today's China, as both a historical legacy and a powerful ideological hegemony, has to be reconsidered within the context of globalization. The dazzling variety and plurality of political and ideological strands in contemporary Chinese intellectual discourses and their interpretations notwithstanding, the revolutionary legacy itself cannot be elided if one intends to find a sense of direction in the labyrinth of social life in China today.

Chapter 2 continues the discussion of the first chapter both thematically and chronologically. It addresses the growing clashes between the ideologies of socialism and developmentalism and describes debates and discourses in the second half of the 1990s in three segments of China's society: the official, the popular, and the intellectual. I investigate in some detail the historical formation of the so-called Deng Theory, or "socialism with Chinese characteristics," demonstrating that the discourse from which the Deng Theory derives ideological and political legitimation is fundamentally at odds with the underlying assumptions of the *gaige kaifang* project; and I examine speeches, statements, editorials, commentaries by the CCP and the official media, and intellectual debates mainly in the fields of social sciences—economics, political sciences, sociology, and so on.

In both popular media and academic studies in the West, scant attention has been paid to official and state discourses. These discourses, however, deserve serious scrutiny, not only because they represent the views of

the political power elite in China today but also because they still exercise a formidable impact upon the Chinese public through mass media, ideological state apparatuses of schools, publishing industries, and, above all, the indoctrination of more than sixty million members of the CCP. Official and intellectual discourses are juxtaposed with consumer popular culture, highlighting the ambivalent and contradictory relationships among these three domains. Just as I emphasize the importance of understanding the official discourses, I investigate elements of popular culture such as soap operas, MTV, karaoke, and so on, because popular cultural texts have an enormous influence over the everyday life of China's 1.3 billion citizens. By the same token, when I analyze the intellectual debates, I single out the best-selling works that popularize intellectual controversies and appeal directly to the general public, primarily to examine their social impact. This is a methodological and strategic choice: I study culture and intellectual debates not as "detached" intellectual inquiries but as ways to understand and then to effect social change. Hence I weigh the subjects of my investigations primarily in terms of their social impact rather than in terms of their intellectual depth or sophistication.

Some critics argue that the main failure of Deng's ideological policy is its inability to elicit the crucial support of the intelligentsia in its economic modernization project.²⁰ Although the intellectual elite by and large remain skeptical about the legitimating discourse of Deng Theory, a significant portion of them, especially in the more powerful sectors of the economic and political domains, have endorsed developmentalism and tried to reinvent an ideological legitimacy by way of Hayekian neoliberalism and neo-conservatism. The critical problem, then, lies in the growing schism between the power elite and the intellectual elite on the one hand and the disenfranchised general public on the other. We should particularly remember, however, that intellectual discourses are never value neutral, as are discourses about intellectuals themselves, and do not represent expressions of the "national mood" or "conscience of society" as such authors may claim. This aspect of intellectual discourses is discussed in detail in chapter 2.

Chapter 3 concentrates on arguably the most dynamic of cultural realms—popular culture—in order to probe further into the fundamental tensions in Chinese culture. The tensions lie primarily in globalization and consumer culture on the one hand and in the Maoist revolutionary legacy on the other. *Qunzhong wenyi* (culture of the masses), a legacy from the revolutionary past and an essential component of the revolutionary hege-

mony, cannot be dismissed as merely residual and irrelevant today. Its aesthetic forms and structures are deeply ingrained in the Chinese cultural imaginary and constitute a significant dimension in the contradiction-ridden cultural arena. The chapter interrogates three “global” interpretive models: the Frankfurt School’s critique of “Culture Industry,” the Gramscian model of hegemony, and postmodernism. The Chinese case is presented as a problematic “local,” as opposed to “the global.” This local may refer to the geopolitical and cultural specificity of China, and it may also, in a narrower sense, suggest more specific and concrete social practices of particular locations and temporalities within China. The “global” perspective necessarily is discussed in the context of the cultural practices of everyday life. The everyday not only encompasses both the global and the local but also may serve as a site of critique of and resistance to consumer culture and a place to begin creative initiatives and innovations.

In addition to the realm of popular culture, where the conflicts of consumerism and the legacies of China’s recent past and its long tradition may have profound impact on the lifestyles and everyday practices of the public, literature is a critical arena of ideological and aesthetic battles. Chapter 4 examines the rise of Chinese avant-garde experimental fiction at the end of the 1980s and its rapid disappearance in the early 1990s within the historical context of the transformation of post-Mao (1976–present) and post-Tiananmen (1989–present) China into a postrevolutionary society. The chapter compares the Chinese avant-garde and some European avant-garde movements in terms of their different political, ideological, and aesthetic views and practices and then focuses on the work of Yu Hua, perhaps the most well known of the Chinese avant-gardists. In the late 1980s when Yu Hua emerged as a new experimental writer, he was considered to be a “paradigmatic symbol of avant-garde fiction.” In the 1990s, however, his writings underwent significant stylistic change as he gave up metafiction and adopted the mode of “plain” realism. My reading of Yu Hua’s writings shows the paradox of the Chinese avant-gardists in that they are aesthetically radical and subversive only in the realm of language and form but are politically disengaged. Faced with the “postpolitical” reality of the 1990s, Yu Hua and other Chinese avant-gardists found their experimentalism increasingly irrelevant. Yu Hua then searched for new modes of writing for his imaginings of a China marked by conflicts of the global market, ideologies of global capitalism, and the lifestyles of millions of farmers and members of the urban working class.

The last chapter, written in 2001, tries to gauge the cultural and ideo-

logical impact of the Internet in China today. Since the mid-1990s the Internet has clearly become a dynamic force. Its role in China is inseparably connected to both globalization and the transformation of Chinese culture. Internet communication as an integral component of globalization is employed by global capitalism to spread its ideologies and values through multimedia images, icons, and other means. While the Internet becomes a principal way to bring China rapidly into the global economic and communication system, confrontations with ideologies of capitalist globalism intensify in the information age. Questions arise as to whether the Internet can create a new public sphere and new opportunities for democratic life and to what extent Internet communication will change the social fabric of China. The chapter concentrates on three salient areas in which the Internet seems to be most active: the news media, Internet political forums and chat rooms, and Internet literature. In these three areas significant changes are taking place, and it is difficult to anticipate where these changes will lead. But the tensions between the existing ideological state apparatuses, the legitimating discourses, and the new cultural forms and manners that the Internet has nurtured are reaching a new height, further intensifying the ideological crisis. Conversely, Internet communication seems to have accelerated the transformational process from which new alternatives can be constituted. Particularly noteworthy is the emergence of a new urban youth culture, shaped by the Internet, television, and other digitally based global communication systems. This new urban youth culture epitomizes the tensions and potentials that globalization brings to China. While ideologies of capitalist globalism are drawing China's urban youth further away from its "local" and national past and pushing it closer to the "globalized," consumerist cultural formations and identities, the Internet has other promises. It opens up new opportunities for nurturing a creative and constructive literacy and social consciousness of new generations, for transforming China's communication and social interaction in more democratic ways, and for generating new forms of aesthetics and politics for the benefit of the public.

I hope this book will elicit more questions, challenges, and reflections on the historical changes that China and the whole world are now undertaking. The still evolving processes of globalization can be seen in a larger context in both spatial and temporal terms; changes in China can therefore be understood only as immanent to the movements and processes of globalization. By the same token, alternatives can be sought only from within these ongoing processes. From a long-term historical perspective, global-

ization ought to be viewed as the latest phase of global modernity or modernities that occur in different locations and temporalities. Specifically in the case of China, modernity or alternative modernity is inextricably connected to the nation's revolutionary legacy and ideological hegemony, which does not simply constitute a particular, "local," antisystemic movement within the global system of capitalism but rather resonates with far-reaching "global" repercussions. In the evolving processes of globalization, China's experiments and movements remain inconclusive and open-ended, pointing to a plurality of possibilities. This book ends with some critical observations of the crises, tensions, and ruptures in the Chinese cultural scene in the 1990s. Yet insofar as critique itself is an indispensable and integral component of historical dialectic, it partakes in the process of change in a positive way.