

## **Introduction: the politics and production of scales in China**

How does geography matter to studies of local, popular culture?

*Jing Wang*

This volume takes on the challenge of exploring the political economy of place, space, and popular culture in contemporary China. *Difang*, the Chinese term for “place,” predictably leads us to other spatial conceptions such as *diyuan* and *diyu*, synonyms for “regions,” and to a mode of critical inquiry that privileges “geography” (*dili*) as the conceptual anchor for our discussion of the production and consumption of culture in local places. Throughout this book, there is an active engagement with the spatial problematic and paradigms of critical geography. Certainly, “the spatial turn” of scholarship, which has been much celebrated in European and American circles of critical social theories in the past decade, has been slow coming in the China field. It slipped through transnational studies with a dominant contribution from anthropologists in Southeast Asian Studies.<sup>1</sup> Turning to the trope of the Chinese diaspora and the cultural politics of mobility, those works bear the distinct mark of cultural studies, and more importantly, they crosscut with a central tension within human geography that stresses the relational notion of space and place.

Since the late 1990s, the influence of transnationalists has spilled over into Chinese studies and contributed to the field’s growing awareness of the paradigm shift from “time” to “space.” Spatial vocabulary peppered articles and books that examined China in the grid of transnationalism and globalization. But the concept of “space” remains in large part metaphorical. Only recently did scholars in geography begin to demonstrate ways of moving beyond a mere spatial vocabulary by spatializing problems and theories. Probing into problematics both old and new (for example, the diaspora, urban development, tourism and modernity, and imperial landscape creation), they introduced to the China field theoretical possibilities of examining place and culture in spatial terms (Cartier and Ma 2003; Cartier 2001, 2002a; Oakes 1998; Foret 2000).<sup>2</sup> The contributors to this volume join those pioneers in the nascent field of Chinese geography to explore ways of developing a critical paradigm that puts the methodological question of space at its heart.

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### **Spatializing SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome)**

Spatial thinking matters. Perhaps nothing illustrates this point better than the ongoing global SARS outbreak that not only stigmatized China – the home of coronavirus – but had an adverse impact on places like China towns in Canada and America which a wayward Western geographical imagination equated with China itself. The SARS scare has tremendous pedagogical value not least because it offers us a few lessons about scalar and spatial concepts. It also serves as a good showcase that demonstrates what it means to spatialize our approach to rethinking human geography today. We will start with the under-reported social tableau of SARS in China:

The Electronic Business Association in Beijing and the Municipal Commission of Business are promoting online shopping with credit cards. This year and next, related ministries in the city will hold monthly lotteries for credit-card users.

*(Beijing News Group 2003)*

A million students in Beijing turned on their television sets and radios to participate in state sponsored distance learning.

*(Ibid.)*

Primary and secondary school students in Beijing will be given individual, standardized email addresses.

*(Ibid.)*

China Basic Education Resource Network (WWW.CBERN.GOV.CN) will start its operation on May 6; Ministry of Education will disseminate one hundred thousand educational VCDs to primary and secondary school students. Individual home deliveries will be made; the Municipal Commission of Education has started a website “Online Classroom” (STADAY.BJEDU.CN) in collaboration with the Subsidiary School of People’s University, 101 Middle School, Huiwen Middle School, etc.

Subjects covered online include English, politics, physics, chemistry, Chinese, history, geography, and biology.

*(Beijing Daily 2003)*

The first virtual job fair for Chinese college graduates will be inaugurated in June by the Ministry of Education.

*(Sina China News 2003)*

The upscaling of social space from the corporeal to the virtual in May 2003 was an administrative order enforced by Beijing. Of course, as a remedy

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1 for the sudden suspension of face-to-face human contacts, e-commerce  
2 and distance learning was hardly a SARS-related phenomenon credited to  
3 China alone. The entire US travel industry had to cope with corporate  
4 America's growing love affair with teleconferencing as a result of the executives' fear of traveling germs. What was dramatic about the Chinese case  
5 was not merely a sudden surge of online shoppers in a land where cash  
6 spending is the norm. Nor was the drama a comic spawning of "virtual  
7 classrooms" (*kongzhong ketang*) on air and online overnight.<sup>3</sup> If the  
8 volume of traffic in virtual space serves as a yardstick for measuring the  
9 size of a country's democratic space, then the online congestion in China  
10 during the SARS scare has thrown this logic into confusion. In the meantime,  
11 the world held its breath, wishing the "lessons of prevention learned  
12 in a tiny, authoritarian country like Singapore be applied elsewhere,  
13 particularly in a vast, chaotic place like China" (Rosenthal 2003b). All of a sudden,  
14 the dominant Western representation of China as a bounded and poreless place  
15 penned in by the omnipresent socialist police was turned  
16 into a newly imagined "chaotic" place where boundaries were found to be  
17 too fluid and whose surveillance mechanism was seen to lag far behind  
18 Singapore. We found ourselves stuck in a paradox: a recharged iron-fisted  
19 authoritarian regime was the globe's best bet for the eventual control of  
20 the epidemic.  
21

22 Several theories of critical geography enter the picture. Contemporary  
23 theorists of space have invariably conceptualized the state as a powerful  
24 scale producer. SARS testified to the value of such insights, but with one  
25 caveat, however. Western conceptualization of scale, because of its deep  
26 ideological roots in economic and political neo-liberalism, invariably privileges  
27 the notion of process as central to scalar production, that is, the continual  
28 meeting and negotiations of conflicting social productive and reproductive  
29 activities and relations. This is said to be an "always" heterogeneous  
30 process riddled with contestation and compromises (Smith 1992: 66; Swyngedouw 1997b: 140; Cox 1997: 10). In other words, scales are  
31 products of processes and of social and spatial changes *accrued* through  
32 history. The Beijing SARS example was indicative of a different politics of  
33 scalar production. It demonstrates that a new scalar construction (i.e., popularized  
34 online classrooms and e-transactions) could skip the process of productive  
35 *sociality* altogether and be delivered abruptly by the state – in a matter of weeks –  
36 to the social agents as a given.  
37

38 Interestingly, Beijing privileged the virtual scale at the very moment  
39 when its grip over the Internet cafés was tightened.<sup>4</sup> That was a contradiction  
40 obviously attributable to the historical contingency of SARS. I say "contradiction"  
41 also because the Internet's built-in capacity for fast domain proliferations  
42 may eventually overtake the state's original pedagogical goal and evolve into  
43 a seditious life of its own. For the time being, though, Lefebvre's worst fear  
44 about the arbitrariness of the ever-expanding "abstract space" of the state  
45 is looming large. SARS simply gave

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Beijing world-approved legitimacy in imposing a new system of spatial management upon its population.

Thus, the surveillance of spitters in parks and at street corners was portrayed by mainstream Western media as one of the most commendable campaigns of the SARS control in China. And readers cannot but be humored by the imagined spectacle of little old ladies of the street committees (the infamous *Malie zhuyi laotaitai*) “busy stopping spitters in mid-stream instead of ferreting out neighbors belonging to the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement” (Rosenthal 2003a). It is said that the sidewalks are safer places now. But “safe” from what?

George Rosen’s notion of medical police, which Foucault used for his genealogical study of the birth of social medicine in Europe, is surprisingly relevant to our discussion of the state intervention of national hygiene and medicine in SARS-ravaged areas. In Hong Kong, chief inspectors and detectives took on a new assignment – tracking down the family members of patients infected with SARS instead of real-life criminals (Bradsher 2003). An increasingly tightened system of quarantine compartmentalized infected areas and broke down the integrated flow of people. Everyone was told to stay put. The “emergency plan” that Beijing and Singapore adopted bore uncanny resemblances to what Foucault described as the systemic control of leprosy and the plague by the European medical regimes at the end of the Middle Ages. Those measures included building special infirmaries outside the city, a house-by-house disinfection, and a centralized system of information that disseminated the latest statistics about new cases, casualties, and suspected cases (Foucault 1994: 145). The close scrutiny of the body as the most important site of SARS control, complete with electronic wristbands (of Singaporean style), testifies once more to the efficacy of the Foucauldian theory about biopolitics.

Other newsworthy scalar narratives were abundant. Another SARS-inscribed social landscape in China was the widespread rural panic about cities in April and May 2003. News of villagers blocking routes into their own hamlets came a bundle. Many rural communities such as Guchang, north of Beijing, hurriedly built makeshift barricades to keep out travelers from the stricken capital. The old scalar hierarchy – the urban as the privileged scale – had been turned upside down. Although such unusual spatial upset could be only temporary, it was instructive to see urban anxieties about rural migrant workers trivialized in the face of an all-out rural offensive against both the city and the trope of traveling itself. From California to Toronto, from Guchang to Moscow, bounded territories re-emerged as a viable concept and reality. Another SARS casualty was undoubtedly the radical global theories about the “end of geography.”<sup>5</sup>

We will remember SARS for its lethal capacity of arresting the transnational flow of capital, people, and goods (pearls and garments especially) for years to come. But potent as the virus was to continually mutate and jump scales – from animal to human hosts and from a localized habitat

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1 to sites of different temporal and spatial zones – it alone could not have  
2 wreaked such havoc. The other culprit was the spatial logic of capitalism  
3 that banks on the seamless interconnections of spaces and places (cities in  
4 particular) through a continual proliferation of roads and airports. SARS  
5 is an unexpected reminder of the tolls that any absolute space will extract  
6 from a human geography that has increasingly lost interest in differences  
7 and connections of an organic kind.  
8  
9

**Provincial China and the Luce Popular Culture Initiative**

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11 This long preamble about SARS serves the primary purpose of directing  
12 us to several fundamental concepts of critical geography that contributors  
13 of this volume work with, namely, the production of scale and difference,  
14 the socio-political and economic character of spatial and scalar produc-  
15 tions, relations of space and power – in short, spatial thinking in slow  
16 motion. SARS also showed us how easy it was to stigmatize a place and  
17 insulate it. And yet on the other hand, as I have shown through my discus-  
18 sion of Foucault, those border-sealing localized strategies of epidemic  
19 control also inherited a borderless, and indeed a global, character. One  
20 crucial question then is how we treat the concept of “local places and prac-  
21 tices” in relation to the larger backdrop of an inherently contradictory ori-  
22 entation of contemporary spatial logic characterized by Swyngedouw as a  
23 *parallel movement* downward to the lower and smaller bounded scales,  
24 and upward, in a centrifugal motion, toward higher and larger scales  
25 beyond the bounded locale (Swyngedouw 1997b: 141).

26 The problematic of “local places and practices” takes us to the origin of  
27 this volume. In June 2001, scholars from two research groups – the  
28 Sydney-based UNSW-UTS Centre for Research on Provincial China and  
29 the Duke-based Luce Project of Contemporary Chinese Popular Culture –  
30 co-sponsored a workshop held at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou,  
31 China. It was one of the few occasions in the China field where cultural  
32 theorists met with social scientists to brainstorm about the locality prob-  
33 lematic. No less important, border-crossing of a different kind (i.e.,  
34 exchanges between Australian China scholars and those based in the  
35 USA, Taiwan, and mainland China) energized our dialogues beyond the  
36 multidisciplinary scale.

37 Despite those differences, the collaboration of Provincial China and the  
38 Luce Project in 2001 was made possible in the first place because we  
39 agreed to meet at the middle ground, namely, our evolving interest in the  
40 “local” as a site of everyday life. Throughout the slow development of this  
41 volume, and despite our shifting editorial foci, we never lost sight of the  
42 epistemological weight we placed on the production (rather than the  
43 representation) of the “local,” hence our emphasis on the quotidian,  
44 whether we are speaking of cultural, socio-political, or economic practices.  
45 How to move forward with the “local” as a potent scale of analysis without

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being bogged down by the “local” as a reified ideological signifier constituted the main thrust of exchanges which took place in Hangzhou. Eventually, “locality” understood in terms of *process-based* cultural and socio-spatial production came very close to the heterogeneous social space dear to the practitioners of critical geography. To wit, a locale is always caught in the process of its own production. And this process is embodied in intra-scalar traffic. A locale is the place where multiple scales traverse and articulate in relation to each other. China is a good case in point because its entry into the WTO in 2001 has brought to a head the reshuffling of scalar configurations and the emergence of new spatial practices that undermine fixed scalar activities.

The interest in the locality problematic was but one intellectual rationale that brought the two research groups together. Another axis of collaboration was our mutual commitment to the border crossings of academic knowledge production. I should note that in the West in particular, the Humanities are often segregated from the Social Sciences, and especially from disciplines such as political science, economics, and geography, albeit much less so from cultural anthropology. This volume draws together those distantly related disciplines in search of a common discursive ground. Many possibilities were brought to the table. Even those that were cast aside during the lengthy editorial process left a productive mark on what is eventually presented here. For the purpose of laying bare the process of this historical collaboration, I excerpt some of our earlier organizing guidelines:

The workshop is less interested in the examinations of *the “local”* as a deterritorialized sign that either validates or invalidates the “global” than *in its relationship to the concept of China*. We are interested in re-articulating, among the multiple spatial scales of analyses, the “global” and the “regional,” while recognizing that there is no authentic or autonomous space existing outside the circuit of the transnational or global. It has been fashionable to discuss *the new places that are emerging*, and the new spaces (both imaginary and symbolic) that are being created. We are equally interested in old [spatial] formations and old spaces/places, and specifically in *how the historical and cultural geography of specific locales articulates with the emerging economic geography of a modernizing China*.

Papers presented to the workshop will each examine a specific aspect of *the process of local cultural production*. In that exercise, each will necessarily attempt to generalise about the processes of social and cultural change, whilst at the same time ensuring that *the study is contextualized in a specific locale*.

(Goodman and Wang 2000)

What is our critical agenda for this workshop? . . . In retrospect, I think we started off with our curiosity about spatial conceptions beyond the

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1 “global” – i.e., spatial conceptions that may help us perceive how local  
 2 culture and social relations are produced and consumed. This curiosity  
 3 led me to the Chinese notion *di* (earth, ground). From *di* grew a spec-  
 4 trum of associative terms such as *diyuan*, *diyü*, *dili*, and *difang* (geo-  
 5 origin, regions, geography, local place). To that list we may add *kua*  
 6 [*di*] *yu xing* (*trans-locality*). The materiality of *di* in itself and in all  
 7 those other terms provides us with a conceptual web that enables us to  
 8 think about *the relations of culture to the economic geography of a*  
 9 *place* ... Are there ways of mapping the relations of place, space,  
 10 locality, and culture *without making a simple return to geographical*  
 11 *determinism* or spatial reductionism?

(Wang 2001d)

14 And on the return flight from Shanghai to San Francisco, Tim Oakes, a  
 15 geographer participant and a contributor to this volume, initiated a con-  
 16 versation with me on scale which led to yet another round of editorial dis-  
 17 cussions about the production of scale in capitalist societies.

19 [The production of scale] tends to emerge, in my mind, from spatially  
 20 oriented Marxist critiques of capital. It focuses on the idea that *capital*  
 21 *structures space according to the most appropriate scales of activity for*  
 22 *maximizing capital accumulation*. Such scales become “fixed” by cul-  
 23 tural practices, social institutions and actual landscapes. But in the  
 24 meantime, capital is always shifting and producing new scales of activ-  
 25 ity that challenge the old ones (thus, “globalization” challenges the  
 26 nation-state, for example) ... Scale is essentially political, and produc-  
 27 ing scale can be viewed as politically contested. Scale is produced by  
 28 political-economic power, and reified in popular practice.

(Oakes 2001)

31 Among the concepts retained (italicized texts above), the examination of  
 32 the “local” in relation to the concept of China imparts to this volume a  
 33 deeply grounded understanding of a national cultural space that is both  
 34 inward and outward looking. That this is not another exercise of parochial  
 35 locality studies is borne out by the contributors’ engagement in relational  
 36 mapping by which the boundedness of the “local” – before and after the  
 37 SARS scare – is proven to be nothing more than an ideological affect.  
 38 How we negotiate meaning transfers between seemingly contradictory  
 39 scales and subject positions (the local, the national, the global, the  
 40 regional, the urban and rural, the Center and the frontiers, and not least,  
 41 the smutty and the moralistic) construes the theoretical priorities of many  
 42 contributors and marks one of the strengths of this anthology. What  
 43 results is the breakdown of several familiar sets of *reified scalar binaries*  
 44 such as the local–global (Cartier’s Shenzhen depicted as a world city of  
 45 “transnational urbanism”); the local–regional (Siu’s fluid human traffic

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between Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta), the local/provincial–national (Oakes’s Guizhou ethnic tourism staking claims to natural cultural heritage); the rural–urban (Schein’s rural peasants engaged in “imagined cosmopolitanism”) and Sun’s Anhui maid seen as integral to the elaborate urban myth); the libidinous–rational (Barlow’s smut *savoir faire*); the past and the present (the continuity of empire to nation in Perdue’s chapter); and finally the pseudo “official” and “unofficial” division of popular culture that nearly every contributor threw into question, especially Hendrischke in his chapter on the Guangxi tabloid papers and Feng Chongyi in his analysis of the teahouse culture in Hainan.

Another surviving editorial principle is the relationship of culture, especially popular culture, to the economy of place in broad terms. Cariter, Sun, Oakes, Feng, Schein, and Siu show us in various ways how the locals think “culture” into the “economy” and how they reinvent local economy in cultural terms. Regardless of place, the cultural turn of economic thinking is an inevitable trend. The mutual articulations between the cultural imaginary of a given place and the rising new economic conditions during the reform era have given birth to new spaces and places, and new forms of sociality inseparable from the trope of pastime and consumption. Tourist villas, museums and theme parks, luxury housing apartments, the Miao Xijiang disco, tabloid papers, Shenzhen’s new city center, teahouses, maid hiring agencies and the Pornographic City are a few notable examples of the “cultural economy” in question. In the meantime, while capital flows converge on rich places (Hainan, Shanghai, and south China), we are also shown that no matter how poor a place is, social agents know how to concoct spatial strategies of getaways, whether by means of migration (Anhui maids), by activities of re-scaling the land (Guizhou locals), or by a leap of faith (Zhang Chengzhi’s Jahriyya Muslims in the northwest). You may ask: where have all the old places gone? Most likely, they will share the same fortune as Guizhou’s Yunshantun Village. Now classified as a protected area of cultural relics by the state, the village will always be cash-starved – judging from its meager 3 *yuan* entry fees. In stark contrast, tourists pay more than ten times this to visit Tianlong Village, a dressed-up *new* major attraction in the neighborhood.

Indeed, the bind of poor, old places in the reform era seems too clear a reminder of the stubborn division between the rich (coastal areas) and the poor (inland) – one of the last ultra-stable bipolar scales that resist deconstruction. If this observation smacks of a simple return to geographical determinism, we should note that Perdue, Oakes, and Schein provide us with many examples of how scale jumping can be seen as a means of subversion adopted by the locals to break out of such determinism. However transient, such imaginary jumping of scales helped deliver them from formidable spatial enclosure and geo-political constraints.



## Rescaling administrative space: a policy debate

Furthermore, it is worth noting that *official* venues of intervention exist that can upset the structural determination of China's rural-urban dichotomy. Truly, as any production-centered scale theorist would insist, "capital is always shifting and producing new scales of activity that challenge the old ones" (Oakes 2001). As a result, the Chinese state (local states included) has huge stakes about whither capital flows. How to direct and channel the traffic of capital and, in concrete terms, how to rescale Chinese administrative regions so as to facilitate such flows has become a central policy issue for Beijing. I should also add that this problem of the spatial restructuring of administrative scales coincided with the ongoing policy debate on urbanization (*chengzhen hua*). The shuffling and regrouping of economic zones and the resulting destabilization of China's administrative scales is not only a palpable reality but a policy priority today. How should state socialism progress? This haunting question of Lefebvre's reverberates in contemporary China as policy makers and analysts ask what kind of socio-economic spatial reorganizations would best enable the regime to cope with the rising disparities of living standards between the countryside and cities and to resolve the pressing issue of hidden social costs resulting from such inequality.

### Yindi zhiyi ("each according to its geo-culture")

Tim Oakes's observation that capital always "produces new scales of activities" is right on target when we examine contemporary Chinese social, political, and economic transformations since the 1990s. However, I would add that what makes China's spatial management more conflict-ridden than that in the West is its age-old legacy of rigid spatial polity that harked back to the *junxian* (prefectures and counties) system of the Han Dynasty in the second century AD. While capital accumulation is restructuring space in contemporary China and is giving rise to patterns of a spatial economy similar to what we saw in the West, the Chinese socio-economic space has been historically structured around and constrained by *xingzheng quhua* (administrative scales). Roughly speaking, the vertical administrative hierarchy consists of four scales – the province, the district (*di*), the county (*xian*), and the township (*xiangzhen*) (Liu, Jin *et al.* 1999: 62–63, 182). That is a graded system of spatial-political hierarchy whose legitimacy is often maintained at the expense of the *raison d'être* of economic development.

This conflict between space-polity and economy has gotten worse in recent years. Economic reform since the late 1990s has intensified debates among different think tanks at the Center over the urbanization question. Since ideologies often translate into spatial organizations and practices, the competition between different planning visions of urbanization

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inevitably brought the issue of *xingzheng quhua* to the front burner. Not only was the field of administrative geography revitalized, but it entered a heightened phase of cross-fertilization with economic geography and political geography in tandem. Changes in the spatial conception of administrative scales both at the lower county-level (*xian*) and at the higher level of the province (*sheng*) as well as the foregrounding of cities (*shi*) as a scale – so as to maximize the “horizontal” and areal expansion of capital – have all emerged as urgent topics for discussion among policy makers and analysts since the latter half of the 1990s (Zhou 1999: 113–128, 217–222; Hua and Yu 1997; Pu 1995: 116; Yang 1995; Lu 1995).<sup>6</sup>

Before acquainting ourselves with those debates about space-economy relations, we need to take a longer look at the tradition of Chinese space-polity and ask: what are those spatial-territorial devices that have served to hold together a country as vast and heterogeneously composed as China? Policy makers of imperial times and the contemporary era have all observed one fundamental doctrine, i.e., *yindi zhiyi*, “each according to its geo-culture.”

Although China is known for its highly centralized political control, the Center has given scholar-gentry bureaucrats and their contemporary counterparts (i.e., the cadres) significant leeway to translate imperial decrees and central policy guidelines into actions appropriate for the particular locality in which they were appointed to govern. What is seen as “appropriate” for a locale usually boils down to the *di* factor (*dili* or *difang*) – a concrete reference to both the constraints and enabling factors inherent in the geo-culture of a place. Those heterogeneous, areal geo-cultures speak of characteristics of both the natural and human geography of a place and usually subject local officials to a high degree of localized policy implementation which presented a perennial problem of governance for authorities at the Center. Political geographer Joseph Whitney thus pinpointed the basic contradiction in the Chinese system as the struggle of China’s rulers to “prevent power from slipping from center to the periphery” on the one hand and to prevent the country from being “bogged down with the great volume of decision-making” (Whitney 1970: 166) taking place at the localities on the other. The problem was compounded, I wish to add, by the enormous administrative costs such polymorphic regional configuration demanded of both the central and local polity.

Historically, the bipolar vacillation between centralization (*zhongyang jiquan*) and decentralization (*difang fenquan*) has characterized the strategic imagination of Chinese rulers. In the contemporary era, the contestation of the governing power between the Center and *difang* is captured in two spatial metaphors – *tiaotiao* (“vertical,” centralized control) and *kuaikuai* (horizontal “clusters” of local command). The actual subscription of policy analysts to the spatial idiom of *tiao/kuai* came into vogue only during the reform years even though what it described is a century-old phenomenon. I should also note that the specific terms of the competition

1 between the “vertical” and “horizontal” leadership vary from place to  
2 place and from one subject area of administration to another.<sup>7</sup> But the  
3 spatial metaphors bring into sharp relief the tensions between centralized  
4 and localized command. Take the relationships between *bumen* (the min-  
5 istries) and *ju* (bureaus), for instance. *Tiaotiao* refers to the vertical, lineal,  
6 and centralized rule that subjugates lower-level bureaus to the ministries  
7 at the Center. *Kuaikuai* subverts such a vertical pattern of hierarchical  
8 control. It conjures up a visual map made up of clusters of power concen-  
9 tration evolving around a local center of power that functions like a semi-  
10 autonomous decision-making agent. In such a scenario, the juridical power  
11 of the Center is often overridden by that of the local state. And the latter  
12 tends to prioritize local agendas and incentives over the administrative  
13 directives passed down to it by the higher-level governing unit. If there is  
14 any consensus reached among participants in the recent debates over  
15 “administrative scales,” it is that the struggle between the *tiaotiao* and  
16 *kuaikuai* modes of administration, each carrying its own drawbacks, con-  
17 stitutes a bottleneck of Chinese economic development (Liu 1996: 430; Pu  
18 1995; Shu 1995).

19 The other precious consensus reached by Chinese policy makers is the  
20 continuing relevance of the historical doctrine of “each according to its  
21 geo-culture” to the Center’s planning vision for urbanization. Given the  
22 central place of the *yindi zhiyi* doctrine in both imperial and socialist  
23 China, a brief revisit of its historical origin is in order. Such an account will  
24 lay bare the intimate connection between the Chinese geo-cultural diver-  
25 sity and a policy culture that privileges locality and flexibility. This account  
26 will also help us trace the materialist parentage of the Chinese epis-  
27 temology of *dili* (geography).

### 28 **The materialist tradition of Chinese geography**

29 The paradigm of *yindi zhiyi* was crucial to ancient Chinese geographical  
30 thinking even prior to the consolidation of the feudal system. One of the  
31 earliest occurrences of *dili* can be traced to the *Xici* chapter in the *Book of*  
32 *Zhouyi* around the fifth century BC – “Looking up, I observe *tianwen* (the  
33 patterns of Heavens); looking down, I examine *dili* (the logic of earth)”  
34 (Huang and Zhang 2001: 535). It is possible that this idealist strand of  
35 early Chinese geographical thinking developed side by side with the mate-  
36 rialist view of earth seen as “productive.” One of the most articulate refer-  
37 ences to “geography” understood in terms of “material productivity”  
38 is found in the *Record of Ritual (Liji)*, a cluster of documents dated  
39 from the earlier part of Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–256 BC) to Han dynasty  
40 (206 BC–AD 220). The passage reads, “What different seasons (*tianwen*)  
41 produced is appropriate to what Earth (*dili*) offers” (Chen and Pei 2000:  
42 1352). In the *Diyuan* chapter of *Guanzi* (c. 26 BC) and *Huainan zi*  
43 (c. 139BC) we saw the further development of this strand of materialist  
44  
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thinking into the clear conceptualization of the theories of *tuyi* (appropriateness to the soil [of a place]) and *diyi* (appropriateness to [its] geography) (The Geography Section 1984: 28). After the Han Dynasty, theories of *tuyi* and *diyi* were largely channeled into dynastic agriculture manuals (*nongshu*) serving as primary guiding principles for agricultural production.

In the meantime, the doctrine of *yindi zhiyi* acquired a political connotation with the rise of a new genre of historical narrative named after *dili zhi* (Records of Geography), a writing tradition started by Historian Ban Gu (32 BC–AD 92) of Eastern Han Dynasty. Ban Gu's *Dili zhi* documented the establishment and evolutions of the Han prefecture and county system. He paid specific attention to the geo-cultures of county governments that incorporated local products, temples and ancestral halls, mountains and rivers, historical sites, and water conservancy (Zhao 1993: 30), thus linking the notion of administration to both the natural and cultural geography of a place. Since Ban Gu's time, those "records of geography" which later evolved into the more genre-conscious *yan'ge dilixue* (evolutionary (administrative) geography), gradually developed into a tradition of studying the continuity and changes of territorial-administrative areas that accorded great significance to geo-cultural differences of places. The importance of administrative geography as a paradigm central to the Chinese geographical thinking was thus firmly established. And "each according to its geo-culture" was passed down to later generations as a political common sense to which every ruler deferred.

The historical associations of geographical space with administrative scales on one hand, and with agricultural practices on the other, sum up the materialist characteristics of Chinese geography as a field of knowledge that privileges the utilitarian ends of territorial control and productivity (or "material production" known as *shengchan*). This dual emphasis is a pure necessity, given the overwhelming need of food provision for a huge population and an equally formidable fix of a government that has too large a territory to rule. Because of the weightiness of such a pragmatic tradition, Western geography of the idealist bent carried little significance to Chinese scholar-intellectuals whose organic ties with society remained strong and whose sense of social mission was not severed with the abolition of civil service examination in 1905, or diminished by the decade-long Maoists' persecutions. What this entails is that Henri Lefebvre's materialist spatial theory resonates better to Chinese intellectuals and researchers than Edward Soja's ontological geography, for example.<sup>8</sup>

Lefebvre's double critique of the state's and capital's perennial drive to produce abstract space sounds more pungent than ever in the twenty-first century. What is even more relevant to this volume is his materialist take on the relations of space and mode of production. He asked, for instance, what kind of physical and social maps (i.e., spatial relations) the Asiatic mode of production generated and privileged? More importantly,

1 Lefebvre hypothesized that “the shift from one mode [of production] to  
2 another must entail the production of a new space” (Lefebvre 1991: 46).  
3 This brings us to our present concern about the spatial production of  
4 socialist China of the post-Deng era. If, as Lefebvre deplored, state social-  
5 ism like the Soviet Union failed to produce a space of its own, this volume  
6 provides a rich spectrum of new spatial articulations in contemporary  
7 China. That is, the contributors of this volume raise different possibilities  
8 of theorizing **the relations of cultural economy and the production of**  
9 **space in a socialist society**. Invariably, new spatial formulations and prac-  
10 tices in China at the turn of the new millennium bear imprints of a mixed  
11 mode of production that is neither socialist nor plainly “capitalist.” No  
12 spaces of everyday life, from the trivial to the sublime, are immune to the  
13 conflict-ridden processes of the functional integration (*zhenghe*) of  
14 planned economy and market economy, for better or for worse.

15 Indeed, the priority shift of China’s productivity output from subsistence  
16 agriculture to commerce and the tertiary sector has produced new spaces en  
17 masse and set in motion spatial practices as trendy as luxury house hunting  
18 and as old and instinctive as labor migration. It is important to note,  
19 however, that contemporary Chinese spatial executions and movements do  
20 not simply take place in a social space seen as external to the space of the  
21 state. On the contrary, trendy spatial practices are articulating *with* the  
22 emerging new stakes and new ruling technologies of the socialist govern-  
23 ment. Now that the GDP index has overtaken stark political control as the  
24 new means of legitimation for the state, scale economies (*zuoqiang zuoda*)  
25 drive various policies. From industrial to media sectors, the speed and  
26 volume of mergers are tale-telling signs of a new governing vision of Beijing  
27 that has grown increasingly scale-conscious. Nowhere has the impact of this  
28 new concept of scale as a barometer of capital accumulation registered more  
29 acutely than at the administrative system of hierarchy known as *xingzheng*  
30 *quhua* – the core of the planned space of the Chinese state.

### 31 32 ***Space-economy, “megapolitan circles,” and the new spatial*** 33 ***imaginary of the state*** 34

35 We noted earlier how traditional and modern Chinese territorial scales  
36 have been constructed in accordance with administrative expediency and  
37 subject to the principle of central command at the cost of the rationale of  
38 economism. Up till the present day, Chinese rulers often gerrymandered  
39 administrative areas to “prevent a marriage between the areas of political  
40 power and the areas of economic power” (Whitney 1970: 140). Over the  
41 decades such normalized practices had given rise to conditions now con-  
42 sidered detrimental to the economic reform in progress. Policy makers of  
43 different persuasions may have disagreed over how to rescale China’s  
44 administrative space, but there is a consensus that an organic economic  
45 region can develop only if it trespasses the arbitrary barriers set up by the

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administrative areal government(s) to which it belongs and under whose jurisdiction commercial transactions are supposed to take place. The Yangtze River Delta is a good case in point. Swift as its development may have appeared, reform advocate Zhou Keyu argues it has not reached its full potential as an economic zone due to unavoidable conflicts resulting from competitive administrative interests that have to be constantly negotiated between three different local governments – the Shanghai Municipality, Jiangsu Provincial state, and Zhejiang Provincial state (Zhou 1999: 228–260). Clearly, the politics of administrative scale created regulatory practices that continue to block the organic flow of market forces. Capital failed to accumulate where comparative advantages abound but converged at the administrative center of a region. Regional economy is eclipsed by the economy of *xingzheng qu*.

Many policy analysts in fact argue that the devolution of power from the Center to the local since the 1980s has intensified the local state's control over sectoral economy. According to this line of argument, the affirmation of the greater autonomy of the local state further facilitated the aberrant development of administrative-areal economy (*xingzheng quhua jingji*), a trend considered detrimental to regional economic growth. This view holds that rampant local protectionism, a political behavior tied to territorial administrative interests, has impacted decision makings of local governments on resource allocation, circulation of raw materials, and infrastructural investment.

Many localists, of course, would rebut the partiality of this view by arguing that scape-goating local protectionism amounts to promoting recentralization. However, I would suggest that the policy proposal for administrative rescaling should not be mistaken for another reenactment of the old struggle between the Center and the local precisely because a third scale was introduced by the market principle – the “region.” To the extent that the state's new spatial logic of “horizontal alliance” is meant to build and consolidate regional clusters, Beijing's motion of administrative rescaling should not be assessed in terms of the old ideology of the Center–locality binarism. The scale issue involved is far too complex to be recuperated (appropriated?) into the logic of the age-long historical contestation between centralization and localization. That is, advocates promoting administrative *rescaling* have a point in saying that *xingzheng qu* economy is in essence a local territorial economy which often expands at the expense of an organic regional economy.<sup>9</sup>

As I said earlier, this pattern of administrative-territorial economy is often conceptualized in spatial terms as the *kuaikuai* economy which is made up of clusters of disconnected and fragmentary capital accumulation. Predictably, such an areal market fragmentation was seen by policy makers as nothing short of obstructing the new policy of maximizing scales of economy. It is, therefore, a primary target for a reform spelled out on numerous occasions as a rescaling of administrative regions.

*The politics and production of scales* 15

1 The hottest issue under discussion since the late 1990s has thus been the  
2 rescaling of regulatory zones from the province and the other upper scales  
3 *downward* to *shi*, “cities or urban centers” (Liu 1996: 170–206). In other  
4 words, it was believed that the interventionism of the state in the economy  
5 needs to take place *not* at the provincial, district, or county level, but at the  
6 scale or location where capital aggregates the fastest, i.e., the city. The  
7 notion of the city-state sounds nothing outlandish when we think of the  
8 municipalities in existence. But it has revolutionary implications if applied  
9 downward to other scales. What the notion entails is nothing short of a  
10 hypothetical liberation of “cities” and “towns” from the vertical hierarchy  
11 to which they belong. It is a liberation that is bound to give rise to a trans-  
12 boundary concept of spatial coherence. Thus, proposals such as “adminis-  
13 tratively independent and trans-boundary networks of urban zones”  
14 characterize the general drift of policy recommendations emerging in  
15 recent years. The Yangtze River Delta and the Pearl River Delta were  
16 singled out by various policy makers as the testing grounds for this new  
17 spatial concept. Those proposals problematize earlier directives such as  
18 “cities governing counties” (*shi guan xian*)<sup>10</sup> and “upgrading counties to  
19 cities” (*xian gai shi*), directives that are said to be more preoccupied with  
20 statistical thickening (the size and number of cities) than with the actual  
21 degree and processes of urban growth.

22 How feasible, you may ask, is the networked form of space to China’s  
23 other geographical zones where the conditions for accumulation lag far  
24 behind the coastal areas? How would the doctrine of *yindi zhiyi* play itself  
25 out in the strategic regrouping of administrative scales in backward  
26 regions? Undoubtedly, even the most fervent advocates of networked,  
27 transboundary metropolitan space should recognize areal differences and  
28 the necessity of developing multiple urbanization models appropriate to  
29 the specific geo-cultures of different regions. We have now arrived at an  
30 intriguing intersection where two policy terrains meet. Since the “urban”  
31 permeates every administrative scale (i.e. municipalities, district-level  
32 cities, county capitals and cities, small market towns at the *xiang* and *zhen*  
33 scales), the policy proposals for rescaling city administrative space (*doushi*  
34 *xingzheng quhua*) are inevitably intertwined with the policy debates over  
35 urbanization (*chengshi hua*). More specifically, the intersection of those  
36 two policy domains yields the larger question: at which scale should  
37 Beijing invest its policy of urbanization – at the top, medium or bottom  
38 administrative scale?

39 Those who advocate grand-scale metropolitanization are pushing the  
40 “megapolis” (a networked spatial zone such as the Pearl River Delta) a  
41 scale above the province (Zhou 1999: 218–222); there are others who pro-  
42 claim that metropolizes with a population of between one and three  
43 million should serve as the new spatial signpost (Wang and Xia 1999). On  
44 the rest of the spectrum of that policy debate, we find provincial city  
45 enthusiasts, county-town advocates, and proponents like Wen Tiejun and

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Li Tie who prioritize the market town (*xiao chengzhen*) below the county level as the most important spatial unit on which strategic resources of the new territorial and economic reorganization should be focused (Wen 2000; Li 2002). In this ongoing debate over the preferential model for urban development and spatial reorganization, *yindi zhiyi* often reemerged as the rule of thumb to justify the necessary flexibility of new spatial policies. There is a consensus that urban centers (regardless of their size and scalar location) should act as nodal points around which spatial and economic interactions of a much larger region should be structured. Finally, it is interesting to note that although Beijing articulated a three-tiered vision of “controlling the growth of the metropolises, developing medium-sized cities at a reasonable scale, and aggressively pushing the growth of small market towns” (Liu 1996: 432), the policy proposal that created the most fanfare among policy makers is that of “metropolitanization.” In more specific terms, this is a proposal about establishing “megapolitan circles” (*dadushi quan*) to be governed by autonomous megapolitan united-states (*chengshi lianhe zhengfu*) (Liu *et al.* 1999: 230–231).

***Transboundary space and networked space***

It is not my goal to get sidetracked into a discussion of China’s urbanization policy. I will direct my inquiry to the conceptual interface between space-polity and space-economy so as to bring into sharp relief the new spatial logic of the socialist state. This spatial logic, I argue, is the natural outcome of Beijing’s policy drift toward scale economy in the wake of China’s accession to the WTO. In the process of “strengthening and super-sizing (China’s sectoral economy)” (*zuoqiang zuoda*) so as to combat infiltrating multinational corporations, Beijing pushed the logic of spatial restructuring beyond translocality to incorporate a “networked” notion of transboundary coordination (“boundaries” here refers to both the sectoral and the geographical). This logic not only gave impetus to ongoing policy reforms such as administrative rescaling, but has also served as the working principle underlying a series of grand-scale state-orchestrated mega-mergers taking place in various sectors since the second half of the 1990s. A noticeable example is China’s media sector where administrative constraints previously laid down powerful blockades to local media’s attempts at transboundary and trans-sectoral business mergers.

The media sector’s breakthrough in the transboundary management of economic resources illustrates a perfect example of Beijing’s prioritization of the space-economy coordinate over that of space-polity. As I mentioned above, the turning point came with China’s accession to the WTO. But to further refine my argument, I should emphasize that the threat of the entry of foreign media constituted only one of the factors that drove China’s new media policy toward tearing down old boundaries in favor of scale economies. The shift toward media conglomeration also had to do



1 with the percolation of the “networked” spatial logic through every policy  
2 domain. What ensued was a chain reaction. The policy created twenty-six  
3 press conglomerates, six publishing house conglomerates, and eight  
4 Broadcasting and Film Groups by June, 2002.

5 Note that although those state-orchestrated mergers were still confined  
6 primarily to single localities, trans-areal media networks began to mush-  
7 room as the principle of scale economy gained a life of its own. In 2002, a  
8 new form of a “networked” alliance called “Advertising Association of  
9 Provincial TV Stations” came into being. This alliance enabled twenty-  
10 nine provincial stations to play the same commercials during the evening  
11 segment of CCTV’s National News Broadcast starting on January 14, 2004  
12 (Editors of *Meijie* 2003: 25–26). This strategic move offered Chinese  
13 corporate clients an alternative to the CCTV. It is likely that the latter’s  
14 monopoly over prime-time TV advertising revenue may be broken as a  
15 result. An equally energizing transboundary media alliance was the forma-  
16 tion of the “Coalition of Five Northwestern Provincial Metro-Papers.”  
17 This novel coalition demonstrates that the notion of a transboundary  
18 media market is working not only in the affluent Pearl River Delta but in  
19 areas waiting to be developed.<sup>11</sup>

20 Many Chinese theorists of administrative geography used the term  
21 “horizontal alliance” (*hengxiang lianhe*) as the scalar metaphor for the  
22 still-unfolding transboundary vision. A more appropriate scalar adjective,  
23 I suggest, is “relational,” “networked,” or “meridian.” As mentioned  
24 above, rescaling administrative regions was a powerful means for the  
25 socialist state to remap China’s economic zones. Although some transi-  
26 tional policies (for example, “cities governing counties” or “counties  
27 upgraded to district-level cities”) seem to indicate a rescaling effort con-  
28 ceived in the directional terms of downward or upward movement, the  
29 kind of ideal rescaling promoted by the state since the 1980s has been  
30 rooted consistently in the concept of the “sphere of influence” (i.e., any of  
31 the pathways in a given urban center along which its energy flows), a  
32 fundamentally networked concept of space. Of course, theoretically, the  
33 greater the size of a city, the larger will be its sphere or network of influ-  
34 ence, and the “more vigorous will be the circulation patterns that develop”  
35 – an insight of Whitney’s (Whitney 1970: 54) that coincides with what the  
36 “megapolitan circles” theorists are advocating today.

37 A reconfiguration of scales in transboundary and relational terms has  
38 indeed characterized the general policy drift of Beijing in the last two  
39 decades. First came the “Temporary Regulations on the Promotion of  
40 Networked Economy” way back in 1980. Stipulated by the State Council,  
41 this directive planted the seeds of networked relations by encouraging  
42 organizations to cross areal, sectoral, and ownership constraints. Four  
43 years later, in a central document that laid down the formula for the  
44 reform of economic systems, the Party re-emphasized the importance of  
45 breaking down existing barriers between towns and villages, regions, and

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sectors that blocked the development of “horizontal economic networks” (Zhou 1999: 95–96). Now, more than two decades later, *kongjian zuzhi chuangxin* (reinvention of spatial organization) and *kongjian fen’gong* (spatial division of infrastructural construction) have slowly evolved from catchy policy slogans to tangible reality.

But one may ask, what kind of changes would eventually take place with the ascent of this new spatial imaginary? Would the extension of the urban produce a lifeless “rurban” where the old oppositions between towns and the countryside are not so much overcome as neutralized (Lefebvre 1996: 120)? Would the organic urban – heterogeneous social spaces – disappear even more quickly once the new spatial-scalar model of the “megapolitan circles” was adopted? A decade from now, as China is finally “catching up” with Western developed countries, would the century-old folk wisdom of “each according to its geo-culture” survive the planning vision of the new generations of urban engineers and architects?

### Space, place, and popular culture: the volume

A volume attempting to address the triple tropes of “space,” “place,” and “popular culture” from multidisciplinary perspectives faces many challenges. But our contributors have built ample common ground to support such a collective agenda. First, “popular culture” is understood in the broad terms of *new forms of sociality* rather than as a generic category external to socio-spatial and economic practices. Second, both the production and consumption of social practices are investigated as spatial activities. Third, “popular culture” of post-1992 China is all about cultural economy, i.e., how governmental agencies and local human agents think “economy” and “culture” together. This volume thus places emphasis on the examination of culture understood as spatial economic activities, but not confined within them. For instance, Perdue’s chapter highlights the age-old association of “culture” with “politics.” The cultural discourse of the frontier from the Qing till the contemporary era is seen primarily as a *political* activity. Finally, this volume follows the analytical tradition of the UNSW-UTS Centre for Research on Provincial China by grounding the socio-economic and political processes of local cultural production in specific locales. Such an emphasis brings into sharp relief our commitment to examining the “local” as the site of everyday life rather than a place frozen in time and space. However, such an analytical move by no means leads us to the conflation of “locality” with the trope of the “local.” As this volume demonstrates, place productions and local cultural practices are not confined within the local scale. The place-bound logic attached to the old notion of locality has been thrown into question by the increasingly busy trans-local and transboundary movements and activities.

In much the same way as the “local” and “locality” has been destabilized, the “urban,” too, has crossed its original scaled boundary. Urbaniza-

tion has indeed become both a rural and an urban phenomenon. Nowhere else was this phenomenon better exemplified than in the remote, poor areas of China. At first sight, Tim Oakes's Guizhou in the "Land of Living Fossils" seems to lie far beyond the reach of the "urban" and to be little affected by the current debates over rescaling administrative hierarchy. But all bipolar spatial scales (i.e., the local and global, the national and local), including those of the periphery and the Center (and for that matter, smut and law), are mutually dependent upon each other in their continual reproduction of their own scalar imaginary. Thus, not surprisingly, the eight "megapolitan circles" envisioned by strategists at the Center include the "Guizhou Highland Megapolitan cluster" (Yang Jianrong, quoted in Zhou, Keyu 2000). And likewise, Oakes's chapter maps out how the remote Caiguan Village in peripheral Guizhou repackaged its *tunpu* culture as one of the last remnants of a displaced, but authentic *jiangnan* culture of the Central Plains. This local act of scalar translation, which involves active participation of both the villagers and the Guizhou officials of Culture and Tourism Bureaus, entails more than just a nostalgia for cultural reconnection or, as the inclusive urban planning vision of the megapolizes indicates, desire for comprehensive cataloging. Precisely because of the politics of scale, i.e., the unequal power equation between the Center and the periphery, *tunpu* culture's claim to central cultural heritage is analyzed by Oakes in terms of the jumping of scales. The stakes of such a jump can be understood only by those fixed by the dominant scale at the margins. What the jump accomplished is no less than "the subversion of the core-periphery framework" which long froze Guizhou into a living fossil.

An ideologically motivated scale jumping tells us only half of the story, however. While we can never underestimate the will of the villagers to challenge the hegemonic cultural geography of the Center, an equally important, but an alternative explanatory possibility for the scale jumping in question is provided by the author's analysis of ethnic tourism. Oakes reminds us, not without ambivalence, that *tunpu* culture cannot merely be seen as a politically correct, scale-subversive culture, because it is, after all, a tourist culture. This brings us to the phenomenon or the paradigmatic thinking of "cultural economy" (*wenhua jingji*) that had grown indispensable to the Chinese development discourse in the reform era (Wang 2001b: 71, 86). Once the Chinese public policy makers came to embrace the understanding of "culture" as a profitable economic activity, they started integrating policy discourses that would transform cultural capital into economic capital ("local cultural development strategies" (*difang wenhua fazhan zhanlu*), so to speak) and thence into local development programs at the municipal, provincial, and other sub-provincial levels. Tourism naturally became a pillar of such developmental strategies. Back to Oakes's Guizhou, it was the locals' vision about a lucrative tourist industry that motivated various scale jumpers in Anshun to participate in

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village-wide re-landscaping projects. Oakes's fascinating multiple accounts of the planned visions of those active scale producers bring us to different sites – an ancient theme park, a museum of liquor culture, tourist villas and resorts, a riverside inn, and other cultural places old and new – and to a spatial construction built on a paradox. That is, the politically progressive connotation of upscaling or rescaling is always in danger of being reified by the economic overdetermination of scale production. In the case of Caiguan and other villages, overproduced sites of tourist attractions may eventually cancel out the inherently liberatory potential of scale jumping. Oakes's solution to this scalar paradox of contestation and reification is to show us how peripherality is struggled over in everyday practices. Besides, he envisions that the very possibility that local cultural production is not confined within the local scale provides us some hope that a scaled boundary is never written in stone. New scales will continually be constructed because the struggle over the meaning of the local place never ends. Perhaps what we can be certain is that locals confront and negotiate scaled processes in their daily lives with enduring commitments to the place where they belong. Those commitments themselves, as Kevin Cox claims, are human resources of competitive advantage that a deterritorialized new world order can never tame nor expropriate (Cox 1997: 5).

The spatial significance of the “region” is revisited in Carolyn Cartier's chapter “Regional Formations and Transnational Urbanism in South China.” She is less concerned than Tim Oakes with the implication of “regionalism” understood as a powerful means of constituting China's spatial polity. The “regions” on her theoretical map relate less to the bounded concept of “China” than to the notion of transboundary “spatialities of complex global processes” captured in the metaphor of transnational urbanism. Not surprisingly, Shenzhen in south China, one of the most privileged locales under the reform era policy, serves as the target region for her inquiry. Cartier traces the relationship between cultural economy and urban built environments through a detailed account of Shenzhen's transformation from a manufacturing zone to a global city. The “transnational urban” provides a place where the state meets capital to produce an ultra-abstract space crystallized in Shenzhen's signature plan for a new city center. Designed by a New York-based architectural firm, this new center would evolve around a gigantic city hall, complete with modern cultural amenities such as a music hall, youth palace, and other showcases of cultural symbolisms. Cartier shows us how domestic and global cultural practices, and the systems of official and unofficial representation, fruitfully intersected in the production of this much-hyped built environment. The production of new spaces matters to a city like Shenzhen that has to live up to the challenges that any new “world city” of cosmopolitanism has to meet. But the new space that matters is already deeply inscribed by old popular cultural practices both in architectural terms

1 (pavilion roofs and the spatial logic of cardinal directions) and in terms of  
2 folk beliefs (i.e., *fengshui*). Thus, architectural symbolisms of traditional  
3 Chinese imperial cities are wedded to high fashions of international design;  
4 and the representational space of national power is sometimes subject to the  
5 unofficial cultural ideology of *fengshui*. Mindful of our search for “altern-  
6 ative landscapes,” Cartier named the *fengshui* practice and ideology – a  
7 powerful spatial principle that guides architects of old times and realtors in  
8 modern times – as the locale where a Chinese *minjian* practice “reaches to  
9 connect rural and urban realms in ways that potentially elide the anti-*feng-*  
10 *shui* ideologies of the state” (Cartier’s chapter in this volume).

11 What other possibilities exist that may poke holes in the totalized  
12 abstract space of such an artificially built environment? Cartier ends her  
13 chapter with a speculation on “places of their own” created by women  
14 migrant laborers. Once again, she reminds us that the social character of

15 space is organic. Space embodies social relationships. The built environ-  
16 ment of the new city center is only a conceived space that mystifies but  
17 which cannot obliterate the lived places of those located at the bottom of  
18 the labor scale, however overdetermined their space is by the aggressive  
19 regime of production. What kinds of spatial strategies can those under-  
20 privileged laborers and migrants resort to? This is a topic that Louisa  
21 Schein and Wanning Sun will revisit in their chapters.

22 Shenzhen, we know, is a city of many guises. The abstract totalized  
23 space planned by local state capitalists and technocratic programmers con-  
24 stitutes only one of the multiple geographies of the political economy of  
25 the Pearl River Delta. Shenzhen returns in Helen Siu’s paper as a fluid  
26 social space traversed by the bustling border-crossing human traffic  
27 between Hong Kong and the nodal cities in the Delta on daily and weekly  
28 bases. What drives the regional economy and culture that bridges Hong  
29 Kong with Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Zhuhai to form an ideal trans-  
30 boundary “megapolitan circle” in flesh? It is none other than the acqui-  
31 sition of private space (i.e., real estate properties) and the lifestyle  
32 consciously adopted by the new property owners of luxury housing dis-  
33 tricts. Siu walks us through the borders between Guangzhou and Hong  
34 Kong, and back and forth between satellite cities near Shenzhen, occasion-  
35 ally lounging at the cafés at the Times Square near Guangzhou Train  
36 Station, imagining herself to be “already in Hong Kong.” Her chapter is  
37 adorned with ethnographic details about a regional cultural style in the  
38 making. A large number of the agents actively engaged in the production  
39 of this regional cultural scale and space are apartment-hunters from Hong  
40 Kong where space is both cramped and unaffordable. This migrational  
41 shift to the Delta for better living space is both an instinctive choice and a  
42 natural course of action induced by a state-directed housing development  
43 craze that started in the early 1990s and which gained a second life in the  
44 late 1990s. Siu’s unconventional multi-sited ethnography reconstructs a  
45 regional pastime of property shopping. She became “part of the fluidity”

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of the circulation of people, meaning, and capital, conversing with those various potential buyers, both Hong Kongers and Mainland professionals and upstarts in the Delta. And like them, she indulges herself in the rhythmic spatial movements enabled by trans-local express trains and subways, witnessing the busy flow into the region, as the result of the luxury housing boom, not only of upscale Hong Kong-style design culture and leisure culture but also of new spatial models such as the superstores. Owners of those stores pride themselves in “using an ordinary space (a supermarket) and mundane activities (daily grocery shopping) to do extraordinary things” (“cultivating the tastes of China’s emerging middle class”). Have the new housing choices changed the buyers’ notions of place-based identities? Siu asked. Nobody who travels with Siu during those vicarious excursions would deny the fact that an inter-cultural space *is* being produced and that identities, like the act of physical border-crossing itself, are blurring place boundaries. The status change of those Hong Kong buyers now settled in the Delta is a case in point. Moving “north” may entail a less prestigious scaled movement in geographical terms. But the ownership of a modern luxury apartment almost certainly guaranteed an upscaled move on the social ladder and a hybrid cultural practice.

South China owes its hybrid cultural economy to the comparative advantage of being contiguous not only to Hong Kong but to the ocean. The Northwestern border, the locale of Peter Perdue’s chapter, enjoys no such advantage and benefits from no *laissez-faire* policies. Instead, the vast region continuously called for stringent territorial maintenance because its multi-ethnic space is conflict-ridden and historically contested. As a historian, Perdue is methodologically keen (and successful) in thinking space through history. He asks particularly how China’s spatial imagination was carried over from empire to nation. The space examined under his analytical lens is the geopolitical space of the modern state and its various canonical projects, each paired with an imperial precedent serving to legitimate controversial territorial claims. He discusses three such hegemonic projects. Each project produced orthodox historical narratives to support the vision of a unified national space, leaving little room for autonomous space or alternative histories of ethnic minorities to emerge. From the PRC’s contestation over the sacred Tibetan method of selecting lamas, to the state-sponsored academic research on China’s frontier regions, and finally to the policy of developing the West, we are taken on a discovery tour to scrutinize, case by case, how those seemingly diverse state projects, historically all traceable to the Qing period, are, in fact, spatial acts fed into the socialist state’s geopolitical agenda of “one country, one territory.”

This geometrically defined space of abstraction was hegemonic because it was rarely challenged by alternative histories and alternative mappings. Two rare possibilities of subversions were discussed by Perdue. One is the Hui fiction writer Zhang Chengzhi’s epic attempt to recount the spiritual history of the Jahriyya Islamic community in Gansu province. In his

1 *Xinling shi* (History of the Soul), the “frontier” is dematerialized and  
2 transformed from a physical space, a prey to conquerors, to a mental space  
3 – a “source of an alternative history,” a space whose very immateriality  
4 renders the land inviolable by the territorial police. Perhaps a more open-  
5 ended option to such an idealist religious philosophy of resistance (the  
6 second possibility of subversion, so to speak) are global alliances forged  
7 between inland lone fighters like Zhang, Chinese religious communities in  
8 exile, the global Hui diaspora, and other transnational sympathizers  
9 of Tibetan Buddhism and Islam. Here Perdue echoes Tim Oakes’s  
10 critical strategy of understanding “scale jumping” as a means of self-  
11 empowerment for those located on the bottom scale.

12 The oppressive and ideologically inexorable Chinese state in Perdue’s  
13 chapter is equated with the emporium or Beijing, the central state which is  
14 under constant pressure to maintain a unified front in its self-representa-  
15 tion. In the next chapter, Hans Hendrichske leads us on an excursion into  
16 a local state’s operation in local tabloid papers. He insists on the import-  
17 ance of differentiating the central state from the local (Guanxi provincial  
18 state, in this case) in our analysis of China because the latter is seen to  
19 enjoy a greater degree of ideological flexibility and thus, unlike Beijing, is  
20 not compelled to project the image of a “unitary central institution.”  
21 Through his examination of the history of rivalry between the official  
22 *South Country Morning Post* and the now obsolete semi-private *Guangxi*  
23 *Business Daily*, Hendrichske provides us with an intimate view of the com-  
24 peting interests of the Guangxi Press and Publication Bureau and the  
25 Guangxi Trade Office in their respective sponsorship of two Nanning  
26 tabloid papers. The evolving relationship between the local Party-state  
27 and local popular media serves as an entry point for his discussion of the  
28 structural changes in the newspaper administration in Guangxi on the one  
29 hand, and the link between popular culture and local culture on the other.  
30 He interprets the “popular” as *tongsu*, a culture driven by market demand.  
31 But neither “pop” nor “local” culture is, in his view, content exclusive. He  
32 blurs not only the distinction between commercial and political content in  
33 the pop offerings of the tabloid press (citing the popular demand of inves-  
34 tigative journalism as an example), but the scalar differentiation between  
35 the local, the national, and the global in the presses’ strategic appeal to  
36 readership. While “locality” inevitably plays a crucial role in shaping local  
37 identity, Hendrichske emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between the  
38 reference frames of different scales. What he finally concludes reminds us  
39 of Tim Oakes’s observation, i.e., there is no absolute equation between  
40 “place” and “scale.” Thus, a Nanning local may be geographically rooted  
41 in Nanning, but the Nanning tabloid papers cultivate “a local identity that  
42 is not exclusive of other localities” nor of other scales. A local place is by  
43 no means constrained within the local scale.

44 A significant problematic suggested in Hendrichske’s chapter is the  
45 potential link between the growth of a local public sphere and a local

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media thriving on exposé journalism. But what this emerging “local political culture” would be like is left unsaid. Feng Chongyi takes on this topic in the next piece “From Barrooms to Teahouses: Commercial nightlife in Hainan since 1988.” He argues that teahouses constitute a social space “not only for cultural consumption but for social and political interactions.” Instead of condemning the commodified leisure culture in Hainan as decadent, Feng sees in Hainan’s teahouse culture a seedbed of proliferating leisure cultural communities where people come together as a “public” not only for fun but also for discussions of issues of common concern without a conscious political agenda. He modifies Habermas’s theory of the public sphere by emphasizing the emergence of those new social, public *spaces* in China whose existence and development, like the various social organizations he cites, are intricately tied to the Leninist Party-state. He claims, however, that because the state has a “limited capacity to dictate lifestyle choices,” a booming commercial nightlife will have the potential of depoliticizing the everyday life and encouraging new forms of sociality not easily contained in a homogenous, abstract space of the state. However, he also warns us that commercial nightlife and leisure cultural consumption are promoted by the state. In as much as economic liberalization does not necessarily lead to political liberalization, public sentiments voiced in teahouses are not identical to public opinions.

What is closely scrutinized in this chapter is not only the question of the public sphere but a parallel question: Whose is Hainan culture? Is this tea drinking culture local culture? To answer that question, Feng recounts the ethnic history of Hainan, tracing respectively the cultural heritage of the Li minority, the equally underprivileged old Han mainlander settlers, and the new mainland immigrants who brought to the island new cultural practices such as the art of tea drinking. If we toss the issue of “class” into the equation of the unequal social relations between those three ethnic communities, it brings into sharp relief Feng’s argument, to wit, the popularized tea culture in Hainan is a fundamentally “white-collar” fad affordable only to the new mainlander diaspora. It is, therefore, not an organic part of Hainan culture but is *constructed* as a “local” culture as such. He thus gets himself into an interesting bind: critiquing and privileging a mainlander cultural form and practice at the same time. If in time the teahouses on the island do breed public communities as Feng has hoped, we should perhaps ask, in his own voice, *whose* “publics” are they?

Louisa Schein’s chapter “Ethnoconsumerism as Cultural Production?” pursues the same line of investigation that foregrounds consumption as a **productive** act and consumers as cultural **producers**. The locale she looks at is Guizhou. And the subjects under discussion are the Miao minorities. Although Guizhou is located on the margin of Chinese modernity, it is participatory, Schein argues, of an imagined cosmopolitanism made possible by trans-local experiences in the everyday life of the Miao. Such experiences can be both virtual – through their consumption of traveling



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1 images transmitted by satellite TV – and real, as villagers come into  
2 contact with migrant returnees from the cities. What blows life into  
3 Schein’s trope of translocality are vignettes she takes from her field work  
4 observations. All consumers are imaginative as postmodern theorists like  
5 John Fiske proclaim, but ethnoconsumers are more privileged because  
6 they have a larger wealth of creative resources to draw from in their  
7 improvisational act of consumption. The creative practices of the Miao  
8 consumers Schein examined include fashion making, grooming, on-stage  
9 performances, and cruising in disco bars. They tell us that the cultural  
10 identity of a place, like one’s sense of style, is unstable to the utmost. Thus  
11 hyper-ethnicization and de-ethnicization co-exist. Miao consumers are by  
12 no means stereotyped passive recipients of modern consumer culture.  
13 And Miao places are not stuck in a cultural backwater because they are  
14 “nodes in the network of trans-local flows rather than endpoints of ‘devel-  
15 opment.’” Those who have resources to jump scale, like the elegant  
16 fashion designer Wei Ronghui whose career is now translocal, can afford  
17 to reinvent the traditional minority beauty culture in a celebratory light.  
18 But Schein’s point is that all the young Miao consumers she encountered  
19 are in one way or another cultural brokers who, like Wei Ronghui, take  
20 and pick the urban style and eventually make it into something Miao, a  
21 process of re-ethnicization of culture that is not to be conflated with the  
22 simple notion of hybridization. This is quite an upbeat take on consumer  
23 culture and marginalized locality. Schein rediscovers the roots of popular  
24 culture as “people’s” culture, celebrates the ethno-consumer as an agent  
25 of change, and bails Guizhou out of the Han imaginary of lack.

26 Schein’s chapter is filled with rich implications about how we may free  
27 ourselves from our fixed sterile imagination about the periphery. Wanning  
28 Sun joins her in interrogating the place-identities of “poor places” on the  
29 periphery. As indicated by the title of her chapter “Anhui *Baomu* in Shang-  
30 hai: Gender, class and a sense of place,” Sun examines how Anhui as a  
31 place is imagined in national popular culture through the trope that makes  
32 it infamous – the Anhui maids. To highlight the constructed nature of our  
33 sense of a place, she brings Shanghai into the equation and complicates the  
34 question of spatial imagination by presenting to us voices of maids, airport  
35 cleaners, Shanghainese employees, each speaking from his or her nested  
36 socio-spatial position which determines their identification with a place and  
37 their own trans-local subjectivity. “Place” as a category is thus destabilized  
38 because she asks: who is defining the place? Whose place is it? What  
39 particular spatial relationship do those who are defining have with the place  
40 defined? Sun pays specific attention to the representations of Anhui in film  
41 and TV drama because she believes that space or place building is not only  
42 a socio-economic project but also a discursive project. She rightfully attrib-  
43 utes the vicious cycle of our association of Anhui with poverty to the triple  
44 facts of the image production (and reproduction) of a poor place through  
45 popular media, the stark reality of its uneven development, and the

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nation-state's development policies. All those factors feed into each other to reinforce the cultural stereotype of Anhui. The rich interviews Sun conducted with those maids and their employers provide us illuminating perspectives on how people at different socio-spatial locations construct place and how they put themselves "in place." Perhaps the saddest message delivered by her interviewees is that the Anhui maids in Shanghai themselves are participating in the construction of a social imaginary that propagates the clichéd binarism of the "poor" Anhui versus the "cosmopolitan" Shanghai.<sup>12</sup>

Tani Barlow's chapter comes last, following the same sequential logic as the previous Luce volume. In *Chinese Popular Culture and the State* (Wang 2001a), she reminds us that desire and pleasure cannot be written out of sight in a critical framework that emphasizes the structuring capacity of the state to inscribe the social (Barlow 2001). Her subversive voice cracked open a theoretical space named desire, irreducible to the state effect. Now Barlow returns with a project on smut in similar critical spirit. She delivers us a poetic spatialization of wanting which scatters to the winds concepts of place and lived geography. She anchors the "economy of smut" at the metaphoric space of the "pornographic city." This is an anonymous and generic city that discriminates neither locales nor scales. It is the unconscious domain of everyday life, liminally situated between the legitimate and the forbidden. Barlow is no less interested in exploring the "smutty ways of knowing" than in directing our attention to the *only* scale (in her view) that is relevant to smut, i.e., the human body. This approach, which she herself places between Lefebvre and Bachelard, raises many fascinating methodological questions about how to study contemporary Chinese popular culture through a genre that not only does not have an archive but which is continuously subject to the gaze of censors. Even more intriguingly, there is a "rationality" of smut to speak of. In a paradoxical twist, Barlow's reconstruction of such a *savoir faire* is, in the end, highly subversive of her own analytical point of departure, namely, that the smutty space is highly resistant to state control.

The twist in question came from Barlow's insight that the liminal and smutty ways of knowing are both sexual and criminal, and legalistic and normative. In so far as contemporary Chinese smut is legalistic to the point of sheer didacticism, it "popularizes the new legal culture" rather than challenges it. Her essay implies that the socialist state plays a rather complicated role in the popularity of smut. Official anti-smut campaigns tell only half of the story. The predominance of law and order in the current semi-yellow literature, while continuing the Confucian legacy of the taming of the pornographic tradition (Wang 2001e), has imparted to contemporary smut a schizophrenic drive toward eroticization of violence and moral edification at the same time. Perhaps the cohabitation of those two opposite drives is predictable, given that the cultural meaning of porn and smut is inseparable from their emergence as categories of regulation.

Eventually, one needs to ask: is our utopian fantasy about smut

1 rewarded after a reading of the examples of “vulgar obscenity”? This may  
2 constitute another paradox that has risen from Barlow’s tension-riddled  
3 creative subversion. Because of smut’s disregard for any geographical,  
4 scalar, cultural, and even bodily differences (i.e., all bodies are inter-  
5 changeable), its space seems so formulaic and tautological that it eventu-  
6 ally turns into a tyranny of its own kind.  
7

## 8 **Conclusion**

9  
10 Edward Soja attributed the anti-spatial traditions in Western Marxism to  
11 the tendency of materialist dialecticians to treat spatial consciousness as  
12 reified false consciousness inseparable from the geographical expansion of  
13 capitalism (Soja 1997: 76–93). If we look at the Chinese spatial projects  
14 showcased in this volume, they may yield similar impressions that the pro-  
15 duction of space in China is reducible to simple reflections of the economic  
16 base and is driven by pure economism. Indeed, from rural Guizhou to the  
17 Pearl River Delta and all the way to Beijing (where rescaling was well  
18 under way), it is difficult to spot any spatial visions and relations that exist  
19 outside the logic of capital. As we have seen, the spatial problematic is  
20 almost identical to the urban problematic. This is clearly shown in  
21 Cartier’s chapter on Shenzhen, Siu’s multi-ethnographical accounts, my  
22 analysis of the spatial policy of the PRC, and the trans-local experiences of  
23 those rural subjects depicted in Sun’s and Schein’s chapters.

24 We face several options at this point about how to assess such a phe-  
25 nomenon. We could, like good old liberals, vouch for the universalist  
26 impulse that celebrates the economic turn of China’s new spatial logic, or  
27 condemn it like old-style Marxists, or search for liberatory spaces outside  
28 market-driven and -organized spatiality like jovial postmodernists. Each  
29 ideological position makes some sense. But it is interesting to note that  
30 none of our contributors fall into the first two camps. The third option is  
31 the most alluring one, subscribed to by several authors. But does that  
32 option tell us more about our own fantasy as Western academic intellectu-  
33 als entrenched in dichotomous thinking (i.e., domination versus resis-  
34 tance) than about the real stakes of the locals or local states in their  
35 struggle over various spatial projects? Indeed, the haunting question as to  
36 **“where lies the Chinese spatial problematic”** appears more compelling  
37 than ever after we finish reading a volume that unwittingly validates  
38 several universal theoretical premises dear to critical human geographers.  
39 First, we are shown that the relations of production and consumption are  
40 simultaneously social and spatial; second, other than the SARS example,  
41 the production of scales is a process, and most likely a contested process;  
42 third, local places and local cultural practices are not constrained within  
43 the local scale; and fourth, the relational mapping between different scales  
44 holds the key to our understanding of “place.” But I am tempted to ask: is  
45 that all there is to the new spatial project of post-1992 socialist China?

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Tapping into the rich resources this volume provides, I would like to offer a few speculations not so much as concluding remarks but as points of departure for future inquiries into the Chinese spatial problematic examined from the disciplinary vantage points of human, administrative, political, and historico-cultural geography. Each of those vantage points was addressed in this volume, gravitating one way or another toward the trope of economy. Emerging economic forces have indeed thrown old scalar configurations into disarray. In general, China is moving toward a spatial imaginary that emphasizes the concept of network, scalar transfers, and boundary transgression. Old vertical boundaries were being torn down. What is in the process of being formed – as a result either of scale jumping or of transboundary movements and activities – is much too new and experimental for us to assess its full social impact in any definitive sense.

Most of our contributors turned their gaze toward scale producers in the “social” domain with a default ideological assumption that such scalar production can be subversive, or at least resistant to the appropriation, of the authoritarian Center. But several contributors, among them Barlow, Siu, Perdue, Feng, Hendrichske, and myself, gave a noticeable acknowledgement to the Chinese state (both Beijing and local states) as a creative scale producer as well. I would caution us against treating all organized and planned spaces in contemporary China as devoid of transformative potentials. This is not just a theoretical issue. In real life, the Chinese have a saying, “The most invisible place is the spot right underneath a light.” Translating this metaphoric saying into plain language, it means that no place is safer than the place of danger. That is because, paradoxically, under the surveillance of the Party-state, it is easier to carve out “breathing spaces” (*shengcun de kongjian*) within the planned space than create them outside it. Ordinary Chinese people pride themselves in finding their own space and place in what seems to be a poreless, planned space. What matters to them are practices not theories. In practice, I should note, the state and the people subscribe to the same spatial practice. The latter performs “scale jumping” while the former is busy experimenting with “transboundary” policy directives. This leads us to another observation spelled out indirectly in this volume: The scalar crossovers between the “local” and the “global” – an imaginary project for a Chinese commoner – tell us only half of the story about mobility in China. The other half is manifested in the inland, transboundary traffic that is taking place between villages, towns, counties, districts, provinces, and among metropolitan centers.

This emphasis on practice and locale immediacy inevitably turns the quotidian into the most important scale for the Chinese. Deng Xiaoping’s famous catchphrase “crossing the river by groping for the stones in it” says just that. Practice is everything. And flexibility – on which the principle of *yindi zhiyi* is based – is the Chinese panacea for survival and optimism. It is in the quotidian where their struggle over space is improvised, where the

inevitable embeddedness of a place is lived and the production of differences taken for granted.

September 2003

## Notes

- 1 I am referring to the pioneering work written by Southeast Asianists. Two such examples are: *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism* (1997), co-edited by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini; and Ong's *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (1999).
- 2 I wish to add to this list two other projects in the making. The first is Tim Oakes and Louisa Schein's co-edited volume *Translocal China: Linkages, Identities and the Reimagining of Space*. The manuscript is now being prepared and will be published by Routledge in the China in Transition Series edited by David S. G. Goodman. The second project is currently undertaken by the Urban China Research Network overseen by Carolyn Cartier and Si-ming Li (Geography, Hong Kong Baptist University). That multi-year project, named "Urban Transformation in China and Reorganization of the State in the Era of Globalization," examined the understudied issues of space economy and the reorganization of China's urban administrative scales in the larger context of globalization.
- 3 China's information industry gained a tremendous growth of 29 per cent in the first quarter of 2003. At the end of April, sales of personal computers and displays had increased by 60.1 per cent and 53 per cent respectively over the same period last year. A spokesman of the Ministry of Information Industry attributed this record to the SARS outbreak which boosted both online businesses and online teaching. See SST's *Semiconductor Weekly*, June 9, 2003.
- 4 In June 2003, the Ministry of Culture granted ten firms licenses to run national Internet café chains. The government was said to want to squeeze independent operators out of the market.
- 5 I am referring to Richard O'Brien's 1992 *Global Financial Integration: The End of Geography* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press), a book very influential in the literature on globalization and deterritorialization.
- 6 The policy that attracted the greatest attention from policy analysts and policy makers has been that of *xian gai shi* ("counties upgraded to city status"). It is a controversial policy deemed by some to be a transitional measure at best. It was an effort made by the central government to cut down the large number of counties and to give "market towns," "county level towns," and "district level cities" greater administrative power over the county governments so as to speed up urbanization in rural China and to gradually relieve the problems created by the rural-urban divide. Another ongoing policy debate was focused on whether the number of provinces should be reduced. The proposal to do so was stalled because *sheng* as an administrative scale is too weighty a tradition to tamper with. For detailed discussion of both policy debates, see Liu 1996, Liu, Jin *et al.* 1999.
- 7 I owe my understanding of the *tiao/kuai* leadership to Michael Dutton.
- 8 A selection of Henri Lefebvre's work was translated by Bao Yaming in *Xiandaixing yu kongjian de shengchan* [Modernity and the Production of Space], Urban Studies Series 2, Shanghai: Shanghai Education Publishers, 2003.
- 9 I owe this discussion about the complexities of the issue of local protectionism to Hans Hendrischke.
- 10 "Cities governing counties" was a policy implemented in 1983 with the purpose of consolidating resources around prosperous market towns and cities

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(*zhongxin cheng*) at both the district and county levels. A large number of such county towns were upgraded to district-level cities (*diji shi*) which were then made to govern neighboring county towns that used to fall under the jurisdiction of the districts in question. And some original district-level cities absorbed surrounding counties to form a Greater urban area such as the Greater Wenzhou. For detailed discussions on the pros and cons of this policy, see Liu, Jin *et al.* 1999: 216–221.

- 11 In 2001, editors of five provincial-level metro-papers (*dushibao*) met at Lanzhou, Gansu Province, for the first time to discuss trans-local business ventures. The papers are *San Qin Metro-paper*, *Lanzhou Daily*, *New News*, *The [North]western Metro-paper*, and *Xinjiang Metro-paper*. It was agreed that a trans-provincial coalition will be formed. See Zhang Jibing (2002) “Dushibao de dushi shenghuo” [The City’s Lives in Metro-papers], *Meijie* [Media], 11: 19. *Nanfang Metro-paper* based in Guangzhou has been frequently cited as a successful example of “trans-local” business operation since it gained market shares in Shenzhen.
- 12 I owe this observation to Arianne Gaetano, the co-editor (with Tamara Jacka) of *On the Move: Women and Rural-to-Urban Migration in Contemporary China*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

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