

**Serving the People:
Institutionalizing Gender Commodification in China's Market Transition¹**

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Introduction

The following is an excerpt from field observations at a karaoke bar in Kunming, China

The mamasan selected six escorts to be viewed by the guests. Some wore chiffon gowns, others tight pants and low cut shirts, all wore high-heeled shoes, thick layers of makeup and sported mobile phones. I followed the six women led by the mamasan into the karaoke room where the male guests were waiting. The space was furnished like a living room with a velvet couch, plush carpet, and a television console. The escorts stood with expressions of indifference in front of the two men who sat on the couch smoking cigarettes, legs spread, arms stretched wide on the back of the couch, as they evaluated the women, looking them up and down joking and drinking. When the mamasan prodded the men to select women to accompany them one shouted ‘we don’t like any of these, we want to see some more’ and stomped past the small cluster of women out of the karaoke room into the pool room where some 30 escorts waited for business, the mamasan running behind him insisting that he wait in the karaoke room (Field Journal April 28, 2000).

The next excerpt is from a slide show presentation for management of the Beijing Transluxury Hotel (a pseudonym) conducted by an Asia Pacific regional executive. The advertisements referred to below are used throughout the world as part of a global marketing campaign.

“...it’s difficult to see the print image on this advertisement... you can see the pretty lady (woman in bathing suit wading in pool) that’s what’s important. This shows guests that they can relax at our hotels.” A second advertisement appeared on the screen. “This is another one of our new advertisements. It’s a man sleeping and the caption in the advertisement questions: who is he sleeping with?*Transluxury Hotel*” (January 14, 2000).

These observations illustrate the different yet complementary organizational conditions under which women are commodified in China’s increasingly globalized economy. The first observation, conducted at a karaoke bar frequented by businessmen in Kunming, a popular tourist destination in southwest China, demonstrates how female bodies have become widely accessible for public scrutiny in consumer service

environments. It suggests a local logic of gender commodification. Here, female service workers are commodified within an informal economy of gifts and favors that undergirds current business practice in China. Such leisure activities as attending karaoke and banqueting which involve female service labor are increasingly part of routine business practices geared to building trust in business relations (*guanxi*) by entwining clients in exchanges of gifts and favors (Hsing 1996; Yang 1994). The second observation, an excerpt from a talk in Beijing by an American regional executive of the “Transluxury” five star hotel line accompanied by a slide show, plays on ambiguities. Is it the woman wading in the pool who is relaxing? Or is the man whose gaze the camera adopts the one who is relaxing? The caption on the second slide, the question ‘who is he sleeping with?’ plays explicitly on a sexual entendre, one that associates the choice of hotel with a choice of sex partner. The advertisement suggests that these choices should operate according to similar logics. As part of its campaign to personalize its product for customers, the international hotel firm uses sexual excitement and intimacy from the male standpoint as a trope for the type of service that awaits potential customers of the hotel. This second observation then suggests the global corporate dynamics influencing the gender politics of commodification. In both cases women tend to inhabit hospitality arenas as producers, and men inhabit these spaces as consumers.

The emerging service economy is reformulating rules and boundaries defining gender in contemporary China. To investigate the organizational forces and consequences of this phenomenon I conducted one year of participant observation and in-depth interviewing in hotels in two contrasting geographical regions within China. The first region, Kunming, is capital of one of China’s poorest and most ethnically diverse

provinces. The second, Beijing, is the nation's capital and center of a considerably more developed region. I conducted research at one international hotel in each site. Both of the hotels were linked to a U.S.-based transnational corporation and provided services for foreign travelers and locals alike. The comparative nature of this ethnographic research sheds light on the articulations between global and local organizational structures and the gender labor regimes forged in the midst of such articulations in divergent regional contexts.

From Gatekeeper to Doorwoman

After the 1949 revolution brought the Chinese Communist Party to power a program of full employment introduced most women into industrial and agricultural labor. Today, the process of economic transition has set women adrift in the uncertain waters of China's emerging labor markets. In China's cities, middle-aged women are the first workers to be laid-off as state owned industries privatize operations. Female college and high school graduates face severe discrimination in entering the entrepreneurial sector. Rural women, whose labor is made redundant by decollectivization, migrate to cities in search of work.² Urban and rural women alike, under pressure to find gainful employment, are channeled into China's rapidly expanding service sector.

Service work lies at the intersection of a radical transformation in modes of production and consumption in China. While consumer services scarcely existed in China's pre-reform era today restaurants, karaoke bars, beauty salons, hotels, and cafes proliferate along urban streets. The introduction of market mechanisms and the decentralization of economic decision-making in the context of centralized state political authority have restructured social and economic relations. China's rapid economic

growth, sustained for well over a decade, has led to a significant rise in urban incomes creating a vigorous demand for consumer services. For the first time in fifty years consumers have access to leisure time and disposable income such that China's domestic tourist market is already the world's largest (Macleod 2001). As a result, consumer service is currently one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. By 1999 the service sector created seventy percent of new jobs in China and employed a majority of the country's new urban workers (China Economic Times 2000).

The growth of service sector employment has been accompanied by a distinct shift in the nature of service work. In the early reform period the few consumer outlets in existence were still predominately state-owned. Work in such shops was defined by an industrial paradigm, one that emphasized efficiency and orderliness over quality of interaction with the customer. As gatekeepers to a range of goods within a collectivist society, service workers adopted attitudes toward customers that could be accurately described as disdainful. It was not unusual at that time for staff to act indifferently toward customers or even to bark orders at them. One older woman who by 1999 was employed as a custodian at a spa reflected nostalgically on her pre-reform employment in a state-owned store: "...at that time we didn't even have to smile, we could yawn out loud and tell the customer to shut up and no one cared."

Given the array of merchandise and services now available to consumers, the service worker's role as gatekeeper to a supply of valuable goods that placed her in a position of power over the customer in the Maoist era has been reversed. With the introduction of market reforms service has made a decisive break from the rules of the Maoist era. Management and customers wield unprecedented power over service

workers. Today in various retail outlets it is not unusual to be greeted repeatedly by saleswomen with a smile and the refrain “welcome honored guest” (*huanying guke*). At restaurants, hotels and department stores doorwomen wear bright red banners reminiscent of beauty pageants emblazoned with yellow Chinese characters welcoming the guest or promoting a product. Customers can inspect merchandise at their leisure and there is often an overabundance of service workers available for assistance and quite enthusiastically willing to help customers. At the same time the growing investments of transnational organizations in service and consumption outlets throughout China also influence definitions and performance of service work. Operating between old and new paradigms of service many locals view service work as highly stigmatized particularly by its implication of subordination as one worker explained: “According to our way of thinking service people (*fuwuyuan*) are inferiors (*xiadengren*).” Service work both creates and signals broader trends of stratification occurring in contemporary China.

How has this shift from “gatekeeper” to “doorwoman” been accomplished? How have workers come to accept changes in status relations embodied in service work and society at large? To what extent are globalized gender service ideologies transferred to China? What are the institutional processes and shifting power relations within which service work has come to be defined in the reform era? Whereas women in the Maoist era were desexualized, socialist workers, why is it that in the current era women seem to be consenting to, in some cases embracing, their own gendered commodification? In the pages ahead I will consider the question of women’s consent to service as a new type of wage work which involves the transformation of bodies and selves into commodified gendered forms. By triangulating theories of institutions, labor processes, and gender I

delineate a theoretical framework that explains consent to service work in late socialist China.

The remaining sections of the paper proceed as follows: first I briefly discuss the utility and limits of labor process theoretical frameworks to explain worker cooperation in service work. To the extent that they focus on industrial labor, such studies present limitations for understanding the structuring of consent to such work. The next section looks specifically at ways the organization of service work diverges from that in manufacturing, raising new questions about the cultural and gendered nature of consent. While prevailing wisdom in the fledgling research field of service work has it that this type of work erodes the self, I argue that the formation of the (gendered) self is central to work regimens in the west. I suggest that the central questions in this field should shift from how the self is alienated to what kinds of gendered subjectivities are available and formed in service work in the process of eliciting worker cooperation. Turning to a discussion of western and Chinese organizations, I then draw on institutionalist theories to develop a conceptualization of the combination of what I argue are largely individualist-based western bureaucratic organizations with a local collectivist and relationally based organizational legacy in China for the formation of disciplinary gendered subjectivities in the context of globalization.

The Labor Process and Service

Why workers cooperate in the labor process and the degree to which their cooperation is secured have been perennial questions of Marxist labor studies. While Marx viewed the coercive force of the market pushing workers into wage labor for want of alternative means of survival, Burawoy (1985) finds historical variation in the

institutional conditions surrounding worker cooperation. Central to his schema is the role of the state in mitigating worker dependence on labor markets. In contrast to the market despotism of western competitive capitalism which Marx described, Burawoy's focus is the subsequent interwar period of monopoly capitalism. During this time legal recognition of trade unions, the provision of state unemployment insurance as well as pressure to increase consumer spending through enhancement of worker's wages, weakened worker dependence on the despotic market, forcing employers to devise strategies to elicit worker cooperation. Burawoy (1979;1985) terms this labor regime 'hegemonic.' In this period the constitution of workers as semi-autonomous individuals who organized work through competitive gamesmanship elicited cooperation in the production process (Burawoy 1979). Burawoy designates socialist labor regimes 'bureaucratic despotic' as workers in such regimes are entirely dependent on the state for their livelihood. In light of frameworks that privilege inexorable developments created by innovations in technology and deskilling (Braverman 1975), Burawoy's approach introduces the role of worker's subjective experiences and their abilities to modify, temper and resist forms of managerial control. Examining work subjectivities that are formed at the point of production is critical to grasping production process relationships that organize consent and resistance to labor processes. But the primary focus on dynamics and traditions of predominantly male industrial labor forces prevented early studies from conceptualizing how strategies of labor control create gender subjectivities to channel worker's efforts and elicit cooperation.

Feminist research on work has extended and amended Burawoy's conceptualization of consent. While Lee (1998) adopts much of Burawoy's labor process

framework, she finds fault with his teleological historical periodization and argues instead that factory regimes vary in response not only to the state but also to labor markets and the cultural organization of gender. In her comparative study of two factories, in Hong Kong and China, she finds that labor markets which channel different types of workers into factory work will have consequences for the way such work is organized. In a mainland Chinese export processing zone employing mostly rural migrant women she finds a labor regime enforced by localistic, patriarchal networks. Such networks organize labor recruitment, inform a division of labor and compel discipline in what is termed a localistic despotic labor regime. In a factory run by the same company but located in Hong Kong, where manufacturing had become a sunset industry, factory workers were recruited from a pool of married ‘matron workers.’ Tight labor markets and workers whose livelihoods and identities revolved as much around family as around wage work in the factory, created a more relaxed labor setting allowing women workers to operate at a slower pace and stretch factory rules. Lee designated such a factory regime ‘hegemonic familialism.’ Both regimes are characterized, according to Lee, by an absence of state mediation of labor markets.

While Lee advances labor process theories by integrating gender and cross-national variation in labor control regimes, neither she nor her predecessors in the labor process school suggest systematic labor control variations within nations and between sectors. I argue that we must not only abandon the notion of a linear transition of labor regimes from despotic to hegemonic, as Lee suggests, but it is imperative to acknowledge and explain variation in the labor process *within* nations and *across* sectors of employment to grasp the range of control and legitimation strategies that are supported in

a given historical moment. This will involve extending the focus of research from industrial production to other sectors as well as a multi-sited research strategy, one employed by this study. Furthermore, due to its traditional focus on male industrial labor, exactly what workers are consenting to, is a question perhaps too much taken for granted in existing labor process models. Feminist researchers have introduced the role of gender in the labor process but their focus on industrial labor still leaves important questions regarding the ways gendered subjectivities are formed in the labor process unanswered (for exceptions see Pierce 1995). To remedy this problem this study shifts analytic attention to the service industry.

Expanding Labor Process Theory

To understand operations of consent enabling the transition of service work identities from ‘gatekeeper to doorwoman’ in the service sector the larger institutional environment shaping the arenas in which consent is produced must be examined. This involves attending to the role of global capital. While global capital is present in Lee’s study it is not problematized or theorized such that we get a sense of how global factories might create conditions of consent different from locally owned factories. The present study asks: How do transnational corporations negotiate and reconfigure local structures of consent? I draw on institutionalist theories that conceptualize macro-institutional pressures for organizational conformity to understand the dynamics introduced by global capital (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Within the labor process studies of Burawoy (1985) and Lee (1998) managerial ideologies which mediate worker consent are unexamined. While institutionalists have a better grasp of the role of managerial ideologies in structuring legitimate authority, they have not adequately taken account of

pressures created by local norms and practices, a strength of labor process studies.³ The cross regional approach applied here brings to the foreground variation in local practices, experiences, and interests in fostering labor consent. It examines the ways gendered globalized western work repertoires are articulated with local work norms and practices in part by contemplating the gendered origins and structures of western organizations. To accomplish this I problematize Hochschild's (1983) notion that such work violates and erodes the self. Rather, I argue western originated global service industries are premised upon creating individualistic, semi-autonomous selves. Indeed a study of a Sino-U.S. hospitality joint venture illustrates the ways certain kinds of western gender identities are promulgated in the course of training for and performing service work. This study examines how such identities are resisted, adapted, and sometimes embraced.

Service: Emotion Work and the Construction of Identity

Despite the growing significance of service sectors to developed and developing economies alike, the literature exploring the gendered processes of economic development as well as market transformation of once socialist societies has focused primarily on women's work in manufacturing (Hsiung 1996; Lee 1998; Ong 1987; Rofel 1999; Salzinger 1997; Wolf 1992). Such studies are suggestive of the ways construction and reinforcement of gender and sexual difference generate labor consent and find that these processes cannot be viewed in isolation from larger societal institutions such as

³ Of course the Weberian tradition has attended to the role of managerial ideology in creating legitimate managerial authority. Bendix's *Work and Authority in Industry* (1956) examined national level variation in legitimating managerial ideologies but tended to rely on sweeping generalizations about national political culture rather than attending to the reconstruction of local norms and values by managers and workers, actors positioned quite differently in the labor process and differentially influenced by international institutional cultures and local organizational imperatives (Sil 2001).

family and religion (Ong 1987; Wolf 1992). However, labor processes in the manufacturing and service sectors diverge in at least four important ways.

First, in service work, particularly in hospitality, gender is simultaneously used as a means of labor control and produced for public consumption. In the service context, gender is produced as a signifier. In other words gendered bodies are used to carry messages about the organization (Lan 2001). That signification creates gender hierarchies through relationships between producers and consumers of services (Allison 1994). Second, the introduction of the customer as a potential point of labor control complicates the picture of consent (Leidner 1993; Smith and Fuller 1996). Customers are the wild card in the labor process; they can at times ally with workers but at other times support management. Hence, in order to contain the labor process, management attempts to also control customers (Leidner 1993). Third, service work often requires a certain amount of improvisation which management cannot always monitor. In place of direct monitoring, companies attempt to modify worker's identities and personalities through intensive and ongoing training programs. Producer and product are closely linked in service work therefore management trains workers to interact in acceptable and predictable ways. According to Leidner, "Since the 'empowered' service worker must custom-craft spontaneous responses to customers' individualized needs, maintaining quality control is a matter of transforming workers' characters, personalities, and thought processes so that their reactions to variable work situations will be predictable" (1993:37). Macdonald and Sirianni (1996) explain that such 'empowerment' approaches transform the workers such that they can flexibly interact with the customer. They argue that the need to supervise the production of an intangible, service, has given rise to

particularly invasive forms of workplace control and has led managers to attempt to oversee areas of workers personal and psychic lives that have heretofore been considered off-limits” (MacDonald and Sirianni 1996:4).

Finally, workers can view such intensive training as an opportunity for acquisition of cultural capital. Smith (1996; 2001) argues that to the extent it is viewed as valuable cultural capital, training can structure compliance to service sector work activities. Such consent cannot be understood, however, outside the class backgrounds and gender of workers which shape their definitions and means of access to such capital. The above factors point to limitations in the application of insights from research on gender and work in manufacturing to the service sector. But the existing corpus of research in the field of service work also present limitations. Most problematic for the present study is the tendency for this research to focus on western settings, blinding us to variations in the methods and consequences of organizing such work in divergent socio-cultural settings. Western models of service work organization should not be assumed to be universally functional.

Hochschild’s now classic research on the service sector conceptualized the defining feature of service as the performance of emotion work which, “...requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others...” (1983:7). Emotion work, she continues, “...sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality” (1983:7). Bringing the issue of subjective control of workers to the center of analysis, Hochschild’s research has constituted the reigning paradigm in studies of service work. But Hochschild views such subjective forms of control as eroding a self that is a source

of individuality and authenticity. For example, Hochschild claims that in service work corporate cues for feelings replace personal cues. Since feelings indicate to us the self-relevance of an event or interaction, this substitution constitutes a ceding of the self to corporate control. This brings about two possible consequences: 1) a splitting of the personality into a false self produced for consumption and a real self produced in the private realm outside of work; 2) a wholesale adoption of the corporate self, threatening the individual with the loss of a real self. But these conclusions rest on problematic assumptions that become clear when we study emotion work in an alternative cultural setting.

Studies of emotion work have rarely been conducted outside of the U.S., hence their conclusions are informed by presumptions about individualism and privacy that might not hold up in other cultures. What are in the west taken as individual concerns are in China often subject to state or employer supervision in the name of collective welfare. Hence 'private matters' (such as reproduction, marriage, and divorce) are viewed as a legitimate object of managerial concern. When we look at service work through the lens of another culture it become clear that Hochschild's (1983) conclusions about emotion work is premised upon a western private/public split, in which employers attempt to transfer emotional exchanges and experiences from a private realm of domesticity via women to the realm of commodity exchange. In other words, in the western capitalist world, bourgeois ideologies of motherhood and the domestic sphere have supported the gendered organization of service work (Hochschild 1983; Pierce 1995). But in the

socialist world gender ideologies that linked women's identities to the home did not exist.⁴

Hochschild's particular notion of self, as a repository for one's feelings and emotions, as well as the center one's authentic being (and interest) should be understood as a provincial perspective on identity, one rooted in a western Judeo-Christian history (Keller 1986; Weber 1956). Caution should be used in applying such assumptions to divergent cultural contexts. To avoid narrow assumptions about an interior self and to allow comparison of ways that identities and relationships are implicated in service work in different cultural settings, we should shift attention from how selves are effaced to how selves are produced within organizational settings. This means that we should first turn our attention to the specific historical western production and diffusion of individualism and its role in organizational discourse which can be linked to the development of industrial capitalism. In the western context hospitality work relies in part on the creation and reinforcement rather than effacing of an individualistic, 'authentic' self. Western workers tend to be constituted as individuals in order to foster production and productive relations. Through the creation of positive, individualistic identities, companies tie

⁴ Drawing on Chodorow's theory of the reproduction of mothering, Pierce argues that emotion work itself structures consent to service work because it draws on skills that resonate with women's roles in the private sphere. Whereas such roles might very well be a productive source of work identities in the US, in China such private gender roles were elaborated in a different way. Women's identity since the revolution have not centered on motherhood (Rofel 1999). Furthermore Mann (1997) argues that in China's late Qing era sons had a "...lasting intimate bond with their mothers that would be broken only by death" (11) which did not exist for daughters who would eventually marry out of the family. Therefore Chodorow's theory of male individuation and female connectivity with the mother does not completely apply to the case of China since women are not seen as full members of their natal families. Women eventually marry out of their families while sons remain integral members. Although this pattern has weakened in urban centers where men and women often relocate neolocally after marriage, the cultural legacy of this practice can be seen in the persisting belief that boys are a more valuable and integral part of the family. Hence, the skills involved in creating bonds of connectedness that are so central to emotion work in the west are not monopolized by women in China. China's socialist and patrilineal legacies do not allow for a neat adoption of gender competencies to the realm of work. Therefore we must look elsewhere to find the origins and sources of consent to service work.

workers to their organizations (Biggart 1989).⁵ Data from a Sino-American joint venture hotel can paint an illuminating portrait of the kinds of identities western firms rely upon to produce service, as well as the limits of promoting these identities in Chinese society.

In an attempt to dislodge the notion of self as a sacred, interior, private core of our beings authors Gubrium and Holstein (2001) argue for a social self viewed as a ‘...central narrative theme around which we convey our identity,’ (6) and as “our primary subjectivity, the entity we construct and comprehend ourselves to be as we go about our lives” (6). By employing this constructionist approach to identity we can comprehend why service workers tend not to view their experiences at work as creating a ‘false’ self in contrast with a ‘true’ self experienced in other arenas such as family, as Hochschild suggests (Wouters 1989). Work should be viewed as an arena in which workers and management alike constantly negotiate how the self will be crafted (Kondo 1990). Indeed, “Identities don’t develop from within us as much as they emerge from the circumstances of self-construction” (Gubrium and Holstein 2001: 8). It is the discourses promoted by institutions and their ties to systems of incentives, coercion, norms and values that set boundaries for the construction of the self. In her study of Japanese workshops, Kondo demonstrates how identities are crafted and re-crafted, reproduced, altered and manipulated within situational contexts, through various discourses which workers invoke as they engage in relations with fellow workers and managers. Kondo suggests, "One could argue that identity and context are inseparable, calling into question the very distinction between the two" (Kondo 1990: 29). Using this as a point of

⁵ Biggart (1989) examined the ways creation of an entrepreneurial identity forged commitment among distributors for direct sales organizations, such that continued participation sustained their identity to the extent that participants forfeited a part of their selves upon departure from the organizations (Biggart 1989).

departure for the present study, the relevant question shifts from Hochschild's, "How is the self eroded or alienated by commodification?" to "What kinds of selves are constructed through labor processes?" What roles do institutional environments play in this construction? What are the social possibilities for the construction of selves and relationships within a given organization? What are the institutional parameters that shape and limit these possibilities? How do workers creatively negotiate, build upon, and negate these parameters?

These questions move the analytic terrain away from conceptions of work alienation, denial, and constraint to the forms of organizational power that operate productively (Foucault 1979) in the creation of gender subjectivities. In performing service work employees are not merely consenting to degrading the self, they work on their own identity in ways that sometimes converge with institutional goals, but sometimes do not. If we understand work as embedded and capitalist modes of production as enabled by the ways in which they articulate with cultural forms we can look for the way the resulting synthetic forms create local points of worker consent, resistance, and appropriation. This will allow a more nuanced understanding of the operations of labor processes in the service sector. Using this framework, I examine the identities that are constituted by emotion work within the intersection of specific cultural, institutional, and historical conditions.

Historical Legacies of Divergent Organizational Patterns

To what extent is the gender organization of work which is created in western hospitality contexts reproduced in the Chinese organizations through macro-institutional pressure created by western global corporations? How thoroughly do imported western

bureaucracies disrupt the local organizational complex which is based on a very different historical legacy? This section first examines the historical legacies which have formed the basis of the western rationalist bureaucracy. It then considers collectivist and personalistic historical legacy of Chinese organizations and the re-emergence of institutional forms of personalism (*guanxi*) in China which have been empirically documented by a number of scholars. It argues that, given the necessity to motivate workers to enact new service repertoires, macro institutional forms must articulate with local cognitive structures and collective norms and values. This section creates a framework for understanding the articulation of divergent organizational forms shaping gender identities and relations.

In the present study culture is understood as institutionally generated and perpetuated, providing broad parameters for decision-making, rather than defining the end-goals of behavior (Bourdieu 1977; Swidler 1986). When institutionalized practices and understandings become a widespread, legitimating factor in organization within a nation-state, or a set of nation-states we can call them civilizational. Variation in institutional logics that frame organizational precepts and practices can be said to derive from divergent civilizational contexts (Hamilton 1994). Such contexts can be viewed as an “ideational bases for institutionalized authority relations” (Biggart 1991). Western bureaucracies can be said to historically derived from the intersection of a number of institutional legacies. The Protestant Reformation created the religious foundation for the emergence of a rational individualist ethos that shaped the development of the ideal typical modern bureaucracy (Weber 1958). Nowhere has the link between individualism and bureaucracy been made more compelling than in Foucault’s historical analyses of

modern institutions such as the prison and the hospital (1994; 1979). He illustrates the ways the bureaucratic institutional complex becomes effectively disciplinary through the formation of highly individuated subjectivities. The significance of individualism for the adoption and spread of specific managerial ideologies, technologies, and organizational characteristics in the west has been noted by a number of scholars (Bellah 1996; Bendix 1956; Cole 1979; Guillén 1994). Indeed, scholars have examined the role of an individualistic cultural ethos in informing the central tenets of Taylorist scientific management, enabling its eventual acceptance among the unions and the the general workforce (Sil 2001). Taylorist scientific management promoted highly differentiated forms of work, salaries and competitive job ladders.

It has been argued that the western bureaucracy is also premised upon a gendered division of social spheres that emerged with rise of capitalism. Historically, the large scale expansion of the western ideal-type bureaucracy was built upon a division of social spheres into a male arena of instrumental action and a female sphere of domesticity characterized by expressive action and particularism (Parsons 1951). Higher value is placed on the modern realm of 'affective neutrality' as Parson's counterposed it with traditional, 'less developed' societies in which relations of affectivity predominated (1977). Critics view the western separation of rational bureaucratic structure from a private, domestic realm of emotions as a product of historical gender ideologies that developed in conjunction with the emergence of capitalism (Ferguson 1984; Fineman 1993; Putnum and Mumby 1993). The classic Weberian ideal type bureaucracy reflects the male arena of instrumental action premised upon affective neutrality: behavior is guided by impersonal rules, power is invested in positions rather than people, activity is

prescribed through a detailed system of rules, relationships between actors are determined by the rules of office. Ferguson argues, “Bureaucratic discourse both creates and reflects the masculine notion of the subject, then posits that version of subjectivity as universal, rationalizes and maintains them” (1984: 204). Indeed gendered assumptions of a public self unfettered by particularistic social ties, inform the very precepts of an economic model that guides and legitimates prevailing organizational and individual action in western nations (England and Kilbourne 1990). Emotions associated with the private realm of expressive action enter organizations most often as commodified forms linked to service. While variations of this trend certainly exist, such research suggests a strong affinity between ideal typical gender roles and the private and public sphere. These ideal types inform popular assumptions about where what kinds of behaviors are appropriate, how action is legitimated, and what behaviors performed by whom are rewarded. In other words, institutions reward action to the extent that it approximates a gendered ideal type. Therefore such institutions can be seen as purveyors of a model of gender when they extend their operations abroad. Some organizations within the west have attempted to resist the gendered isomorphism of the rationalist bureaucracy, replacing bureaucratic interactional standards with what has been called ‘bounded emotionality’ (Martin 1998). But the pressures exerted by existing institutions are so powerful that this is difficult to accomplish (Klienman 1996; Rothschild 1979). How powerful are these pressures when exported to non-western contexts? What are the international reach and limits of this gendered model of organization and does it displace the local organization of gender?

The remainder of this paper considers the influence of global macro-institutional pressure (isomorphism) on Chinese organizations. It considers the processes through

which local forms articulate with globalized western organizations. Whereas such western bureaucracies are based on a gendered individualist model of self, Chinese organizations tend to be built upon a relational model of self. I argue that the contrasting models of self, embodied in the different organizations, must be synthesized to guarantee worker compliance to new service repertoires.

In contrast to an individualistic model of organization, a number of researchers point to the centrality of collective/relational modes to institution building as China undergoes market reform.⁶ A host of research on the growth of rural industries in China point to the re-emergence of personalistic/relational forms of organization that are providing the basis for rapid economic growth (Henderson 1997; Hsing 1998; Smart and Smart 1998; Wank 1999). As the central state recedes, relational forms (*guanxi*) that operated in underground opposition to the state (Yang 1994) now provide organizational resources for the market. The relational/collectivist norms governing such ties provide the cultural and normative materials for networks and organization (Lo and Otis 1999; Hsing 1998; Smart and Smart 1998; Wank 1999). But some caution that such ties might be an ephemeral transitional necessity that will ultimately be replaced by rational bureaucratic forms of organization. They claim that it is only in the vacuum of a more rationalized legal and institutional environment that relational (*guanxi*) forms are deployed (Clark 1996; Guthrie 1999; 1998). Others view such local practices as valuable socio-cultural resources that will constitute alternative organizational resources to sustain China's development.

⁶ Such relational modes have been de-linked from the strict familial roles that once defined them. Currently *guanxi* provides the norms and idioms for engaging in relations, but is no longer dictated strictly by kin relations (Lo and Otis 1999).

I argue that preexisting norms and relations are not inherently at odds with western bureaucratic forms of organization. Global corporate expansion will necessitate embedding corporate structures in local culture and institutional legacies. While this process will certainly transform relational norms, it will not dispense with them. Such norms are quite tenacious and persisted through China's period of Soviet aided industrialization. During the early years of Communist Party rule attempts to create more individualistic rationalized factories (embodied in the 'one man managerial system' and 'the responsibility system' promoted by Russian Soviet advisors in the early 1950's) socialist institutions did not create individualistic work systems. Instead organizations drew upon and channeled particularistic relations (Schurman 1971; Walder 1986). As mentioned earlier, dichotomized social spheres which cordoned off 'affectivity' to a private, domestic sphere was not part of the institutional legacy of China's industrialization. Nor are dichotomizations of rationality and emotion in evidence within the Chinese linguistic structure. For example the word for heart, the seat of emotions is also the work for mind (*xin*). The term for feeling (*ganqing*) is a fundamentally social concept, one that does not derive from a notion of the individual as the center of feeling but rather social relations as the source of feelings. Hence such divisions have not in the past provided an important basis to legitimate behavior or authority in China.

Differences in institutional orientation to dichotomies so fundamental to organizational logic in the west raise three questions: 1) What happens when western corporations attempt to introduce rationalistic bureaucracies relying on the dichotomies mentioned above into a cultural/organizational context that does not recognize such dichotomies? How do transnational organizations negotiate local structures of consent?

2) How is 'emotion work' organized within such a context and what are the individual and social consequences of such work? 3) What happens to the original gendered logic of western organizational forms once imported to the Chinese context?

Managing Isomorphism to Manufacture Consent

So far we have pinpointed the limits of labor process theory in addressing questions that arise in the course of analyzing the global organization of service work. There are also shortcomings in the research on service work that are a product of its assumptions about the self and its focus on western settings. While both of these fields have taken into account gender they cannot explain the necessarily synthetic processes of organizing worker cooperation to service work organized by transnational corporations in non-western settings. I turn to institutionalism to fill in the gaps left by labor process and service literatures.

China's rapid integration into the global economy has created institutional pressures and incentives to structure economic organizations in ways that seem familiar and legitimate to western investors and international organizations (Guthrie 2000). Institutional theory has conceptualized such pressures and their organizational consequences. It is argued that organizations that arise in an environment regulated by macro-institutions adopt organizational forms that are consonant with such institutions (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Such macro-institutional processes are termed 'isomorphism.' Prevailing institutional forms are adopted because they lend organizations stability, legitimacy, and provide a basis of communication with other organizations within the institutional domain. Hence, organizational change occurs within a set of power relations defined by such macro-institutions as states, international

organizations, and professions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Organizational change is better explained by such isomorphic pressures than by reference to efficiency or markets.

Most studies of organizational isomorphism examine pressures exerted within national boundaries. Orru, Biggart and Hamilton (1991) argue that firms within nation-states will develop methods of organization expedient within the local, political, cultural and social framework which create national-level isomorphic pressures. Such local factors will play a major role in determining those institutional forms which are most effective. Such studies can take for granted a broad cultural environment of shared norms and values. But what are the consequences of isomorphic pressures brought to bear on organizations across national and cultural boundaries? The economic positioning of developing economies motivates leaders to succumb to global isomorphic pressures in order to access investment and legitimate local organizations to such international institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. Hence the western derived rationalist bureaucratic forms and procedures are adopted (Guthrie 1999). In China, urban state enterprises adopt such forms, convinced they will gain legitimacy in the eyes of western institutions (Guthrie 1999). But local firms are then faced with the dilemma: how do they utilize their own socio-cultural resources (that have served firms in for example Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan so well) while simultaneously maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of western organizations?

Examining Sino-US joint ventures can illuminate how dilemmas presented by global isomorphic pressures are managed. In the case of the present study, incentives for local property owners (both state agencies) to adopt western methods of organizing hotel work at the two hotel properties I studied included promise of greater access to tourist

and business markets, a means of acquiring international, professional hospitality expertise, and leverage to promote organizational change within the hotel. More importantly, companies based in countries with successful economies are viewed by local managers and workers as providing consummate models of organizational success. The hotels' owners and managers welcomed in principle the 'state of the art' methods and management ideologies delivered by the transnational hotel company. Such western affiliation also accords workers and management prestige. But the problem of eliciting worker consent to new western derived service work repertoires including enacting the gender hierarchies involved in such repertoires must involve integrating work activity into local norms and practices that have in the past secured consent. As Hamilton and Biggart suggest, "Organizational practices...represent strategies of control that serve to legitimate structures of command and often employ cultural understandings in so doing. Such practices are not randomly developed but rather are fashioned out of preexisting interactional patterns, which in many cases date to pre-industrial times" (1992:182).

Extant literature suggests that isomorphic pressures can lead to three different consequences. The first possible outcome is wholesale adoption of prevailing institutional forms, creating a fundamental shift in authority relations (Guthrie 1999). While some studies suggest this is precisely what is occurring in present day Chinese organizations (Guthrie 1999), it should not be assumed that global isomorphism leads to thorough conformity with western forms of organization. This is particularly the case when the organizations in question rely on the activities of workers to garner profits. In this case bureaucratic mechanisms cannot be understood apart from the necessity of controlling and channeling workers energies in the interest of capitalist accumulation

(Gouldner 1954). Whereas western cultural, economic, and political hegemony legitimates western multinationals as conveyors of techniques of efficiency, work regimens and managerial strategies do not smoothly translate into local idioms of work and cooperation that must be involved to elicit worker cooperation. So while global organizations use their western credentials to legitimate new work regimens, they cannot rely entirely upon forms of work organization derived from western contexts.

The second organizational response to isomorphic pressures is to 'loosely couple' structure and activity. 'Loose coupling' refers to a chasm between ceremonial institutional structure and 'practical' or technical activity (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Routine decision-making under this model is not determined by formal institutional structures and regularly takes place outside the purview of generalized rules and goals. Rather than narrowly prescribing behavior, under a loose coupling model organizations rely on individual and group level demonstrations of commitment to a 'mythical structure of rationality and rules' to assure good faith decision-making (Meyer and Rowan 1977). But the notion of loose coupling tends to obscure the interface between structure and activity. While pressures to adopt prevailing forms certainly exist, it leaves open the question of how these forms articulate with local organizations.

The third organizational response to globalized isomorphic pressure, syncretism, is based upon observations in this study and others which indicate that in the process of development, western bureaucratic forms are not simply reproduced, rather, they interact with local organization and practice. Syncretism refers to the combining of organizational forms that have institutional roots in divergent settings (Sil 2001). Sil argues that in the process of adapting western derived organizational forms to non-

western settings “...aspects of preexisting models of community are selectively incorporated into formal ideological tenets and organizational routines for the purpose of providing a mutually intelligible foundation for cooperation and shared meaning among superordinates and subordinates.” (Sil 2001). Such models of community are perpetuated institutionally in the family, rural villages, and even by the state. Rather than loosely coupling, global structures must articulate with local practices through the various translations and transpositions of divergent routines and norms by middle managers and workers in order to be effective.⁷ Local managers must engage in creative forms of syncretic activity that integrate structural forms into familiar local practice. For example at the hotels that were the field site for this study, individualistic forms of self that were promoted by the global corporation in training became a basis for neo-traditional forms of paternalism on the ‘shopfloor’ (Walder 1986). In order to promote the individualistic ethics of the hotel among workers managers positioned themselves as parental figures teaching young apprentices how to become cultivated human beings. It is often the work of managers who find themselves at the intersection of global and local structures of work to creatively transpose work repertoires derived from different institutional settings (Sewell 1992).

As Palmer and Biggart have pointed out, “... new institutional analyses often fail to acknowledge the existence of multiple competing bases of organization legitimacy (2001). Indeed, the local organizational response to global isomorphic pressure cannot be explained without reference to the configuration of local institutions, their ability, power and interest in maintaining local norms and practices. Institutional studies have not

⁷ Tolich, Kenny and Biggart (1999) find that joint venture managers who ignore the cultural norms of local managers do so to the detriment of their organizations (see also Deyo 1996).

considered the potentially countervailing pressures to obtain both global macro-institutional legitimacy and grassroots worker consent increasingly necessary for maintaining many market organizations. In the case of China, organizational responses must also take into account two somewhat countervailing factors produced by the state: its ideological commitment to socialist norms and values and its simultaneous interest in turning a profit in the era of hard budget constraints. The state is under popular pressure to maintain a minimal commitment to certain collective norms and values. But, with its monopoly on union activity, the state also operates as a factor both legitimating and coercing local acceptance to global capitalist forms of work organization.

In applying syncretism to the case of western management in a reform-socialist Chinese context, I will extend the concept by incorporating the role of socialist institutional legacies, as well as current trends in globalization including the asymmetrical power relations produced between western transnational managers and local actors. My study will add depth to this framework by taking into account the three specific institutional legacies that shape the implementation of rational bureaucratic forms in this context: 1) a relational (*guanxi*) culture, based on a moral economy of face, trust, and reciprocity; 2) the multiple roles of the state; 3) persisting socialist collectivist traditions. In utilizing this framework to analyze the rich ethnographic data I have collected the dissertation will answer the question: How are western organizational structures adapted to local practices and what are the consequences of these adaptation for gender?

Conclusion

This dissertation examines the reconstruction of meanings in the interstices of global and local organizations which are necessary to make service work cognitively familiar and palatable to local workers. Connell (2000) argues that in the era of globalization a gendered politics implicit in the neoliberalist economic model is propagated by transnational corporations (57). While certainly promoting a gender politics, global organizations that disseminate gendered patterns of activity that do not entirely displace local gender practices but rather articulate with them. This dissertation will examine the ways that processes of globalization create and reinforce gendered identities that in turn foster worker consent to the historical shift in work roles from ‘gatekeeper to doorwoman’ and women’s attendant incorporation into a local informal economy of ‘gifts and favors.’ It is critical to examine such articulations in order to perceive syncretic forms of legitimate managerial authority and to understand the limits to such authority.

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