

dreadful desires

CHARLIE YI ZHANG



The Uses of Love in Neoliberal China

dreadful
desires

BUY

Thought in the Act

A series edited by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi

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For my dear mother, Suhua Yan

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Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	1

PART I MAPPING THE EDGELESS LANDSCAPE OF LOVE

1	Love of the Zeitgeist	35
	Temporalized Desire in the PRC's Sixtieth-Anniversary Ceremony	
2	Only If You Are the One!	60
	The Expansive Neoliberal Universe through Love Competitors' Eyes	

PART II TRACING THE MACHINERY THAT BOTH INTEGRATES CHINA INTO AND SEPARATES IT FROM THE WORLD

3	The Woeful Landscape of Love	97
	Work Hard, Dream Big, and Die Slowly	
4	Lessons from the Polarizing Love	127
	Mapping Contradictions for Social Change	
5	Love with an Unspeakable Name	155
	The Exceptional <i>Danmei</i> World as the Escape Route	

Conclusion	177
Envisioning a Love-Enabled Future	
Notes	187
Bibliography	227
Index	255

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Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a personal journey of learning and unlearning driven by numerous fellow sojourners' unquenchable aspiration for a good life. I was born into a working-class family in a small town in southwestern China in the late 1970s, right after Deng Xiaoping announced the economic reform and plan for opening China up for the global market. In the year I was born, the policy of allowing only one child per family was also introduced by the state to reshape the population and facilitate economic restructuring. Marketizing practices started in coastal regions and mainly focused on southern and eastern urban areas throughout the 1980s, and the polarizing effects of neoliberal economy did not fully unfold in my hometown at the time. Like my working-class peers, I enjoyed an array of benefits unavailable to rural Chinese citizens, including good public education; affordable rationed food and medical care because of my urban residential status in the state-controlled registration system of *hukou*; and free housing, which came with my parents' state-sponsored jobs. Moreover, the soft, literary masculinity associated with the Confucian tradition that I embodied placed me in an advantaged position at school. These taken-for-granted privileges took me years to realize and unpack, a process that was the starting point of this book project.

China's marketizing transition started to accelerate in the early 1990s, unsettling my habituated way of living and revealing the brutal facades of the social systems of class, gender, and sexuality that took new forms in neoliberal China. In the wake of the whole country's opening up, westernized dimorphic gender discourse and discriminatory terminology for homosexuality became prevalent, turning my ambiguous masculinity into a source

of shamefulness and rendering my burgeoning same-sex desire a target of surveillance and disciplining that haunted me throughout puberty. In the late 1990s, with the hope of restoring my so-called normality and changing my life, I left my hometown to attend college in Nanjing, a big city in eastern China. My first attempt at self-rejuvenation, however, turned out to be more disturbing than freeing. As someone from a working-class background and an underdeveloped area, I experienced firsthand the devastating effects of neoliberalism in this metropolitan area. For marginalized students like me, the meritocratic dream that a good education will finally bring you a good life was embraced as the only viable solution to our problems, beckoning us into the self-help neoliberal fantasy by having us invest more time and energy to remake ourselves according to its rule. In 2004, I was admitted to a graduate program in Shanghai, winning a ticket that I expected to help me achieve my goal. However, in the face of soaring housing prices resulting from a rapidly growing market economy, I soon realized that I might not even be able to afford to find a place in this megacity that I could call home. Like other subaltern migrants who persist against all odds, I did not lose hope. In 2008, three days before the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics, I boarded a flight to the United States—which I saw as a land of opportunity—looking to revitalize my dream in uncharted places on the other side of the Pacific Ocean.

My learning experience in the United States provided me with a much-needed hiatus and, more importantly, critical tools that allow me to revisit the questions that have defined the dream-pursuing journeys of countless Chinese migrants. Why do we keep returning to our aspirational dreams even after they repeatedly fail us? How do the systems of gender, class, sexuality, and ethno-race shape our dreams and sustain our hope, which often works in opposition to our rational thinking and well-being? How do our self-defeating efforts contribute to the so-called self-serving market subjectivity and neoliberal restructuring that happens as or in the background? What does it take for us to unlearn our intangible yet poignant dreams for a good life and break down the detrimental cycle that these dreams refuel? These questions are at the heart of this book. There are innumerable people who have challenged me to push my inquiry in new ways; provided unswerving support during the process of learning and writing; shared their thoughts, which opened my mind; read my manuscript and offered constructive feedback; and inspired me to continue my journey simply by being who they are. I hope my acknowledgments do justice to their invaluable contributions.

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xiv
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Acknowledgments

Introduction

One early summer afternoon, after a long day of fieldwork in a silk factory in suburban Hai'an, a small town located on the northern bank of the Yangtze River in Jiangsu province, I stopped by a grocery store at the front gate of the factory to purchase a gift for the woman who had helped organize the trip. My conversation with her about gender inequality in China's labor market soon attracted the attention of the male store owner, who, perturbed by the topic, tried to persuade us that women had taken over control of the family and society at large, to the detriment of all Chinese men. Apparently, the prickly man's misogyny was inspired by, and chiefly levied against, his wife, Liu, who was about to replace him to start her shift for the day. Intrigued by our exchanges and after several hesitant attempts and retreats, Liu finally divulged her story after her husband had left the store.¹

As a teenager in the mid-1980s, Liu had left her home in the nearby village and taken a job in the silk factory. After working there for over thirteen years, she had left to start this grocery store, which she had run with her husband ever since. Before her resignation from the factory, the manager had planned to promote her to a more challenging leadership position. There, she could have explored her business talents in performing more important tasks. However, this potentially life-changing opportunity met with vehement opposition from Liu's husband, who insisted that "any virtuous women should let their husband take care of them and never get involved in the business world." Liu used the term *virtuous women* almost like a verbal stab, infusing it with poignancy and self-derision steeped in piercing cynicism about such restrictive gender norms. After a marathon of impassioned arguments, silent

protests, and even physical altercations, Liu gave up her career plan and resigned from her position. “People like me would sacrifice for the sake of our family and happiness of our children. When my sons date girls, their girlfriends’ parents will say our family is not very harmonious,” she commented with a shaky voice and tense countenance, which conveyed meanings far graver than her words did. Her narrative then took a drastic turn, and she began to stab the air with her fingers, while her speech became a punchy staccato punctuated by searing rage: “Actually, I did everything for my sons. I am a woman. My husband is so sexist, and he can say anything. Sometimes I am worried about my face, so I just suppress myself.” To salvage her sons’ romantic prospects and preserve her femininity, Liu had subordinated her personal aspirations to the gendered and sexual scripts of a family-focused love, which ironically impeded her original aim.

As the following chapters show, Liu’s self-defeating love is by no means singular. Instead, it reveals a life-sustaining fantasy looming large in China’s boundless landscape of love that entraps innumerable rural migrants like Liu in dreadful ways. As China shifts from socialism to neoliberalism, countless women have wrestled with dilemmas similar to hers. Their full participation in the newly minted market economy—one that, to no small extent, is developed through and built upon men’s consumption of women’s sexuality—profoundly undercuts their chances for a good family life. Women’s qualifications for love have been redefined in contradictory terms that require both self-made success in the market and self-sacrifice for the family.² Learning that our conversation would be included in my research project, which might be published at some point, Liu—her voice quavering and her eyes welling up with tears—insisted that I should write down the following words, which she stated emphatically: “We, Chinese women, are different from American women. We have big love (*daai*) for our family, but they only prioritize small love (*xiaoai*) for themselves.” Of course, this sweeping generalization begs for contextualization and further scrutiny for nuanced understanding. Still, it provides a glimpse into the daunting lovescape that this book aims to unfold: in China, love has contributed to a collective hallucination that cajoles numerous disenfranchised subjects to expect that the possession of the correct format of love, or even proximity to it, will help their lives become different in the right way, no matter what that format of love looks and feels like on an everyday basis.

Its delusively promissory feature aside, love is hard to capture. According to Lauren Berlant, love can be seen as an affective structure of enduring attachments that “might feel like anything, including nothing” at any moment.³

In addition, it flies repeatedly in the face of our linguistic and cognitive capacities, taking shape as shifting and often contradictory personal feelings and interpersonal attachments. From day to day, the apparatus of love finds its way into our capacity “to affect and to be affected that pushes a present into a composition, an expressivity.”⁴ Furthermore, it encircles us as an incipient but freighted affectsphere that can suddenly immerse us in “something that feels like something” and motivate our collective sensibilities to “pulse in plain sight.”⁵ With her emotionally imbued words, Liu tried to impress me with the self-value and -esteem that she derived from the family-centered love so as to distinguish her from the selfish Others—that is, the “American women.” Yet based on her gestures, I could sense that she did not feel much happiness, excitement, passion, or any of the other warm feelings usually associated with love. Instead, the love that she articulated chilled me with the glaring regret and anguish that it registered both sonically and visually. Drawn partially by the affective valence of Liu’s dreadful experience and partially by her propositional content, women workers who had finished their day started to gather around us to share their own pitiable stories, amplifying the atmosphere that she had activated and attracting more passersby to join in the denunciation of love’s false promises. Transmitted between and across different bodies, love’s affectivities generated far greater effects than the sum of its parts and created a sense of “living together” and “relations made flesh” that accompanied the bursts and circulations of the messages and objects that it brought into shape.⁶ Before disappearing into the air again, this contagious love created an intangible but thick ambience that produced a group of woeful women. This “might not be [directly] visible, but at any given point it might be sensed” through these women’s conflicted feelings as “the socio-cultural expression of [its] felt intensity.”⁷ Circulating among these women, the embodied weight of love furthered their world building by disturbing and creating “what is continuous, anchoring [them] enough in the scene to pull in other things as [it] goes,” such as a rekindled hope of a promising tomorrow.⁸

As this book sets out to show, despite its ever-morphing and fleeting nature, the structure of love has taken on an unsettling pattern in the milieu of neoliberalization in China and beyond. On the day of an interview with a group of male construction workers in Hai’an, after briefly introducing the nature of my project, I explained that there would be an audio recording of our conversations and my research would be made available to the public. This disclosure is common in Western academia, and I was surprised when it triggered overwhelmingly positive responses. I was inundated by a deluge of stories about my interviewees’ unremitting fight with the government for

better working conditions and treatment, which, they hoped, could rouse some transnational repercussions that would tame the unruly state and make their life easier. Like these workers, many other informants tried to secure a spot for their long-subdued experiences in my notebook, bringing into focus the sacrificial love that had sustained them as children who had given up educational opportunities to help with family finances, mothers or daughters who had terminated careers to move back home to care for underage and aging loved ones, outcasts living alone in cities and struggling to support their rural families, and hopeful migrants following fellow villagers' footsteps in search of job opportunities in China's proliferating overseas construction sites to provide a better life for the people they care about. Out of a shared sense of family-centered love, they had re-created themselves as pursuers of dreams who were motivated to work for all but their own well-being, and as indentured laborers shoring up the interests of the Chinese state and transnational capital alike. Divergent though the starting points of their migratory route might be, the ends remain distressingly identical to what Jasbir Puar calls "slow death," as they all move toward the premeditated destination of a decaying segment of the population meted out by the state for wearing out.⁹ Instead of the self-interested individuals intent on personal optimization who are touted by neoliberal ideologues as the epitome of rational market subjectivity, these migrants were motivated by their love for their family, and they toiled for the benefits of the state and capital to their own detriment. Thus, they constitute the obscured source of China's presumably inexhaustible labor force, which is pivotal to its neoliberalizing transformation. Like the workers, I came from a lower-class background, and I had left my home at the age of eighteen, moving out of China and across the Pacific to pursue my family dream in my late twenties.¹⁰ As a former migrant and now a diasporic subject, I share their feelings about the love-ignited aspiration and fully identify with them. Having frequently returned to promissory love only to find it unfailingly chimerical rather than salvific, I feel obligated to find ways to end its illusory spell and release the potentials that it subdues.¹¹

Dreadful Desires: The Uses of Love in Neoliberal China invites readers to reencounter love—not to accept love as it is, but to shift the way we look at love from a transparent form of feeling ingrained in all human beings to a complex set of potentials for embedded actualization in polarized terms. Taking cues from the affective turn in critical theories, the book reframes love as a social apparatus that transpires sustainably into variegated emotions and feelings with grounded effects.¹² This study draws upon both a discursive analysis of media and cultural products and ethnographic data to trace how

disparate emotive responses are generated on personal and interpersonal levels to reproduce different subjects and social groups for energizing China's neoliberal transition. The book not only adds new materials from a different context to enrich the discussions of affect that have heretofore mostly focused on Western societies, but it also employs affect as a heuristic device to reexamine the critical issues that human beings are facing together at this moment—that is, the rampant neoliberalizing process and its dire consequences. To deepen our knowledge of the kaleidoscopic landscape of love, I take a feminist intersectional approach to interrogate and untangle the mechanism that the Chinese state relies upon to define and redefine the affective parameters of desire and intimacy in binaristic terms of gender, class, sexuality, and ethno-race.¹³ Such an analysis enables me to delineate how these manipulative practices are integrated with other exploitative biopolitical policies through the bifurcated engineering of differences. Following insights from queer of color critiques, I am also attentive to hidden aspects of the institutionalized disparities, and I keep track of emerging forms of differences that are re-created by the party-state for profit-seeking purposes to build a robust platform of solidarity for social change.¹⁴

Taken together, these issues and concerns bring forth the central questions that my study intends to answer: What constitutes the driving forces that render China at once a part of the global neoliberal system and yet apart from it? Using the case of China as an optic, what larger picture can we capture to identify the mechanism that informs and enables neoliberalism's global control and, more recently, the mounting nationalist backlash against that control? Given the disturbing arrangements built upon this mechanism, what are the conditions in which new forms of livability and sociality can emerge, survive, and thrive? And if we believe that all social life is material, grounded, and embodied on a daily basis, how can critical scholars committed to positive social change uncover and access these potentialities for a more humane future?

This book argues that love sets up the daily flow of our affective energies as a fantasmatic apparatus of desire and intimacy that inhabits a non-linear temporal logic operating recursively between the past, present, and future and works along and across multiscale sociospaces to mediate and fuse our processes of becoming self and world making into symbiotic ones. My analysis probes the ways in which love is fabulated both by the Chinese state and by capital as an expansive spatiotemporal matrix that I call the borderless Loveland for serving their collective interests. Since China initiated economic reforms and reopened its door to the world in the late 1970s,

the state has developed a series of rationalized policies to regenerate precarious migrant workers to boost China's marketization and reintegration with the global economy.¹⁵ This has attracted plenty of critical attention.¹⁶ However, that coverage generally misses how affective forces—in particular, those related to love—are used to complement stringent biopolitical management.¹⁷ As Lisa Rofel shows, the constitution of desires—aspirations, needs, and longings—is central to the remaking of human subjects vital for China's neoliberal transition.¹⁸ Neoliberalism, Berlant posits, is not simply “a world-homogenizing sovereign with coherent intentions that produces subjects who serve its interests, such that their singular actions only seem personal, effective, and freely intentional,” but also “the messy dynamics of attachment, self-continuity, and the reproduction of life that are the material scenes of living on in the present.”¹⁹ More broadly, as Brian Massumi demonstrates, “affectivity and rationality” that function by the divergent “feedforward” and “feedback” logic “circle creatively through each other” to subtend and buttress all economic relationships.²⁰ Building on her genealogical analysis of modern liberalism and settler colonialism, Lisa Lowe lays bare how the capitalistic system was established and expanded through the mixture of the affective traction created by enticing offers of rights, emancipation, wage labor, and free trade with geographic, national, racialized, gendered, sexualized, and religious asymmetries to re-create docile laboring subjects.²¹ Likewise, showing how legions of nonwhite migrants were drawn to Canada and the United States by their aspirational dreams of settler family life in the second half of the twentieth century, but were simultaneously confronted with the gendered and sexualized norms that denied them enough political voice and social status and thus perpetuated their enslaved labor, Nayan Shah identifies the collusional connection between the biopolitical regulation of populations and the manipulation of affective potentials that fostered the capitalistic system from its early stages.²²

To answer the questions and explore alternatives to the present dire setup, this book develops an approach that includes an engaged scrutiny of the borderless Loveland and an embedded inquiry into people's mundane lives as the Loveland's grounded effects to identify the mechanism that subtends and upholds the transnational neoliberal system. I call this mechanism the difference-making machinery. My study integrates the discursive with the ethnographic and combines grave scrutiny of political economies and empirical data with upbeat examinations of popular cultures to unpack the entanglements of affect, rationality, capital, labor, market, and state in contemporary China with the goal of finding transformative possibilities.

Following this approach, I provide a broad view of China's dramatic love-scape and its variegated articulations, and I dissect how the state relies upon the difference-making machinery to shuffle and reshuffle disparities of gender, class, sexuality, and ethno-race to preregister the affective tendencies of myriad rural migrants before they are actualized in unfavorable terms and align the migrants' life trajectories with neoliberal restructuring in the Chinese and transnational contexts. Drawing upon a critical analysis of state-sponsored cultural spectacles, such as the televised ceremony of China's sixtieth anniversary in 2009 and the popular TV dating game show *If You Are the One*, my investigation brings into focus the phantasmagoric terrains of the Loveland to cast light on the ways in which love is orchestrated to serve different needs of the party-state and capital. Through ethnographic engagement with the migrant worker communities in Hai'an and Wuxi (a metropolitan area eighty miles west of Hai'an), I explore how the apparatus of love facilitates and sustains the biopolitical exploitation of disenfranchised and so-called irrational groups to stabilize China's turbulent neoliberalization and demonstrate how the dreadful Loveland can be dismantled. Drawing attention to the resistant praxes of well-educated single urban women demonized as being unlovable and unable to love in China's daunting marriage market, my query also maps fissures across the landscape of love that create room for concrete change. Diverse and divergent as the materials for analysis are, they are all clustered around China's fantasmatic apparatus of desire and intimacy—serving as its normative articulation embedded in the neoliberal condition or as willful or resistant subjects impelled by its possibilities and impossibilities.

Dreadful Desires can thus be viewed as an intervention in contrast to the claim of universal rationality and its incarnation, homo economicus (the figurative human being driven solely to maximize personal interests), as the epistemic foundation of neoliberalism and ideological leverage of its global domination. Instead, the book identifies the ways in which affect and rationality are imbricated to enable and sustain the transnational unfolding of neoliberal relationships, while also spawning insolvable contradictions for subversions. It disentangles the transactional relationships between affective forces and biopolitical calculus, as well as dismantling the difference-making machinery that accommodates their disparate functioning to undergird China's neoliberal transition. Tracing how this mechanism also sets China apart as an emerging threat to the capitalist world, my analysis unpacks the recent nationalist backlash against globalization to envision possibilities of substantive change from within the transnational neoliberal regime.

Reencountering the Borderless Apparatus of Love

Certainly, the manipulative orchestration of love is central to China's neoliberal and neocolonial agenda, which has been met with escalating pushback. In May 2017, *China Daily*, the state-run flagship English-language newspaper, released a five-episode web series intended to promote and defend the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the largest infrastructure construction project in history.²³ Packaging the aggressive plan into affectionate dialogues between a genteel white American father and his studious daughter, "Belt and Road Bedtime Stories" attempts to mitigate the growing concern about China's debt-funded plan to bend other nation-states to its will and create new markets for its excess production capacity of steel, cement, and aluminum. Episode 4, for example, centers on a bedtime storytelling scene that turns into a blatant propaganda tool. As the man relaxes in bed, lying against the headboard and playing the ukulele, his five-year-old daughter cuddles next to him, tapping on her pink toy bunny in time with the tune. "Time for bed, kiddo," says the man as he stops playing and turns toward the girl. "Story time!" the girl demands. The father grabs a globe and starts to mark on it the various countries connected by the BRI. "Wow! So it really is globalization! Like all around the world," the girl exclaims with a knowing smile. The father continues, "But some countries are moving away from globalization." The BRI, in his account, is "an opportunity to move globalization forward. Especially since a lot about it is about building infrastructure." Ostensibly, the heart-melting videos employ affable storytelling to ease the brewing tension between the world and the aspiring imperial giant intent on increasing its global presence. Even China's harshest critics might find solace in the daughter's seemingly spontaneous reactions to such fatherly storytelling. But these videos are only part of China's paternalist affective agenda.

In the wake of the 2008 global financial meltdown imputed to the failure of the Washington Consensus—the US-backed global restructuring plan through market fundamentalism developed by a group of Washington-based organizations and institutions—many of its critics embraced the Beijing Consensus, which relies on larger policy tool kits, more regulated resources, long-term state planning, and the stringent control of enterprises as an alternative way of advancing global economic integration.²⁴ Xi Jinping, China's president, has largely accrued his authoritarian power to expand the Beijing Consensus through his meticulously crafted persona as a loving father, symbolized not least by the well-popularized moniker "*xi dada*" (or "Big Daddy

Xi"). Since he assumed the presidency in 2013, Chinese media have used a wide range of discursive tropes—including animated ditties, video clips, musical odes, and comic images—to cultivate his chivalrous, gallant, and paternalistic personality, extolling him as a strong leader born with a kind heart. At home, he is lauded as an affectionate husband who puts his wife's needs ahead of his own.²⁵ He is also praised as a softhearted man who is unashamed of shedding tears in public and who "feels deeply about family, friends, average citizens and model officials."²⁶ In addition, he is presented as an unpretentious and genuine commander in chief who is willing to pay his own way and carry his own tray to share street food around cheap folding tables with average Chinese citizens.²⁷ Abroad, he is portrayed as a reliable champion who makes every effort during crises to ensure the safety of Chinese nationals, citizens or not.²⁸ And he is shown as an unfaltering guardian of China's revival and return to the world stage after hundreds of years of war, colonized humiliation, poverty-stricken disarray, and other calamities.²⁹ Xi's embodied heteropatriarchal love for his own nuclear family and, by proxy, the family of the nation has been measured and used repeatedly as nothing less than a vessel to rally nationalist momentum to propel China into its role as a new global leader.

In stark contrast to China's love-paved road into a more cosmopolitan world, far-right groups have recently come to power through fearmongering campaigns across Europe, Asia, and the Americas, giving rise to a nationalist groundswell that is ready to reshape and curtail our putatively unified future.³⁰ For instance, Xi's geopolitical nemesis, Donald J. Trump, rode a virulent racist, xenophobic, misogynist, and ableist campaign into the White House to the surprise of both ends of the political spectrum. By demonizing marginalized groups such as Mexicans and Muslim immigrants as a direct threat to the American people, he spoke directly about the failed American dream, inspiring an inward-looking nationalist vision for remaking the United States. Meanwhile, by touting himself as the only person who could deliver on the unfulfilled promise of America, Trump created and retained thick affective forces that drew many disillusioned voters to him as his most loyal electoral base.³¹

However, China's love-gilded cosmopolitan dream proves no less pernicious than the hate-filled paranoia stoked by incendiary nationalists. In November 2017, the Beijing municipal government's forces stormed migrant worker communities, cut off their water and electricity with no notice, and bulldozed their homes.³² Under mounting pressure from the public and media, the state defended its act as part of a broad plan to purge "low-end

populations” and “modernize, beautify, and gentrify the Chinese capital as a showcase for the Communist Party.”³³ Predictably, this reckless justification increased tensions, inadvertently revealing the heart of the state’s developmental agenda: the consistent intrusive management of the Chinese population and individual lives. Stuck in these baffling developments, we might ask how love, as a human emotion that is often celebrated as a self-evident good, is inspired, retained, and spread in such a way that has led to dire consequences like presumably negative feelings—say, hate and fear. And when heterogeneous feelings are persistently provoked by tyrannical politicians to sponsor their comparably dangerous agendas and the consequential boundaries between positive and negative emotions appear to be incrementally blurred, how can we retrieve the good ones such as love to build a truly blissful world?

This book develops a novel approach to tracing the genealogies and topologies of love that are embedded in and extend beyond China’s social upheavals and provide a panoramic view of the fantasmatic lovescape to release love from its grim entrapment by neoliberal logic and reopen its boundless potential. As Sara Ahmed reminds us, no feelings “simply reside within subjects and then move outward toward objects,” and human beings’ innate desires and presumably transcendent emotions are in actuality all directed by outside-in forces toward certain ends.³⁴ Using happiness as an example, Ahmed adeptly unpacks how emotions treated as self-evidently good are frequently “used to redescribe social norms as social goods,” with unhappy consequences.³⁵ As Mishuana Goeman has observed, in North America liberal discourses of love and marriage re-create the intimate couple as a transference point within liberalism and partake in the ideology as part of a complex of “freedom producing subjects and institutions” that operates around the autonomous subject to support settler colonialism.³⁶ In the global context, Elizabeth Povinelli expounds on how love “secures the self-evident good of social institutions, social distributions of life and death, and social responsibilities for these institutions and distributions” as an ongoing event, anchoring the construction of liberalism as a Western sociopolitical project to further transnational colonial and imperial expansion.³⁷ Love, in these accounts, begs for more critical attention to unravel how different social forces are woven into the texture of the affective apparatus, which in turn shapes and reshapes our desire and intimacy in varied directions with tangible consequences.

As will be clear from my analysis, the borderless Loveland functions as a public structure of sensing and perceiving that modulates our potentialities

to love and be loved, incorporating its effectual tapestry into our subjectivities as expanding lovabilities and love-abilities. Meanwhile, it creates an embedded matrix of sentiments that tunes our love-associated feelings, cognitions, and actions to habituate our sovereign individuality and collective existence, enfolding its sprawling affectsphere in the worlding process that we all inhabit as conjoined experiences. Along the Loveland's morphing spatiotemporal terrains, love is frequently registered as "the anticipatory reality in the present," a promissory future that materializes our being by "the felt reality of the nonexistent, looming present as the affective fact of the matter."³⁸ Retrieving the past and present and thrusting their recurrence into our emerging existence, it also takes shape as a form of "future anteriority," the anticipated future embedded in the past and present.³⁹ Love, in our lifeworld, cannot be fully captured but only briefly sensed as a cluster of spatialities—both physical and imaginary—best understood topologically "as attenuated, squeezed, pliant, and labile-like textiles," which are "dense with circulating expressive forms that effect transnational belonging" that in turn is textured by local forces and attributes.⁴⁰ Every now and then, it surges into being as "a speculative topography of the everyday sensibilities," reaching us as "a state of alert saturated with the potentiality of things in the making in a personal, political, and aesthetic ambit that has not yet found its form but is always promising and threatening to take shape."⁴¹ In the midst of China's neoliberal transition, the prismatic lovescape permutes its affective ambience along the shifting metrics of gender, class, and sexuality, reframing the idealized projection of love from the state-supervised version that Haiyan Lee calls "revolutionary romanticism" to the one based on private property ownership, upward mobility, and enduring heteronormative intimacy.⁴² By predetermining the scope of our desire and intimacy, the unbounded Loveland plays an integral role in reorienting Chinese people from self-effacing subjects, whose interests are subordinated to the state's socialist cause, to agential selves motivated to seek familial opulence and prosperity in market competition—a collective subjective transition affectively modulated to accommodate societal changes at a structural level.

Building on the holistic view of China's extensive Loveland, this book also opens up a new horizon to reexamine the alarming nationalist waves that have set the stage for a new Cold War, while reconstructing solidarities through feminist and queer lenses for more humanitarian and just futurities beyond the neoliberal singularity of the present. Offering a critical optic to revisit the Cold War legacy and probe how it proliferates the communist specter and protracts its haunting into antiglobalist resurgences, it enables

readers to delve into the difference-making machinery that begets the germination of gendered, classed, sexualized, and racialized polarities—which in turn remake barriers in calculative and affective terms, both allowing China’s integration into the global market as a central player and, at the same time, re-creating it as the new primary adversary of the capitalist world. I propose a different perspective for understanding the ways that the competing relationships of structurally induced biopolitics and the speculative manipulation of affective tendencies, profiteering capital and laborers seeking a better life, border-crossing markets and border-reclaiming nation-states, and politico-economic materialities and cultural formations of identities are fused into contingent balance to ground the operation of the neoliberal matrix and forward its global reign. It is my hope that this book will provide a vantage point from which we can initiate generative discussion and concerted efforts to find a path through the chaotic moment and build a more peaceful world.

Identifying the Difference-Making Neoliberal Mechanism

Francis Fukuyama declared that history “ended” with the demise of the Soviet-led socialist bloc and human beings became united as a global community founded on cosmopolitan solidarity and Western-style democracy.⁴³ However, the Cold War mentality persists into the present, spawning growing agitation that has erupted into an antiglobalist tsunami. As Jinhua Dai suggests, although China freed itself from the frenzied competition between the socialist and capitalist camps in the old Cold War as an independent, self-sufficient nation and major advocate of third world solidarity, its active participation in neoliberal globalization has implicated it in the current Cold War as the new emblem of the socialist or communist threat.⁴⁴ By re-creating communist China as their major geopolitical adversary, right-wing groups in the West recharge nationalist frenzy to consolidate their political power across the world.⁴⁵ Instead of building up the anticipated bountiful cosmopolitan community, we are rapidly backtracking into the dark days of divisive, parochial, and war-torn disarray, with conservatives fully rallied against their new opponent.

To be sure, since its reform and opening up in 1978, China has grown from a newly founded regime sandwiched between two ideological camps, carrying the potential to tip their power balance at the height of the arms race in the 1980s, into a giant set on using its immeasurable economic clout

to reshape the world. Capitalizing on the turbulence of financial deregulation and trade liberalization afforded by globalization, the so-called socialist monster with Chinese characteristics has siphoned off tremendous amounts of capital and numerous jobs from its capitalist adversaries to subsidize its own development. For decades, the world envied China for the double-digit growth in its gross domestic product (GDP). In 2009, after pulling itself swiftly out of the Great Recession—the devastating aftershock from one of the worst financial meltdowns since the Great Depression in the 1930s—and acting as a generous lender to the troubled Western economies, it emerged as the savior of the capitalist world and the leader of the global recovery.⁴⁶ By 2010, China had leapfrogged Japan and was in the second position in the global economic hierarchy, trailing only the United States.⁴⁷ In January 2017, three days before Trump's seismic inauguration, Xi defended globalization in his plenary speech at the World Economic Forum meeting at Davos, Switzerland, announcing his commitment to shepherding the globalizing process.⁴⁸ Four months later, he opened China's own globalization forum with a pledge to provide \$78 billion to advance the BRI project that supported the country's view of itself as the founder and advocate of the "community of common destiny with mankind."⁴⁹

Despite their contrasting affective appeals and worldviews, right-wing nationalists in the West and Chinese globalists converge via the difference-making strategies they develop to realize their rival visions. By turning pluralist identity politics on its head and into vengeful masculinist and white supremacist rhetoric and braiding it into his inflammatory prolabor populist narrative, Trump reinforced the resentful nationalist ethos that propelled him to his 2016 electoral victory and gave him the opportunity to carry out his neoliberal agenda.⁵⁰ Comparably, Xi's plan to "comprehensively deepen China's reform" and revitalize its imperial multiplication for markets and resources is delivered in and shored up by gendered and classed biopolitics that reaggregate the Chinese population and individual lives in line with his grandiose restructuring plan—and in turn, its implementation is justified by love-defined cosmopolitanism.⁵¹ Paradoxically, their affectively registered counterinterviews vying to lead "the people"—however defined—and find the path forward converge via an identity-induced differentiation working toward a common telos. Through incessant affection and propagation by these politicians to manipulate the general public, such contradictory narratives and fragmented realities are pieced together into a bewildering scenario that challenges any conventional wisdom and surely confounds the view of even the savviest pundits.

Dreadful Desires develops a road map to shed light on the inner workings of this neoliberal apparatus while seeking a path through the present turbulence. What refuels and upholds the transnational neoliberal regime and its neo-nationalist backfire, I argue, is the difference-making machinery that regenerates oppositional relationships and binaristic categorizations of gender, race, sexuality, and class, as well as concealing the connections in between to balance the competing factors, agents, components, and institutions implicated in transnational trading relationships. Working against the polarizing logic of this machinery and tracking how it weaves China into the global network of capital as the menacing Other, this book furthers critical understanding of the difference-fostering and -managing core of the neoliberal apparatus to coordinate our rationalized beings and affective potential in the service of the planetary banquet of interests for capital and rescaled nation-states.

In contrast to oppositional Cold War thinking, copious connections exist between China's reform and the neoliberal restructuring across the capitalist world. In response to the financial crisis that broke out in Britain in 1973 and quickly spread to the United States, neoliberal theories were road tested in Latin America first and then adopted in the West.⁵² Under Augusto Pinochet's aegis and with US support, Chile became "the first country in the world to make that [neoliberal] momentous break with the past—away from socialism and extreme state capitalism toward more market-oriented structures and policies."⁵³ When the Conservative Party took power in 1978 in Britain, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher launched drastic initiatives to privatize the public sector, deregulate financial and labor markets, and withdraw the state from the provision of welfare, laying the cornerstones of neoliberalization for other powerful politicians, such as Ronald Reagan and Deng Xiaoping.⁵⁴

Amid the grueling socioeconomic crisis in the late 1970s, China also adopted neoliberalism as an "exception" for state-controlled experimentation.⁵⁵ And "if it wasn't merely reciting the neoliberal canons that originated in the West, then it was at least adding an effective footnote."⁵⁶ In 1978, the state replaced the system of the People's Commune with a family-based farming system to test the waters of the market, allowing farmers to sell the produce they had left after giving their quotas to the state. In 1980, the Communist leadership established four special economic zones in southern coastal regions to expand this marketizing thrust to nonagricultural sectors, and in 1984, it opened fourteen more coastal cities to overseas investment.⁵⁷ As reform edged its way into the late 1980s, Beijing introduced a two-track system, which included state-set prices applied to means of production

and market prices for consumer items to create competing market subjects within the planned economy.⁵⁸ As effective as this price reform proved to be, it created the perfect conditions for rent seeking by government officials, who monopolized the access to material goods and triggered severe inflation in 1988, exacerbating the public's discontent with corruption and spiraling inequality.⁵⁹ The resulting social mobilization raged across the country and soon sprawled into the Tian'anmen Square (or June 4th) movement. One of the world's earliest mass protests against neoliberalism, it was soon forcibly suppressed by the state.⁶⁰

While resistance movements waxed and waned in China, a transformative momentum swept across Europe, clearing the way for global neoliberal restructuring. Culminating in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, these fundamental policy changes redirected societies toward a capital-leaning avenue. In the same year, the Washington-based International Monetary Fund and World Bank—in collaboration with the US Treasury Department (the so-called Washington Consensus)—prescribed a reform package for Latin American countries to liberalize and open up their markets to address the problems of their crisis-ridden economies. Purged of Keynesian influences in the 1980s, supranational institutions established under the Keynesian-Westphalian frame to stabilize and facilitate the postwar reconstruction were turned into mouthpieces of neoliberal ideology and imposed a series of disastrous structural adjustment programs on developing countries to consolidate free-market economies around the globe.⁶¹

China undoubtedly occupies a vital and pivotal point in the global network of capital, and the undeterred US efforts to integrate it into this network for broadening the scope of capital reproduction—even in the apogee of anti-China sentiment after the Tian'anmen Square movement among the European allies of the United States—finally bore fruit with Deng's so-called Southern Tour, which resumed reforms in 1992. The decision to open up Shanghai's Pudong area marked China's full embrace of the market mechanism, and soon afterward previously sporadic experiments were moving ahead at full steam.⁶² Under the tutelage of two subsequent leaders (Jiang Zemin [1989–2003] and Hu Jintao [2003–2013]), China was transformed from a semi-autarkic economy into a major player in the global market, appealing to transnational capital with new facilities and reliable infrastructures; favorable policies and legal support; and, most importantly, a seemingly inexhaustible supply of cheap labor and raw materials.

China's reopening to the world also created “an important condition for the formation of neoliberal globalization.”⁶³ In 2001, under pressure from the

United States, China compromised and sacrificed substantial national interests to secure its seat in the World Trade Organization. The global market quickly took advantage of its abundant labor force and resources, earning China the title of the (new) world's factory. By outsourcing low-value-added manufacturing jobs and offshoring sunset labor-intensive industries in decline to China, Western investors and multinationals exponentially reduced their costs and increased their profit margins.⁶⁴ This subjected Chinese workers to exploitation by transnational capital, multinational corporations, and supranational organizations, which siphoned off values to maximize their interests via the conduit of the party-state.

By altering its interconnected parameters of gender, class, and sexuality, the difference-making machinery also plays a key role in integrating China into global neoliberal infrastructures. In the early 1990s, following the discursive shift that heralded the gentrified lifestyle in tandem with global restructuring, media representations of daily life in China switched their focus from working-class people or peasants to the newly minted middle class, justifying the massive structural changes and soaring inequalities.⁶⁵ In contradiction to the Maoist goal of building a classless society, class struggles and social injustice became a suppressed topic that warranted the implicit value extraction of poor workers by both the state and capital. Meanwhile, the homogenizing gender egalitarianism of socialism gave way to a *mélange* of binaristic gender concepts, and the polarized gender essentialism that had been held at bay earlier was unleashed to shore up middle-class normativity.⁶⁶ For example, Chinese began to celebrate entrepreneurship as the new hallmark of manhood, with business masculinity assuming hegemonic status in a globalized world.⁶⁷ Like their Western counterparts, Chinese women are confronted with prescribed roles that instruct them, along with their male counterparts, to pursue education and hone their professional skills as independent, competitive, and successful people in a market-driven society.⁶⁸ However, women also have contradictory roles, as they are told to take on the role of caretaker and homemaker to facilitate the privatization of public services previously provided by the state.⁶⁹ Alongside the dichotomized installations of class and gender, the dualistic concept of homo- and heterosexuality emerged as a new taxonomic vector in the 1990s.⁷⁰ The discursive construction of sexual identities as a new label replaced Mao's heavy-handed punitive policies in regard to homosexual behavior. To compete for more jobs at the lower end of the global division of labor with its Southeast Asian neighbors and tackle the challenges from developed countries to build its advantages in high-tech sectors, the state is poised to redraw the lines of

gender, class, and sexuality to further extract Chinese people's biopolitical values. Consequently, it has substantially increased the social splintering that keeps unfolding with massive rebellions, epidemic suicidal protests, and organized serial strikes.⁷¹

Tracking how the difference-making machinery works to incorporate China into the global neoliberal matrix and foster cross-border reproduction of capital, my study dismantles the Cold War legacy for new understandings of the present crisis. By imposing neoliberal principles as the blueprint of global restructuring, the Washington Consensus paved the way for the disastrous Great Recession and unrelenting resistance to globalization across the world.⁷² Showing that the China model is not quintessentially different from its Western counterpart, my investigation provides a tool kit to dissect the various modes of neoliberal governance—in particular, the antigovernment discourse trafficked transnationally by right-wing nationalists to reinforce and perpetuate the neoliberal mantra.⁷³

Following the paths through which this machinery reconfigures categories of differences to segregate human beings into competing groups and sets the stage for the global exploitation of laborers by the Chinese party-state, foreign countries, and multinationals, my study also builds an epistemic ground for fundamental change. As Aihwa Ong and Nancy Fraser both note, current studies of globalization treat it as a set of either rationalized structural changes or cultural dynamics that have shaped human identities and subjectivities.⁷⁴ Either way, these frameworks prevent us from fully accounting for, much less dismantling, the relationship between neoliberalism and the formations and re-formations of identities on both individual and societal levels. Far from bringing forth a borderless cosmopolitan world, the systematic and oppressive reordering of social control over populations in the form of reentrenched gendered, sexualized, classed, and ethno-racialized differences has accompanied the promotion of open markets and free traffic of capital, creating new tensions of reterritorialization of nation-state boundaries.⁷⁵ Focusing on the daily operation of the difference-making machinery, my analysis untangles the braided vectors of gender, sexuality, class, and ethno-race to expose the oppositions that are re-created in transnational settings to pit disenfranchised groups against one another, thus allowing for their compound exploitation by nation-states and multinational corporations. This grounded scrutiny clarifies how social hierarchies are remade at the local levels to thwart collective resistance of people on the periphery.

More critically, my investigation traces the ways in which China's marketization has been pushed forward through the integration of rational

market subjectivity and love-induced fantasies and desires by the difference-making machinery. It also addresses the theoretical lacunae that leave affect, emotions, and feelings fatally underdiscussed in scholarly examinations of neoliberal subject and world making. This analytical inadequacy contributes to our inability to fathom the innermost layers of the transnational neoliberal matrix, an inability that prevents us from enacting far-reaching changes. In practice, neoliberalism depends on its ideological basis, which touts personal optimization through quantifiable market value maximization, as much as it does on motivation to increase the qualitative surplus value of life—which is infinitely deferred to elsewhere and elsewhen. During the course of China’s neoliberalization, erratic feelings, emotive responses, and affective tethering have been unceasingly provoked and spread to engineer the marketized relationships and meet the changing needs of industrial and financial capital. In the following sections, drawing upon critical scholarship that has addressed these topics from various perspectives, I propose a new approach and elaborate how it can be used both to develop a different understanding of global neoliberalism and to transform the current system.

Tracing the Multidirectional and Multidimensional Governing Machinery

To move beyond antagonistic Cold War thinking, we might readdress neoliberalism as the set of contingent and flexible practices that Michel Foucault calls “governmentality” to produce self-serving subjects and, in turn, create and consolidate market mechanisms for managing all social relationships.⁷⁶ As the most important means as well as the end of neoliberal governance, the state embeds the market in a symbiotic relationship aimed to facilitate and sustain the efficacious running of the market—which, in turn, provides the ultimate legitimacy for the state’s *raison d’être*. As chapter 4 shows, the adoption of neoliberal governance by the party-state has transformed all levels of the Chinese government from *de jure* bastions of social justice into *de facto* entrepreneurial entities wielding sovereign power to maximize their own interests. In short, China has turned into “a capitalistic society in terms of administration, fiscal system, and social structure . . . and socialist in terms of political bureaucracy,” as a rural migrant with decades of experience in the housing development industry put it succinctly.⁷⁷ To stabilize this transition, nationalism comes to the fore as the primary resource for the state to use in garnering public support for advancing its marketizing agenda, as I show in chapter 1.

At its core, the neoliberal governing machinery relies upon the production of agential subjects to exert and extend market rule, and the administration of individual bodies and populations becomes two poles that are coordinated by the difference-making mechanism. At one end, generative biopower circulates and refuels itself in horizontal ways to produce new singular subjects who are willing to practice market rule.⁷⁸ At the other end, calculative biopolitics to catalogue, differentiate, and stratify populations are waged in totalizing vertical ways to set the stage for the practicing of market rule by these individualized subjects.⁷⁹ To coordinate the crosscurrents of biopower and biopolitics, the governing machine regenerates bifurcated differences to accommodate the diagonal working of biopower and biopolitics. Citing sexuality in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe, Foucault explained how this polarizing mechanism constituted homosexuality as the categorical antithesis to heterosexuality in the burgeoning capitalist system via discursive formations; scientific archiving; medical practices; judicial protocols; legal practices; and the social institutions of state, family, and education. Meanwhile, the difference-making mechanism produced other so-called abnormal sexual categories (such as child sex and extramarital relationships) in the same manner as homosexuality, limiting the human sexual spectrum and valorizing the heterosexual conjugal relationship as normative. By inserting sexuality as a wedge between the macromanagement of the population and the microregimentation of self making, this normalized selfhood helped channel people's heterogeneous desiring fantasies into the monolithic purpose of reproduction of quality bodies, consolidating the bourgeois nuclear family as a bastion in which to foster subjects best suited for capital's needs.⁸⁰

Feminist scholarship, especially scholarship about women of color and transnational feminism, substantially expand the single-axis and flattened Foucauldian framework by shedding light on the multidirectional and multidimensional operation of the difference-making machinery.⁸¹ For example, Patricia Hill Collins aptly disentangles how race, gender, and class interact with one another to create the multilayered and multifaceted architecture of the matrix of domination, which modifies its structures and textures to serve the contingent socioeconomic and political interests of the United States.⁸² At the apex of globalization, the machinery extends its layered parameters well beyond nation-state boundaries, taking a far more complicated shape to set up, distribute, and administer variously organized disciplinary regimes that invigorate neoliberalism's global reign.⁸³ The difference-making machinery drastically redraws the lines between central and peripheral,

privileged and disadvantaged, and first and third worlds to match globally distributed capital, subjecting the marginalized majority to the joint exploitation by a global minority of elites.⁸⁴

Taking these observations further, I argue that the difference-making machinery has created a multidirectional and multidimensional network in which disciplinary biopower and totalizing biopolitics collude to prop up the day-to-day running of the neoliberal regime. Out of its overlapping parameters of gender, sexuality, class, and race/ethnicity, oppositional differences are regenerated to pit the working majorities against one another and squeeze the most out of their labor values. The neoliberal machinery fixes these disenfranchised subjects in differentiated positions for comparative biopolitical devaluation, to maximize the benefits of state and capital by drawing upon the established patterns of dichotomized inequalities.

Given its elastic nature, the multidirectional and multidimensional machinery calls for a supple approach to avoid reducing its eclectic governing parameters to static categories simply for the purpose of naming identities, and to keep track of its grounded articulation to build “a gathering place for open-ended investigations of the overlapping and conflicting dynamics of race, gender, class, sexuality, nation, and other inequalities” that undergirds its daily operation.⁸⁵ For this purpose, I do not aim to provide an exhaustive account of all the parameters at play. Instead, my inquiry focuses on singular events, localized practices, and historiographic flash points as the nodal points to develop a broad view of its embedded functioning.⁸⁶ For instance, although I use the terms *race/ethnicity* and *ethno-race* interchangeably for making overarching arguments, my analysis shifts between race and ethnicity throughout the book for contextually relevant and culturally specific meanings, shedding light on details about the systematic pattern of the governing machine. My goal is to retain analytical sharpness related to structural inequalities that are key to biopolitical management, while remaining attentive to fictive and becoming aspects of the machinery that are instrumental to the speculative manipulation of affective tendencies and potentials.⁸⁷

Feeling Love's Tempo with the Pulsating Body

Unarguably, building upon the polarized differences that it regenerates, the neoliberal machinery does not simply use feedback to capture and remake existing patterns of asymmetries to effectuate biopolitical control: it also uses feedforward to preregister people's affective tendencies to forestall their inauspicious concretization and better serve the state and capital.⁸⁸ On top of

the retrospective ordering to create “a world-homogenizing sovereign with coherent intentions that produces subjects who serve its interests, such that their singular actions only *seem* personal, effective, and freely intentional,” the difference-making machinery incorporates visceral forces and autopoietic shifts for preemptive registering of “the messy dynamics of attachment, self-continuity, and the reproduction of life that are the material scenes of living on in the present.”⁸⁹ With life-changing hope for many people and life-affirming prospects for others, the machinery invigorates “a fantasy of the good life” that ensures the continuity of human subjects’ sense of “what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being” in our lifeworld that creates inseverable attachments by moving people out of themselves and toward its enticing offers.⁹⁰ These fantasmatic relationships help establish and retain the neoliberal system as “a thing that is sensed and under constant revision” by plunging people into a ceaseless search for a better life to facilitate the post-World War II restructuring across Europe and the United States.⁹¹ Regardless of what happens in actuality, the pleasures of proximity to the aspirational dreams become the life-sustaining habitus that is essentially cruel rather than remedial, since neoliberal governance has turned the world into “a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to ‘have a life’”; it is the sticky attachment wrought by the promise of the good life that yokes people in ways that have reinforced and perpetuated the status quo.⁹² As Berlant sees it, the hollow-sounding promise of the neoliberal dream is concretized in the binaristic terms of gender, class, and sexuality as “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality . . . durable intimacy . . . meritocracy” in the West.⁹³

Through the antithetical and detached differences, life-improving neoliberal aspirations remap infinitely onto other times or places to recharge their affective traction. As Massumi argues, the futuristic and other-place-oriented neoliberal dreams operate in the “logic of the would-have/could-have,” implying that “if I had . . . , I would/could have.”⁹⁴ The difference-making machinery prevents people from seeing the broad picture by enacting a nonstop renewal of the future-oriented and other-object-projected affective attachments, displacing their unfulfilled neoliberal aspirations onto an ensemble of the Otherized items, people, relationships, and worlds. Thus, “the nonexistence of what has not happened” is rendered “more real than what is now observably over and done with.”⁹⁵ The affective forces that such aspirational dreams generate are contemporary and very real, driving people toward the never-to-be-fulfilled promise offered by the delusive dreams against their calculative rationality.

In China, the unbounded difference-making machinery has contributed to an embedded structure of affective tethering that is comparable to what Berlant observes in Western societies, integrating people's becoming self with their world making into a symbiotic genesis that subtends and grounds the neoliberalizing process. Taking form as the kaleidoscopic Loveland, the structure of the sensorium does not simply dig up and reinforce enamoring feelings out of its burial ground, but fabulates love as a set of potentials that Massumi calls "the virtual" to be actualized in the wake of promissory things, items, or relationships.⁹⁶ Passing through our body, love lands on us, "ending up in a facial tic or passing fast, a one-time only smirk," and its intensified impacts on the body become our "new jumping-off point" and "seeds for a worlding."⁹⁷ The suspension of love's unobstructed flow in particular forms of bodily posture, felt tingling, or spontaneous kinesthetic reaction—as seen in the love-informed group of woeful women discussed above—is when and where the edgeless Loveland manifests its amorphous sensual registers both linguistically and prelinguistically. Anchored in the volatile vectors of the difference-making machinery, the Loveland nimbly extends its affectsphere along and across diverse spatiotemporal scales, transducing disciplinary biopower and totalizing biopolitical forces structured by the dimorphic categories of gender, class, sexuality, and race/ethnicity into sovereign selves to carry forward the worlding process in neoliberal terms.

As the contact sheet of the phantasmagoric lovescape, the pulsating body is the grounded venue we use to sense and chart the quotidian rhythm of love that perpetually takes and loses shape, appears and disappears. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari suggest, instead of a collective organism of flesh, sinews, blood, cartilages, and bones, the body is an ongoing event, an open-ended process of becoming and an assemblage of zones defined by intensity, thresholds, gradients, and flux.⁹⁸ At its core, "a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies," and "it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality."⁹⁹ A body, in this sense, is defined not by insulation from but by interaction with other bodies. Via the vessel of the body, the intensification of transactional biopower and biopolitics produces individual subjects latched onto the body as residual effects that reshape the world these subjects coinhabit. With the focus being "less about its [the body's] nature as bounded substance or eternal essence and more . . . as an interface that becomes more and more describable when it learns to be affected by many more elements," a Deleuzian approach is instrumental to tracing people's emerging lovabilities and love-abilities and throwing into relief the indeterminate boundaries of the Loveland.¹⁰⁰

In this book, I use the body as a telescope to develop an overview of the Loveland and as a microscope to zoom in on its metamorphic working and effects on the ground. Focusing on the “national bodies” of the performers spotlighted in the ceremony for the sixtieth anniversary of the People’s Republic of China, chapter 1 explores how the state deploys an array of epidermal-cultural and fleshy-organic techniques on the metabolic body as a chronobiopolitical tool to re-create a coherent timeline and reunite its polarized socialist past and neoliberal present.¹⁰¹ Reading against the historiography pieced together through these performing bodies, my analysis unearths the gendered, classed, and sexualized basics of the difference-making machinery that works to align the Loveland’s shifting temporalities with the state’s evolving biopolitical agenda for stabilizing China’s neoliberal transition. Switching to the mass-mediated body as the prosaic extension of the corporeal body, chapter 2 diagnoses the articulation (both spatialized and despatialized) of the Loveland and shows how it recasts “normative constructions of body and corporeality” and confounds “assumptions about propinquity and distance, physicality and virtuality” to affect people’s love capacities for fusing China’s national interests with the transnational interests of capital.¹⁰² The expansive Loveland, as chapters 3, 4, and 5 continue to delineate, complements and contradicts calculative biopolitics to regenerate subjects who work volitionally for the benefits of the state and capital, while it also spawns incessant contradictions from within the neoliberal apparatus as a contingent space for change.

Building a Robust Future from Within

Indeed, the difference-making machinery stretches its vibrant parameters and braids them into multifarious aspects of market activities, linking varying capitalistic relationships into a stabilized entity. For example, Roderick Ferguson notes that throughout US history, oppositional differences are continuously re-created out of the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality to disaggregate the working majorities into surplus populations that are antagonistic to one another and satisfy capital’s incremental needs to reduce labor costs and increase profits.¹⁰³ While different racialized, gendered, and sexualized Others are re-created for capital reproduction, heterosexual white men, as Grace Hong posits, are reified as the emblem of US citizenship to demarcate and enforce the ambiguous borders of an imagined national community.¹⁰⁴ Via the centripetal apparatus of gender, race, and sexuality, the contradictory needs of freewheeling capital and the border-making nation-state are unified into a daunting US empire.

Building on its preemptive capacities to capture people's becoming tendencies, the difference-making machinery is also instrumental in the speculative proliferation of capital—the defining feature of the neoliberal economies that David Harvey calls “financialization.”¹⁰⁵ Industrial capital depends on cheap labor, identified through retrospective differentiation based on race, gender, class, and sexuality. Yet for financial capital, profits are generated not directly by productive labor but by fantasy-engineered circulation to translate unknowable futurities into manageable probabilities.¹⁰⁶ With the oppositional differences that it foment and sustains, this polarizing machinery efficaciously preconditions and directs the future- and other-place-oriented projection of fantasies with the goal of fueling and furthering financial capital's predatory circulation.

China's swelling housing bubble—probably the largest in history—is the best example for expounding how the difference-making machinery coordinates the divergent needs of capital and labor, market and state, and rationalized biopolitics and affective apparatus of love to set the stage for hyper neoliberalization. Created and sponsored as a developmental powerhouse by the Zhu Rongji (1998–2003) and Wen Jiabao (2003–2013) administrations to accelerate the transitioning process, China's housing market is essentially driven by binaristic differentiation. As chapter 3 shows, precluding rural migrants who are building the urban housing sprawl out of its future existence and preventing these workers' preset-to-be-wasted bodies from compromising that sprawl's life-improving potential, the reordered disparities not only secure the unperturbed supply of low-cost labor for construction but also recharge its ever-better futurities to maintain skyrocketing prices and realize high market values. In particular, building on the manipulative formulation of love, the state-imposed rural identity and binaristic gender norms are interlocked into an enclosed route that captures numerous migrants working tirelessly toward their slow deaths to build China's glamorizing skyline. Almost all of the male construction workers I interviewed were over thirty years old and married but living alone in cities. Their wives, impelled by sacrificial love for their family members, had quit their own jobs in the cities (where educational resources for their school-age children are restricted) and moved back home (where state-sponsored care is minimal to none) to take care of their aging parents and in-laws. Also out of the familial love, the male migrants, now positioned as their family's sole breadwinner, chose to stay and struggled in abysmal conditions to work toward the family's aspirational dream. However, their love-incentivized striving has invariably left marks on them that cast them as perpetual outsiders to the spellbinding neoliberal dream: their worn-out physique, crude com-

portment and demeanor, and ill-advised and -selected style and clothing mark them as irredeemable outcasts in the entrancing cityscape that they have built with these outcomes. In shuffling and reshuffling the polarized differences, the scathing identification of “who you are” for locating cheap labor for industrial capital and the manipulation of “who you might become” for warranting speculative proliferation of financial capital are linked into a fantasized Ponzi economy that serves to benefit everyone but the workers.

Undoubtedly, in fostering and furthering the binaristic relationships that feed competing needs of entities implicated in neoliberal relationships, the difference-making machinery re-creates contradictions, conflicts, and clashes that pave the way for internal fissures and fractures that in turn create the necessary conditions for transformative change. Following the daily running and grounded effects of the machinery, I suggest that we can identify and access these spaces to lay the foundation for better futures.

First, the difference-making machinery has produced multiple mighty state-market subjects vying to expand their discretionary territories to gain more advantages, having escalated global competition to unsustainable levels so that it unfolds as knee-jerk antiglobalist or nationalist mobilizations. As chapter 4 shows, decades-old neoliberal practices have transformed China from a monolithic politico-economic amalgam into a matrix of rivaling state-market competitors that wield total power in their own sphere. To facilitate China’s marketization and avoid a Soviet-style political overhaul, the party-state instituted the GDP growth rate as the first and foremost criterion to use in evaluating its multitiered subdivisions. This has turned local Chinese governments into bona fide entrepreneurial subjects, emboldening them to use any resources and means at their disposal to maximize economic and political outcomes. The central government also keeps drawing and redrawing gendered, classed, sexualized, and racial/ethnic lines to recategorize the population—both citizens and noncitizens—to create new biopolitical edges that attract an influx of capital and facilitate state-controlled outbound investments. These investments rescale China’s national boundaries by augmenting the party-state’s totalizing power to push through its expansionist agenda. Heavily reliant on predatory circulations of sovereign power, these aggressive acts have resulted in backlash from other sovereign states seeking to reclaim and revitalize their own nationalist leverage. Having created notable cracks in the World Trade Organization-based free trade system as the ground of the global neoliberal order, these responses reverberate in the form of demagogic authoritarianism, virulent mobilizations, and trade protectionism rendered as overdue economic nationalism that will sharpen their competitiveness.

Second, the multidirectional and multidimensional machinery is inherently full of crevices and openings. Thus, marginalized groups, navigating along and across its interconnected vectors, partitions, and connections, can map out subversive interstices, enclaves, and disjunctures. As Wanning Sun notes, new communication technologies such as the internet and social media have contributed to “digital political literacy” that enables subaltern groups to regenerate inventive cultural practices and “insert themselves into the symbolic order and make moral and political interventions in the field of public culture” in China.¹⁰⁷ Focusing on *danmei*, a queer fandom online community that consists mainly of well-educated, professional, urban, single women deemed unlovable and unable to love, chapter 5 illustrates how this group takes a nonconfrontational strategy to make room for resistance under the belly of the beast. Tiptoeing around the draconian gendered biopolitics and focusing on the sexual vector (which is relatively less monitored by the Chinese state), *danmei* fans build a utopian world of same-sex intimacy about gay men and articulate their ideal of love. Having successfully popularized a soft and effeminate version of masculinity that challenges the state-endorsed hypermasculinity and heteropatriarchal norm of love, they contribute to a more inclusive and diversified space for sexual minorities and women.

Last but not least, despite the universal rationality that is trumpeted as its epistemic and ideological foundation, neoliberal governance incessantly appeals to and recreates emotive attachments and integrates rationalized biopolitical control with preemptive conditioning of affect. These deployments make use of independent, contingent, and multiplex material and discursive practices that might converge but often contradict one another. As chapter 4 shows, rural youths leave high-paying construction and manufacturing jobs in droves for work in service industries that yields lower monetary returns but carries more affective weight by promising to improve their love capabilities. Driven by such irrational feelings, the exodus of rural laborers disrupts their biopolitically predetermined path to a slow death, leading to a thorny labor crisis that compels the state-capital alliance to mitigate its grim exploitation, although only momentarily. This love-filled fantasy has also informed a new residential pattern that shakes the patrilocal basis of sexism in rural areas, creating new room for Chinese women’s subsistence and resistance. Women’s growing awareness of independence has become a direct threat to Xi’s rule, which has turned to masculinist, patriarchal, and paternalistic decrees as the source of legitimacy—resulting in more violent and stringent control by the state.¹⁰⁸

The Organization and Methodologies of the Book

I have divided the book into two parts. Part I, "Mapping the Edgeless Landscape of Love," probes the prismatic temporal (chapter 1) and sociospatial (chapter 2) registers of the Loveland and explores the ways in which love is orchestrated as a public sentiment that serves the shifting needs of the party-state and capital. Part II, "Tracing the Machinery That Both Integrates China into and Separates It from the World," examines how affectively registered love and biopolitical calculus, coordinated by the difference-making machinery, complement (chapter 3) and contradict (chapter 4) each other to facilitate China's neoliberal transition and neocolonial expansion, while spawning contradictions as possibilities of subsistence and survival for subaltern groups (chapter 5).

Part I examines public culture as its major object of analysis, attending to the intertextual and extratextual modalities of transnational discursive exchanges as they circulate between China and other parts of the world, plotting the genealogies and topologies of love as created out of the phantasmagoric vectors of gender, class, sexuality, and race/ethnicity. I do not accept these categories of difference as given but use them to develop an inquiry into how categorized relationships become established as part of the regulatory biopolitical regime that effects neoliberalization in China. Taking a queer of color critique approach, I also work against these categories to foreground power relationships and engage the becoming aspects of the machinery to interrogate its speculative manipulation of affective ecologies.¹⁰⁹ Using the category of queer as a diagnostic instrument, I develop "an analysis of geopolitically reproduced relations of power" through polarized differentiations.¹¹⁰ I also revisit the nationalist mobilizations that reconfigure "historical relations among political economies, the geopolitics of war and terror, and national manifestations of sexual, racial, and gendered hierarchies."¹¹¹ This approach allows me to identify the invisible heteronormative linchpin that anchors the seemingly impossible affiliation between socialism and neoliberalism in China (chapter 1) and tease out the "ambivalence, theoretical openness, and indeterminacy" of "Asia" and "Asianness," exposing them as processual histories enfolded and unfolding in sync with China's neoliberalization (chapter 2).¹¹²

Part II draws upon formal interviews, informal conversations, focus group discussions, and participant observation, while supplementing and cross-referencing the empirical data with a pointed discursive analysis. The analyses of chapters 3 and 4 are mainly built upon ethnographic work that I

conducted between May and August 2012 in Hai'an and Wuxi. Two friends of mine, Xiao Li and Dan Li, provided accommodation and other help to facilitate my fieldwork. I interviewed over a hundred rural migrants and local farmers or workers. Roughly half of them were men working in construction or related industries, such as home decorating and gardening, and the others were women working in various export-oriented manufacturing industries, ranging from clothing, textile, and silk weaving to electronics. Additionally, I interviewed about twenty people related to these workers in certain ways, including owners of factories and small businesses, housing developers, salespeople in international trade, media professionals, labor agents acting as intermediaries between Chinese workers and foreign employers, and government officials. In 2016, I revisited some of my informants in Hai'an to follow up with them.

Hai'an and Wuxi have a unique position in China's transitioning process. Bordering Shanghai on each side of the Yangtze River, the two regions are divided not only by a physical gap but also by profound disparities that have varied with the vicissitude of China's modernization since its forced opening up to the West after the First Opium War (1839–42). When Shanghai emerged as a commercial and industrial powerhouse in the mid-nineteenth century, countless laborers, merchants, and entrepreneurs flooded the city from Guangdong, Jiangnan (in the southern Yangtze Delta), and Subei (now northern Jiangsu).¹¹³ Part of the impoverished Subei area, Hai'an has supplied labor for Shanghai and other affluent areas while building its national reputation for having reserves of skilled construction workers and making high-quality silk products. By contrast, Wuxi is located at the heart of Jiangnan—China's most prosperous region since the middle of the Tang dynasty (around 780 BC). It witnessed the burgeoning westernization movement in the 1860s and has been at the forefront of China's industrialization ever since. Like other coastal metropolises, it has attracted numerous migrant workers and gone through dazzling urbanization and gentrification since the 1990s. As labor-sending and labor-receiving regions, respectively, Hai'an and Wuxi serve as ideal locations to investigate labor-capital dynamics involved in China's marketization and global expansion. During my fieldwork, I spent considerable time in the homes and dormitories of my informants and engaged in observation and informal conversations. I also spent much of my fieldwork at various locations of production, such as construction sites, factories, small workshops, family mills, and farms. More than an outside observer of capital's faceless exploitation of labor through calculated biopolitical management, I immersed myself in the daily tempo of the Loveland in

nonproductive activities such as family dinners, birthday parties, weddings, festival celebrations, and mundane chores, probing how affectively oriented (or disoriented) subjects are produced as the voluntary servants of China's neoliberal regime. My goal is to develop insights into the *modus operandi* of China's two economic pillars: export-oriented manufacturing and real estate industries. The chronological hiatus between my two periods of fieldwork allowed me to deepen my understanding of how the state has intensified gendered, classed, and sexualized disparities to extract biopolitical value as a means of maintaining China's competitiveness when confronted with the challenges from its Southeast Asian neighbors that offer cheaper labor and material resources.

The last chapter turns to a group of female *danmei* fans and examines how they navigate the multilayered difference-making system for survival and subsistence. Between 2009 and 2013 I conducted in-person, telephone, and online interviews with sixteen fans who were introduced to me by friends and recruited through snowball sampling. Ranging in age from eighteen to their early thirties, all of the fans were single urbanites except for one, who is from a rural region in southern China. Three identified themselves as bisexual (one was in a same-sex relationship), with the others being heterosexual. At the time of the interviews, two were students in senior high school, four were attending college, and three were working on a PhD. The others had all earned a bachelor's or master's degree and had full-time jobs in a college, foreign corporation, or government (one had just been laid off). After the interviews, I kept in touch with them by email or text messages to ask follow-up questions. My analysis is supplemented by my survey reading of popular online *danmei* fictions, interspersed by a critical reading of *Beijing Comrades: A Novel*, arguably one of China's "earliest, best known, and most influential contemporary" *danmei* works.¹¹⁴

Working against the performative lineage of desire and intimacy in the sixtieth-anniversary celebration of the People's Republic of China in 2009, chapter 1 untangles the mechanism that orders the temporal lines of the Loveland in tune with biopolitical regulation to reshape the republic's sharply polarized historiography into a coherent timeline. As my analysis reveals, gender, class, and sexuality constitute the basics of the difference-making machinery that stabilizes China's transition, foreshadowing an increasingly oppressive China under Xi's hypermasculine and patriarchal leadership. The gingerly framed and represented family love between the first couple is a recent demonstration of the fantasmatic working of love to harden and broaden China's global neocolonial thrust.

Turning to the mass-mediated body and using as an example one of the most popular entertainment TV programs in Chinese history, *If You Are the One*, chapter 2 probes the spatialized (or despatialized) topologies of love. I explore how the unbounded Loveland changes its ambience to facilitate China's neoliberal transition and rescale its national boundaries to garner new biopolitical and affective momentum for expansion. In promulgating love as the trophy for winners, the show valorizes a self-serving rationality to further neoliberalism's dominance in China and beyond. In specifying the means of winning, it delimits the scope of lovabilities and love-abilities to interject a property-based fantasy of family love into people's mundane lives and bar rural migrants from its affective orbit. Endorsing and echoing the transnational discourse of Asia and Asianness, it also builds an ethno-racial linkage to reinforce the Chinese diaspora's affective tie to the so-called homeland—a major source of foreign investments that invigorated China's marketization in the first place—and prompts an exodus of middle-class people and capital in pursuit of the dream of a good life projected onto the as-yet-uncharted West.

Tracing the life trajectories of a group of rural migrants, chapter 3 unpacks the ways in which love-spawned collective fantasies prescribe the migrants' path to a slow death with almost no outlets. Throughout their love-impelled dream-pursuing journeys, these workers have traveled along divergent and disparate routes but with identically preordained destinations. No matter how hard they try, their love-imbued dreams remain a mirage that leads them to perform still more self-defeating striving. Via the mesmerizing Loveland, they entrap themselves within a willful dream to work for the well-being of everyone but themselves, contradicting the "serving yourself, therefore benefiting all" mantra of neoliberal economics.

Chapter 4 explores the fissures arising within the difference-making system for possibilities of changes. The rationality-based neoliberal truth claim runs counter to the reality that disillusioned working subjects are constantly reproduced through fanciful and erratic feelings in support of the neoliberal matrix. Meanwhile, spurred on by the dreams of a good life modeled on the Western nuclear family, new residential patterns emerge in rural China, creating new room for gender equality for women. Last but not least, intensified competition between entrepreneurialized state-market players has revealed the brutal nature of the laissez-faire economy and motivated resistance among marginalized groups.

The last chapter shows that in building a love-only fictional world of gay men, well-educated single women have created an outlet for their own frustra-

trated and suppressed love and project their ideal of love free of market logic onto an ethereal homoromanticism embodied by feminized gay men who are constructed, paradoxically enough, as their mirror image. This allows the women to disrupt gender polarity and heteronormative conjugal relationships objectified for market transactions and subjected to the state's pronatal initiatives. However, following a men-only logic that resonates with transnational homonormative story lines of queer gentrification, the women also create what I call a "homopatriarchal form of love" that furthers neoliberal supremacy.

In the following pages, we will see that in charging and recharging love's hallucinogenic traction to keep alive rural migrants' aspirational dreams as the key driving force of the world's factory, the borderless Loveland is indeed where China meets the world. Demarcating its boundless borders in binaristic terms that support the polarizing mechanism of the difference-making machinery, this fantasmatic lovescape is also precisely where China departs from the world.

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Introduction
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Introduction

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