# Underglobalization

## Beijing's Media Urbanism and the Chimera of Legitimacy

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Courtesy of the artist and Danwen Studio.

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# After Legitimacy

*You have failed, you have done wrong,*
*says the modern orientalist.*

—EDWARD SAID

In July 2007, Beijing TV aired a story about local food stalls that served steamed buns (*baozi* 包子) filled with fat-soaked cardboard instead of pork. The money-saving tactic caused an uproar in the city's media and was broadcast nationwide on China Central Television (CCTV), leading people to speculate about food safety and the everyday flavors of getting ahead in the capital. Shortly after the report aired it was retracted by the station as itself a fake. The journalist, Zi Beijia, allegedly staged the story based on hearsay using migrant workers. He had hoped to the boost the ratings of *Degrees of Transparency* (*Toumingdu* 透明度), a program he produced for Beijing TV's Life Channel. Soon after, Mr. Zi issued a formal apology and was arrested. The fake story about the fake baozi, however, did not go away. The media and passing conversations revealed a rampant belief that the fake buns were in fact real—that is, actually filled with fatty pulp—and that the retraction, apology, and arrest were put on by government intervention.[1] Unsavory practices that contributed to the negative "made in China" image, it was thought, would not to be tolerated in the Olympic era—a period intrinsically linked to China's twenty-first-century media urbanism.

Regardless of the story's truth,[2] the string of fakes, or more precisely uncertainties, underline a host of issues related to media, development, and legitimacy in contemporary China—and globally. In the very same week in July 2007, the former head of China's State Food and Drug Administration, Zheng Xiaoyu, was executed for accepting bribes to approve substandard and tainted medicine. The proximate months were equally marred by repeated controversies, at home and abroad, over poisonous infant formula, contaminated toothpaste, intellectual property (IP) violations, performance-enhancing

drugs, human rights abuses, artificial rain, images of stubborn "nail houses" (*dingzihu* 钉子户), campaigns against corruption and pornography, and confusion over the high steroid levels of Beijing's poultry. This latter fact hit the news as part of a campaign boasting that Olympic athletes would eat from a separate food supply chain. Residents wondered why their food was not fit for visitors.

What troubles is not that people modify food with cheap ingredients for economic advantage, or that information is manipulated and put to various ends—such stories are overwhelmingly ordinary—but rather the fear that one's ability to discern paper food and bad news has somehow been diminished. The story about the alleged cardboard buns is filled with this confusion—they are literally con-fused—pointing to changing notions of how the state and citizens should act, the commercialization of media industries, and new discourses of (il)legitimacy that are irresolutely *after* socialism. These mushrooming experiences of disorientation, extralegality, and social endangerment are at the center of underglobalization, though it is often said to be something else entirely. While these examples are specific to the People's Republic of China (PRC), this felt sense of uncertainty also extends across the continents, shored up by anxieties about fake news, failing ecologies, massive inequity, resurgent fascisms, neoliberal reasoning, and more. Put differently, illegitimacy—as a marker of illegality, abnormality, and crisis—is both a protocol and an outcome of globalizing processes.

While the mundane example of the cardboard bun privileges a key period in my own research—the years framing the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games—the uncertainties it projects have only intensified in subsequent years: from stories about picture-perfect fake Apple stores, false reports of former Premier Jiang Zemin's death, and the confiscation of "miracle pills" allegedly made from dead babies, to evidence of pervasive academic fraud; widely reported ghost cities; the global fascination with the detention of figures like Liu Xiaobo, Chen Guangcheng, and Ai Weiwei; and salacious tales of corruption. The latter is exemplified by the 2012 Bo Xilai and Gu Kailai scandal, including Bo's dismissal as Chongqing party chief and removal from the Politburo, and Gu's conviction for the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood. The opaqueness of Beijing's polluted skyline is more than a metaphor.

In this way, the cardboard baozi is emblematic of a new social mode where fake is broadly defined to conflate a range of meanings and practices. Fakes are not genuine (not pork), second-rate (not as good as pork), harmful (poisonous, lacking in nutrition), and punishable (by arrest, execution, pedagogical intervention), and, at the same time, can be a productive strategy to lower

costs, increase ratings, and assert control over an epistemological or social field (e.g., state intervention, street-level doubt, fake news). This emerging cultural, economic, and political logic, or *illogic*—which extends far beyond the commonplace discussion of counterfeit goods and media piracy—is the focus of this book. It centers on struggles over legality and legitimacy, and their deep embeddedness in the technologized city, during a period that I term the *Olympic era*: from Beijing's victorious Olympic bid in July 2001, to the ninetieth anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party in 2011, and into the speculative future of the 2022 Beijing Winter Games.

## The Fake

The fake—variously figured as *jiahuo* 假货 (faked goods) or *fangmaopin* 仿冒品 (counterfeit), *daoban* 盗版 (pirated), *kelong* 克隆 (cloned), *gao* 稿 (copied),[3] or *shanzhai* 山寨 (a common term for copies of branded products, especially electronics),[4] among many other such terms—emerges and is put into discourse under a particular set of historical conditions. The cultural theorist Akbar Abbas describes this "historical marker" as the process of "faking globalization." He argues that fakes appear when cities are "just about to enter the world economy and become exposed to media representations of global commodities." The fake, for Abbas, is part of a historical stepladder that disappears, or reappears in bona fide forms, when a city or country integrates more fully into global structures; it is a *symptom* of development.[5]

Abbas's well-known essay is an emblematic frame for this book. I build on a number of his insights about the transformation of Chinese cities, informal and piratical practices, and their relation to globalization. But ultimately, I disagree with his conclusions about fakes, design, and development. I take these up more fully below. In short, whereas Abbas turns to design culture as a geopolitical fix, perhaps as a kind of pharmakon, I locate the problem elsewhere. This book begins to theorize a larger process of *faking globalization*—what I reconceptualize as *underglobalization*—examining the frictions and folds between an emergent China and prevailing hegemonic structures. Put differently, it moves beyond the common focus on counterfeit objects, pirate consumption, and benevolent norms. Instead, it examines multiplying conditions of illegality and illegitimacy, and the basic relation of such conditions to dominant models for development and futurity (from district governments to the World Trade Organization): illegal citizens and cities, erratic legitimacies newly tethered to media infrastructures and performativities, and a global condition that, despite its own triumphalist rhetoric, is profoundly antidemocratic, unequal, and unjust.

As a starting point, I share Abbas's concern with the inadequacy of our current frameworks for meaningfully engaging Asian urbanism, illicit assemblages, and forms of political action. Instead, "we must come up with new terms and new frameworks" to engage this complex media urbanism at all.[6] This is particularly true of Chinese media/area studies' deep narrowness—which too often emphasizes national culture and discrete fields such as literature, cinema, and the new. Such frames are largely uninterested in inter-Asian or intermedial dynamics, or in the crucial social and political interpenetrations that make illicit life meaningful. Instead, they rely on what Bhaskar Sarkar calls an "additive" model of the global—where, if you add up all of the areas, you have a world.[7] Against such a static world picture, pirate culture and politics make sense only as part of a mutating system of prescribed and proscribed imitations, and the structural harmonizing of legal regimes, economic norms, and aspirational lifeworlds.[8] This is what has led political scientists like Edward S. Steinfeld—not to mention publications from *The Economist* to *Foreign Affairs*—to argue that "China's rise doesn't threaten the West"; instead, the architecture of globalization has developing nations "playing our game."[9]

Let me briefly rehearse a few of Abbas's arguments in the "Faking Globalization" essay. He begins by offering three concepts for engaging Asian cities and their ineluctable relation to globalization: Gilles Deleuze's "any-space-whatever," Mario Gandelsonas's "x-urbanism," and Abbas's own riff on the latter term, *X-colonialism*.[10] Together these concepts, while distinct, theorize a shift in the experience of the city and of everyday life that are deeply uncertain—not unlike the confusion of chewing on a cardboard baozi. The first term describes processes of fragmentation and disorientation, both in cinema and in spatial practice (such as Deleuze's theorization of the "movement image" and focus on postwar ruins and shantytowns), where, as Abbas puts it, space describes "places we do not yet understand, or no longer understand," and affect refers to "emotions we do not yet have, or no longer have a name for."[11]

Such unmooring is amplified by new modes of replication that have transformed the image and experience of the city in ways that are affectively felt but are often unregistered by visual knowledge—a mode of visuality or repetition that makes it difficult to see.[12] Drawing on Gandelsonas's x-urbanism, and resonant with theorizations of digital culture, Abbas describes this replication as *fractal*. Its logic disrupts previous urban forms, like the unicentric model of downtown and suburb, not by contesting the whole or adding a new discrete dimension, but through "the replication, on a smaller scale, of the whole."[13] X-urbanism is a model of reproduction or diffusion that basically challenges

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existing ideas about social and political space—where, for instance, the richest and poorest are not separated by continents but live as neighbors, worlds apart—transforming the import of repetition itself (as imitation, model, transfer, atmosphere, digitization, etc.). Finally, Abbas argues that fractal replication matters beyond urban form or developmental gestures and is crucial to how colonialism transforms itself as a structure of dominance—the x-colonial. As above, this presence is hard to describe, not where one expects it to be, affectively powerful but unnamed, and yet vital to the performativity of legitimacy and control. It is, in other words, spectral. I develop this idea in chapter 1 in relation to the experience of ruins and of planning's new visual culture.

It is when Abbas turns to the fake that the essay becomes most illuminating and most infuriating—a paradoxical mode of theorizing that he relishes. He moves through a wide range of examples—from Orson Welles's *F Is for Fake* (1973), Swiss watch *ebanchés* (movements), and the "original-fake," to the politics of fake consumption—demonstrating how fakes can destabilize our very categories of authenticity and drive puzzlement.[14] What is useful in Abbas's analysis of the fake is that he refuses simple moralizing or the familiar invocation of legal regimes to manage the piratical. The RAND Corporation's report *Film Piracy, Organized Crime, and Terrorism* is emblematic of such narratives, linking the financial losses of US movie studios to the criminal acts of cartels and terrorists.[15] Such reasoning justifies both direct and covert interventionism the world over, turning pirates into terrorists and affluent white male hackers into darling CEOs of Silicon Valley–style tech-utopias. Instead, he takes the contradictions of the fake seriously. Abbas argues that the fake never exists in isolation—rather, it depends on experts, legal regimes, technology, developmental logic, and so on—and that its value is as a "symptom of a set of social, economic, and cultural conditions" that we must consider how to change.[16]

At the same time—and this is what I find most significant—Abbas sets a clear limit on the social and political value of the fake and informal or piratical practices, and on their capacity to disturb the condition of globalization itself. He writes: "When something is faked, global order is not disturbed; in fact, the fake confirms, rather than subverts the global division of labor, made worse now by the fact that it is developing countries that condemn *themselves* to the (fake) production of First World designs. The fake is not, as it is sometimes represented to be, capable of being politically subversive of the global order."[17] He arrives at this conclusion after a curious comparison of Richard Rosecrance's developmental parable of "head" (designing) and "body"

(manufacturing) nations, and Ziauddin Sardar's postcolonial challenge to global commodity consumption in the form of Malaysian street piracy. Abbas finds each claim, in a different way, to be too optimistic. The former assumes that foreign investment, technology transfer, and manufacturing capacity will lead assembling nations to grow their own heads, becoming designers. It does not account for basic inequities, the experience of lag and enforced imitation, or whether in fact this "meanwhile" will ever arrive. On the other hand, Sardar's understanding of the "gentle inversion" of "in-cluded" Malays, with their fake fashions and cloned mobile phones, emphasizes the timeliness of the fake as an immediate form of technology transfer. But its short-term gains, for Abbas, confirm rather than subvert the global order.[18]

Against these two optimisms—one hegemonic, the other a form of making do—he abruptly concludes the essay with another inversion: the problem with the fake is not its lawlessness and radicality, but that it is "too rule-bound and conservative." While provocative, the claim leads to a narrow understanding of the fake and faking it, and, in my view, a deeply problematic conclusion: "the best way to go beyond the fake is not through legislation" (all good so far!), "but to encourage the development of design culture." To be fair, his provocations about design are intriguing if far too vague—that it "falsify" rather than "fake," that it stop making crap that is so easy to copy, and that it include those responsible for the informal economy.[19]

What I want to emphasize here is this: Abbas erects a threshold for what constitutes transformative practice, and clearly locates the value of the fake in the narrow context of high-value commodity design (e.g., in designing, not making). What is surprising is how unsurprising the conclusion is: it is a familiar call to avant-garde production that is pedagogical in its idealizations, fits easily within the global creative economy and China's own innovation ambitions, and is oddly dismissive of real conditions of precarity, abandonment, and the becoming illegal of everyday forms of life. At best this call for design merely reverses the head–body problem, sending manufacturing further down the food chain. Hence his playful suggestion that the West fears China's power to design more than its power to copy: "once China can also design, it will be unstoppable."[20] The question of what design creates and for whom requires more attention.

### From Fake Things to Illegal Life

Abbas's thresholding and symptomatic reading of the fake are important because they are familiar. In one way or another his arguments are reiterated by much of the best work on informal media, piracy, and other forms of
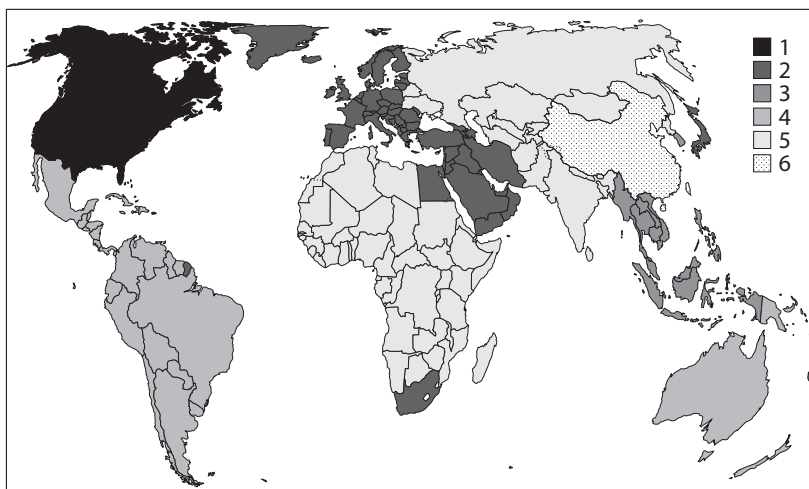
Map I.1  ᴅᴠᴅ region coding quarantines China into a single zone. Adapted from "Map of ᴅᴠᴅ Regions with a Key" by Monaneko, available under ɢɴᴜ Free Documentation License.

make-do politics and sociality. Many such works—including what I take to be seminal books in media studies, such as Pang Laikwan's *Creativity and Its Discontents*, Ramon Lobato and Julian Thomas's *The Informal Media Economy*, Joe Karaganis's *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies*, and Ravi Sundaram's *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism*—explore the piratical but also establish a clear limit to the value of the illicit and the informal as political thought and action. Thus, while fake practices may draw attention to real problems, and are titillating in their transgression and shoddy inventiveness—as with discussions of local make-do practices like shanzhai, *jugaad*, and *gambiara*—such practices are hardly the stuff of serious cultural engagement or political theory. This gap between the meaningful and the trivial, center and edge, draws our attention to an epistemological block: the discursive construction of piracy impedes understandings of actually existing forms and practices.[21] While the piratical announces a broad array of social forms and relations—from the ᴅɪʏ and the survivalist to indeterminate zones and the blatantly illegal and antisocial—it also helps us to conceptualize a particular relationship to legality and legitimacy shored up by media globalization. I will return to this idea shortly.

There are, of course, good reasons for dismissals. Concerns about fakes and faking it are also familiar: piratical practices may be illicit but they are not self-consciously political; at best they are "prepolitical," and thus fail to

constitute anything like a counterpublic;[22] informal practices are apertures to formality and thus are easily incorporated by the existing state and corporate structures; focusing on the informal and make-do practices is just more of the romance industry shored up by cultural studies and related fields, where resistance is located and evocatively described, but nothing changes; pirate production steals from the legitimate economy, but damages artists and small-scale producers the most; piracy is best described as a "global pricing problem" and should be understood in relation to access and economic concerns;[23] pirates challenge the rule of law upon which democratic life is built; piracy enables short-term inhabitations for subaltern and popular populations but also brings "them to the edge of permanent technological visibility" and surveillance;[24] unregulated practices lead to real dangers like the production of fake infant formulas or medicines that harm or kill people, and thus "forgeries can't be romanticized";[25] piracy is merely a symptom, the real action is elsewhere; among many others.

These are important issues and are taken up at different points in this book. But routine dismissals, and the general policing of the boundary between real and fake, also do a certain kind of political work. They have become automatic and inhibiting rather than critical and enabling.[26] It is by now required to point out the limits of piracy before discussing its minor potentialities, mere footnotes to core problems. Against such dismissals, piracy and fakes—as modes of cultural, economic, and political life under conditions of illegality and illegitimacy—have more to tell and teach us. At the same time, the idea that fakes are merely symptomatic of development and disappear in so-called developed zones demonstrates the force of hegemonic claims of globalization—which is to say they are fictions. Such claims get to the heart of late capitalist logics, including deep collaborations between ostensible democracies and autocracies, and the marketization of control via commonsense categories like *creativity*, *authenticity*, *security*, *futurity*, and even *civil society* and *citizenship*.[27] The linkage between the cognitive economy, legal regimes, and state violence (in its banal and catastrophic forms) demands more attention.

Legal activist Lawrence Liang, in the widely circulated online documentary *Steal This Film* (2006), describes the imbrication of intellectual property and militarized violence as the repression of human potential. Liang asserts: "One cannot speak of the gap between the possible and the proscribed without actually looking at what exists between the two. And what exists between the two are legal fictions backed by extreme capabilities of violence. So, it's a terrorism of the mind that actually sustains concepts like intellectual property.

It's a terrorism that's grounded on an idea of a brutal repression of that which is actually possible."[28] Liang's critique of intellectual property and the creative economy—as a "terrorism of the mind"—inverts discourses of the pirate and terrorist, and it is a sharp reminder of what the creative economy produces. What it produces is the power to adjudicate, and to violently enforce distinctions between, real and fake things, affects, and ways of life—what we can call the *creation of legitimacy*. The flip side is a surge in gatekeeping, disciplinary actions, and illegitimacy (where illegitimacy means not sanctioned by the law and its recognizable signs or trademarks). These less visibly violent forms of brute repression are at the heart of underglobalization. Further, they shift our attention to the forms of difference and disposable worlds—what Neferti X. M. Tadiar terms "remaindered life-times"—that many neoliberal critiques, because they focus on top-down economic domination, have proven less suited to theorize.[29]

This is to recalibrate our focus from *what piracy is* to *what piracy does*. As Liang argues, a "shift in focus from the discursive and moral representation of the illegal deed to the wider social world in which the deed is located allows us to bring into light the very nature of the law that names a particular act as an illegal one."[30] A key task in this context is to repopulate the techno-economic discourses that diminish and dispose of human beings and social worlds. For example, the first part of this study addresses how the inhuman address of urban plans, devoid of people but richly rendered in vital and verdant hues, catalyzes modes of *piratical citizenship*—contested forms of urban belonging enacted by illegal but socially legitimate claims on media, infrastructure, and citizenship itself.[31] Further along this thread, the book concludes by considering how human infrastructures and the "social network of hands" recast sprawling policing projects, like China's National Anti-Pornography and Anti-Piracy Office (Quanguo saohuang dafei gongzuo xiaozhu bangongshi 全国扫黄打非工作小组办公室), which combines copyright enforcement with nebulous antistate or pornographic targets. What is not potentially illegal in this context? Each of these, and the chapters in between, is centered on a shift from examining fake things to theorizing the antagonisms of illegal life.

These debates are not new. They recall, among other things, the mottled practices associated with popular shanzhai (literally "mountain fortress" 山寨) and *jianghu* (literally "rivers and lakes" 江湖) culture, among other lawless zones in China's past and present imagination. Often traced back to the fourteenth-century text *Outlaws of the Marsh* (*Shuihuzhuan* 水浒传), shanzhai and jianghu draw our attention to time and space outside the familiar, such as the alternative worlds of *wuxia* (martial arts 武侠) literature and cinema.

Taiwanese scholar Josephine Ho describes shanzhai as various outlaw communities and modes of "self-preservation and self-protection" that emerge during particularly troubled times in Chinese history. She adds: "with only limited resources afforded by the defensive geographic location, and pressed by the desire for survival, these fortresses had also been known to sometimes resort to highwayman or Robin Hood–style robberies."[32] Now applied to copycat electronics that disassemble and remake global brands like Apple and Samsung, shanzhai productions mark a tentative position outside the economic order that has been both celebrated for its vitality and, at the same time, condemned as criminal or primitive.[33] Critically, the concepts stake out communities at the edge of the social—what we might think of as quotidian if structural heterotopias—sites that are at once integral to the cognitive economy and drive an informal politics of assembly. This line between creative and menial labor, the socially valuable and socially tolerated, for example, is the focus of chapter 5.

Similarly, these contemporary forms recall Marcus Tullius Cicero's 2,000-year-old proclamation that pirates, because they operate outside of territorial sovereignty and ordinary jurisdiction, are the "enemy of all" (*hostis humani generis*). Under Roman law, and subsequently international law, piracy came to define a new legal category distinct from individuals and states.[34] It carves out an alternative "legal geography," both inside and beyond the state, that denies subjects legal status in the world.[35] As Daniel Heller-Roazen argues, they can neither be considered "common criminals" under the civil code, nor "be represented of lawful enemies, for by virtue of their enmity with respect to the general collectivity they fail to constitute an association with which there might be peace as well as war."[36]

As such, the pirate is legitimized as the universal enemy of humankind and thus can be killed by anyone. This startling and resilient formulation—durable because this logic continues to enable slow and catastrophic violence toward various nonstate actors; terrorists; immigrants and refugees; sexual, gender, religious, and racial minorities; as well as those operating in indeterminate legal zones, such as the sea—captures how piracy troubles legal and social legitimacy, and seeps into ordinary life.[37] This includes the possibility of "the collapse of the distinction between the criminal and the political." Put differently, the zone of illegality ordained by the "enemy of all" leads to a transformation of the idea of war.[38] It relocates warfare to seemingly mundane levels of the social—immunizing some from risk, exposing others—consolidating new legal regimes centered on the exclusion and eradication of illegal forms of life. What matters here is how illegal or piratical subjects, practices, and

sites—placed outside of and endangered by the whole—are recast and prolife-rate under neoliberal cum postsocialist legitimacies and governance. This illicit assemblage, and not counterfeit IP or uncreative Asians, is the real problem specified by underglobalization. In this way, *Underglobalization* contributes to decades-long debates about colonialism and development, ranging from Walter Rodney's foundational critique, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, to Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's 1968 film *Memories of Underdevelopment (Memorias del Subdesarrollo).*[39] That questions of underdevelopment are central to recent Chinese cultural production, and that China is now the power tied to the underdevelopment of Africa, among other areas, signals the importance and complexity of this problem.

It is worth noting here that the "enemy of all" does not neatly map onto Carl Schmitt's well-known articulation of the "state of exception."[40] The ex-ception operates on the dichotomy of "law" versus "no law," where, in theory, the law is operative or it is suspended, and the sovereign is the one who can decide. In contrast, piracy inaugurates a paradoxical formation. It is a legal category that makes the exception permanent, extralegal—which is to say it is only ever partially a legal formation to begin with. The idea of piracy in international law is thus not based only or even primarily on the authority to decide on the state of exception—on, that is, the power to suspend democracy during crisis—but rather the entangled power to decide on the state of nor-mality and inclusion, and thus abnormality and exclusion, *distinct from legal norms*. This is the power to determine real and fake, human and inhuman. In other words, the logic of hostis humani generis offers its own challenge to un-derstandings of sovereignty. And this challenge, following Achille Mbembe's intervention in a parallel context, is *necropolitical* rather than biopolitical. As Mbembe puts it: "sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is *disposable* and who is not."[41] Here, most basically, we find the troubling and peculiar linkage between fake things and fake life.

To be clear, I agree with Schmitt's foundational claim that sovereignty rests on the power to decide rather than on legal norms. Indeed, my aim is to push his Hobbesian notion that authority and not truth makes laws into the mundane world of media urbanism and global contact.[42] To do so requires challenging the scale or intensity of what constitutes meaningful events or crises. The exception is not invoked for the banal, the chronic, the pathology of the normal. As Elizabeth Povinelli forcefully argues in *Economies of Aban-donment*, in much of the disposability, exposure, and killing that proliferates across the global system, "nothing happens that rises to the level of an event let alone crisis." Rather, it suggests a "dispersed suffering" for which the state

of exception need not ever be invoked.[43] Schmitt's exception thus needs to be pushed to its extreme—which is to say, to its most banal. When left only to ponder the possible limit or suspension of the system itself, the exception becomes a kind of ruse, misrecognizing the real emergency. This transposition, in my view, is entangled with another important shift: the waxing of legitimacy and waning of legality as sovereign forces across the global system.

In this regard, a basic aim of this book is to reorient research about piracy and the fake away from a narrow focus on copyright and related violations, which spectacularize headlines about northern loss and southern larceny—and toward concrete failures in legality, democracy, and globalization. These are not simply China's failures, as Euro-American pundits and scholars have it, but are intrinsic to the global system that it cocreates. Bourgeoning and global forms of illegality include illicit relationships to water, food, housing, electricity, medicine, education, political representation, labor, religion, mobility, gender, imagination, technology, cities, and citizenship itself. Beyond the focus on discrete commodities or legal regimes, this book begins by learning from postcolonial studies and engagements with the Global South, by tracing everyday urban forms and media practices, and by emphasizing "political society" over more familiar civil and public spheres—including critiques of the limits of such spheres in the People's Republic of China.[44]

A related problem is the tendency to subordinate the political aspects of piratical and illegal practices to their economic effects. In addition to assuming the logic of WTO-style claims about creativity and development—which requires the adoption of legal protocols that benefit patent-holding nations (like the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights or TRIPS), enabling new forms of "information feudalism"[45]—this subordination transforms political claims into developmental crises to be solved by technocrats. Similarly, research on informal (media) economies and the survival sector, which examines how unofficial economic activities operate outside of or in partial articulation with state and corporate structures, tends to take a narrow economic view.[46] While such work has been crucial in reorienting the basic terrain of cultural production, distribution, and consumption—acknowledging that what had been called fake, shadow, or the edge is indeed the center for most people—its focus on the unmeasured, unregulated, and untaxed has downplayed or ignored how informality and pirate practices animate social and political systems. Piratical practices matter well beyond strict economic concerns, hysterical narratives of law-breaking and lost revenues, production contexts, or even the consumption side of the global economy and its emphasis on producing consumers. Indeed, one of the chief arguments

of this book is that informal and illicit culture and creativity—as modes of underperformativity—not only open up new economic zones, fostering circulation, contact, and local value, but also drive a new *distribution of the social*.

## Global Political Society

The fiction of law has been exposed by globalization. Put differently, sovereignty is to legality what competing sovereignties are to legitimacy. By this I mean simply that the overlapping spatial and temporal controls intensified by globalization basically transform legal effects and affects. If the imagi*national* allowed for a relatively coherent sense of territoriality, jurisdiction, and the law, then global flows and permeabilities constantly disregard, resituate, and remake these claims. In the context of intellectual property and piracy, Shujen Wang describes the problematic enforcement of global copyright at distinct scales as a shuttling between liminal spaces: "between copyright legislation and law enforcement, between global copyright governance and national/local compliance, between global actors and national networks, and among different levels of juridical spaces and overlapping sovereignties."[47] Following Saskia Sassen and Aihwa Ong, among others, Wang argues that national–global models are insufficient to make sense of what is a "polycentric legal order" consisting of "multiplying and overlapping sovereignties."[48]

Overlapping sovereignty describes multiscalar negotiations and a crucial shift in the textures of legality and legitimacy. This emergent confusion is a many-headed hydra. On the one hand, it emphasizes a range of debates in international affairs. As Richard Falk asks, "can international actions be regarded as legitimate even if they are not legal? And are legal actions in the global arena sometimes deemed illegitimate?"[49] Falk and his coeditors have in mind a range of current issues in international law, including military interventions—which are often understood by international bodies to be legitimate even if they are illegal (and vice versa). Sovereign states are not supposed to invade one another, but in certain cases (and importantly not in others) public opinion and institutions like the United Nations or states like United States or the People's Republic of China may sanction such interventions as moral and political goods. Here, legitimacy trumps legality.[50] In other cases still, as Falk notes, they proceed regardless of legitimacy and legal will. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 or China's excursions into the South China Sea are widely seen as both illegal and illegitimate.

This tension, focused on top-down formations in the above examples, signals a larger contemporary shift whereby legality and the law—in ad hoc, opportunistic, and at times rabidly antiprogressive fashion—give way to

contested forms of legitimacy. As I develop throughout this book, overlapping sovereignty might be better considered and theorized as forms of *overlapping legitimacy*. This, in my view, is an essential ramification of proliferating conditions of under-, extra-, and illegality—and the constant negotiation between what is (il)legal and what is socially (il)legitimate. It returns us anew to Schmitt's political theology: that the sovereign is both inside and outside the law, because of the capacity to suspend it, is also to note the turtles-all-the-way-down logic of the argument. If not legality, then upon what does this authority rest? My modest answer to this question is that the workings of political society—wedged between state and civil and corporate spheres, local to transnational—bring us sharply into contact with the portable legitimacies and contests over authority that undergird contemporary forms of political subjectivity.

If competing sovereignties suggest routine exceptions and the uneven enforcement of the law—as sovereign claims multiply, expanding and contracting across scales and contact zones—then the law itself is diminished. Thus, while legal regimes speak in a loud voice and continue to buttress hegemonic global projects, they must also seek out new forms of legitimation. This observation is consonant with critiques of how neoliberalism(s) divides populations—fostering new modes of social legitimacy and illegitimacy. Consider two distinct if entangled examples. First, critiques of contemporary economic reason emphasize the increasing division between those living with legal rights and protections—now recast as privilege—and those squeezed outside the licit realm. This is to ask, as Tadiar does, "which individuals inhabit and qualify for the investor model of subjectivity and its structure of temporal experience?"[51] And which fall away as bad investments or illegal citizens? Another emblematic example is what legal activists like Vandana Shiva term "biopiracy." Biopiracy describes how Western patent systems treat local biodiversity and knowledge as "empty of prior creativity and prior rights," and hence open to outside claims of "ownership" and "invention."[52] This clear and exploitative gap between what is legal and what is legitimate also helps us to observe, as Shiva notes, that the "promotion of piracy is not an aberration in the US patent law. It is intrinsic to it."[53]

Competing legitimacies—from subnational to transnational—fill the space left by uncertain juridical powers and the paradoxical condition of weak law (e.g., overlapping, unevenly enforced, at sea), on the one hand, and growing conditions of under- or illegality on the other. From illegal squatters who make moral claims on housing or education to transnational alliances that mobilize public will for illegal interventions—including those against violence

Figure I.1 A graphic forest surrounds a construction site in Beijing—exemplifying the banal ways media become enmeshed with the city. Photo courtesy of Wang Wo.

and genocide—legitimacy increasingly bleeds into and reanimates any universal sense of the law as a political infrastructure. The recourse to legitimacy marks the instability and the failure to harmonize, or at the very least the massive gaps within, legal protocols. This recalls another of Heller-Roazen's recuperated terms, the *littorum*. The littorum designates the indeterminate zone where land meets sea, and where the fluctuations of the moving shoreline put all rights under dispute, thus challenging sovereignty and its claims on land, property, and the rule of law itself.[54]

A basic assumption of this book is that popular politics are increasingly situated in gray zones outside or between civil and state recognition—which is to say, public culture for many increasingly takes on the patina of the piratical. The proliferation of extralegal lifeworlds, where social actors must negotiate from a position beyond and between states and civil–corporate spheres, requires new critical engagements with popular politics and public cultures.[55] A crucial starting point is to move beyond the idealized self-descriptions that shore up elite democracies and the package of exported modernity, the sphere that continues to overdetermine democratic discourse, as well Eurocentric dismissals of robust political life in China and across Asia. Instead, this book seeks to engage and extend Partha Chatterjee's theorization of "political

society," a concept developed in *The Politics of the Governed* and extended in numerous essays and lectures, as well as the work of other scholars, including Taiwanese cultural theorist Chen Kuan-hsing.[56] Political society expresses the workings of popular politics in zones where legitimacy matters more than legality. The concept has much to offer to understandings of political negotiation in China—and globally. It designates a political sphere that meets few of the definitional requirements of democratic theory and is yet where unfettered democracy, including its excesses, seems to actually be in action.

*Underglobalization* examines how pervasive discourses about *global civil society* are challenged and recalibrated by attending to its underbelly—*global political society*. This is especially important given the role of NGOs and other pedagogical institutions in China. I situate this transition in more depth in the first part of the book, but let me begin to locate political society within debates about public culture in contemporary China—though my larger interest might be described as the space between China and the world. Following the student movement and massacre in Tiananmen Square, the collapse of the Berlin Wall, both in 1989, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the concepts of civil society and the public sphere emerged as key tools for thinking about political negotiation and the desire for democracy in postsocialist and postcolonial states across the world. Such conceptions attempted to build on Jürgen Habermas's notion of the bourgeois public sphere, first translated into English in 1989, in order to identify those emergent realms where new democratic capacities might lurk.[57] From religious organizations to new café cultures, scholars were quick to project a familiar modernity onto a range of states—from Poland to the People's Republic of China.

This impulse was critical to many treatments of the failed student movement and state violence in Beijing and cities throughout China, culminating in numerous books and a special issue of *Modern China* in 1993.[58] The symposium "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China?" debated a spectrum of issues related to China's presocialist civil formations and the appropriateness of Habermas's ideal public sphere for thinking about non-Western contexts. The editor of the volume, Philip C. C. Huang, usefully suggested that Habermas's public sphere should be understood as part of a typology of public spheres—which included the bourgeois public sphere, among other variants—and that the concept could be reworked to engage contemporary Chinese politics. To do so, he productively theorized a "third realm" between state and society, in which both sets of actors participated.[59] This third zone is an early recognition of the importance of something like political society for examining China's transformation.

International debates, however, continued to flounder around the weight of overdetermined concepts like the public sphere, with their idealization of particular state–society relations, and ethnocentric views of the world—not to mention the neglect of Chinese intellectuals and the substantial democratic gains of China's socialist past. In the US context, scholars like Nancy Fraser turned to a critique of "actually existing democracies" in order to demonstrate the degree to which the celebrated public sphere relied on the exclusion of women and those marked by racial, economic, or sexual difference.[60] Such interventions were vital to debates about the workings of the public sphere and led to an explosion of work on "counterpublics."[61] While important works by scholars like Pheng Cheah, Bruce Robbins, Michael Warner, and Lauren Berlant, among others associated with the journal *Public Culture*, transformed the very notion of publics, they also led to stagnation in many areas, where, after a sidebar noting the awkwardness but necessity of the concepts, one could go ahead and use them.[62]

My interest here is to move away from cookie-cutter or reformulated applications of civil society and the public sphere. Instead, Chatterjee's theorization of political society is crucial throughout this study. The force of Chatterjee's conceptual innovation is that it returns us to the space of political negotiation itself. As Nivedita Menon asserts in the introduction to a 2010 collection of Chatterjee's essays, *Empire and Nation*, political society theorizes "the domain where democracy seems to be actually in action, but which meets none of the standards set by political theory for what is permitted to count as democracy—rationality, deliberation, reasonable justification, control over excess, non-violence."[63] Rather than exporting notions of state–society relations, Chatterjee shifts attention to the basic back-and-forth practices through which people create pressure and claim the services and things they need to live. This includes both those denied political subjectivity and rights and those engaged in the more formalized fields of rights-based negotiations (e.g., civil society). "To effectively direct those benefits toward them," he writes, the governed "must succeed in applying the right pressure at the right places in the governmental machinery."[64] Perhaps most significantly, as Chatterjee and urban theorists like AbdouMaliq Simone have shown, it is these self-generating, collective practices—generally dismissed as aberrations—that provide the basis for theorizing the social formations of the future.

Chatterjee's insights must also be located in the context of China's actually existing social struggles, and be modified to account for the critical role of media. The former is exemplified by what the political scientist Xi Chen terms "contentious authoritarianism"—a phrase that describes pervasive and

normalized social protest in China, as well as the fact that "beneath the surface of noise and anxiety," China's political system remains stable.[65] As Xi puts it, China represents a seemingly peculiar case "of a strong authoritarian regime having accommodated or facilitated widespread and routinized popular and collective action for a relatively long period of time."[66] The latter—the critical role of media forms and infrastructures—is the focus of Ravi Sundaram's *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism*. Sundaram argues that political society, as developed by Chatterjee, is "surprisingly devoid of technocultural networks."[67] The current experience of media urbanism, for Sundaram, emphasizes both the ways that technology has "now seeped into the everyday lives of urban residents," as well as how "media has changed the flesh of infrastructure," thereby transforming the material and imaginary city.[68] Extending Sundaram's insight to social relations and media urban practices in Olympic-era China is one of the key aims of this book. It contributes to debates over the media city, examining how political society is taken up and transformed by a wide range of media practices, forms, and spaces. Chapters 1 and 2 trace the politics of urban planning's visual culture and of inhabiting the model city; chapters 3 and 4 examine contests over emergent media and spatial legitimacies, focusing on ambient television and the explosion of new movie theaters; and chapters 5 and 6 trace the politics of global connection and technological intimacy, examining microelectronics labor and the hand-to-hand assemblies of street piracy—what I call "people as media infrastructure."

The work of Chen Kuan-hsing, one of the leading voices of inter-Asian cultural studies, is also key to this discussion. In particular, Chen takes seriously Chatterjee's theorization of political struggles in non-Western social formations and resituates political society in the context of Taiwan and East Asia more generally. He offers the concept of *minjian shehui* 民间社会—which roughly corresponds to "people's" or "folk" society, emphasizing a certain "in-betweenness"—to describe the "space where traditions are maintained as resources to help common people survive the violent rupture brought about by the modernizing of state and civil society."[69] This emphasis on local cosmologies in working out locally situated but global processes is central to political society's transnational relevance. As such, Chen's intervention also foregrounds the generative role of interreferencing across Asia(s), and other marginalized locales, as central to contemporary cultural and political theory. Chen describes the potential of *Asia as Method*: "The potential of Asia as method is this: using the idea of Asia as an imaginary anchoring point, societies in Asia can become each other's points of reference, so that the understanding of the self may be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. On this

basis, the diverse historical experiences and rich social practices of Asia may be mobilized to provide alternative horizons and perspectives. This method of engagement, I believe, has the potential to advance a different understanding of world history."[70]

Building on this insight, *Underglobalization* draws on inter-Asian cultural studies and parallel engagements with urban politics in Africa and South and East Asia—archipelagos of diverse and dynamic world-building projects. Abbas's Hong Kong, Chen's Taiwan, Neferti X. M. Tadiar's Manila, Brian Larkin's Kano, Ravi Sundaram's Delhi, AbdouMaliq Simone's Dakar, Swati Chattopadhyay's Calcutta, Ziauddin Sardar's Kuala Lumpur, Néstor Canclini's Mexico City, Chua Beng Huat's Singapore, among many others, are critical to generating a fresh set of intersections and concerns for approaching media, urbanism, and political society in China. These sites, while distinct, share the burden of development, including the double movement of incessant Western criticism for failing to do modernity right, and the failure of development plans themselves to meet the needs of states and local populations.

## Underglobalization

Such is the ambivalence of development projects. They are at once massively destructive, displacing many, but may also bring about new infrastructures and improve living conditions for sectors of the population. About this context, I have often been asked whether I think that the images of destruction and displacement that figure in my research "are bad." While I do not think this is a particularly useful question, it does point to at least two key issues. The first is the problem of the North American scholar imposing an external set of assumptions and values to evaluate Chinese aspirations. Part nativist critique and part anxiety about how orientalism lives on, it queries: Is this not just more of the same criticism—like those that fill the popular press, international relations books, legal indictments—pointing to China's excessive, authoritarian, backward, and counterfeiting ways? On the other hand, are not massive new infrastructure projects like metro systems, roads, business districts, public monuments and parks, and new housing to replace the often-dilapidated courtyard houses of the inner city an important public good? Is this not an area where China's state-led development clearly outperforms that of its G7 peers? Just observe the disappointment of Chinese tourists when they disembark at New York's shabby John F. Kennedy airport. And more to the point: how do such ambitions and images of the city differ from the package of global modernity endorsed by dominant economies like the US, the UK, Germany, or Japan?

Why is China's development constantly critiqued while the larger system it cocreates remains, for many, the global ideal?

To be clear, my analysis of postsocialist-cum-neoliberal media and developmental projects, as well as various responses to living transformation, is not interested in reiterating the same old complaints about the Chinese state—especially not those that isolate China as the bad object in order to reinforce ideas about the "free world" and the munificent West. Or that advance yet another argument in the genre: China will rise or China will fall. Those fallacies are as reckless as the picture of the cunning and excessive Chinese. Instead, this book begins to theorize a larger process of *underglobalization*—part of a more general theory "of which Western theory is just a particular case."[71] In this sense, the critiques lodged against China in this book are not exceptional (i.e., not about China alone); rather, they are emblematic (i.e., they describe a global condition). This is to eschew the still dominant and often racist West–East binary and to examine political conditions of inequity and aspiration in their local and global dimensions. It is a project that takes seriously Chinese specificities while challenging the civilizational world picture, where essentialist differences of monolithic civilizations cover over differences that matter.[72] Contra civilizational geopolitics, this book adopts an inter-Asian and southern perspective, pointing its critique at global economic and political projects, and not simply the purported excesses of the PRC.

This is not to disregard the very real issues China poses for those interested in social equity, ecological preservation, and democratic futures. But neither can these problems be taken apart from the global, to which they are intimately tied. We need to return with renewed critical force to the deep failures, structural violence, and antidemocratic pulses that sustain and are sustained by the idea of the West, including its imbrication with globalization. For starters, this is to acknowledge the role that hegemonic imitation and transfer play in global processes—from the harmonizing of intellectual property required by the World Trade Organization and the protocols of the World Bank, to the exported models for productive, consumer, and debt-driven lifestyles. That these are widely understood to be practices of equality and progressive change gives the lie to claims that copying and informality are simply the backward practices of lazy and cunning southerners.

Routine developmental fables, which have traveled across Asia in recent decades (from Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea to China, India, and the ASEAN countries), cover over the significance of imitation as a *global* and not merely a developmental phenomenon. This is to challenge the fallacy that fringe or developing nations "cheat" the well-meaning economies of the core and, at

the same time, incessantly hinder themselves. Even left-leaning scholars of intellectual property like Lawrence Lessig distinguish between "good" remix cultures, which are innovative and "add value," and "bad" Asian piracy, which is "theft plain and simple."[73] While the problem of the fake is generally narrated through the lens of Asian sameness and excess—from rote memorization to authoritarian compliance—what is at stake here is a shifted understanding of transformation and, ultimately, an understanding of Asia and the non-West as not only counterfeit zones but also centers where new and non-Western forms of life are (re)produced.

As in diverse locations ranging from Scotland to South Korea, innovation and the cultural creative industries (*wenhua chuangyi chanye* 文化创意产业) are critical to contemporary Chinese policymaking and rhetoric, and to China's transition from manufacturing and export processing into a global designer (and rights holder) of film, TV, publishing, fashion, high-tech, pharma, urbanism, and the like. This creative turn complements China's "Going Out Policy" (*Zouchuqu zhanlüe* 走出去战略), initiated in 1999, encouraging the spread of overseas investment and influence. Fascination with the innovation industries has led to new government committees and plans, university departments, urban districts, smart initiatives, Confucius Institutes, and numerous recent books and essays in and about Asia, and throughout the world. In the Chinese context, for instance, Wang Jing's *Brand New China: Advertising, Media, and Commercial Culture* (2008); Michael Keane's *Created in China: The New Great Leap Forward* (2007) and *Creative Industries in China: Art, Design, and Media* (2013); Hu Huilin's *The Development of Cultural Industries and National Cultural Security* (*Wenhua chanye fazhan yu guojia wenhua anquan*, 2005); Pang Laikwan's *Creativity and Its Discontents: China's Creative Industries and Intellectual Property Rights Offenses* (2012); Winnie Wong's *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade* (2014); and Fan Yang's *Faked in China: Nation Branding, Counterfeit Culture, and Globalization* (2015), to name just a few, offer a wide range of approaches to the politics of creativity across national and global registers.

I will return to the cultural creative industries throughout the book. What I want to establish here is this: first, the creative industries extend far beyond culture and are enmeshed with media urbanism and broader geopolitical concerns; and second, formal creative and design industries, while framed as solutions to global inequity, are instead its underlying logic.[74] My aim is to bring into relief the crucial role of creative capitalism, including its Chinese characteristics, in attempting to harmonize legitimacy across subnational and supranational scales. As Pang argues, the discourse of creativity has shaped contemporary imaginaries that see China as a pirate nation and, at

the same time, have led Chinese upper classes to widely embrace the idea that creativity is the key to modernization.[75] Creativity thus frames the allure and legal power wielded by the knowledge economy.

What is generally called creativity or innovation is enmeshed in thicker processes of simulation and replication that are central to hegemonic globalization. If we shift our focus from value-added content, authorship, and ownership, what comes into view is the degree to which global platforms require faking, imitation, and transfer as the price of admission. Postsocialist and neoliberal governmentality—or what we might simply call globalization in its dominant form—works both by goading much of the world to copy its structures and, at the same time, by perpetually belittling developing nations for not copying right or the right things, for copying too much, or for copying too well. From trade agreements to international standards, mimicry is far from an aberrant logic; it is the norm—functioning as a kind of software update for the developing world. This "transfer" is what is undercut by global processes.

Against this thrust, faking can also be understood as a basic and powerful reluctance or refusal to copy and to implement the specific procedures or templates associated with hegemonic global modernity—whether enforced by international institutions, state policy, or local government. This is to give a name to contemporary forms of underdevelopment—what we can call *underglobalization*. The term *underglobalization*, rather than signaling developmental lag or failure, points to the ways various actors undermine or underperform national and global protocols. The concept helps us to theorize the illicit or underworldly practices—often illegal but valid in their own contexts—at the center of this book. Key examples include emerging forms of piratical citizenship; struggles over eminent domain practices and the resulting demolition of housing and relocation of tens of thousands of Beijing residents (*chaiqian* 拆迁); claims on the technologized city, including struggles over ambient television, cinematic spectatorship, and street piracy; and mundane forms of creativity—from menial factory labor to the hand-to-hand sociality of street piracy—that are widely dismissed as mere imitation and yet drive social infrastructures and urban belonging. These reorientations turn our attention to the situated and sophisticated engagements with illicit forms by a wide range of popular and subaltern actors.

To take seriously faking as a social practice is not to romanticize what can be dangerous and antiprogressive. But neither is it to dismiss tensions over growing illegalities and illegitimacies, as is the habit of political avant-gardism and the deep-seated elitist fear of the popular that informs much of cultural and political theory. Instead, we need to examine how quotidian, ad

hoc, and informal practices and semiotics drive disregarded forms of political action and social timeliness, keying in on wide-ranging struggles over the city, citizenship, and the present tense. This, in my view, suggests a useful temporal intervention into current social thought and the emphasis on *longue durée* and utopian transformations. Focusing on the informal, the survivalist, and the piratical challenges the theological dimension of radical critique—the pie-in-the-sky ethos that continually defers social equity into the revolutionary future. While radical critiques remain vital, critical social theory still has much to learn from mundane tactics and popular negotiations. The point is to understand how people find ways to inhabit the present. Finally, this is not merely to romance resistance—as the by now banal critiques of cultural studies and related fields have it—but to learn from and to transform debates about cultures of democracy. Even when they appear in unlikely times and places.

### The Olympic Era

Postsocialism describes the complexity of China's reform and opening (*gaige kaifang* 改革开放), and especially life in the post-1989 or "post new period" (*hou xin shiqi* 后新时期). These competing logics include the continued rule of the Communist Party and the everyday if residual relevance of Chinese socialism, as well as China's transition to a marketized mode of cultural production and integration into the global economy—where it is now a prime mover.[76] Much scholarship, for example, has focused on the contradictions and ambiguities animating life *after* socialism. A related thread emphasizes the significance of China's transformation and capitalist compromise for what we now call globalization. Zhang Xudong argues that the condition of postsocialism "does not disappear into but becomes intertwined" with global postmodernity.[77] Similarly, what Jason McGrath calls "postsocialist modernity" describes the mutual entanglement of China and the global, where each is transformed.[78]

But Arif Dirlik, who coined the term in the late 1980s, perhaps offered the most useful if now anachronistic explanation of Chinese postsocialism.[79] For Dirlik, postsocialism not only described the new reality at the end of the grand Maoist project and command economy, but the possibility to rethink Chinese socialism anew. While tied to a particular historical moment and interest in theorizing postsocialist challenges to global capital, it remains explanatory, and its idealism remains appealing. Writing in 1989, Dirlik argues:

> Postsocialism is of necessity also postcapitalist, not in the classical sense of socialism as a phase in historical development that is anterior to capitalism, but in the sense of a socialism that represents a response to the

experience of capitalism and an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of capitalist development. Its own deficiencies and efforts to correct thereby resorting to capitalist methods of development are conditioned by this awareness of the deficiencies of capitalism in history. Hence postsocialism seeks to avoid a return to capitalism, no matter how much it may draw upon the latter to improve the performance of "actually existing social-ism." For this reason, and also to legitimize the structure of "actually exist-ing socialism," it strives to keep alive a vague vision of future socialism as the common goal of humankind while denying to it any immanent role in the determination of present social policy.[80]

Dirlik's analysis continues to resonate strongly with the present. It highlights, for example, two notable tendencies of the Xi Jinping era: permanent eco-nomic development and a reinvigoration of socialist language and imagery. The latter, in particular, is highlighted at the October 2017 Communist Party Congress, which saw "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese charac-teristics for a new era" enshrined in the constitution and, more recently, term limits abolished.[81]

Rather than suggest a simple return to Dirlik's proposal, I am interested in a parallel track proposed two decades ago by Ralph Litzinger. Litzinger calls for a decolonization of scholarship on postsocialism "by way of the eth-nic margins" (while not simply identifying "the ethnic minority other [as] the quintessential sign of resistance and rebellion").[82] The question of how to write marginal communities—here: the illegible, illegitimate, illegal—into the analysis of contemporary China and of the global system has once again emerged as a pressing issue. While Litzinger's call remains vital on its own terms—and critical studies of race and ethnicity are much needed in the face of still overwhelming Han- and northern China–centered analysis—my aim is also to invert familiar approaches by making what is epistemologically at the edge, the center. This study seeks to transform approaches to the postsocialist-global by emphasizing burgeoning illegal and illegitimate forms, including how these widespread practices enact their own social infrastructures, modes of legitimacy, and political agencies.

Across this study, I employ the conceptual periodization or chronotope of the Olympic era in place of the fraught and familiar concept of postso-cialism. I argue that the Olympic era consolidates postsocialism as a way of life—which is to say that what has routinely been called "postsocialist China" has become something else altogether. While the term *postsocialism* retains a certain analytical value, particularly as it links up with other postcommu-

Figure I.2  The official website of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) greets visitors with a snow-dusted image of the Great Wall and Beijing 2022.

nist and postcolonial societies and research, it often obscures more than it reveals. On the one hand, it severs critical ties with prereform China(s). On the other hand, it frequently serves as a placeholder for what is assumed to be ungraspable, a descriptor for a condition that is taken to be too fast, opaque, and complex—an unknowable afterlife. As a historical marker, postsocialism is unconvincing. It remains overly invested in the duality through which a monolithic "socialist" period is opposed to a dynamic and confused "post" (or posts). In this context, gaige kaifang and the years bracketing the suppressed student movement in Tiananmen Square and Deng Xiaoping's 1992 southern tour (*nanxun* 南巡) are very often taken as *the* turning points in the rise of China. While significant, such tales of transformation make static what is in fact dynamic and ongoing change.

The "post" in postsocialism suggests both transformation (*zhuanxing* 转型) and stability (*wending* 稳定). Stability is a fascinating concept. It suggests solidity, steadiness, sanity, strength, and security, as in the permanence of the Chinese state, the importance of social harmony for economic growth, and the need for rational planning and enforcement (e.g., five-year plans, sacrifice). But stability requires constant interventions and rigid policing, and poses important problems for transformation after socialism. Development and stability, interestingly, presuppose contradictory tempos and imaginaries for Chinese modernity. Development suggests the unfolding, evolution, or modernization of China, while stability insists on its fixity, security, and immutability. This fact is explained by the dual emphasis on discourses of limitless modernization and celebrations of a changeless

cultural heritage. The Olympics, as a developmental medium, spectacularizes and links these spatiotemporal fascinations, stitching together a harmonious image of the ancient and the technologized future city (see figure I.3). Similarly, events like China's sixtieth anniversary celebration on October I, 2009, national filmic spectaculars like *The Founding of a Republic* (Han Sanping and Huang Jianxing, 2009) and *The Founding of a Party* (Han and Huang, 2011), and CCTV's annual new year's gala also scramble to connect China to this bipolar imaginary. What they share is a focus on the past and the future that disappears the present.

This paradoxical vector is central to what I term the Olympic era. The Olympic era clears fresh space for the consideration not only of China's relationship to the past—it is, in part, a repetition[83]—but also of the continued significance of technological development and models of the future. Integral to such shifts are contemporary processes of *media urbanism*—for which the Olympics are an emblematic global form. Such mega-events not only require the material remaking of the city, they also prepare the city as an image for global circulation, transforming it into a media capital.[84] The media capital produces new feelings of legitimacy via monumental and mundane infrastructures and habits, and the proliferation of mediated forms. While the book is not explicitly about the Beijing Olympics, I take the 2008 and 2022 Games as a periodizing blueprint for analyzing the cultural politics of transformation in twenty-first-century China.

*Underglobalization* examines the cultural logic of the fake across different media technologies that shape politics, development, and aspiration in Olympic-era China. This analysis centers on cinema and television practices, urban space, and design, tracing how Beijing functions as a pivot for public communication about the future of the social body. Specifically, I interrogate a range of contested claims on the social: planning's visual culture, ambient TV, film and video exhibition, electronics labor and technological intimacy, and the entanglement of piracy and pornography. In this context, I argue that digital cultural economies and the turn to the creative industries underscore how "faking" and "legitimacy" operate as confused forms of postscocialist, neoliberal, and neocolonial emergence and control. In this way, piratical culture and politics constitute a set of prescribed and proscribed imitations that both sustain the world system and dismiss of Chinese modernization itself as counterfeit, false, or excessive. Arguing for a shift from global civil society to global political society, this study asks how mundane and mediated practices of faking (and its myriad cognates) undergird and transform globalization as we know it.

## Beijing as Method

This book draws on research I conducted during several extended trips to Beijing between 2007 and 2016, including regular summer visits and a continuous stay of fifteen months in 2007–8. The research unfolded in three stages, beginning in the mid-2000s as a representational and ethnographic study of Beijing's film and TV cultures and their relationship to Olympic-era development. In the course of conducting my fieldwork, as it became clear just how vital new screen technologies were to remaking the city, I began to expand my analysis beyond urban cinema, television programs, and planning discourse. Instead, I was struck by the proliferation of digital forms and practices across the city—construction-site billboards and planning imagery, ubiquitous screens (from buses to building façades), new movie theater construction, electronics markets and optical disc piracy, mobile phones and digital video cameras, and so much more. Crucially, these media urban forms were both out of sync with dominant ideas about new media—which tended to see China as backward and to ignore local digital cultures—and also beyond the purview of cinema studies, visual studies, Asian studies, anthropology, and related fields.

Building on these insights, the second stage of my research begins from actually existing media phenomena in the city, relying on observation and attention to spatial practices, materials gleaned from personal and professional relationships, formal and informal interviews, participation in archiving and film festival communities,[85] and photography and video projects.[86] One starting point, for example, was to walk or cycle the major arteries and narrow alleyways in the inner city (within the Second Ring Road), among other sites associated with Olympic urbanization (e.g., the Olympic Green, central business district, 798 Art Zone, Haidian District, among others), in order to better apprehend the relationship between media technologies and demolition and construction projects. On many trips, I was accompanied by a photographer and graduate students from Peking University and Beijing Normal University. My approach was to map new developments in the city, and based on street-by-street observation I began to focus on—and to photograph, describe, and archive—a cluster of objects and sites that were clearly significant but that remained underexplored. Everywhere I went during this stage, I encountered a clash between older and informal media practices and new, more centralized forms of address. Countertop TVs were replaced by new state–corporate displays; independent film festivals were pressured by flashy cinemas and state-run galas; colorful images of the ancient or future city covered over demolished

neighborhoods; antipiracy and antipornography campaigns were performed in public squares and filled newspapers, banners, and television news.

This perambulatory mode of meeting the city through the camera was not only a way to map social and media space; it was also a way to meet people. Residents, visitors, even the police were quick to share their own stories, suggest other locations, offer interpretations, tell you to move on. While I conducted informal interviews with neighbors and shopkeepers, construction managers and print shop workers, activists and filmmakers, my research departs from traditional ethnography and its focus on informants and community dynamics. Instead, I became more and more interested in the role of media technologies, alongside people and institutions, as agents of change. In this way, I prefer the terms *sociography* or *technography* to describe the method of this project. The former I borrow from Elizabeth Povinelli, via James Clifford, to describe a shift from traditional ethnographic thick description toward "a way of writing the social from the point of view of social projects."[87] Extending Povinelli's interest in alternative social projects, my research engages and writes the social from the point of view of *technologized social projects*. This is what is meant by the concept of media urbanism across this book.

This focus on technologized sociality was also informed by collaborations at the Li Xianting Film Fund and documentary archive in Songzhuang—an artist hub in Beijing's eastern suburbs. This includes regular participation in the China Documentary Film Festival (Zhongguo jilupian jiaoliu zhou) and Beijing Independent Film Festival (Beijing duli yingzhan), interviews with filmmakers, production of a documentary film focused on China's railways (*The Iron Ministry*, 2014, directed by JP Sniadecki), and long evenings spent watching films and discussing politics. Here is where I first became fascinated with how activists and filmmakers established informal archives to keep and share their work and utilized piracy networks to distribute their films, where I observed police interventions push festival screenings into private living rooms or other cities far from the capital, and where I observed many Chinese friends leave for North America, Europe, and Australia. In this way, I began to understand the tension between locally legitimate practices and pervasive illegality. Put differently, examining media piracy led me to much broader and more significant problems.

As my research went on, it became increasingly clear that to make sense of Beijing's media urbanism I would need to better understand the larger medial and political dynamics that shaped widespread discourses about piracy, imitation, and informality—what I would eventually call *underglobalization*. To that end, I expanded the scope of the research once again. My aim was

to contribute to important debates in media and cultural studies but also to refuse the disciplinary limits articulated by those fields. As I became more focused on piratical social practices, and on the normalized condition of illegality, I also recognized that understanding these practices only in terms of media or intellectual property—the contours of dominant discourse—was to miss the point. Thus, the final stage of this research brought me more squarely into contact with social and political theory, including postcolonial studies, Asian cultural studies, political science, and sociology. By working between the spaces and objects from my technographic research, and larger theoretical engagements with social, economic, and political change in China and the Global South, I came to appreciate the contradictory role of imitation or faking as a global logic—legality and legitimacy were at loggerheads. This emphasis on the becoming illegal of everyday life also helped me to understand the way that official media objects and practices—by providing narratives of danger or economic loss, enabling policing, shaping social aspirations, training the sensorium, and so on—inform more insidious systems of political and economic exclusion and violence.

## Structure of the Book

This book examines illegality and illegitimacy as global techniques and techniques of being global. It engages practices and sites of faking or underglobalization at multiple scales and across contact zones—shifting attention from fake objects to illegal citizens. It takes the routine dismissal of and anxiety over forgery, failure, and falsity as the chief line of inquiry—as the real symptom—asking: How or in what ways is faking altering or undermining globalization as we know it? What role does this process play in China's own contested desires for development? How does faking capacitate models of social, political, and economic practice or collaboration—that is, new social projects and understandings of authenticity—across a range of actors, street-level to the state, local to global? And what does it mean to bring informal, illicit, and fringe practices—overlooked social and political infrastructures—to the center of critical analysis and social thought? If underglobalization is not merely yet another southern flop, marking anachronistic habits and cities, then perhaps its variegated forms can provide models for building new societies. What I termed "after legitimacy" at the start of this introduction is thus to name not legitimacy's end, but rather the founding of critical projects on the back of socially legitimate, if illegal, forms of life.

Chapter 1, "Rendering the City," offers both a history of a particularly salient moment in Beijing's transformation and a reinterpretation of what this

remaking means in the context of media and political theory. The chapter examines how ruins and blueprints constitute the sensorium of the technologized city. It centers on how Beijing is produced as a set of competing vectors—between past and future—and how these dominant modes of experience make claims on its present. Of particular importance is Sundaram's idea of *media urbanism*—a synthetic concept that brings together important material and imaginary practices. This includes the long-standing tension between culture and development itself. Rendering the city thus takes seriously planning's visual culture and adapts a mode of reading the city that is attentive to design's address as well as the imbricated politics of dispossession. It concludes by developing an approach to the politics of the governed suited the emergent sphere of political relations in China. Chapter 2, "Digital Urbanism," extends the discussion of the future-function of culture begun in chapter 1. It traces how media publics engage and seep into official designs and blueprints—creating their own (un)civil contracts. The chapter also lays out the conceptual foundation for the book's focus on popular politics and public culture. This infrastructure of dissensus is traced across media urban practices, including digital video and documentary, urban billboards, contemporary art, and a range of dynamic claims on city surfaces and everyday life. Drawing on what the RAQs Media Collective calls "seepage," it theorizes how *piratical* or *illegal citizens* are both managed by official structures and penetrate and transform them.

The next two chapters build on the approach to digital urbanism established in the opening chapters by examining two important sites that proliferate in the media city. Chapter 3, "Bricks and Media," begins with China's booming movie theater business. It both describes this transition and theorizes shifting modes of technologized spatiality that pit the gloss of state-led blockbuster projects against informal and alternative video cultures. This includes massive political crackdowns on China's independent film festivals and other unofficial forms. By exploring a range of specific exhibition sites, it traces both how Chinese state–market clusters increasingly reach a global audience and, at the same time, how they seek to control local screens and shape commonsense space and imaginaries. Similarly, chapter 4, "Beijing en Abyme," examines both technological changes in ambient TV culture—from handheld devices to subway television—and how official structures attempt to choreograph state–society relations at the interface. The chapter takes an intermedial approach, pushing the study of television outside the home as well as into the gallery and the cinema. The title "Beijing en Abyme" points to the proliferation of screens and images showing Beijing's transformation in the

city itself, as well as how the congruence between TV and the state transforms the television into a volatile form for public communication. This includes the unhomely social, the spectral laborers who make new technologies but are pushed out of frame by media development.

The final two chapters move from site-specific issues in Beijing to a larger politics related to technology, social change, and global intimacies. Chapter 5, "Videation: Technological Intimacy and the Politics of Global Connection," centers on the unhomely laborers alluded to in the previous chapter. Moving beyond the spectacular image of worker suicides, the chapter traces everyday forms of intimacy and technomobility. It pays particular attention to the threshold between creative designs and menial labor, centering on what I call *videation*: video culture's overlooked habits, actions, and results. The chapter examines China's own neoliberal forms of abandonment and opens up what constitutes meaningful cultural production. It also considers the media savvy of workers who use low-fi video infrastructures to project their own desires and to refuse the fractured citizenship assigned to them by the state. Chapter 6, "People as Media Infrastructure," both builds on this discussion and acts as the book's conclusion. It brings the book full circle by returning to the question of pirate culture and sociality. But it does so not through an interest in intellectual property but rather by exploring the social life of informal media in Beijing, or what I call people as media infrastructure. This chapter engages media infrastructure studies and seeks to extend them to people's actions in the city. An important framing element for this chapter is the National Anti-Pornography and Anti-Piracy Office (Quanguo saohuang dafei gongzuo xiaozhu bangongshi). The office and its campaigns demonstrate the confused intersections of legality and legitimacy that propel this study, and draw our attention to both competing legitimacies and what I theorize as the "pornographies of globalization." The latter phrase describes the forms of social timeliness generated by piracy's hand-to-hand sociality, and returns us to the larger illicit assemblages that frame the book.

Introduction: After Legitimacy

1 Numerous such stories circulated online in 2007. See a summary of the story's lifespan at Danwei.org: Jeremy Goldkorn, "Is the Fake News Story Fake News?" July 20, 2007, accessed April 1, 2011, http://www.danwei.org/media_regulation/fake _news_about_fake_news_abou.php. See also "Meat Buns with Cardboard Fillings in Beijing Is Hoax," *People's Daily*, July 19, 2007, http://en.people.cn/90001/90782 /90872/6219458.html.

2 Several online forums debate the plausibility of the cardboard baozi tale. The story traveled at least as far as Japan, where bloggers tried unsuccessfully to replicate the cardboard dumplings based on the original report's recipe. A version of the story is reprinted on the EastSouthWestNorth (东南西北) blog, "Why Do People Think a Fake News Story Is Real?," accessed April 5, 2011, http://www .zonaeuropa.com/20070720_1.htm.

3 See Winnie Wong's discussion of "a draft to be copied" in *Van Gogh on Demand: China and the Readymade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 17–22.

4 Josephine Ho, "ShanZhai: Economic Cultural Production through the Cracks of Globalization," plenary speech, Crossroads: 2010 Cultural Studies Conference, Hong Kong.

5 Ackbar Abbas, "Faking Globalization," in Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 282–95.

6 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 282.

7 Bhaskar Sarkar, "Postcolonial and Transnational Perspectives," in James Donald and Michael Renov, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Film Studies* (London: SAGE, 2008), 138–41.

8 This assemblage echoes Homi Bhabha's seminal reading of colonial power as a "subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite." Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" *October* 28 (spring 1984): 126.

9 Edward S. Steinfeld, *Playing Our Game: Why China's Rise Doesn't Threaten the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

10 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 282.

11 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 283.

12 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 285.

13 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 285.

14 Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 291. For example, he describes the importance of taste, per Walter Benjamin, during times when consumers are "ignorant" of how objects are actually made.

15  Gregory F. Treverton et al., *Film Piracy, Organized Crime, and Terrorism* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2009).

16  Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 291.

17  Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 293.

18  Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 293.

19  Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 294–95. That these gestures are both undeveloped and seem to fit comfortably with the global order suggests the severe limits of the design ethos—one that is eerily familiar of the claims of neoliberal innovation industries themselves.

20  Abbas, "Faking Globalization," 295.

21  Bhaskar Sarkar and I develop this epistemic logic as "penumbral" in the introduction to *Asian Video Cultures: In the Penumbra of the Global* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 2, 5–6.

22  Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: W. W. Norton, 1965). For work on counterpublics, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone, 2002).

23  Joe Karaganis, ed., *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2011), i, http://piracy.ssrc.org.

24  Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 13.

25  Pang Laikwan, "'China Who Makes and Fakes': A Semiotics of the Counterfeit," *Theory, Culture and Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 131–32.

26  Three decades of critiques against cultural studies, for instance, have led to a knee-jerk response to engagements with antagonism and resistance. While there is much to be vigilant about, and critical of, in academic work, these critiques very often sustain the business-as-usual conservatism that allows disciplines to motor along. In other words, critiques of work in the resistance genre have failed to produce alternatives. It's as if the critique itself, for many scholars, is the point.

27  Here it is worth remembering that one of the best-known arguments about the creative economy in China directly links the innovation industries to national security. See, for example, Hu Huilin's *The Development of Cultural Industries and National Cultural Security* [Wenhua chanye fazhan yu guojia wenhua anquan] (Guangdong: Guangzhou renmin chubanshe, 2005).

28  Lawrence Liang interviews in *Steal This Film II* (League of Noble Peers, 2007). The abridged interview with Liang, "Piracy and Production," can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=7p0xanXV3u4. *Steal this Film II* can be downloaded at http://www.stealthisfilm.com/Part1/.

29  Neferti X. M. Tadiar, "Life-Times of Disposability within Neoliberalism," *Social Text* 115 (summer 2013): 22.

30  Lawrence Liang, "Piracy, Creativity, and Infrastructure: Rethinking Access to Culture," *Alternative Law Forum*, July 2009, 15, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1436229.

31  I thank Bhaskar Sarkar for his long-standing engagement with this project and his suggestion to think about piracy in this way. This understanding of piracy as illegal but socially legitimate is also developed in Sarkar's forthcoming work on the pirate humanities.

32  Ho, "ShanZhai."

33  See IDEO's collective intelligence report: Makiko Taniguchi and Eddie Wu, "Shanzhai: Copycat Design as an Open Platform for Innovation," *Patterns*, 2009, patterns.ideo.com.

34  Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone, 2009), 10–11.

35  Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 137.

36  Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All*, 11.

37  This legal imagination has led numerous commentators in academic and popular contexts, including periodicals like *Legal Affairs*, *Foreign Affairs*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, to speculate that the category of piracy holds the key to unlocking the global scourge of terrorism. One such article, entitled "The Dread Pirate bin Laden," argues that piracy provides the legal precedent through which terrorism can be criminalized. See, for instance, Douglas R. Burgess Jr., "The Dread Pirate bin Laden," *Legal Affairs*, July/August 2005, http://www.legalaffairs.org/issues/July -August-2005/feature_burgess_julaug05.msp. See also Bhaskar Sarkar, "Media Piracy and the Terrorist Boogeyman: Speculative Potentiations," *positions* 24, no. 2 (May 2016): 343–68.

38  Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All*, 11.

39  Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, [1972] 1982).

40  Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, translated by G. Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

41  Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," translated by Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 27.

42  Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 33–34.

43  Elizabeth Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 3–4.

44  Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Much of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

45  Peter Drahos and John Braithwaite, *Information Feudalism: Who Owns the Knowledge Economy?* (London: Earthscan, 2002).

46  See, for example, Ramon Lobato and Julian Thomas, *The Informal Media Economy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015); Alejandro Portes, Manuel Castells, and Lauren A. Benton, eds., *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

47  Shujen Wang, "Harmony or Discord? TRIPS, China, and Overlapping Sovereignties," in *Sarai Reader 2005: Bare Acts* (Delhi: Sarai Media Lab, 2005), 190.

48 Wang, "Harmony or Discord?," 194.

49 Richard Falk, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Vesselin Popovski, eds., *Legality and Legitimacy in Global Affairs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), vii.

50 For example, Falk et al., in *Legality and Legitimacy in Global Affairs*, give the example of Kosovo as a humanitarian intervention that was deemed legitimate but was not legally sanctioned (vii).

51 Falk et al., *Legality and Legitimacy in Global Affairs*, 21.

52 Vandana Shiva, *Protect or Plunder: Understanding Intellectual Property Rights* (London: Zed, 2001), 49.

53 Shiva, *Protect or Plunder*, 62.

54 Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All*, 61–68. See also Neves and Sarkar, *Asian Video Cultures*, 14.

55 I develop this further in chapter 2, but see especially Partha Chatterjee, "Democracy and Economic Transformation in India," *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 19, 2008, 53–62.

56 Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). See chapter 5, 211–56.

57 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

58 Philip C. C. Huang, "Symposium: 'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China?" *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993). Other engagements with the public sphere in post-Tiananmen China include Craig Calhoun, *Neither Gods nor Emperors: Students and the Struggle for Democracy in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, *Public Secrets, Public Spaces: Cinema and Civility in China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).

59 Philip C. C. Huang, "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China? The Third Realm between State and Society," *Modern China* 19, no. 2 (1993): 216.

60 Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56–80.

61 See, for instance, Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*.

62 Such invocations of civil society remain common in important recent works. See Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Robin Visser, *Cities Surround the Countryside: Urban Aesthetics in Postsocialist China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

63 Nivedita Menon, "Introduction," in Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 8.

64 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*.

65 Xi Chen, *Social Protests and Contentious Authoritarianism in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 5.

66 Xi Chen, *Social Protests*, 6.

67 Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*, 21.

68  Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity*, xiv, 3.

69  Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method*, 239–40.

70  Chen Kuan-hsing, *Asia as Method*, 212.

71  Partha Chattteree, interviewed by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Sephis e-Magazine* 1, no. 1 (2004).

72  As, for example, in Samuel P. Huntington's influential essay "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (summer 1993): 22–49.

73  Lawrence Lessig, *Free Culture: How Big Media Uses Technology and the Law to Lock Down Culture and Control Creativity* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 63.

74  While this may seem like an obvious critique of neoliberalism, the widespread adoption and celebration of the creative industries and what scholars like Koichi Iwabuchi have called "brand nationalism" suggests a different story. Universities, in particular, are among the most eager to support the "creative turn," seeking out ways to instrumentalize, measure, and monetize humanities and social science research.

75  Pang Laikwan, "'China Who Makes and Fakes,'" 119.

76  See, for instance, Chris Berry, *Postsocialist Cinema in Post-Mao China: The Cultural Revolution after the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Dai Jinhua, *Cinema and Desire: Feminist Marxism and Cultural Politics in the Work of Dai Jinhua* (London: Verso, 2002); Arif Dirlik and Zhang Xudong, eds., *Postmodernism and China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Tang Xiaobing, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Visser, *Cities Surround the Countryside*; Wang Hui, *China's New Order: Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

77  Zhang Xudong, *Postsocialism and Cultural Politics: China in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 13.

78  Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

79  Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflections on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics," in Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner, eds., *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1989), 361–84.

80  Dirlik, "Postsocialism?," 364.

81  See, for example, Carrie Gracie, "China's Xi Jinping Consolidates Power with New Ideology," *BBC News*, October 20, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-41677062.

82  Ralph Litzinger, "Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (winter 2002): 36.

83  It recalls, among other examples, the Ten Great Buildings (*shi da jianzhu* 十大建筑) erected by 1959 to commemorate the founding of the PRC ten years prior. Much of the reconstruction was completed in less than one year as part of the Great Leap

Forward's urban initiatives. The project is often invoked as a comparison to understand the speed and scale of demolition and construction in the Olympic era.

84  Michael Curtin, "Media Capital: Toward the Study of Spatial Flows," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 202–28.

85  In 2009–11, I collaborated with JP Sniadecki on a series of interviews with key voices in the Chinese independent film scene. Interviews recorded include Cui Zi'en, Zhu Rikun, Wang Wo, Xu Tong, Wang Hongwei, among others. Also with JP Sniadecki, I produced the 2014 documentary *The Iron Ministry*. Over the course of three summers, I spent more than 100 hours riding trains across China, and I observed much about contemporary media and migration that informs this research. The film opened at Locarno International Film Festival and has screened at major festivals, museums, and universities around the world: https://www.theironministry.com/.

86  Much of the photographic research was undertaken with the photographer Graham Bury. Over the course of seven months in 2007–8, we walked the streets of Beijing in a neighborhood-by-neighborhood fashion and documented a wide range of street-level media: construction-site billboards, public television sets, advertisements, and large-format displays. Graham passed away during the writing of this book, and the images included in this book are in his memory.

87  Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, x.

Chapter 1: Rendering the City

Epigraphs: Partha Chatterjee interview by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Sephis e-Magazine* 1, no. 1 (2004). Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps* (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 1.

1  As David Harvey argues, creative destruction is crucial to the redistribution of capital toward economic elites in the latter part of the twentieth century. While his chief example is the destruction of North Atlantic welfare states, postsocialist creative destruction is also crucial to this larger process and to new forms of common sense. See, for example, "Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction," *Annals of the American Academy of Social Science* 610 (March 2007): 22–44.

2  Ravi Sundaram, *Pirate Modernity: Delhi's Media Urbanism* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

3  There are notable exceptions, including Yomi Braester's *Painting the City Red* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). Braester's central innovation, however, is to trace how cinema and theater participated alongside official planning culture—often by promoting ideas of urban change in films or plays before demolition and reconstruction began. As such, his important study gives less attention to how urban planning constitutes its own forms of visual culture beyond its entanglements with cinema and the high arts.

4  I draw on William Mazzarella's distinction between *media* as a material framework that "makes society imaginable and intelligible to itself in the form of external representations," and *mediation* as "processes by which a given social dispensa-