

## 道德漠視與遠端資本主義：《蝸居》受眾研究

### Moral Indifference and Capitalism from Afar: An Audience Research on *Woju*

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#### 摘要

本文是一個電視劇《蝸居》的受眾研究，並聚焦在中國大學畢業生的新自由主義主體的構成。《蝸居》於 2009 年夏天播放，並迅速產生了「蝸居」這個關鍵詞，指中國城市裡中下階級的狹窄的居所環境，媒體亦經常報導受過高等教育的年青人的階級期望與生活及工作條件之間的巨大差距。研究發現，儘管媒體經常把《蝸居》連繫上中國的裙帶資本主義的問題，例如腐敗、道德危機及經濟不平等，但是，我的受訪者在閱讀電視劇角色及故事時，其道德說辭與關注並不顯著，相反，從他們對《蝸居》的閱讀，我們發現他們透過協議一個遠離社會及道德矛盾的主體位置，擁抱一種大都會生活方式。這體現了一種新自由主義主體，往往只看到都市生活的光明面，以及各種實踐自我激發及管理的技術。這種想像的自我是深植於不均衡的國家空間，內裡包括兩個真實 - 想像世界：「內陸或家鄉」是一個聲望及前途決定於既有的政治權力及財富，而「大城市」的世界則是個人市場競逐決定一切聲望及前途的地方。

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## Abstract

This paper is an audience research on the TV drama series of Woju (蝸居), with focus on the making of neoliberal subject of Chinese college graduates. This drama series, which began airing in July 2009, made the term “woju” a public idiom, which now refers to the cramped living environment of middle-lower class in Chinese cities. The huge gap between educated young adult’s aspirations and their living and working conditions is routinely discussed and dramatized in media. However, despite the association frequently made by the media between Woju and the social and cultural problems of Chinese crony capitalism, such as corruption, moral crisis and economic inequalities, in my informants’ reading of the stories and characters, moral codes and concerns did not prevail at all. Instead they embrace a cosmopolitan way of life by negotiating a subject position distant from the social and moral conflicts. It features a neoliberal subject always looking on the bright side of urban life and practicing self-enabling/ managing techniques. This imaginary self is firmly situated in an uneven landscape of national space, including two real-imagined worlds: the world of hinterland/ hometown in which prestige rests on political power and wealth, and the world of central cities in which prestige rests on individual effort in market competition.

## 道德漠視與遠端資本主義：《蝸居》受眾研究

葉蔭聰

### 前言

1990 年代以來，隨著中國急劇的市場改革步伐，配合上掠奪成性的地方幹部，以及專制威權的國家體制，被稱為「群體事件」的社會動盪在二線城市及小城鎮

裡蔓延。然而，身處及湧進中心城市（如北京、上海及廣州等）的大學生及畢業生卻異常平靜，在政治上極不活躍，與 1989 年學生運動裡的大學生有天淵之別。雖然這可解釋為 1989 年的「六四鎮壓」及伴隨的政治控制的後果，它把學生運動扼殺於萌芽狀態，但是，亦無法充份解釋城市中受過高等教育的年青人為何會如此順從，對這場國家主導的新自由資本主義沒有多少抗議。我們當然可以研究制度及結構如何限制了他們的行動，但本文嘗試從個人層面出發，探究其原因。近年，描繪這些城市青年的低下、受困、被壓迫的詞彙應運而生，例如「蝸居」與「蟻族」，揭示出觸及他們生存狀態的階級兩極化與經濟困頓，也成為他們自我理解的關鍵詞。然而，這似乎也沒有產生青年激進主義。在經濟不平等及各種腐敗的大城市裡，受過高等教育的年青人如何安身立命，進行定位的呢？他們對新秩序的相對順從，與近年媒體（傳統及網上媒體）上日漸增強的社會不滿構成了有趣的對比，因此，值得我們去研究，他們是如何接收媒體有關社會矛盾與衝突的訊息。

本研究的訪問環繞著城市裡受過高等教育的年青人如何閱讀及接收 2009 年 7 月開始播放的電視劇《蝸居》。《蝸居》這個故事環繞著兩位大學畢業生在大城市的遭遇，尤其是受到房價及住屋問題的困擾，而且觸及經濟不平等、腐敗、拆遷、婚外情等等問題。研究發現，他們雖有對當下不公體制的零星批判，但是，他們仍然抱著階級向上流動的期望，並接受現狀。同時，我要論證，他們順從社會的

態度並不怎麼源於他們在中國式資本主義裡有任何既得利益，而是他們在不同層次的「社會現實」裡的階級及區域定位。他們對未來的日子的期盼，與他們由內陸到沿海省份或農村到城市的遷移經驗有關。區域性的差異及不平等，一般被視為社會不滿及動盪的原因，可是，在這個研究裡我們發現，知識青年在他們的鮮活的經驗裡感受到的「差異」與「不平等」卻是另一回事，很弔詭地，他們體驗到一條當下通往自由的大道，遠離他們感知、想像及描述為限制的現實以及「過去」。我們可以理解為這是對新自由主義現實的協商過程及結果，他們把階級身份以地域說法及觀念來定位，同時，他們在市場社會裡想像自身的公民身份。

本文嘗試聚焦在由經濟發展水平較低的地區進入廣州的大學畢業生，並分析他們的階級及地域定位，而廣州亦是中國新自由主義發展排在最前列的城市之一。自2010年開始，在中山大學幾位研究生的幫助下，筆者成功訪問了30位大學畢業生，年齡界乎於23至31歲，他們部份是當年來廣州讀大學，畢業後留下來，或是從其他地方的大學畢業後來到廣州。

### **新自由主義與新自由主義主體**

部份馬克思主義者傾向把「新自由主義」描繪為一系列的政治經濟轉變，由經濟全球化、私有化到西方國家在福利計劃中退出來等等。根據他們的理論範式，個人、社會組織及政府被驅使接受新自由主義式的企業型進取、逐利及競爭等理性。然而，在云云馬克思主義者當中，哈維 ( David Harvey ) 指出，新自由主義政策

意識形態不應從其字面意思去理解 ( Harvey 2005 ) , 相反, 他提醒我們, 資本主義的實際實踐運作, 與意識形態自我合理化辯解之間, 存在著差異。哈維的細緻歷史敘述, 促使我們去從下而上, 分析及理論化新自由主義, 換言之, 即新自由主義實踐的在地邏輯。

近年對新自由主義的研究, 集中審視資本主義發展、治理及主體性的關係, 而不再視之為一套早已設計周全, 由上而下灌輸的經濟意識形態。研究者把新自由主義設想成一套治理技術 ( governing techniques ) 或系統性計劃, 促使個人在各個生活層面以類企業家式的選擇來思考、談論及實踐( Rose 1999; Brown 2005 ) 。

學者王愛華嘗試發展一套扎實的理論架構, 捕捉新自由主義在非西方社會的歷史及在地路徑, 她把新自由主義界定為一個通過自由的治理 / 自我治理

( governing/self-governing ) 的模式, 提醒我們, 新自由主義並不是一成不變地灌輸在人們身上, 而是不同的群體對各種規條、慣例進行修正。新自由主義既是來自西方, 但它需要與在地的體制及實踐結合, 才能得以傳播, 尤其是後社會主義國家, 因為它們的領導人往往在嘴巴上大談反西方的教條, 鼓動民族主義情緒。

王愛華用「例外狀態」 ( exception ) 來分析作為「例外狀態」的新自由主義, 與例外於新自由主義的種種之間的互動。

羅麗莎 ( Lisa Rofel ) 與王愛華有關在地的例外狀態想法接近, 她在多個當代中國公共文化的場地中, 進一步分辨出多種新自由主義 / 後社會主義的慾望主體的

形式。例如，她指出，中國流行文化是一個不是或較少為官方宣傳量身訂造的場所，它成為一個人們學習「渴求或慾望自由技藝」的地方，在這裡人們把個人經驗與國族再想像扣連起來。她並沒有從各個民族誌書寫中歸納一個統一的論點，但是，她指出，中國的社會主義過去是一個重要的場所，讓不同的人、社會群體及國家政權，在既是新自由主義又是後社會主義的世界裡，去扣連自由慾望主體 (Rofel 2007: 25)。

受到羅麗莎的啟發，筆者把由外地進入廣州市的知識青年視為慾望主體。在這裡研究裡我視他們為「開端人物」( threshold figures )——借用一個文學術語，他們在現實與戲劇，在個人與公共領域之間，商議及尋找位置 ( Waters 2001: p. 128 )。而筆者感到興趣的是，社會現實如何在個人領域面向外在支配性力量中展開 ( unfolding )，而研究電視影像文本及其閱讀接收可以讓我們窺看這個展開過程，同時，我特別關注觀影實踐涉及社會現實的道德感覺與認知視野。因此，在我的分析裡，我並不認為這部電視劇是一個封閉的文本，或一種獨特的思考模式，相反，我會聚焦及疏理人們談論電視劇的論述過程 ( discursive process )，包含故事的人物、情節與主題如何與他們的日常生活相關或不相關。

## 後改革年代中國的電視與意識形態

中國開放改革初年，流行文化如流行音樂歌曲、電影及電視劇等主要來自香港、台灣及西方國家。但是，在 1990 年代開始，中國自己的流行文化標誌性人物與類型漸漸出現。六四事件後，中國共產黨政權不單剷除了大量異見，還結束了八十年代由知識份子帶領的文化熱及新啟蒙運動。鄧小平堅決的繼續開放改革，而不走回毛澤東時代的道路，導致了全面性的資本主義發展。隨著急速的市場化，文化產業如雨後春筍般冒現，相當程度接替了知識份子精英及黨國宣傳機器的功能，塑造人們的文化品味、感覺、情緒以及意識形態。在云云文化形式中，電視劇迅速變成針對大眾最流行的產物，很大程度上是因為，家庭擁有電視機的比率在 1990 年代暴增。

學者一般不會視電視連續劇只是一種娛樂的文化商品，然而，它們的政治功能及意識形態效果卻令許多研究當代中國文化的學者感到疑惑，不容易一下子說清楚。例如，在 1989 年天安門事件後，中央電視台播放的《渴望》，引起全國觀眾的熱捧，而黨的宣傳部門亦視它為有效的工具，讓公眾減少對政治爭議及行動的興趣 ( Lu 2001: p. 207-208 ; Zha 1995 )。正如羅麗莎指出，電視劇在後天安門時代的冒起，標誌著一個新的意識形態場地，內裡的國族主體及可能的反抗都會同時發生 ( Rofel 1994 )。例如，有論述分析的研究指出，90 年代新威權國家的建造、保守派知識份子及古裝或現代的「清官劇」之間有著妙微的關係 ( Zhu 2008: Chapter 2 )；魯曉鵬 ( Sharon H. Lu ) 指出，電視文化不是預先設計包裝

好的國族主義工具，他提出一個較細緻的架構去理解電視影像文本中的身份認同構成，揭示跨國界流動、階級、性別及慾力動態（libidinal dynamics）的關係；他的精神文析取徑指出，在中國遇上跨國及去疆域化之際，不少電視劇中蘊藏及構成了一個男性、企業家式主體（Lu 2001: Chapter 10）。當代中國電視劇文化研究愈來愈轉向探索國族身份的可能及流動邊界，而它對黨國計劃的涵意，需要從不同的感知、想像、情感與情緒之中去分析。

簡言之，電視研究的目的，是要理解國族想像的政治過程。相對來說，文本結構裡的官方意識形態並不是那麼重要，而電視劇的現實 - 虛構世界才是重要，因為製作人、角色及觀眾都在這個場域裡去想像、定位及建構他們不同的主體。在《蝸居》這個個案裡，它標榜寫實、社會熱門話題以及社會批判，所以，對城市裡受過高等教育的年青人來說，觀影實踐不只包含了資本主義城市生活所誘發的慾望，還包括了階級及性別等等的定位。電視劇的世界把觀眾的生活處境以虛構方式描繪出來，提供了一個想像世界，讓觀眾透過一個想像世界看見及理解自己作為現代化國家的一員。

《蝸居》的獨特之處在於，電視劇的故事及角色身陷各類低下階層至中產階級同樣面對的問題，包括難以負擔的房價、拆遷、階級不平等、「小三」（情婦）及腐敗等等。而該劇又與一般「清官劇」不同，它把「貪官」及「小三」放在前台，而整個故事則環繞著他們來展開。藏在電視劇的敘事結構裡的道德爭議，讓觀眾



有多重詮釋、情感投注及道德思考，觀眾的閱讀與接收正是一個意識形態過程，它座落在電視劇虛構的世界與他們生活的世界之間。

《蝸居》的故事以兩位來到大城市的大學畢業生的真實處境作為背景，從中把許多國族認同的標誌性人物及事物帶出來，而它們都是鄧小平經濟改革所推動的現代化的產物。電視劇的開端製造了一個誘惑空間，刺激讀者的慾望去對劇中人物的行動認同、賦予意義，並連繫自身。然而，它不同於大部份中國電視劇，它不是一個成功故事，製造一個進取、企業家型的角色（通常是男性），讓觀眾代入認同（Lu 2001: pp. 220-225）；它也不是毛澤東年代及經改早期流行的「訴苦」類型，讓被壓迫者表達他們過去的痛苦，擁抱由共產黨帶給我們的現狀及光明的未來（Rofel 1994: p. 707）。相反，《蝸居》充滿了來自觀眾都市經驗的含糊意義之處，而這都在故事裡被統歸為「蝸居」——字面意思指的是城市年輕外來者的擠迫及簡陋的居所。該劇的敘事並不是環繞著英雄性人物，結尾也沒有高舉任何角色作為國家民族的代表。儘管結尾算是解除所有戲劇矛盾，但卻有極為強烈的不確定性，令人疑惑那些弱勢群體的問題是否已消除。例如，貪官宋思明的確在結尾被捕及死於車禍，可是，並沒有突出清官，也沒有以家庭團聚為結；拆遷「釘子戶」最後因為強拆，家中的老母親被拆房子的瓦礫砸死，雖獲得了額外的賠償作為封口費，很難說完滿或得到最後的安慰。事實上，很少觀眾認為，故事結尾意味著所有問題與道德兩難有所減少，更遑論是消除。

換言之，由於這些含糊及豐富的意義，該劇並不能簡單地視為官方意識形態，或是正統的顛覆。關鍵的是，觀眾如何投入或避開閱讀某些情節、浪漫愛情故事、道德兩難與批評的內容，他們的接收與閱讀不只關於於他們的社經狀況，還涉及他們在中國城市現代性中，如何感知及定位自身。本研究聚焦在大學畢業青年，嘗試由觀眾回應的模式勾勒出這個意識形態過程。

### 社會現實：「看的」而不是「經歷感受的」

《蝸居》一劇充滿了複雜的道德及社會爭議，嚴格來說，受訪者對劇中的人物及劇情並沒有共識，唯一共同的判斷是，他們都視之為「現實」，然而，它是一種從媒體或互聯網上已獲知的現實，他們並不感到驚訝。

問：你看過蝸居嗎？

答：去年的時候看過幾集，自己看的也有和同學一起看的也有。（通過什麼方式看）網絡。（大概看了多少集？）八九集。

問：為什麼沒有把它看完呢？

答：一個是浪費時間；二是看到那裡基本上知道是什麼情況了；第三個是覺得裡面滲透著消極的情緒，血淋淋的事實擋在我這裡，我哪裡還有什麼奮鬥的空間啊？這也算是一種逃避。

（CL，男性，25歲，2010年大學畢業，他在一家保險公司工作）

CL 不單認為，把每一集電視劇看完是浪費時間，而且，他不願意太直接面對電視劇裡的現實。他是一位窮學生，來自廣東一個經濟不發達地區，他努力工作賺錢，應付日常開支及昂貴的學費。訪問期間，他偶爾會抱怨各種對畢業於非重點大學的窮學生的歧視，對此他只感到無奈。然而，他經常想著美好的明天，他非常樂意跟我們分享他未來創業的大計。CL 有意逃避電視劇那個暮氣沉沉的現實，想望著光明的未來。其他受訪者則把媒體呈現的陰暗面視為既定的現實，卻又與自身經驗無關。

它多多少少反應了一些現實的問題，有些問題還是說得挺現實的。……

我接觸的這方面比較少，我見過的、接觸到的比較少，可能社會上是存在這種現象，我們看新聞經常說，甚麼甚麼高官貪污腐敗了，背後揪出多少個小三，比較常出現這種情況。我個人認為社會上還是比較普遍的，是不能避免的。

( LJ · 女性 · 24 歲 · 2010 年大學畢業，她在一家國營電訊公司裡當初級秘書。 )

《蝸居》及其他媒體所呈現的社會不平等屬於「媒體中介的現實」

( mediated reality )，它在受訪者感知他們的生活世界裡處於一個特別的位置。它是一個並不會激起任何有關未來事業的渴求及建設性規劃的現實。它是一個「不能避免的現實」，這個由媒體所呈現的現實仿似獨

立於個人，自己運轉。它異化於受訪者的生活經驗，而他們亦選擇不去投入太多情感於這些電視或其他媒體呈現的現實，儘管關於腐敗及社會不平等等是熱門話題。事實上，在訪問裡，那個離開自身經驗、自我運轉的現實經常被提及。

我平常也關注新聞上的東西，新聞說房價貴了，房租貴了，網上有一句話說，中國的房價在控制中增長。這句話很經典，房價不停地控制，也不停地增長，這是不可避免的現象。

(LJ)

這個現實也不能說對他們毫無關係，受訪者會描述為一種壓力。電視劇裡的角色就像任何人一樣，無可避免地感受到壓力，而這往往成為不要對他們過份苛責的理由，無論他們幹過甚麼。

問：那有沒有什麼不喜歡的角色、情節？

答：我覺得都能接受吧，現實中比那些惡劣的都有，沒有什麼不能接受的。那樣的抉擇，都有自己的難處。

問：那海萍的妹妹呢？後來她當了人家的二奶？

答：小三是吧，我感覺沒有什麼要批判的，還能接受。

問：為什麼能接受呢？別人覺得破壞了別人家庭。

答：從那方面來講，是感覺挺那個的。但是如果沒記錯的話，她也是被逼的是不是，我不太記得了。應該是出於一些壓力吧。

( JY · 女性 · 27 歲 · 2007 年大學畢業 · 她在一家民營公司的會計部工作 )

受訪者普遍透過一個深受壓力的主體位置而認同或接受劇中的角色及劇情，然而，它只能算是一種微弱的同情，部份受訪者甚至以一種理性計算思維來評價角色及他們的行動。尤其是劇中的貪官宋思明：

我覺得還算是愛情關係了 ( 指官員宋思明與大學畢業生郭海藻 ) 。因為宋思明也經常想念她，然後海藻也經常想念宋思明，他們的關係也比較好的。我覺得這是他們人生中的一個過程。我覺得他們最錯的地方是他們要了那個 BB 。這件事發生了就發生了，這世界上發生什麼事誰也不能控制，我們享受它的過程就好了，這個嚴重性一定要看重他。該到甚麼時候結束就應該結束。宋思明也是沒有腦子的，他想把海藻一輩子都放在自己身邊，但他的年紀也那麼大了，怎麼能對得起海藻呢？你和她感情發生了，一起快樂過，就行了吧，記得把感情收回來嘛。就像股票那樣，上漲到一定程度就應該收了嘛。

( ZW · 男 · 25 歲 · 2010 年大學畢業 · 在一超級市場當人事部經理 )

受訪者無法扣連出對政治經濟結構的批判，亦沒有對體制有很清晰的道德判斷。

他們對宋思明的閱讀最耐人尋味。有點出乎我們意料之外，除了少部份人對宋的貪污瀆職行為有簡單的道德批判外，大部份人並沒有太大興趣：

問：那些幹部（電視劇裡的幹部）呢？你覺得？

答：宋思明我覺得作為一個幹部還不錯，因為當別人遇到困難的時候，他會極力去幫助別人。比如說當海藻姐夫被人說盜竊公司機密的時候，海藻還沒有告訴他，他還是去幫了。又比如，他女兒要去看 she 演唱會，他還專門打電話要求要把現場秩序維持好，不用轉車接送他女兒，說明他不是唯一想到的是自己的女兒。

問：但是他是個貪污的官員，你覺得他算得上一個好的官員嗎？

答：嗯，其實現在社會裡，貪官太多了，只是沒被報出來。

(ZP, 女性, 23 歲, 2009 年大學畢業, 在一家工廠當文員)

儘管受訪者對宋思明的貪污及對妻子不忠有些溫和的批評，但一半以上的受訪者讚賞他的能力、友善，以及對海藻的一往情深。宋思明在劇中有一個撈錢大計，濫用他的權力，與房地產發展商合作，累積財富，操控海外上市公司等等，但在訪問中很少有受訪者提及，甚至有人根本沒注意。簡言之，在他們的閱讀裡，道德說辭或符碼並不是主導的。同時，也沒有受訪者對宋思明及海藻的戀情有太多投入。他們只怪宋沒有妥善處理他的工作、生意、家庭及婚外情，他們甚至想像

自己若是宋，會如何理性地處理這一切。這個想像的戲劇世界比較不像是一個要受社會或道德批判或認同的對象，而是一個場域，讓觀眾去實驗他們的新自由主義理性。

### **遷移經驗：新自由主義空間**

問：那你覺得什麼樣的人處在社會的下層？

答：平常老百姓咯。

問：中間沒有過渡嗎？

答：以前有吧，但是現在社會流動性的問題，上不去。

問：那你覺得你自己處在一個什麼階層呢？

答：平常老百姓咯。

問：在未來你覺得你的社會階層會不會向上發展呢？

答：應該是有的，有希望。

問：那會不會往下掉呢？

答：可能性不大。

(WW, 女性, 27 歲, 2011 年在大學畢業, 她在一家醫院當初級護)

在受訪者中只有幾位認為自己是中產階級，大部份也只覺得自己是中低階級，然而，他們有很強的向上社會流動渴望，認為自己會一步一步地往上爬，即使他們對整體社會流動狀況及經濟前景並不樂觀。WW 的說法聽起來有點自相矛盾，

對自己未來前途的樂觀，與他們對社會現實的悲觀，兩者可以並存，這在訪談中處處可見。但是，如果我們把他們談及的現實與他們自己在現實的經驗區別過來，一切便會較容易明白。儘管他們意識到社會制度的不公、腐敗及經濟不平等，《蝸居》及其他媒體報導與刻劃的暗淡的社會現實，這些受過高等教育的年青人會保持距離，他們的認知視野與他們的自我處境的感知之間，存在著鴻溝，這並非說明他們無法理解自己的階級處境，而是說明他們如何順從當代中國的新自由主義秩序。

所有受訪者並不視《蝸居》的負面問題是廣州、上海等大城市獨有的，相反，他們覺得像廣州這樣的大城市的就業市場活躍，有競爭力，這些問題好像看起來並不那麼嚴重，或不值得他們過份擔心。相反，他們不願回老家，並把家鄉描繪成一個充滿制肘的地方，而擁抱大都會生活，視之為通往自由之路。他們把自己置放在一個想像的國家地景之中，這個國家充滿地域及城鄉的差距。例如，YC 在他的家鄉看不到希望，就算他的黨員身份亦幫不了他多少。

問：為甚麼你不回去考公務員？

答：因為那時候已經錯過了省考的時分。而且在河南 XX 當公務員收入比較低，……廣州這邊發達地方……我不貪污，一樣可以拿到很不錯的工作。像我們那邊，你不貪污就很難得到一個很好的工作。……那些（廣州的）企業裡的工作還是比較好找，考公務員還是比較難的，還要碰運



氣。所以，我就不敢搏嘛！其實，那時候內心裡也還沒做好要工作的準備。

(YC, 男, 23 歲, 2011 年大學畢業, 在一家銀行當銷售員)

問：你以後是打算留在廣州？有沒有想過其他城市？

答：是的，珠三角都有考慮過。(那有沒想過回家裡那邊發展？)沒有，

主觀因素比較大，首先是家族勢力比較小，我們那邊的潛規則是：要麼

是當官的，要麼有錢，你才能混得比較好；第二個那邊的投資機會不多；

第三個是即便你做了面臨許多的苛捐雜稅，甚至黑社會的威脅。

(CL)

以上兩位受訪者並沒有天真地以為廣州沒有腐敗，他們這樣說是關乎於個人經驗，多於一般的認知。他們由發展水平較低的地方遷移到廣州的經驗，是一個重要背景，讓我們理解，他們為何建構家鄉為一個相對於廣州來說的「傳統社會」：那裡充滿官僚繁瑣的程序、裙帶關係、貪污腐化等等，與廣州等中心城市的競爭性市場及經濟機會形成強烈對比。廣州的面積、人口數量及經濟規模大及複雜，足以讓一位畢業不久的年青人可以不用涉足太多政府機關的程序，不會直接碰上官商勾結。在他們遷移經驗裡，蘊含了一個地區差別的結構，促成一個新自由主義空間，使個人尋找各種可能。

CP 的故事是個值得一談的例子。她生於 1980 年代末，出生地是湖北省武漢附近的農村，她自小便被中小學老師視為優秀學生。在高考前，她期望考進武漢大學，她結果考出全校最高分數，於是，她改選自己的志願為更重點的大學，最後，她考進廣州的中山大學。畢業後，她透過在東莞工作的姐姐的介紹，在當地找到一份工作，她父母也從家鄉搬過來跟她們一塊住。但是，後來她覺得東莞作為廣東的二線城市，經濟及文化發展落後，於是，她還搬回來廣州，透過考試進入了一家銀行工作。當我們訪問她時，她正準備考取其他與銀行相關的專業資格。在她的人生中，總是考試的勝者，她對自己的才能充滿信心，也相信自己能取得向上流動的機會。

有趣的是，儘管她認為電視劇相當「反映現實」，但她還是認為，《蝸居》的劇情有點誇張。她並不認為房價高漲得那麼嚴重，因為，她相信，她能夠在幾年之內與自己的男友存夠 60 萬人民幣的首付，也並不認為自己會成為房奴，要為付房貸犧牲體面的生活。但是，我實在懷疑她是否低估了房價問題的嚴重性，因為，她的月薪只有 6,000 元人民幣，而房價卻持續上升。儘管銀行的工作她才上班不久，但她肯定是相信，自己的薪金會漲，職位上也會得到晉升。

受訪者準備及應考各種考試，尤其是高考，在塑造他們的遷移經驗及主體有很重要的作用。每一位大學生在考場上互相競爭，按分數高低，獲得分配不同位置，而且，競爭性考試在畢業後並不會停下來，尤其是在廣州這樣的中心性城市。當

他們被專業機構或大公司聘用後，他們會馬上準備其他專業資格考試。功績主義（meritocracy）作為神話或現實，塑造了他們的尋求階級晉升的經驗。對他們來說，各類不同等級的考試，都集中在這些大城市，漸漸培養了他們自我管理及自我敦促（self-managing and self-enalbing）的主體，這個主體喚起了現實與幻像，在裡面人們自由地尋找他們的成功與快樂，至於那個令人沮喪的現實仿如只是媒體的景觀。

### 結論：現實的兩個維度

戴維斯（Mike Davis）在評論艾萊（James Ellroy）關於洛杉磯的黑色小說時說：

「極度浸淫在腐敗之中，不再能令人產生激憤，甚至是興趣」（Davis 1990: 45），社會學家及文化評論人早已注意，日益急劇的揭示及暴露於城市黑暗之中，冷漠自然而生。在《蝸居》這個個案中，「極度浸淫在腐敗之中」對進入城市的大學畢業生來說，意味著中國新自由主義現實的兩個向度。第一個是向度，我會修改王愛華及張鵬的「遠端社會主義」——國家對進取自我的打造以遙距的方法進行規管，提出「遠端資本主義」，即在當代中國裡新自由主義邏輯的運用，有賴於把權貴資本主義的現實外化成異化的現實，從而製造空間來實踐新自由主體性。

異化的現實「以某種方法被注意，但不是被批判攻擊」（Fisher 2009: 11）。本文的受訪者選擇享受一種大都會生活方式，標榜競爭爭取成功及自由，以解除家鄉的束縛。儘管他們完全明白，城市居民所受的壓力，但他們把自己從中國式的

國家資本主義黑暗現實中異化抽離出來。王愛華及張鸞指出，新自由主義思維令社會主義 - 威權統治看起來很遙遠 ( Ong and Li, 2009: 8 )，而我研究發現，當代中國的資本主義發展，亦使中國國家資本主義的掠奪過程保持在一個論述及存有論的距離，這個「遠端資本主義」 ( capitalism from afar ) 是一個缺乏利益相關感覺、道德關注及同情的現實。

對他們來說，這個媒體中介的現實，反而與他們的家鄉連繫起來，而不是他們當下生活及打拼的大城市。在廣州這樣的中國核心城市裡，他們想像自己為大都會的主體，總是看著城市生活的光明面，實踐自我激勵 / 管理的技術。同時，這個新自由主義主體是深深嵌入在國家空間裡不均衡的地景結構之中，內裡有兩個真實 - 想像的世界：內陸 / 家鄉世界，在這個世界裡，權勢與威望來自政治權力及財富；另一個世界是中心城市的世界，榮辱取決於個人在工作及商品市場中的努力。

## **Moral Indifference and Capitalism from Afar: An Audience Research on *Woju***

IP lam Chong

### **Preamble**

Since the early 1990s, social unrest has spawned in regional cities, small towns and rural villages along with the breathless pace of market reforms, predatory nature of local cadres and continuity of the authoritarian state. However the university students and graduates, mostly inhabiting in and flooding to central cities, remain politically calm compared to their counterparts

who led a nationwide protest in 1989. While political crackdown and tight control since the 1990s might nip in the bud of student movement, the urban educated youth's conformity to the state-led process of neoliberalization is yet to be explained. While one may study the institutional and structural constraint imposed on them, this paper provides an account at the individual level. Although in recent years, the popularity of the catchwords of "woju" (poor and shabby dwelling) and "yizu" (Ant Tribe) attests to the increasingly population of poor educated youth in big cities, class polarization and economic grievances seem not to result in any revival of youth radicalism. In what ways do the educated youth position themselves and conform to the order of urban China characteristic of inequalities and corruption? Despite educated youth's relative compliance with the new order, political control and censorship, one could easily identify the increasing social discontent in the media in recent years. It is worthwhile to explore their reception of the media coverage and representation of social tensions.

This paper is based on the interviews conducted by having conversation with the informants on their reception of the TV drama series of *Woju*, which began airing in July 2009 and became a big hit. The story revolves around two college-graduate sisters suffering from soaring urban housing prices and touches upon various topics such as economic inequalities, corruption, eviction, extra-marital affairs, etc. The major plot of the drama is the affair between Song Siming, an official, and Haizao, a young college graduate. In my interview, it is found that despite their knowledge of the injustices of the current system, educated urban youth largely accepted the status quo with aspiration for class mobility. I argue that their social conformity was less derived from their vested interest in Chinese capitalism than their class and regional positionings in the neoliberal reality. There are two dimensions of the reality they encounter with. The first one is the alienated reality featuring state-capitalist imperatives and constraints from which the

educated urban youth tried hard to distance themselves. Their longing and aspiration for upward mobility, permeated with their migratory experience from the hinterland to coastal provinces or rural to urban, lie with the second dimension of Chinese neoliberalism. In this light, regional disparity, presumably the cause of grievances or even social unrest, is paradoxically lived as a path toward freedom beyond what was perceived, imagined and portrayed as the constraints of the socialist “past” and the current crony-capitalism in their hometowns. In their negotiation with neoliberal realities, they positioned their class identity in regional terms, thereby imagining their citizenship in a market society.

This paper focuses on the college graduates who migrate to Guangzhou, usually from less developed areas of the country, for analyzing their class and regional positioning in one of the frontline cities of Chinese neoliberalism. Since 2010, with the help of three students of Sun Yat-sen University, I successfully interviewed 30 college graduates aged between 23-31.

### **Neoliberalism and neoliberal subject**

Marxists tend to use the term “neoliberalism” to characterize a wide range of politico-economic transformations, from economic globalization, privatization to the retreat of the states from their welfare programs. According to their theoretical paradigms, individuals, social organizations and governments have been forced to adopt the neoliberal rationality of enterprising, profit-pursuing and competing with others. Yet, David Harvey, among the Marxists, does not take the ideologues of neoliberal policies at their words (Harvey 2005). Instead he reminds us of the gap between capitalist practices and ideological justifications. In light of Harvey’s more sophisticated historical account of neoliberalism, one has to analyze and theorize neoliberalism from below, i.e. the local logics of neoliberal practices.

Recent work on neoliberalism further scrutinizes the interaction between capitalist development, governance and subjectivity, rather than sees it as a top-down process of imposing a set of economic ideology on everyone. It is understood as either a set of governing techniques or systematic programs of enabling individual citizens to think, talk and practice according to entrepreneurial choices in all aspects of life (Rose 1999; Brown 2005). In order to develop a more robust framework for delineating the historical and local paths of neoliberalism in the non-western contexts, Aihwa Ong, defining neoliberalism as a mode of governing/self-governing through freedom, draws our attention to the fact that it is neither uniformly applied to all groups of people nor fully adopted without modification by everyone. Given its western origins, the global form of neoliberalism disseminates itself through its interaction with situated institutions and practices, particularly in post-socialist countries whose regimes had long stuck to or pay lip service to anti-western doctrines and sentiment. Ong proposes to use the concept of “exception” to analyze the interplay between neoliberalism as exception and the exceptions to it (Ong 2007, 2006).

Following Ong’s reminder of exception at the local level, Lisa Rofel identifies multiple forms of neoliberal/postsocialist subjects of desire in various sites of Chinese public culture. She notices that popular culture in contemporary China, a new arena not or less designed for official propaganda, has become the field in which people learn “the art of longing or desiring” for freedom by articulating their personal experience with national re-imagining. While she does not generalize from her ethnographic writings into an overall argument for Chinese postsocialist subject, she highlights China’s socialist past as the key field in which a wide variety of individuals, social groups and the state articulate their desiring subjects for freedom in a neoliberal as well as postsocialist world (Rofel 2007: 25).

Inspired by Ong and Rofel, I take Chinese migrant educated youth as a desiring subject. To put it in literary terms, they are the “threshold figures”, referring to those who position themselves and negotiate between personal domain and public domain in the drama as well as the reality (Waters 2001: p. 128). What I am interested in is the social reality unfolding itself by opening up the boundaries of personal domain to the intrusions from the dominant forces outside. In this light, the study of televisual text and its reception could shed some light on this unfolding process in which viewing practices involves moral sensibilities and cognitive horizon of the social reality. Henceforth, in my analysis of *Woju* and the audience’ reception, I see them neither as closed texts nor a particular mode of thinking. Instead I specify the discursive process through which people told us of the relevance or irrelevance of the characters, plots and themes to their quotidian lives in the city.

### **TV and ideology in Post-reform China**

In the beginning years of the economic reform, Chinese popular culture, such as songs, movies and TV serials, came from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West. However national popular icons and genres gradually emerged from within China, particularly after the crackdown on the Beijing student movements in 1989. The Chinese communist regime not only ended the dissident voices but also the cultural fever and the enlightenment movement led by intellectuals in the 1980s. Deng Xiaoping’s firm stand on continuing economic reform, rather than going back to the Mao’s period, resulted in full-fledged capitalist development across the country. Along with the rapid process of marketization in various economic sectors, the mushrooming culture industry largely took over the roles of intellectual elite and party apparatus to shape ordinary people’s tastes in culture, feeling, sentiments and even ideology. Among various cultural forms, TV serials had quickly become



the most popular one targeting the general public largely because of the skyrocketing rate of TV set ownership since the 1990s.

TV serials, however, are not simply treated by scholars as a kind of cultural commodity for entertainment. Their political functions and ideological effects have been puzzling the students of contemporary Chinese culture. For example, *Yearning* (Kewang), a dramatic serial produced shortly after the Tiananmen incident, gripped the entire nation. The party propaganda apparatus saw it as an effective tool to distance the public from political discontent and action (Lu 2001: p. 207-208; Zha 1995). As Lisa Rofel noted, the rise of TV serial in post-Tiananmen China marks a new site of ideology in which the constitution of national subjects and possible oppositions took place simultaneously (Rofel 1994). For instance, Ying Zhu's discourse analysis drew our attention to the relationship between the making of new authoritarian state, conservative intellectuals and the "clean official genre", dynastic as well as contemporary dramas (Zhu 2008: Chapter 2). Instead of seeing TV culture as a vehicle for packaged nationalism, Sheldon H. Lu offered a complicated framework for understanding the identity formation in TV serials which foregrounded the transnational, class, gender and libidinal dynamics involved in identity formation. His psychoanalytical approach identified a male and entrepreneurial subjectivity in China's encounters with transnational and deterritorialized forces (Lu 2001: Chapter 10). The studies on contemporary Chinese TV serials have increasingly shifted to exploring the possible and fluid boundaries of national identity. And its implications for the party-state projects need to be analyzed from diverse perceptions, imaginaries, passions and sentiments.

To put it simply, the objective of the study of TV serial is to take account of the political process of national imagining. It has less to do with the official ideology implicit in the textual structure than the real-fictional world of TV

dramas in which the producer, characters and audience imagine, position and construct their different subjectivities. In the case of contemporary drama such as *Woju*, characterized by realist depiction, social relevancy and even social criticism, viewing experience, particularly for the urban educated youth, embodies not only the desires set loose by capitalist urbanism, but also class and gender positionings. It provided an imagined world in which viewers view and make sense of themselves as members of a modernizing country while the melodrama portrayed their life situations in fiction.

What makes *Woju* special is that the melodramatic stories and characters found their ways in the problems such as unaffordable housing price, eviction, class inequalities, mistress (xiaosan) and corruption, facing the lower and middle class in cities. Instead of making the myth of “clean official”, it foregrounded the protagonists of “corrupt official” and his mistress, around whom the melodrama unfolded itself. The moral controversies implicit in this narrative structure invite audience’s multiple interpretation, affective investment and moral thinking. Their reception, as an ideological process, resides in the fictional world as well as their living world, both contributing to the imagined community of urban China.

The story of *Woju*, set in the real situation of young college graduates who are new to big city, trafficked in icons for national identification largely defined by China’s modernization initiated by Deng Xiaoping’s economic reform. The opening episodes of *Woju* created a seductive space, stirring viewers’ desire to make claims on the meanings of the key protagonists’ actions. However, unlike most contemporary TV dramas, it is by no means a success story, providing an enterprising character, usually men, for viewers’ identification (Lu 2001: pp. 220-225). Neither is it a genre of “speaking bitterness”, popular in Mao’s China and the early years of economic reform, for the oppressed groups to express their sufferings in the past and to embrace

the status quo and the bright future brought by the party (Rofel 1994: p. 707). Instead, the melodrama of *Woju* provided a crucible of ambivalence that derived from viewers' urban experience which was narrated around the catchword "Woju", literally referring to the shabby and crowded home of young migrants in the city. The narrative neither revolved around heroic figures nor ended at upholding any character as the representative figure for the nation. Although the ending seems to resolve all melodramatic conflicts, there is a strong sense of uncertainty on whether the problems facing the disadvantaged groups of urban residents come to the end. For example, the corrupt official Song Siming was arrested and got killed in car accident, no character such as clean official or narrative trope of family union was foregrounded. The old mother of the "nail house" family got killed by a collapsed building during eviction. Although her family received a large sum of hush money, it is far from a comfort of feeling for most viewers. Few viewers would be convinced by the ending that all social problems and moral dilemmas could be mitigated, not to mention being solved.

In other words, given the ambivalence and the rich signification, the meanings of this TV serial could not be determined simply by reducing the plots to confirmation of official ideology or subversive codes. What really matters is how the viewers engaged in or distracted from reading the melodramatic plots, romances, moral dilemmas and critical content. Their readings not only have something to do with their socio-economic conditions, but also involves their perception of and positioning in Chinese urban modernity. With focus on the young migrant college graduates, this study attempts to delineate this ideological process by identifying the patterns of the audience's responses.

**Social reality: To be seen rather than to be lived**

*Woju* is fraught with moral and social complexity. Strictly speaking, the informants did not reach consensus on their judgement of all characters and plots. However all of them saw it a reflection of social reality (*xianshi*), a reality they knew so well through media and the Internet that they find no surprise in it.

Q: You had watched *Woju*?

A: Last year I watched a couple of episodes. Sometimes I watched alone. Sometimes with my classmates. (Q: In what channel?) Internet. I finished eight to nine episodes.

Q: Why hadn't you finished all?

A: First of all, it is a waste of time. Second, after watching several episodes, I largely know what will happen. Third, there is a pessimistic sentiment in it. Coming face to face with the bloody reality, how could I have any motivation to work hard and struggle? I probably want to escape from it.

(CL, male, aged 25, graduated from university in 2010. He worked as a sales representative in an insurance company)

Not only did CL find not necessary to waste time on watching all episodes, but also he felt reluctant to face with the reality depicted by it. CL was a poor student from a less developed area of Guangdong. He worked very hard on making money for his living and tuition fees. During the interview, he occasionally complained about various discriminations against poor student graduating from a low-ranking university. However he always kept hopes for a better tomorrow. He enjoyed sharing with us his plan of running his own business in the future.

While some informants like CL consciously avoid the bad feeling caused by the gloomy reality and held on hope for a bright future, some took the darkside of the world as a given reality fully represented by media, yet not much personal experience involved.

Somehow *Woju* reflects some problems of reality. They are depicted in a quite realist way... .. I don't have much direct experience about them. I didn't see or experience much. They probably exist. I read news about this and that corrupt official and their mistresses. They happen all the times. I personally feel that it's quite common. Inevitable.

(LJ, female, aged 24, graduated from university in 2010. She worked as a junior secretary in a state-owned communications company)

The mediated reality, by *Woju* and media coverage of social inequalities, occupies a very special position in the informants' perception of their life world. It is either a reality not conducive to any aspiration and constructive planning for their career action, or an inevitable order, largely represented by media, functioning by itself. It is so alienated from the informants' lived experience that they preferred not to invest much affection in the televisual reality and the media incidents of corruption and social inequalities. The seemingly self-regulating reality was frequently highlighted in the interview.

I notice the news about the soaring property price. I read a popular saying on the Internet: "Housing price is on the rise under control in China". That is very classic. Housing price is constantly controlled but yet constantly increases. It is inevitable.

(LJ)

The reality was usually felt as a kind of pressure or stress. Like everyone, the characters of the drama were under the pressure of reality in one or another. It was used as a pretext for not putting much blame on them and whatever they did.

Q: Do you have any character or plot you don't like?

A: I find them acceptable. Something is even worse than them in reality. There is nothing I find acceptable. They made their choices. They also had difficulties.

Q: How about Haiping's sister? She became a mistress.

A: Yes, she is a mistress. But I don't feel any need to judge her. It is acceptable.

Q: Why? Don't you think she destroyed others' marriage?

A: To certain extent, you may say so. But if my memory is right, she is forced to do it, isn't she? I don't remember exactly. She should be under some pressures.

(JY, female, graduated from university in 2007. She worked in the accounting department of a private company.)

The primary identification my informants found in *Woju* is a subject position persistently in stress. It may work through a weak sense of sympathy while a significant portion of informants adopted a calculative reasoning to evaluate the characters and their decisions, particularly in the case of Song: I feel that their affair (between Haizao and Song Siming) is only a part of their life. The biggest mistake is that they wanted to keep the baby. Their affair already happened. It is something you could not control. It is fine to enjoy the process... .. But you should end it whenever it should be ended. Song is brainless. He wants to keep Haizao for life. He is so old. How could he provide her with happiness? They had relationship and enjoyed it. That's enough. He should have controlled his passion. It is like investment in stock market. When the price goes up to a certain level, one should take profit at the right time. (ZW, aged 25, graduated from university in 2010. He worked as human resources manager in a supermarket.)

Informants were neither able to articulate a critique of the political economic structure, nor consolidate a very clear moral judgment on the current

system. In this light, their talk of the lead character of corrupt official Song Siming was read in an intriguing way. To my surprise, they showed so little interest in making moral judgment on his wrongdoings and illegal activities:

Q: How about the cadres (those in the TV serials)? What do you think about them?

A: Song Siming as a cadre is not that bad. When people came across difficulties, he would help as much as possible. For example, when Haizao's brother-in-law was detained for the charge of stealing commercial secret, Song helped him out before Haizao told him. Another example is about his daughter. He called the police to advise them to take extra care of the public order of the S.H.E.'s concert after he knew that his daughter was going to attend. But he rejected the proposal made by the police to send a car to pick her up. It demonstrated that he was not only concerned about her daughter.

Q: But he was a corrupt official. You think Song should be counted as a good one?

A: There are so many corrupt officials. Most of them are not revealed by the media.

(ZP, female, aged 23, graduated from university in 2009. She worked as clerk in a factory)

Despite moderate criticisms of his corruption and disloyalty to his wife, more than half of my informants appreciated Song's capability, kindness and devotion to Haizao. I feel quite amazed that Song's big plan of accumulating wealth by abusing his power, collaborating with real-estate developers and controlling an overseas listed company were rarely mentioned, and sometimes even not noticed, by the informants. To put it simply, in their reading of the stories and characters, moral codes did not prevail. Likewise, no informant felt emotionally involved in the relationship between Song Siming and Haizao.

Instead they complained about Song incapable of handling his work, business, family and extra-marital affairs properly. They even imagined what they would do rationally if they were Song Siming. The imaginary world of the drama functions less as an object for socio- moral critique or identification than as a field for audience to experiment their neoliberal reasoning.

### **Migratory experience: neoliberal space**

Q: Who are the people at the social bottom?

A: Ordinary people

Q: No middle class?

A: There was. But now social mobility got stuck. It is difficult to move upward.

Q: Where are you in the social ladder?

A: Ordinary people.

Q: Do you think you could go up in the future?

A: Yes, I think so. Hopefully.

Q: Will you go down?

A: Not quite possible.

(WW, female, aged 27, graduated from university in 2011. She worked as junior nurse at hospital)

While a handful of my informants clearly positioned themselves as middle class, most of them identified themselves as lower-middle class, yet with strong aspiration of upward mobility, even though they were not quite optimistic about social mobility and economic prospect in general. WW's remarks sounds self-contradictory. The co-existence of optimism about their future prospect with their pessimistic view of the social reality prevails in my informants' talk of Woju. However It makes sense if one differentiates their talk of the reality from personal experience in reality. Despite their awareness of injustice, corruption and economic inequalities, the educated youth personally



kept distance from their gloomy impression about the social reality depicted by *Waju* and other media coverages. The gap between their cognitive horizon and their self-perception serves less the evidence of their inability to understand their class situation than sheds a light on their conformity to the neoliberal order.

All informants did not perceive the problems depicted in *Waju* as unique to the central cities such as Guangzhou and Shanghai. Instead, most informants appreciated Guangzhou's strong and competitive job market. They felt reluctant to return to their hometowns, usually portrayed as places plagued with all kinds of constraints. In contrast, they embraced their cosmopolitan life as the highway to freedom. They positioned themselves in an imagined national landscape featuring regional and urban-rural disparity. For example, YC saw no hope in his hometown even though his membership of Chinese Communist Party would probably give him some sort of advantage.

“Q: Why didn't you return to hometown to take the examination for civil servant recruitment?”

A: I missed the time of examination. And the salary of civil servant in Qingyuan, Henan province, is relatively low. Here in Guangzhou, there is no need of bribery for getting a good job. In my hometown, it's difficult not to bribe someone to get a good job... .. It is easier to get a job of company here at the time. The examination for recruitment of civil servant is difficult. You also have to try your luck. I didn't dare to take the risk. By the way, I was not yet ready to get a stable job.”

(YC, male, aged 23, graduated from university in 2011. He worked as sale in a bank)

“Q: You want to stay in Guangzhou? Or any other cities?”

A: I thought about the Pearl River Delta. (Q: Have you thought of returning home?) No. For personal reasons. I don't have a strong family background. We have some implicit rules in my hometown. In order to make a better living, you have to be either an official or a rich guy. Second, there are not many opportunities for investment. Finally, you would suffer from the unreasonably heavy burden of tax and levies. Or even threatened by gangsters."

(CL)

The informants above were not so naive that he believes corruption do not exist at all in Guangzhou. It is more about their personal experience than general knowledge. Their experience of migrating from a less developed area to Guangzhou proves to be an important background against which they constructed their hometowns as a traditional society plagued with red tape, favouritism and corruption, in contrast to the central city featuring competitive market and plenty of economic opportunities. The city of Guangzhou is large and complex enough for college graduates to avoid getting involved directly in much obstructive official routine and government-business collusion. The structure of migratory experience enables a neoliberal space in which individuals learn to long for new possibilities.

The story of CP is an illustrative example. In the late 1980s, she was born in a village close to the city of Wuhan in Hubei province. She had been highly regarded by teachers in school and studied in the highest-ranking junior and high schools. Before the university entrance examination, she expected to get admitted to Wuhan University. But later on her academic result turned out to be the highest in school. Then she looked for other higher-ranking universities. Finally with her high university entrance score, she entered the Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou. After graduation, she took up a job in Dongguan because her sister worked there and her parents moved to live with

them. However she found Dongguan, as a second-tier city of Guangdong, not economically and culturally developed enough. She moved back to Guangzhou and got a job in a bank by passing an examination. When we interviewed her, she was preparing examinations again for more professional qualification in the field of banking. As a winner of examinations all the times, she had a strong confidence in her talent to achieve social mobility.

Interestingly enough she found Woju exaggerating the housing problem even though she agreed that Woju is very realist. She did not see the soaring housing price as a serious problem for herself because she believe that she could afford the down payment of about RMB 600,000 with her and her partner's saving for several years. She did not see any chance for her to become a home mortgage slave who desperately saves money at the expense of decent life. I doubt if she under-estimated the gravity of the housing problem because her monthly wage was only about RMB 6,000 and housing price was still constantly on the rise. It is obvious that she felt confident in her pay raise and promotion in the coming years although she only got her job a couple of months before interview.

Their experience of preparing and taking various kinds of examination, especially university entrance examination, plays an important part in shaping their migration and subjectivities. Every educated youth competes with one another in examination and gets assigned to their respective positions according to score and ranking. Competitive examination would not stop after graduation from university, particularly in central cities. Once they got recruited by professional organizations or large companies, they would prepare for other examinations of professional qualification. Meritocracy, myth or reality, largely shapes their lived experience of aspiring for class mobility. For educated youth in Chinese cities, the wide variety of examinations at different levels and in diverse fields, highly concentrated in large cities, have long cultivated their

self-managing and self-enabling subjectivities who conjured up a fantasy-reality in which people act freely to achieve their success and happiness as if the frustrating reality is merely a media spectacle.

### **Concluding remarks: Two Dimensions**

“[A] supersaturation of corruption that fails any longer to outrage or even interest,” Mike Davis comments on James Ellroy’s noir fiction about Los Angeles. Davis notices the indifference enabled by increasingly explicit revelation of city’s darkness (Davis 1990: 45). Sociologists and cultural critics have long noticed the indifference enabled by increasingly explicit revelation of and exposure to city’s darkness. In the case of *Woju* and contemporary Chinese cities, the supersaturation of corruption manifested itself in migrant educated youth’s reception and reading, particularly the two opposite dimensions of China’s neoliberal reality. With regard to the first dimension, I would like to modify Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang’s concept of “socialism from afar” which refers to the state regulation of the making process of enterprising self from a distance by proposing the idea of “capitalism from afar”. The adoption of neoliberal logic in contemporary China lies with externalizing crony capitalism into an alienated reality to make room for actualizing a neoliberal subjectivity. While the alienated reality “is somehow underscored rather than undercut” (Fisher 2009: 11), my informants prefer to enjoy the cosmopolitan way of life featuring competition for success and freedom from the constraints of the hometown. Although they fully understood that city dwellers are stressful, they alienated themselves from the dark side of Chinese state-capitalism. The adoption of neoliberal reasoning has not only made socialist-authoritarian rule look afar, as argued by Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang (2009: 8), but also made the predatory process of Chinese state capitalism at an ontological and discursive distance. It is a reality, “capitalism from afar”, deprived of interest, moral concern and sympathy

For these educated urban youth, this mediated reality is associated with their hometown from which they departed rather than the big cities in which they live and work hard. In the central cities of China such as Guangzhou, they imagine themselves as cosmopolitan subjects, i.e. always looking on the bright side of urban life and practicing self-enabling/ managing techniques. There is one more thing quite unique to contemporary China. This neoliberal subject is firmly situated in an uneven landscape of national space, featuring two real-imagined worlds: the world of hinterland/ hometown in which prestige rests on political power and wealth, and the world of central cities in which prestige rests on individual effort in the job and commodity markets.

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