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# Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place

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## Economic Hybridity, Bataille, and Ritual Expenditure<sup>1</sup>

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by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang

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This article takes up J. K. Gibson-Graham's call for a theoretical move away from a model of monolithic global capitalism and notions of one-way "penetration" of capitalism. The notion of "economic hybridity" (derived from Bakhtin's writing on linguistic hybridity) is proposed as an alternative to the Marxist concept of "articulation of modes of production" to account for the coming together of economic logics and practices from different epochs and cultural histories. The ethnography that sustains this discussion addresses the significance of popular religious revival in rural Wenzhou, on the southeast coast of China, and its role in the postsocialist market economy. Borrowing from Georges Bataille's notion of "ritual expenditure" and from early Baudrillard on symbolic economies, the case study shows that rural Wenzhou's ritual economy harbors an archaic economic logic which is subversive of capitalist, state socialist, and developmental-state principles. The older strains of an alternative economic logic in this hybrid are shown not as complementing, adapting to, or serving capitalism's expansion but as contesting it and re-channeling its movement toward other ends.

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*Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historical organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it.*

KARL MARX, *The Grundrisse* (1857)

At the dawn of the 21st century, in the rural areas and small towns of Wenzhou, in coastal southeastern China, people are experiencing the interweaving of a centralized state socialist economy, transnational capitalism, a revitalized premodern market economy based on household production, and a ritual economy. In describing their situation here, I hope to move the analysis of capitalism in a new theoretical direction—recognizing what Marx himself detected, that "unconquered remnants" of earlier social formations are "carried along" within a seemingly capitalist structure and "have developed explicit significance within it" (1973:105). At issue is not simply that ethnographic writing on the economy must be reflexive (Clifford and Marcus 1986), take into account the cultural dimensions, and recognize a local economy's embeddedness in larger global systems (Marcus and Fischer 1986:77–110; Blim 1996). Rather, we must also strive to describe the *hybridity of economies*, a seldom explored strategy in the critique of modern hegemonic forces such as capitalism and state economies. The analysis here concurs with J. K. Gibson-Graham's (1996) assertion that economic formations around the world today, including the West, are composed of both capitalist and noncapitalist forms, and the task before us is to retrieve from the margins the conceptual architectures which will make the latter more visible. The suggestion is that indigenous economies are not always plowed under with the introduction of capitalism but may even experience renewal and pose a challenge to capitalist principles, stimulating us to rethink existing critiques of capitalism.

Why coin the term *economic hybridity*? Because, as Gibson-Graham (1996) makes clear, the trope of global capitalist penetration has become an all too powerful and unquestioned model for understanding the absorption of diverse socioeconomic systems into a global economy. An underlying sexual subtext of male penetration and

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the rape and sexual conquest of the Other, based on a heterosexual protocol of male dominance and the passive female receptor and victim, can be detected here. An alternative model of the gay male body as both penetrator and penetrated (Grosz 1994) enables us to envision economic encounters in modernity as a process of *mutual*, albeit not necessarily equal, penetration. The notion of hybridity (Young 1995)<sup>2</sup> expresses this mutuality in that an organic hybrid will always bear the physical traces of the heterogeneous elements of which it consists, thus presenting a distinctively different form from its progenitors.

The integration and fusion within organic structure which is encapsulated in the notion of hybridity recommends itself over the Marxist notion of the “articulation of modes of production,” wherein modes are presented as more or less intact, distinct, and separate (Wolpe 1978). In articulation theory, economic differences are seen mainly in terms of differences between formations or modes or stages of production, obscuring the fact that each formation carries within it the economic logics and impulses of diverse epochs. This creates certain difficulties in accounting for the frequency with which the *forces* of production introduced by capitalism may be delinked from its *relations* of production and attached to noncapitalist or native relations of production. It is difficult to explain how capitalist elements can be embedded in political schemes and logics different from the social institutions of the capitalist West, such as those of what Chalmers Johnson and Manuel Castells have called the “Asian developmental states,” where the promotion of economic growth serves the nation-state’s sovereignty and strength (Castells 1998). Finally, articulation theory gives priority to *production* as the axis of an economic formation and neglects the possibility that while relations of production may conform to capitalist features, *consumption* may take a noncapitalist form. In approaching noncapitalist formations, and having experienced over two centuries of capitalist production and exploitation of natural “resources” and depletion of the natural environment, other dimensions such as *consumption* and *distribution* may now need to be stressed.

While emphasis on reproduction may be continuing in a heterosexist vein (Young 1995:25), notions of hybridity do have the merit of moving the discussion historically from the age of Western colonialism, in which tropes of unidirectional penetration are often mired, to the postcolonial generation, the offspring of the union of capitalism with native forms of economy. This article in fact deals with an even later generation which is both postcolonial and postsocialist. As an anticolonial response, state socialism in China (1949–79) was itself a

2. Robert Young (1995) eloquently traces how the notion of hybridity in modern biology became implicated in 19th-century Western racist discourse warning against racial miscegenation. This was an expression of unease over capitalist imperialism’s sexual encounters with other races. There is the danger in the current theoretical fascination with notions of cultural hybridity of a failure to detach ourselves from that discourse. I thank Kum-kum Bhavnani for bringing this book to my attention.

hybrid economy which combined the rational productivist ethos and disciplinary labor mobilization of both capitalism and Stalinism and an imperial Chinese state economy of centralized administration, state monopolies, and *corvée* labor. In the 1980s and ’90s in Wenzhou, both Chinese and Western scholars have paid attention only to Wenzhou’s flourishing market economy, ignoring the return of a *nonprofit ritual economy* which will be the focus of our inquiry here.

The past two decades have seen dramatic industrialization in rural Wenzhou. Already in 1993 I was told that most peasants spent only one week of the year working in the fields, plowing, sowing, and harvesting their “responsibility fields” (*zerentian*) of 1–1.5 *mou* per family to pay the government grain tax. This is a society of “ex-peasants” who have kept their peasant culture alive even while their material livelihoods have shifted to small family-run industries.<sup>3</sup> The astounding economic growth here has earned Wenzhou a national reputation. Its particular configuration of blossoming commodity and labor markets, astute private entrepreneurs, dynamic household industries, private- and community-financed town constructions (Yang 1994b), and commercial expansion across the nation soon earned it a distinct title coined by Chinese economists and sociologists: “the Wenzhou model” (*Wenzhou muoshi*), which became a household word (Fei 1992, 1997; Li and Zhen 1991; A. Liu 1992; Y. Liu 1992; Zhu 1994).

Two processes of rapid economic development can be detected in Wenzhou. First a process of what Marx and contemporary Chinese call “primitive accumulation” (*yuanshi jilei*), in which rural capital is built up from humble beginnings through wage labor and a privatized market economy of long-distance trade, was initiated by peasants themselves as early as the latter half of the 1970s, before the state legalized decollectivization and market forces in 1979. The modest capital accumulation produced small household rural industries in the 1980s, some of which acquired further capital to expand or combine into joint-stock cooperative enterprises (*gufen hezi qiye*) after 1987 (Li and Zhen 1991). Second, since the 1980s there has been a movement of external capital into the area centered in Wenzhou City, where there is an encounter between local state enterprises and a growing private entrepreneurial class, on the one hand, and investments from overseas Chinese capital, on the other.

Rural Wenzhou defies both the Weberian prediction that industrial modernity leads to rationalization and the assumption that the introduction of global capital into

3. Many families simply hired specialized households or migrant laborers to work their fields, paying them 200 yuan per *mou* and even giving them the harvested rice. From 1978 to 1989, Wenzhou’s industrial output increased nine times (A. Liu 1992:698–99); the worth of nonagricultural production as a percentage of total output rose from 31% in 1980 to 67% in 1985, and Wenzhou peasants’ average income jumped from being one of the lowest in the nation to 50% above the national average in 1989 (A. Liu 1992:698–99). By 1996, of the total agricultural and industrial output values, agriculture provided only 7.5% to industry’s 92.5% (Want Qibei 1997: 53, 91).

an area means the decline of traditional culture. Elsewhere in China, the admiration for Wenzhou's material prosperity has been accompanied by a mixture of bewilderment by and contempt for its squandering of the newfound wealth on "religious superstition" (*zongjiao mixin*) and ancestor worship. The following ethnographic vignettes illustrate an important clash in economic logics and rationalities.

At a small temple festival in Xuan Ling Temple in Taoling Township in 1998,<sup>4</sup> I chatted with a volunteer musician between his performances on his *er-hu*, a two-stringed instrument that emits a heavenly sound evoking the lonely barren slopes of the Chinese northwest. He pointed proudly at the photos on the temple walls that he had shot as the designated photographer at the local dragon boat exercises during the Duan Wu Festival held on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar in 1991. I asked him why the dragon boat rowing had been discontinued in some areas since then, expecting him to reply that it was because of the polluted waterways. Instead, he said that it was not permitted by the government because it could lead to conflict. I said that people had told me that these days dragon boat rowing no longer involved any racing or competition as in the old days before 1949, the boats now representing not lineages but whole villages. He replied that despite this there was the danger of fights' breaking out because the boats were said to convey a mysterious force that propelled a group of people forward. The villagers and kin of the rowers gave money and gifts to support the boats—to provide each with its elaborate uniforms and equipment, drums, and oars—and it was customary for kin to give the rowers expensive gifts for their houses. Thus competition for prestige still found an outlet. People vied with each other with regard to which group had received more money for better uniforms, more beautiful boats, and so forth, he said, and "this leads to a lot of waste of money, and there is a danger of an outbreak of hostilities and violence."

Paper money, made of gold-colored paper folded into the shape of traditional Chinese gold ingots, is burned in rural Wenzhou temples for the gods on a regular basis and also for the gods' birthdays, for them to use in the other world. It is also burned when a person or family is making a special request of a god at the temple—begging for help in sickness, to pass an exam, or to succeed in business. A different form of paper money is also burned at funerals and at special ancestor events such as the Qing Ming Festival, lineage rituals, and ancestor birthdays. There are also stories of wealthy families' burning real money at funerals. I heard of a case in Qingtian County in Wenzhou in the early 1990s in which the son of an overseas Chinese who had died spent an incredible 1.5 million yuan on his father's funeral.<sup>5</sup> He

gave 20 yuan to everyone who attended the funeral and burned an untold number of 100-yuan bills. His family even hired a man to keep vigil by the grave for 500 yuan a month. The police raided the event and put a stop to the festivities. There is still an aura of state and social disapproval of extravagant expenditures and banqueting at funerals, and officials constantly ask people to scale down their funerals and weddings.

Also burned at Wenzhou funerals are paper replicas of modern luxury consumer goods such as televisions, refrigerators, houses, cars, cameras, and video compact disc players. A man whose family makes these things as a business told me that the burning of these items is done discreetly and generally occurs at night. Although people say they burn these for the use of the deceased in the other world, one wonders if burning them might also represent a repressed urge to burn the real things in a display of ritual excess and disregard of earthly goods for family honor if only family budgets and officialdom permitted.

These stories about Wenzhou people burning real money circulate not only in Wenzhou but across the country, and they are generally met with outrage by people in other parts of China at the thought of such waste (*langfei*) and stupidity (*yüchun*). Indeed, in 1992 I heard another story about the burning of real money in Wenzhou from a friend in the city of Xi'an, over a thousand miles away, who shook his head in disapproval: "This is an example of Wenzhou people's ignorance (*yümei*)." At a dinner with another urban friend in the giant city of Chongqing in 1998, she observed that "Wenzhou people are so wealthy, but because they are uneducated, they do not know how to spend their money properly." She remembers that a national debate even started in newspapers two years ago over whether the burning of real money constituted a crime and should be punished.

Since Wenzhou is not operating under the dire colonial and exploitative conditions of the Colombian peasantry or the Bolivian tin miners described by Michael Taussig (1980), we detect no fear or hatred of the immorality of the money economy or demonizing of commodity fetishism in this entrepreneurial culture. There is another attitude here, equally challenging to capital accumulation: wealth can be made, but one must also display the generosity and bravado to squander it in the community for prestige. Instead of stories of the "baptism of money" and pacts with the Devil for illegitimate gain, there are rituals of the disdain and destruction of hard-earned exchange value *and* use value: money is burned and food and goods are given away in exaggerated displays.<sup>6</sup> In both these vignettes, excessive ritual expenditure is regarded by the state and by most urban Chinese today as an example of backwardness (*luoho*) and economic ir-

4. Most local place-names in this article are pseudonyms.

5. Throughout most of the 1990s, the exchange rate hovered around 8 yuan to a dollar.

6. My analysis of the burning of money for the dead differs from Hill Gates's symbolic and functionalist view of it as a reflection and confirmation of a society of "petty capitalist economy" which structures the other world just like the one the deceased is leaving, a world where money is needed for investment and to buy off the gods/officials (Gates 1989).

rationality. Wealth is seen as being withdrawn from legitimate uses (personal savings, capital accumulation to expand production, state appropriations) and expended in “useless” ways: superstitious accumulation of symbolic capital in the spiritual world and excesses of indulgent consumption in this world. In addition, there is also a perception (on the part of both critics and participants) that there is something dangerous about ritual extravagance and an uneasiness about ritual gatherings and performances as potentially explosive and in need of being contained and restrained. The irony of these fears of Wenzhou’s ritual excess and economic irrationality is that this area is one of the most prosperous and developed rural areas in China and home to a very entrepreneurial local culture. The opposition between ritual and religion, on the one hand, and economic development, on the other, does not hold in rural Wenzhou. The genealogy of this opposition, so pervasive in both Chinese official and popular discourse today, can be traced to the introduction of the Western Enlightenment into China at the end of the 19th century,<sup>7</sup> although Talal Asad (1993) has attributed the ontological distinction between “religion” and domains such as “politics” and “economy” to Christian cosmology itself. This binary conceptual structure, predicated on each category’s mutual exclusiveness, cannot account for the veritable explosion of religious, kinship, and ritual activity and organizations (hitherto labeled “feudal” [*fengjian*]) that has accompanied economic development in the 1980s and ’90s (Yang 1994b, 2000). Local funds from the market economy have enabled lineages to reassemble their memberships, restore or build ancestor halls, revive ancient ancestor sacrificial ceremonies, and redraft their genealogies. Deity temples to countless gods and goddesses dot the countryside and enliven community life with their temple festivals and operas, while Daoist and Buddhist temples and monasteries vie with each other for ritual authority, donations, and membership. No less impressive is the emergence of Catholic and Protestant churches like spring bamboo shoots in every township and village, with virtually no Western missionary activity, which is banned by the state. Popular spending has reinvigorated the traditional festival calendar, and Chinese New Year’s, the Duan Wu Dragon Boat Festival, the Qing Ming Festival, the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, and others are joyous community events planned and organized by local elders which dwarf in significance the national state holidays. Life-cycle ritual events such as weddings, funerals, and birth and house-building celebrations have all been energized and are now subject to

7. See my discussion of how a Western evolutionary discourse led to the progressive destruction of ritual culture, popular religion, and local autonomy by the modernizing forces of first the intelligentsia and then the state in the 20th century in Wenzhou (Yang 1996).

the inflation of competitive communal feasting and tomb building.<sup>8</sup>

This ritual economy cannot be seen merely as the *result* of economic development, for ritual life has also *fueled* economic growth (it often provides the organizational apparatus, site, and motivation for economic activity) and *constrained and channeled* it through the deployment of ritual consumption against capital accumulation. Thus, to understand the Chinese peasant economy we must widen the frame of our analysis to see how economy and production are part of the ritual and religious system. Here I am following a line of thinking pursued by Steven Sangren (1987: 106–26), Wang Mingming (1995:34–39), Kenneth Dean (1998), and Stephan Feuchtwang (1992:84), who have all noted that the space of Chinese ritual and religious practice, which includes the space of territorial deity cults, festival trajectories, and pilgrimage centers, is not isomorphic with and cannot be subsumed under the hierarchy of economic central places and market towns as William Skinner’s (1964–65) rational economic models assume. There is an autonomy of the ritual dimension, whose structures inform economic practice, and we cannot understand many forms of economic hybridity without taking ritual and religion into account.

On a comparative note, the (re)introduction of the market economy in Wenzhou, leading to the renewal and expansion of traditional ritual culture rather than its decline, is reminiscent of another historical encounter, that between the Kwakwaka’wakw<sup>9</sup> Native Americans of Vancouver Island and early Western capitalism on the Northwest Coast in the 19th century. The integration of the Kwakwaka’wakw into the wage labor and entrepreneurial activities of the area’s fishing, mining, fur, and timber industries did not compromise the native economic logic of the proper ends for the accumulation of wealth and the proper form for its consumption until well into the 20th century. The wealth accumulated from wage labor and trading in the white man’s world went into expanding ritual potlatches, extravagant feasting in which vast amounts of wealth objects (Hudson Bay blankets, food, bracelets, and coppers) were given away or ritually destroyed in competitive rivalry for pres-

8. Kenneth Dean has described how in Xinghua Prefecture, Fujian Province, “village level, and increasingly, regional ritual systems are being restored,” where villages average three to four temples and an average of 15–30 days of ritual performances take place in each village every year (Dean 1998:33; 1993). Jun Jing (1996) delivers a moving account of how a lineage in Gansu Province which traces its ancestry to Confucius rebuilt a Confucian temple and reconstructed public ancestor worship ceremonies in the 1990s as a way to work through the traumatic memories of cultural destruction and material loss in the Maoist era.

9. I am using the native self-designation because, as one native informed me on a visit to Alert Bay, British Columbia, in 1999, the traditional anthropological term “Kwakiutl” used the name of one tribe to designate their whole *nation*.

tige among chiefs and their communities.<sup>10</sup> Despite the severe population decline due to disease from the whites and the concerted efforts on the part of Christian missionaries and the colonial Indian Affairs Agency of the Canadian government to ban potlatches (outlawed in 1884) and punish violators, the frequency of potlatches and the value of the wealth objects ritually disposed of in them increased dramatically between 1849 and the 1930s (Codere 1950:81–97). Thus, a native noncapitalist logic of ritual economy made use of capitalist forms for self-renewal. The theoretical significance of this astonishing history, so impressively documented by Helen Codere (1950), seems thus far to have eluded most anthropologists, although Marshall Sahlins (1994) uses it to illustrate the native's point of view in capitalism. No anthropologist to my knowledge has seen in it a principle in opposition to capitalism.

## Western Critiques of Political Economy

The dominant tendency of Western critiques of capitalist economy in the past three decades has been to focus on a sobering picture of the consolidation of Western capitalism, its penetration to the farthest corners of the globe, and its destruction and conversion of local economies. In the world-systems theory of the 1970s and '80s, capitalism is portrayed as quickly and effectively integrating regional and imperial economies into the capitalist world system, and Marxist class analysis is applied to whole nation-states in a scenario of global class struggle between core and semiperiphery and against the exploited periphery (Wallerstein 1979).<sup>11</sup> For others, the second half of the 20th century is marked by the rise of multinational corporations which break out of the limitations of the nation-state and directly induct foreign labor forces ranging across the globe (Miyoshi 1993). The thesis of "flexible accumulation" argues that capitalism

10. Codere (1950) shows that whites approved of Kwakwaka'wakw industriousness and their material living standards but deplored their ritual squandering of wealth, and Drucker and Heizer write, "The Coast Indian demonstrated a comprehension of the economic values of the day. But what did he do when he was paid off after his season of industry? Did he spend his hard-won earnings for things regarded as beneficial and progressive by Victorian standards? Did he invest them sagaciously for future benefit? He did not. He blew the works in a potlatch" (1967:28, quoted in Sahlins 1994:447).

11. An interesting turn toward decentering capitalism from the West has been taken with Andre Gunder Frank's recent book *ReOrient* (1998), which proposes that the world system has been moving in cycles of shifting centers of economic dominance rather than in terms of the linear teleology of ascendancy and totalization that has been used to represent capitalism's development. Frank suggests that the center is moving back to Asia after an interregnum of five centuries in the West. The Japanese economic historian Takeshi Hamashita (1994) also contributes an influential thesis that a regional world system was already in operation in the Asia-Pacific region in the 15th century in the form of an Asian tributary state economy centered around China, its tributary states (Japan, Korea, Vietnam, etc.), and their own satellite states and that the introduction of European capitalism was merely overlaid on and expanded this system.

has entered a new historical stage since the 1960s, one marked by its deeper penetration in the world and the greater intensification and global integration of production as new technologies of communication and transport produce time-space compression (Harvey 1989). In this new capitalist regime, the global economy achieves a new competitive edge by abandoning hierarchical, capital-intensive bureaucratic enterprises for flexible smaller subcontracting firms.

In all this thinking there is a Eurocentric assumption that the Midas touch of capitalism immediately destroys local indigenous economies and cultures or transforms them into a standardized form involving private accumulation, rational-legal principles, individual maximization, and Western cultural domination. Older forms are seen to present no challenge to the all-encompassing and overriding logic of capitalism, whose development is predetermined. Rather than assume that capitalist forces arrive everywhere like conquering victorious armies, I will suggest here that capitalism can be altered, subverted, or appropriated by, made to accommodate to, and even itself absorb preexisting socioeconomic forms.<sup>12</sup>

Another body of critiques of capitalism emerging in French intellectual circles (Schrift 1997, Botting and Wilson 1998) offers a very different approach from the more dominant tradition of political economy which privileges the tropes of labor and production. Inspired by Marcel Mauss's (1967) classic work on primitive gift economies and by a Nietzschean challenge to the asceticist ethics and utilitarianism of capitalism, these writers include Georges Bataille (1985, 1989a, 1989b), Jean Baudrillard (1975), Pierre Bourdieu (1977), Marshall Sahlins (1972, 1976), and Pierre Clastres (1987). Instead of taking capitalism as the subject of analysis, these writings seek to mount their critique from *outside* capitalism, focusing on the radical difference of primitive economies and the way in which primitive gift, sacrificial, ritual, and festival economies present oppositional logics and harbor the potential for alternative social orders. Despite certain shortcomings, these works are more conducive to reconceptualizing capitalism in such a way as to reveal the multiplicity of economies, the tensions between them, and their differential embeddings within the larger social formation.

The passage from *The Grundrisse* with which we began is also cited by Baudrillard in *The Mirror of Production* (1975:86–87), but he does so in order to launch his unique critique of historical materialism. Baudrillard objects to Marx's assumption that the contradictions of labor and ownership in capitalism can be projected back to precapitalist societies such as primitive, archaic, and feudal forms as *their* structural pivots. Although Marx

12. See Alan Smart's (1995) observation that in South China capitalism is subordinated to other relations of production such as state production in state-owned factories, which are still dominant. This is seen in the tenuousness of property rights and the barely institutionalized labor market. Thus capitalism must rely on local relationships and institutions, so that even though it is globally linked, it is hampered by its interaction with the local economy.

challenged bourgeois society, his theories did not go far enough to extricate themselves from the productivist and utilitarian ethic of capitalism found in such concepts as *subsistence, labor, economic exchange, and relations and means of production*. For Baudrillard, this failure to achieve a radical break from capitalist epistemology means that Marxism liberates workers from the bourgeoisie but not from the view that the basic value of their being lies in their labor and productivity. Historical materialism is thus unable to grasp the profound difference between societies based on symbolic circulation and societies based on ownership and exchange of labor and commodities. Notions of labor and production do violence to these societies, where the point of life and the structural order are predicated not on production but on symbolic exchange with humans, spirits, and ancestors. Historical materialism cannot see that these societies possess mechanisms for the collective consumption of the surplus and deliberate antiproduction whenever accumulation threatens the continuity of cycles of reciprocity (p. 143). It fails to recognize that they did not separate economics from other social relations such as kinship, religion, and politics or distinguish between infra- and superstructure. It also perpetuates the Enlightenment invention of Nature as a resource for human production rather than an encompassing symbolic field whose offerings to humans must be compensated through sacrifice.<sup>13</sup>

Baudrillard's emphasis on consumption and the radical difference of precapitalist formations owes much to the earlier work of Georges Bataille. Bataille produced a very different kind of critique of capitalism, one focused not on production but on *consumption*. He found that in archaic economies "production was subordinated to non-productive destruction" (1989a:90). The great motive force of these societies was not the compulsion to produce (which unleashes a process of objectification whereby all forms of life, including humans, become things) but a desire to escape the order of things and to live for the present moment through exuberant consumption in the form of excesses of generosity, display, and sacrifice. The societies of Kwakwaka'wakw potlatch feasting, Aztec human sacrifice, Islamic militarism, and Tibetan monastic Lamaism all understood the necessity of nonproductive expenditure (Bataille 1989b). They set aside a major proportion of their wealth for expenditures which ensured the "wasting" and "loss" of wealth rather than rational accumulation. This destructive consumption allowed them to avoid the deadly hand of utility and to restore some of the lost "intimacy" of an existence without a separation between sacred and profane. Whereas Weber (1958) looked to religion to explain the origins of the capitalist ethic, Bataille looked to archaic religion for seeds of a subversion of capitalism. If forms

of archaic ritual prestation and sacrificial destruction of wealth could be reintegrated into modern economies, capitalism would have built-in mechanisms for social redistribution and for limiting its utilitarian productivism and incessant commodification of nature and culture. Its expansionary tendencies would suffer frequent shutdowns and reversals.

Bataille's project called for widening the frame of our economic inquiry to what he called a *general economy*, which accounted not only for such things as production, trade, and finance but also for social consumption, of which ritual and religious sacrifice, feasting, and festival were important components in precapitalist economies. In Bataille's approach, religion was not an epiphenomenal derivative of the infrastructures of production but an economic activity in itself. A general economy treats economic wealth and growth as part of the operations of the law of physics governing the global field of energy for *all* organic phenomena, so that, when any organism accumulates energy in excess of that needed for its subsistence, this energy must be expended and dissipated in some way. What he proposed in his enigmatic and mesmerizing book *The Accursed Share* was that, in our modern capitalist productivism, we have lost sight of this fundamental law of physics and material existence: that the surplus energy and wealth left over after the basic conditions for subsistence, reproduction, and growth have been satisfied must be expended. If this energy is not destroyed, it will erupt of its own in an uncontrolled explosion such as war. Given the tremendous productive power of modern industrial society and the fact that its productivist ethos has cut off virtually all traditional avenues of ritual and festive expenditures, energy surpluses have been redirected to military expenditures for modern warfare on a scale unknown in traditional societies. Bataille thought that the incessant growth machine that is the post-World War II U.S. economy could be deflected from a catastrophic expenditure on violent warfare only by potlatching the entire national economy. In giving away its excess wealth to poorer nations, as in the Marshall Plan to rebuild war-torn Europe, the United States could engage in a nonmilitary rivalry for prestige and influence with the Soviet Union, that other center of industrial modernity's radical reduction of nonproductive expenditure.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Bataille wished to resuscitate an important dimension of the economy, nonproductive expenditure, that has all but disappeared in both capitalist and state socialist modernity.

Scholars such as Jean-Joseph Goux (1998) have pointed to a troubling overlap between Bataille's views on luxury and sacrificial expenditure and postmodern consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism is also predicated on massive consumption and waste rather than on the thrift, asceticism, and accumulation against which Ba-

13. Baudrillard contests the functional explanation that primitive magic, sacrifice, and religion try to accomplish what labor and forces of production cannot. Rather than our rational reading of sacrifice as producing use values, sacrifice is engagement in reciprocity with the gods for taking the fruits of the earth (1975:82–83).

14. It is estimated that the Marshall Plan cost 2% of the U.S. gross national product annually from 1947 to 1951 (\$160 billion a year in today's terms), in comparison with which the tiny amounts proposed today to forgive Third World debt (\$600 million) and rebuild Kosovo and Albania (\$5 billion) seem laughable (Sanger 1999).

taille directed his theory of expenditure. It exhibits potlatch features in the tendency for businesses to give goods away in the hope that “supply creates its own demand”; it collapses the distinction between luxury and useful goods and between need and desire (Goux 1998). Unlike modernist capitalism, postmodern consumer capitalism is driven by consumption rather than production. Thus, Bataille’s vision of the ritual destruction of wealth as defying the principles of accumulative and productive capitalism does not address this different phase of consumer capitalism, whose contours have only become clear since his death in 1962.

It seems to me that despite their overt similarities, the principles of ritual consumption and those of consumer capitalism are basically incompatible. If Bataille had addressed our consumer society today, he would have said that this sort of consumption is still in the service of production and productive accumulation, since every act of consumption in the world of leisure, entertainment, media, fashion, and home décor merely feeds back into the growth of the economy rather than leading to the finality and loss of truly nonproductive expenditure. Even much of modern warfare is no longer truly destructive but tied into the furthering of military-industrial production. Nor, despite its economic excesses, does our consumer culture today challenge the basic economic logic of rational private accumulation as a self-depleting archaic sacrificial economy does.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, capitalist consumption is very much an *individual* consumption rather than one involving the whole community or social order.

## Writing Economic Hybridity

Both Chinese and Western scholars of Wenzhou economic development have noted its high degree of privatization and prevalence of farms, industries, and enterprises based on the household, which distinguish it from the “Sunan model” in Jiangsu Province, where rural government collective industries are the rule (Fei 1992, 1997; Li and Zhen 1991; Nolan and Dong 1989; Bramall 1989; A. Liu 1992). Years before 1979 (the year the Party Central Committee promulgated the economic reforms and permitted the transfer of land and economic activities from collectives back to the household), Wenzhou peasant communities had already quietly started this process with the tacit protection of local cadres (Y. Liu

15. Baudrillard had a similar idea: “[The capitalist system] cannot make consumption a true *consummation*, a festival, a waste. To consume is to start producing again. All that is expended is in fact invested; nothing is ever totally lost. . . . Even when coffee stocks burn, when enormous wealth is squandered in war, the system cannot stop having this lead to a widening reproduction. It is caught in the necessity of producing, accumulating, making a profit. Its assistance to developing countries is returned in multiple profits” (1975:144).

1992).<sup>16</sup> Today, household industries produce metal pipe valves and switches, porcelain bathroom tiles, leather and athletic shoes, medical needles, home electric lamps, wooden coffins, bricks, cut stone tiles, and printed name cards. There are also household workshops subcontracting with factories or distributors, sewing vinyl bags and clothing, packaging factory goods, finishing knitted goods, etc. The extent of privatization in Wenzhou can be shown in the astonishing growth of family industries, from 0.4% in 1980 to 30% in 1996, and joint-stock industries, from 3.5% in 1980 to 29% in 1996. In the same period state ownership declined from 32% to 4% of enterprises and collectives from 54% to 22.5% (Wang Qibei 1997:27). Because collectives are often privatized discreetly by being contracted out to families, the rate of privatization in this area is even higher than official figures.

How are we to make sense of rural Wenzhou’s rapid economic growth and privatization? Is it yet another example of a successful capitalist modernization which has liberated Wenzhou from the state command economy and helped realize neoliberalism as Fukuyama’s “end of history”? This would seem to be the conclusion reached by an American journalist in the *New York Times* (Rosenthal 1999):

Ever since Deng Xiaoping opened China’s markets twenty years ago, people in this and other rural towns around the city of Wenzhou have been transforming themselves from the poorest of farmers into the country’s ultimate capitalists, with a strong libertarian bent. Renowned for their entrepreneurial skills, Wenzhou business people . . . have spent the last five years plowing money not only into their private factories and homes but also into roads, bridges. . . . In the world’s largest Communist country, they have created a free-market paradise.

Or, alternatively, is Wenzhou another instance of the capitalist penetration of the Third World in a neo- (post-socialist) colonialism? Gibson and Graham have suggested that, despite their differences, left and right political economists share a structure in their discursive representation of capitalism. Both discourses construct capitalism as a monolithic, all-encompassing, penetrating, seamless, and integrated total system with a predetermined and knowable teleology (Gibson-Graham 1996). Noting the performativity of discourse (discourses are *constitutive* of reality and inform our actions in reality), they point out that such reductive representations of capitalism have reified it and contributed to its power, so that either it is useless to oppose it or the only way

16. Liu Yia-ling (1996) argues that the key to Wenzhou’s economic and social autonomy in defiance of the centralized state, which has given it the distinctive features of a highly commercial society, lies in the fact that the Wenzhou area was liberated not by Communist forces from other parts of China but by the local leadership. Local cadres have played an important role in shielding Wenzhou’s dynamic grassroots entrepreneurialism from the ideological rigidities of the central state.



to do so is by overturning the total system, as in a revolution. Rather than discursively building up capitalism's power and invincibility, they call for a new mode of representation which fragments capitalism and shows up the fissures and counterlogics within it and the diverse modes and relations that have been obscured by "capitalocentrism"—a totalizing discourse that sees noncapitalist forms as modeled upon, complementing, imitating, or serving capitalism (p. 6).

From a general-economy perspective, one distinctive feature of rural Wenzhou is the economy's *reconstitution* of local kinship relations and structures, in contrast to most understandings of capitalism as the destruction of kinship by the mobility and fragmentation of wage labor. Another feature is this economy's appropriation of surplus for expenditures in a public festival-and-ritual economy. The historical shift from agriculture to rural industrialization has resulted not in a single modal set of capitalist relations of production but in a diversity of relations of production, ownership forms, and consumption practices: a kinship and a ritual economy have emerged out of a household market economy, and these have not totally displaced the state and collective redistributive economy. What is taking shape in Wenzhou today cannot be reduced to either the triumph or the penetration of capitalism.

There have been various attempts to describe the heterogeneity of economies in the modern world and to examine the encounter with capitalism from the non-Western point of view. Four such approaches can be identified here. First in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), Eric Wolf attempted to correct the Eurocentrism of world-systems theory and give agency to colonized natives as they were integrated into the capitalist world economy. Yet, as Sahlins points out, the book does not show how these natives understood the capitalist process in their own cultural terms and how they integrated or adapted capitalist practices into their own existing structures (1994:413). Wolf's project of giving them agency in the capitalist process is undermined by the fact that "a major argument of [his] book [is] that most of the societies studied by anthropologists are an outgrowth of the expansion of Europe and not the pristine precipitates of past evolutionary stages" (Wolf 1982:76) and by his contention that "the global processes set in motion by European expansion constitute *their* history as well" (p. 385). Instead of showing how other histories have dealt with and incorporated capitalism, the book focuses on how other histories have been integrated into capitalist history. In a roundabout way, European history again becomes the history of other peoples.

Sahlins's (1994) own attempt to incorporate the agency of the West's Other into the world economy of the 18th century points in a promising direction. He shows how three different cultural-economic logics understood and participated in Western capitalist trade in their own terms. For example, the Chinese Qing court permitted trade with the West as a form of tributary relations; the West was understood as paying homage and tributary gifts of technological gadgets to the Qing emperor in

return for permission to buy Chinese luxury goods (tea, silks, and porcelain) for Western consumers. Kwak-waka'wakw on the Northwest Coast of North America engaged in trade with Westerners in order to supply and fund their great potlatch feasts. Sahlins's tendency to separate culture as interpretation and form from the material rationality of the mode of production means that he approaches indigenous economies mainly in terms of differential perceptions rather than as having material reverberations on capitalism. In narrating Wenzhou's economic growth we must not only look at the process from a native point of view but also show that native understanding and practice leave material imprints on the economy.

A body of discourse regarding "Confucian capitalism," "guanxi capitalism," and "overseas Chinese network capitalism" that emerged in the 1980s and '90s includes contributions from scholars based in Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and the United States and the former prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew (Redding 1993, 1996; Hamilton 1990, 1996; *Fortune* 1994). Their works generally play down regional, political, and class differences among overseas Chinese to argue that cultural essentials such as family values, personalistic network or *guanxi* ties, and paternalist authority structures all represent "the spirit of Chinese capitalism." There is the suggestion that not only do Confucian values humanize the organization of transnational Chinese capitalism but traditional Chinese culture is uniquely adapted to the requirements of capitalism, even more so than the Protestant ethic that Weber identified. Chinese network capitalism is shown to challenge neoclassical economics and the individualism and legal-contractual firm emphasis of Western capitalism. Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (1997; Ong 1996) have critiqued this body of discourse for its celebration of capitalism (albeit an alternative Chinese kind). Arif Dirlik has argued that, far from describing Chinese *culture*, this discourse is actually symptomatic of, and a legitimation of, a *structural* shift in global capitalism toward flexible accumulation and subcontracting, wherein the movement into China, where there is no capitalist legal system in place, favors business relationships based on kinship networks and personal trust (Dirlik 1997). However, both the discourse of Confucian capitalism and its critique further the discourse of "capitalocentrism." In the former, the encounter between Chinese culture and capitalism is presented as a smooth and seamless amalgamation, with Chinese culture serving to advance capitalism and giving Chinese capitalism a competitive advantage. In the critique, the expansion of capitalism into East Asia is understood as a process driven by the structural dictates of global economic restructuring, involving neither hindrance nor alteration in its encounter with Asian host societies.

A fourth approach to decentering Western capitalism is that of the 1970s "articulation of modes of production" already mentioned. These writers also tended to see pre-capitalist modes of production in terms of their appro-



priation by and service of capitalism.<sup>17</sup> Another problem is that, whereas over time a process of economic integration often takes place between different modes, with the result that their boundaries become blurred, the notion of articulation suggests a process whereby two distinct modes enter into a relationship of externality with each other that more or less preserves the integrity of each. Even dependency is a relationship of externality. In China as in many other places, the capitalist forces of production introduced in the 19th century did not remain restricted to particular relations of production (in the Maoist period, these forces sustained state socialist relations, and in the post-Mao era they may support household and kinship production). Thus, the same forces of production can work with several different kinds of relations of production (and consumption), and the dominant form does not have to be capitalist (Smart 1995).<sup>18</sup> Rather than articulation, the concept of *imbri-cation*, whereby the boundaries between modes are compromised and it is no longer a situation of two different entities' entering into a relationship but of their merging into one, gets at a process in which difference is embodied internally.

In organic hybridization the crossing of two breeds, strains, or varieties of animal or plant species or of two different species or even genera results in the diversification of organic forms. Hybrids embody certain traits of both parents, enhancing some and erasing others. Since "hybridization" gets at the mutual incorporation of difference internally, it can be a useful metaphor for understanding certain processes of economic encounters. However, organic hybridization presupposes a smooth and unproblematic blending of traits and does not encapsulate the contested and agonistic features of the process of combination.

Perhaps more directly relevant for an anthropology of economic imbrication is Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *linguistic* hybridity (1981:358, my emphasis): "What is hybridization? It is a mixture of two social languages within the limits of a single utterance, an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two different linguistic consciousnesses, *separated from one another by an epoch*, by social differentiation, or by some other factor." Analyzing 19th-century English comic novels, he shows that the novel is a complex hybrid language composed of different voices, styles, and tones of speech and forms of utterance (e.g., pompous ceremonial speech, everyday dialogues, the authorial voice) which express different social and ideological standpoints. This shifting from one voice or standpoint to another, often within a single sentence, illustrates "language's fundamental ability to be

simultaneously the same but different" (Young 1995:20). As Bakhtin (1981:304–5, my emphasis) puts it,

What we are calling a hybrid construction is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological belief systems. We repeat, *there is no formal—compositional and syntactic—boundary* between these utterances, styles, languages, belief systems; the division of voices and languages takes place within the limits of a single syntactic whole, often within the limits of a simple sentence. It frequently happens that even one and the same word will belong simultaneously to two languages, two belief systems that intersect in a hybrid construction—and, consequently, the word has two contradictory meanings, two accents.

This ability of language to be double-voiced without the two voices' being separated by formal linguistic boundary markers means that, within a single utterance or text, there can be integration as well as fragmentation, unity as well as dissonance, and one voice or standpoint can parody or undermine the other even as both function together within the larger whole. Whereas discussions of biological hybridization tend to emphasize the process as a smooth and seamless fusion of traits from two organisms, Bakhtin emphasizes the internal differences and tensions in language resulting from hybridization. The different strains which have been incorporated into one body present politicized and conflictual voices of multiplicity and inflect the whole in different ways.<sup>19</sup>

In recent years, in literary and cultural studies, there has been much work done on *cultural* hybridity, such as the writings of Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini. Although Bhabha's discussion of colonial hybridity (1994) also stresses the contestatory quality of hybridity, the economic hybridity I am talking about differs from his notion in several ways. In the context of fully colonized areas such as India and Africa, his concern is to show how, by incorporating and displaying traces of the Other, colonial representation opens itself to a reversal of its authoritative discourse—how a colonial hybrid erases the seemingly natural division of cultures and the language of cultural difference that were so useful for a colonial discourse in asserting its authority over native cultures. In contrast, in China, which was never fully colonized and retained much more of its language, a native and nationalist discourse gained strength through the incorporation of elements of Western colonial discourse, especially its modernist narrative of progress and development. In this form of reverse hybridization, or what Partha Chatterjee (1986) has called a "derivative discourse," colonial discourse has been embedded in

17. For example, in Meillassoux's (1972) essay describing noncapitalist agricultural communities as controlling the means of reproduction (subsistence and women) rather than the means of production, the way that he sees this economy articulating with capitalism is in capitalism's appropriation of its kinship principles for the reproduction of labor for its wage economy and its function of social security, which capitalism refuses to provide.

18. I thank Alan Smart for discussion on this point.

19. Bakhtin distinguishes between the smoothness and fusion of unconscious, organic hybridization and the contestatory and politicized process of "intentional hybridity" (Young 1995:21–23).

something else. Furthermore, its agency has changed, and the source of authority is no longer the original West but its new native, nationalist/socialist form. Thus, when a new hybrid form has assumed both agency and authority, it seems pointless to reify the original colonial discourse as the sole culprit. In addition, it is not enough to pay attention to discourses, especially in contexts such as Maoist China, where ideologies and words were closely monitored so that most people said the things that the dominant discourse required. One must also focus on the nondiscursive, such as ritual performances or economic activities, as realms of practice counter to capitalist penetration or hybrid appropriations of capitalism for other purposes.

The notion of economic hybridity resonates more with García Canclini's (1995) examination of cultural hybridity in Latin America. García Canclini adopts a transdisciplinary approach to the hybridity not only of discourse but also of architectural spaces, arts and handicrafts, the rhythms and tones of music, and the technologies of cultural production. For him the thesis that modern Western culture is everywhere invading and displacing local and native forms cannot be supported when Latin America today is a mixture of the traditional and modern—where elite culture is interwoven with indigenous, folk, and popular mass culture and democratic liberal institutions coexist with authoritarian habits (pp. 2–3). In mass media consumption there is increasing demand for the domestic and regionally produced (p. 230). What is developing in the modern world is a deterritorialization of culture (p. 261), a movement which includes the transplantation of Third World or non-Western cultures, economic capital, and bodies into the First World. Instead of a bipolar world split between imperialist and subaltern or core and periphery, García Canclini's vision attempts to capture "the planetary functioning of an industrial, technological, financial, and cultural system whose headquarters is not in a single nation" but draws inputs from diverse geographical sources (p. 229).

Rather than the unidirectional penetration of global capitalism, what has been unfolding in post-Mao rural Wenzhou is a new phase of economic hybridization in which an interrupted native tradition of household and market economy and the introduction of overseas capitalism have released the forces of a ritual economy which had been curtailed and almost abolished in the Maoist era. In this new hybrid one can faintly detect a logic of a peasant ritual economy in operation *within* a market economy, inflecting the market economy with its distinctive voice and standpoint and helping to unmask and undermine the larger economy's hegemonic principles.

### Wenzhou's Ritual Economy of Expenditure

Classical economics [cannot imagine] that a means of acquisition such as exchange might have as its

origin, not the need to acquire that it satisfies today, but the contrary need, the need to destroy and to lose. (Bataille 1985:121)

The sacred is that prodigious effervescence of life that, for the sake of duration, the order of things holds in check, and this holding changes into a breaking loose, that is, into violence. It constantly threatens to break the dikes, to confront productive activity with the precipitate and contagious movement of a purely glorious consumption. The sacred is exactly comparable to the flame that destroys the wood by consuming it. (Bataille 1989a: 52–53)

In his analysis of capitalism, Marx was primarily interested in production, and this befitted the kind of society he was located in—a society that was undergoing the tremendous productivity born of the Industrial Revolution and the ascendancy of the productivist principles of utility and rationality. It was in production that modern workers lost their autonomy and humanity in alienated labor and that their surplus value was extracted by the bourgeoisie. Where Marx sought to intervene was in emphasizing distribution, calling attention to unequal relations of the distribution of factors of production and of the wealth produced by workers. Marx did not assign any independent structural impetus to consumption, since for him "whether production and consumption are viewed as the activity of one or of many individuals, they appear in any case as moments of one process, in which production is the real point of departure and hence also the predominant moment. . . . Consumption thus appears as a moment of production" (Marx 1973:94, my emphasis). No economic analysis of rural Wenzhou would be complete without taking into account how collective consumption and community redistribution outside of the state apparatus take hold of a significant portion of the economic surpluses produced. Individual and private household consumption is always tempered by the social necessity for participation in public ritual expenditures and escalating gift exchange, as the almost daily public funeral and wedding processions and the frequent fundraising drives for temple, ancestor hall, and church construction attest. Thus, in the current spurt of economic development, although often overshadowed by productive accumulation and reinvestment in production (*kuoda zaishenchan*), the spirit of an ancient economy of expenditure still courses perceptibly and may even be part of production's secret driving force. Bataille noted that in primitive societies social rank is won "on the condition that [one's] fortune be partially sacrificed in unproductive social expenditures such as festivals, spectacles, and games, [while] in so-called civilized societies, the fundamental *obligation* of wealth disappeared only in a fairly recent period" (1985:123). In rural Wenzhou, despite the important outlets for surplus (private con-

sumption, taxation, and productive expansion), the “obligation of wealth” is still very significant, to the extent that families are willing to go into debt for ritual expenditure.

One site for ritual expenditure can be found in the kinship economy, of which lineage organizations are one form. These lineage revivals have proceeded despite the objections of a state evolutionary discourse condemning “feudal remnants” (Yang 1996) and the state’s deep fear of alternative bases of local leadership and interlineage armed conflicts (*xiedou*). Although Wenzhou lineages no longer own land and are not productive units, they are economically important in other ways. Since lineage communal land was confiscated and collectivized during the land reform of the early 1950s, the most significant economic dimension of the revived lineages today is not lineage-organized production or commerce but consumption which supports the lineage and the ancestors. Lineage members donate money to finance such lineage activities as collecting family histories for the lineage genealogy, restoring or building the ancestor hall, holding the annual ritual of sacrifice to the ancestors, repairing key ancestral tombs, undertaking the collective rites of the Qing Ming Festival, and sending poor children to advanced schools. A sense of lineage pride leads well-financed lineages to stage impressive ritual celebrations and maintain beautiful halls to the admiration of other lineages and future generations. The wealthy are expected to give generously. One lineage manager told me he had stepped down to allow an illiterate fisherman to take his place because he could not sustain the huge outlays expected of a lineage head. The fisherman had several wealthy sons.

In 1998, the Wang lineage of Taofan Township collected a total of 1 million yuan from its members for the eleventh updating of their genealogy since the first drafting of it in the Ming Dynasty in 1469. Forty thousand yuan was set aside for a ritual spectacle to celebrate the completion of the new genealogy, which was held on February 23, 1999. Well over 5,000 local and out-of-town lineage members (about a quarter to a third of them women) attended the celebration, and 300 participated in the special ritual, held in the courtyard of their main ancestor hall, to present the genealogy and food sacrifices to the ancestors. The ritual was presided over by ritual experts and accompanied by two musical groups. About 1,000 participants sat down to a collective ritual banquet in shifts in the course of the day, occupying some 100 giant round tables spread out both inside and outside the ancestor hall courtyards. That year the local government and police’s usual reluctance to approve large-scale ritual events was given added justification by a fire that had killed 12–15 people during an opera performance sponsored by another lineage in the area, and the Wang lineage ritual was almost banned—a hazard that lineage organizers face annually. By repeated appeals, Wang lineage elders prevailed upon the government to allow them to continue with the festivities. Through these expenditures and donations for lineage ritual and funerals of kin and family, each household enterprise gives back a por-

tion of its economic accumulation to the larger kinship and ritual community, defined as not only the living but also the dead and the yet-to-be-born.

Donation drives, or what local people call “collecting funds among the masses” (*qunzhong jizi*), have become a part of the social landscape of Wenzhou. They are launched whenever there is any community effort, activity, or project that needs funding, such as the repair and building of new roads and bridges, the rebuilding of the Ming Dynasty wall in Taofan town, the construction of public parks and old people’s pavilions (*laoren ting*) and public or private schools, the restoration or erection of ancestor halls, deity temples, Buddhist and Daoist temples, and Christian churches, and the preparations for all manner of festivals and collective rituals. Led by old people, who have the leisure time and social respect to solicit contributions, these donation drives have been remarkably successful, and people are quite willing to give. For example, in 1998 I was surprised to see that an old wooden temple to a local goddess called Tian Xian Gong in Taofan Township that I had visited in 1993 had been completely replaced by an impressive larger concrete structure with green-tiled roofs. A member of the temple managerial committee told me that they had rebuilt the temple in 1994 at a cost of 1,800,000 yuan, all from donations. Then, when the temple burned down in 1996 because of an electrical short circuit in the wall, the local people, on their own initiative, had immediately started contributing money and quickly amassed another 1,200,000 yuan to build a new concrete structure. “We didn’t have to do much soliciting for funds at all; the money just came to us very quickly. People showed up to give us money. They were all anxious to get the temple rebuilt,” he said. Similar self-initiated volunteer donations for his school were reported to me by the principal of a private technical middle school and by a Party leader of Taolong Township, whose business people wanted to build a public park for the town.

Throughout the Maoist era down to today, Wenzhou had received very little central government investment, and therefore it has always been self-reliant through local government initiatives. It was not until 1984–85 that donation drives initiated by ordinary people in society (as opposed to local government leaders) were started. Before this, people had been too poor to afford to give anything, and state policies were not so relaxed as to tolerate grassroots initiatives toward such questionable religious and “feudal” practices. Thus, the market economy and the ritual economy of expenditure emerged hand in hand in rural Wenzhou.

The act of giving is simultaneously an act of competition for family, lineage, and community prestige. The ancient art of carving stone stelae (*shi bei*) has been resurrected. Erected on important historical occasions marking the building or restoration of a temple, the completion of a new updated genealogy, or the erection of a new community cultural center, these stelae record the names of prominent contributors and often include the amounts of donations. Temples also display annual lists of donors and their donation figures on paper pasted on

walls. Donors are also honored with plaques of appreciation noting the sums they contributed, which they hang in their homes for all to see. Lineages compete to have the most beautiful ancestor hall; whole communities vie with each other in displaying the best-built old people's pavilion and the most extravagant temples. Ritual donations are different from the rational practice of secreting earnings and profits in bank accounts and stock investments: instead of feeding wealth back into further private accumulation, they redistribute a portion of private wealth to the larger community.

Table 1 is the result of a survey of 15 households from three local townships in rural Wenzhou conducted by a local research assistant and myself showing the amount of ritual expenditures per family in 1998 as a percentage of after-tax household income. Because of the local government's sensitivity toward research on religious practice and people's reluctance to divulge personal financial information, this survey is not as thorough as I would have liked. Since we had the opportunity to interview

only one adult member of each household, we may have missed information on donations by other adult members, such as the elderly, who seem to be more active in community activities and more generous in donations than the young or even the middle-aged. In addition, people probably underreported their donations to lineages and temples, since these are still actively discouraged and restricted by the state as "superstitious activities." Thus, the actual percentage of household income represented by ritual expenditures may be much higher than this survey's average of 12% suggests. This suspicion is strengthened when we consider that Yan Yunxiang (1996:77), in a survey of gift-giving expenditures (he did not survey donations and expenses for ritual activities) in rural Heilongjiang Province in northeastern China, found that peasant families donated an astonishing 20% of net household income in 1990. Compared with donations made by U.S. corporations in 1997, which, despite their impressive total of \$8.20 billion, represented only 1.1% of pretax corporate income

TABLE 1  
*Ritual and Community Expenditures as Percentage of Household Income*

Family and Number of Members	1998 Family Income (yuan)	Main Occupation	Income Tax (yuan)	Family Living Expenses (yuan)	Life-Cycle Ritual and <i>renqing</i> (yuan) <sup>a</sup>	Temple/Church Donations (yuan)	Community Donations (yuan) <sup>b</sup>	Lineage Donations (yuan)	% of Aftertax Income Donated
Family A (6)	2,000,000	Switch-valve factory	200,000	200,000	30,000	25,000	35,000	10,000	5.5
Family B (9)	1,000,000	Joint enterprise shoe factory	200,000	100,000	10,000	—	10,000	5,000	3
Family C (4)	1,000,000	Stainless-steel pots factory	100,000	50,000	20,000	—	—	10,000	3.3
Family D (6)	200,000	Motorcycle parts factory	35,000	50,000	5,000	—	1,000	500	4
Family E (5)	150,000	Medical instruments factory	15,000	40,000	8,000	—	10,000	2,000	14.8
Family F (6)	120,000	Switch-valve factory	12,000	36,000	12,000	2,400	2,000	220	15.3
Family G (3)	100,000	Ritual consultant	—	18,000	10,000	500	500	500	11.5
Family H (8)	60,000	Scrap-metal market stall	1,400	22,000	5,000	100	200	280	9.5
Family I (6)	50,000	Transport business	—	36,000	3,000	—	400	240	7
Family J (4)	36,000	Small retail store	2,000	25,000	1,500	—	—	200	5
Family K (3)	36,000	Office work	—	12,000	2,000	—	200	200	6.6
Family L (2)	30,000	Accountant	—	10,000	4,000	2,000	2,000	1,000	30
Family M (4)	20,000	Pedicab driver	—	6,000	6,000	600	—	150	33
Family N (2)	12,000	Retirement pension	—	9,000	2,000	—	100	100	18.3
Family O (2)	10,000	Retirement pension	—	10,000	1,500	—	—	60	15.6
Average									12.16

<sup>a</sup>"Life-cycle rituals" are family expenditures for events such as weddings, funerals, and other occasions for *renqing* (human relations and sentiments) banqueting or gifting, whether hosted by the family itself or by other people to whom gifts are given.

<sup>b</sup>"Community donations" include money given to projects organized by local Old People's Associations or by village and township governments and to public festival events. Community operas are included under the organizations which sponsor them, whether temples, lineages, or community organizations such as Old People's Associations.

(AAFRC 1998), Wenzhou's household donations are very generous, and they receive no tax deductions.

Like the two vignettes at the beginning of this essay, a third vignette reveals the continued viability of an ancient religious/festival economy of expenditure and the efforts by different levels of the state to contain what it perceives as a dangerous force, constantly threatening to break the surface and erupt.

In a strong culture of ancestor worship, funerals are perhaps the most important life-cycle ritual. A family must go to great expense to bury its dead. In 1998, the average funerary expense in Wenzhou was 20,000 yuan, about a year's income for a middle-income family. An expensive funeral would cost 40,000 and beyond and a cheaper one about 10,000 yuan. Most of the cost goes to putting on the big banquet for guests, both local and distant, who may number in the tens, hundreds, or even thousands. Other expenditures are buying land, hiring a *fengshui* geomantic expert to site the tomb on the best spot, building the tomb, and paying for a funeral procession of marching band and strings of deafening firecrackers accompanying the coffin. Generally, the most expensive and impressive funerals are those put on for the death of a parent of "district-level" (*qu*) officials who have not moved into Wenzhou City but still reside in the local towns, making up the top echelon of the local elite. Township officials (*zhen*), on the next rung down, are even more embedded in local society and also have the economic resources and social pressure to put on extravagant funerals.

A woman cadre who works in the district government told me that the higher the social status or office of a person, the bigger the funeral display will be when an important member of his family dies. This is an expectation among the people and the result of an important person's larger network and power to attract followers who will "pay homage" (*pengchang*) to him. The large scale of the ritual, the amount of money spent, and the elaborateness of the public display all confirm and enhance the person's stature. A high-status person must confirm his status and local influence with public generosity. Generally, in the countryside, it is the funeral of a deceased parent of a cadre (who is in office) which will have the largest processions, the most flower wreaths, the most lavish banquets, the loudest marching bands, and the most firecrackers. However, large funerals directly contravene Party and state principles for the reduction of ritual display and ritual expenditures. As an official, one should set a good example to the people by simplifying rituals so as to conserve money rather than waste it on nonproductive endeavors. Cadres are supposed to be loyal first to the Party and not emphasize their personal ties and networks of obligation, so as to discourage any local claims on their loyalties. For example, they are *not* supposed to wear "filial clothing" (*xiaofu*) at the funeral. However, to meet expectations among the people and win their respect, they must display their filiality, and therefore some cadres will violate

Party principles and provide a generous banquet and ritual display.

Cadres at the district (*qu*) and township (*zhen*) levels straddle a tension-filled divide not only between the state and local community but between divergent economic cosmologies—a secular notion of state redistribution as state taxation, wages, welfare, and disaster relief, on the one hand, and an ancient habitus of elite redistribution through ritual expenditure that is no longer discursively recognized or elaborated, on the other. From the point of view of the dominant modernist secular outlook, cadres receiving money and gifts in putting on a funeral are doing so for illegal private gain, succumbing to cadre corruption (*ganbu fubai*).<sup>20</sup> By the flickering light of the ancient ethics and cosmology, however, they are supposed to earn their status by giving back what they receive in public acts of generosity such as an extravagant ritual expenditure which dazzles the community and sets it ablaze with pleasant memories for months to come. The fact that many cadres fail to understand or to enact this ancient logic of the moral/ritual economy is perhaps the reason that the subject of corruption is so prevalent not only in official but also in popular discourse. Just as the Native American potlatch seemed more useful for understanding local elites in 1940s rural China than rational economic models of behavior (Wang Mingming 1997:146), so the unspoken logic of the potlatch is the point of tension today between local cadres and their communities, on the one hand, and their superiors in officialdom, on the other.

In this vignette as in the others, we see the revived spirit of festival—what Bataille called nonproductive expenditure—still animating the economic development of rural Wenzhou. Nearly all of the elements of the Native American potlatch and Bataille's festival are present in Wenzhou, although in muted form: competitive display and exaggerated generosity for prestige and the ever-present danger of the eruption of an explosive ritual energy, of exuberance escalating into violence and a joyful destruction and consumption of productive wealth in the heat of the moment. From the point of view of both the Chinese state and capitalist logic, such destruction and ritual excess are wasteful (*langfei*), backward (*luohou*), ignorant (*yümei*), and dangerous (*weixian*); this unrestrained spirit is destructive of the social order and hinders economic development. Here it is interesting to note that the restraining hand of both the Maoist state and the post-Mao developmental state continues the sobriety and austerity of an older late-imperial Neo-Confucian state and elite gentry discourse.

20. Such was the case of a Wenzhou cadre that I have reported on elsewhere (1994a:317–20), who was investigated by the Party and in danger of losing his position for putting on a big funeral and accepting gifts. The local people organized and petitioned government offices to protest that he was an upright cadre who not only had benefited local people but also understood their practices.

## The Historicity of Hybridity

The writing of economic hybridity and the ritual economy calls for negotiating China's history, including both its past economic forms and the process of their entrance into modernity and the changes of the post-Mao period. In adapting the approach of Bataille and Baudrillard to the critique of Western capitalism, reasoning from within archaic economic logics which are *external* to it, to the Chinese situation, we face two important problems. First, in the Chinese economic formation such archaic forms as primitive gifts and potlatch economies have been contained by and integrated into a state economy since at least the centralized state of Qin in 221 B.C., if not by earlier state systems such as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties. Rather than accept Bataille's and Baudrillard's binarism of modern Western versus primitive, then, we must take a more historical approach. Whereas the literature on gift, potlatch, and expenditure economies derives primarily from the study of small-scale stateless formations, archaic economies in China have long been embedded in the taxation and tributary systems of the state and state regulation of ritual activity. Since the 10th century A.D. they have been further integrated into a commercialized preindustrial handicraft economy (Gates 1996).<sup>21</sup> As a result, by the time capitalism arrived in China, the pure principles of these archaic economies had already been diluted or hybridized with other economic principles.

Second, whereas Western critiques of capitalism proceed from an already highly developed and productive economy, China is still struggling to feed its population, especially in the interior rural areas, and ensure steady production. Recent Chinese writings on the "Wenzhou model" show that the questions which preoccupy researchers have to do with economic development: What makes the Wenzhou area so productive and prosperous? What features distinguish the Wenzhou model from other models of development in rural China, and is it replicable elsewhere (Fei 1992, 1997; Li and Zhen 1991)? After the scarcity economy of the Maoist period and the famine years of 1959–61, there is great interest in what Wenzhou has to say to the rest of the nation about economic stimulation, but the question of ritual expen-

21. Gates's *China's Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism* (1996) amasses historical and ethnographic evidence for the existence of a powerful premodern petty commodity economy of small producers and entrepreneurs from the Song Dynasty's commercial revolution to the small businesses of Taiwan today. This economy posed a challenge to the state redistributive economy based on state taxation, corvée labor extraction, and state monopolies on certain goods and was constantly threatened by state power. I have reservations about Gates's term "petty capitalist mode of production," which I see as reading contemporary Taiwan's petty capitalist mode of production back into Chinese history and calling the late-imperial Chinese economy "capitalist." For Marx, capitalism began with the displacement of peasants from the land into factory wage labor on a massive scale, whereas late-imperial China was a landed agricultural society in which most of the petty commodity production did not rely on such mobile labor and wage labor was checked by kinship and other personalistic principles of bonding between employer and employee.

ditures always lies outside the frame of analysis. Therefore, the theories of Bataille and Baudrillard must be understood not only in terms of their critique of Western capitalism but also in terms of their potential for critical engagement with issues of development in China. Their theory must address how the Chinese peasant economy, which in modernity has experienced a long period of disruption and impoverishment by wars, famines, and state modernization projects, can be both stimulated and controlled by peasants themselves and how peasants can reduce the detrimental effects of modern development. Through an examination of historical texts, I will endeavor to address these two problems and discuss the historical significance of the reemergence of a ritual economy.

In much of Chinese history, the context for the embedding of an archaic peasant ritual economy was not capitalism but the imperial state's desire to monopolize the ritual and economic order. Spokespersons for state hegemonic discourse were often the literate gentry, many of whom held office. In a discussion of "local customs" (*fengsu*) found in the Ming Dynasty *Gazetteer of Wenzhou Prefecture* (*Wenzhou fuzhi*), published in 1537, a member of the local gentry named Zhang Fujing expresses the standard elite attitudes toward popular ritual excess and deviation (Zhang 1981[1537]). Zhang (whose tomb I have visited) was a local scholar who had accomplished the incredible feat of landing a high official post in the Board of Civil Office (*Libu*), one of the six ministries of the imperial government in the capital, Beijing. Because of an illness, he retired from court life and returned home to write the local gazetteer, the *Zhang Family Codes* (*Jiajie*), and new commentaries on the ancient *Book of Ritual* (*Li Ji*). His commentaries on local funerals and festive boat races at that time (section 1, "Customs") reveal the typical late imperial gentry's abhorrence of ecstatic folk rituals and festivals.<sup>22</sup>

In conducting funerals now, the people no longer have Buddhist ceremonies or drink alcohol.

Since Yuan times, the common people have been wild and extravagant and beguiled in following Buddhism. Junior Preceptor Zhang worked energetically to change these customs. In his *Family Instructions*, it says: "When there is a funeral, the neighbors and local villagers get together to console the family; this is the proper ritual. In recent times, however, the local rituals have lost their clarity of purpose. At the beginning of the funeral, a banquet is held, to which guests are invited. The carousing and drinking continue right down to the day of interment. There is also the obligation to provide food and drink to the servants and underlings. Thus, these practices have caused filial sons to neglect their proper expressions of grief and abandon the proper way of observing ritual, as they expend all their energies in managing the feasting and the guests. When occasionally someone stands up to uphold the

22. I thank Everett Zhang and Ron Egan for their help in the translation.

proper way of ritual conduct, he is met with tremendous opposition and animosity. Usually such antics of lowly people are not worth attention, but they present the danger of ruining public morality, which is an offense that cannot be absolved. Recently our family had to put on two funerals at once. Determined to depart from the established and usual practices, the younger members of the family were expected to show that they knew how to uphold proper ritual and examine their conduct, so as to avoid any offense or wrongdoing. They were prohibited from following the vile local beliefs and customs or neglecting our fine family regulations. For our guests in mourning, we provided tea service according to proper ritual etiquette. For those among them who had traveled from afar, a provision of simple vegetarian meals was enough. Anyone who violated these expectations would be considered guilty of offense. This conduct does not mean that our family is parsimonious; rather, it is the important principle of seeking to improve the local customs."

The local townspeople like to put on public events of extravagant expenditure [*huami*], involving singing and dancing. For example, at the first moon of each lunar year, they like to light up the whole place with paper lanterns, and at the Duan Wu Festival they like to run boat races.

The old gazetteer states: "Boat racing started with Gou Jian, king of the Yue. Since Yong Jia [an area of Wenzhou] is full of waterways, the ritual boat races were especially held there. At the beginning of the Kaixi reign period of the Song Dynasty [1205–7], Admiral Qian Zhongbiao requested the emperor to ban these races because of the excessive drowning deaths.

The surrounding areas also have this problem of extravagant customs and rituals. However, since these areas are remote and inaccessible and there are few [other] diversions, in their natural quest for amusement the people often violate the prohibitions of excessive display.

An ancient logic of ritual and festival economy, with its exuberant penchant for excesses in community expenditures and Dionysian extremes of pleasure and danger, clearly left its imprint throughout much of the imperial period in China.<sup>23</sup> Equally evident are the

23. In northeastern China from the mid-Ming through the Qing Dynasty, "extravagant customs" could also describe the lavish gifts bestowed by the wealthy on the temple of Bixia Yuanjun, the goddess of Taishan, the surging tides of pilgrims attending the festivals and sacrifices to her every year, and the occasional self-sacrifices (suicide jumping) and sacrifices of children (Pomeranz 1997). As many local gazetteers of this period noted, at festival times the volume of commerce "significantly affects the county's overall prosperity for the year" (Pomeranz 1997:189); Sangren (1987:120) has made the same point about Ma Tsu festivals in Taiwan in the 1970s. Such excesses of ritual energy led the late-Ming state to jeopardize its own lucrative "incense tax" levies at these festivals and temples by labeling the Taishan goddess cult "licentious" (*yin*),

prohibitions and restraints of the Neo-Confucian state and gentry, who called for moderation and fastidious ritual sobriety.<sup>24</sup> Neo-Confucian ritual stressed the hierarchical relationships to be observed in the social order and the harmonious acceptance of this order rather than contention over prestige and status or escape through religious fervor.

Recent scholarship on the late-imperial Chinese economy has emphasized the tensions between a state redistributive economy and a commercialized economy of merchants, craft manufacturers, and shopkeepers (Gates 1996, Brook 1997a). The latter tension can be traced to a state Confucian discourse of "righteousness over profit" which for more than two millennia has "served the need to sustain the priority of political over commercial power" in China (Brook 1997b:43). Given the historical legacy of the power of the state economy in imperial China and the state's renewed anticommmercial stance in Maoist China, this tension indeed deserves emphasis. However, as the above passage shows, we must also account for a submerged economic tradition in this hybrid economy which extends far back in history, one which presents a different kind of challenge to the principles of the state economy. Especially in the contemporary moment of the blending of state economy, capitalism, and native market economy officially called "socialism with Chinese characteristics," it becomes more pressing to search for a third economic logic in the Chinese cultural-economic repertoire whose practice defies the gathering strength of the developmental-state-capitalist hybrid.

In the 20th century, from the Republican through the Communist era, these archaic economic practices were almost extinguished by economic impoverishment, rural class polarization, local official corruption and extortion, active government campaigns to wipe out "backward" peasant customs and religions (Duara 1995, Yang 1996, Anagnost 1997), and state collectivization of the peasant economy. After 1949, the asceticism and antireligion campaigns of the revolutionary state and its state-coordinated production and state extraction of all surpluses almost eliminated the ritual economy. The revival of both market and ritual economies in contemporary Wenzhou is occurring against the backdrop of over three decades of a Maoist centralized state economy which

which was not as serious as calling it "heterodox" (*xie*) but did curb it. Wang Mingming reports that in the city of Quanzhou, Fujian Province, official gazetteers describe temple festivals organized by wealthy households in rival territorial divisions of the city as ecstatic (*kuang*), noisy (*nao*), drunken, chaotic (*luan*), and violent (1995:59–60). These ceremonials lasted from the Ming Dynasty until the early 20th century.

24. Several scholars have shown how the imperial state sought to appropriate and domesticate popular religious cults by interjecting more pro-state values into the worship of the gods and establishing state-sponsored temples. Prasenjit Duara (1988) calls it "state superscription" in the case of Guandi cults, and James Watson (1985) calls it "standardizing the gods" in his examination of two regional Ma Tsu cults. While they emphasize the imposition of state values, I am interested in a distinctive economic logic displayed in popular ritual activity.



squelched local grassroots economic development initiatives. Given that ritual expenditures were traditional mechanisms for maintaining local community autonomy, now, in the face of the penetration of both the centralized state and global capitalism, they can play an even more crucial role.

In the modern context, issues surrounding peasant economic development are just as important as a critique of capitalism. The modern state in China, under the influence of evolutionism and what Chatterjee (1986) calls “nationalism as derivative discourse,” has sought to modernize the peasants and release them from impoverishment by systematically preventing the channeling of economic surplus into ritual consumption. In the *Guanzi*, a text dated by scholars to either the Warring States period (4th century B.C.) or the early Han Dynasty (2nd century B.C.), a chapter titled “Wasteful Extravagance” (*Chimi*) suggests a very different strategy.<sup>25</sup> Since it describes this period as one of population increase, exhaustion of natural resources, and economic desperation, this chapter is all the more intriguing for undertaking what few extant ancient Chinese texts have done (Yang 1961):<sup>26</sup> advocating extravagant expenditure, consumption of luxury, and prodigious spending on ritual and sacrifice by the prince and the nobility as ways of stimulating production (Rickett 1998:306–7):

Nothing is better than a policy of extravagance in spending. If the prince treats the necessities of life as having little value but useless things with great respect, men can be shaped at will. Accordingly, the prince should treat grain as having little value but pearls and jade with respect. Likewise, he should express his liking for ceremony and music but belittle productive enterprise. Such a policy is the beginning of essential production.

This passage provides a striking contrast to the practices of the Maoist era, when the slogan “take grain as the guiding principle” (*yiliang weigang*) meant that peasants were discouraged or prevented from growing other crops and pursuing other economic activities, when it was thought that parks should be rid of flowers to plant more useful cotton, and when ritual life was banned as a distraction from work and peasant productivity. It would seem that the author of the *Guanzi* understood the people’s basic life orientation of consumptive and ritual intensity and recognized that state policies predicated on utilitarianism and enforced austerity, far from promoting production, would only destroy the impetus for production. This is because in the peasant economy production is an activity which is deeply embedded in ritual life and

cannot be extricated from the larger concerns of peasant life without damage to the whole system. Shorn of its linkages and moorings in the pleasures and sacrality of a full life, production shrivels. In contrast to Bataille’s explication of the alterity of the logic of “expenditure” which defies the basic values of utilitarian capitalism, this ancient Chinese text makes a utilitarian justification for expenditure. Nevertheless, it shares with Bataille a recognition that what is most compelling and meaningful for the people in their pursuit of life is not what is useful but what has been defined as useless.

The text also advises rulers to give away their wealth in ritual displays, because when the prince properly and generously observes the rituals and makes the sacrifices he gains the support of the people (Rickett 1998:324):

Do not expect rewards for the food presented in bags at the sacrifices. Such action is simply to make clear your great virtue. Sacrifices to the river gods [casting jade into the water] simply demonstrate your lack of concern for personal wealth. If you first set up images of the spirits and then fix the dates for sacrifices to them, the people will act accordingly. Therefore by building temples of worship and using silk cords and banners to summon the spirits, you will make clear that you have no regard for wealth, but respect the people.

The efficacy of generosity in sacrifice lies not in any returns from the spirits but in enhanced stature among the people. From a rational economic perspective, this act of sacrifice involves waste and excessive generosity to spirits who may not respond or may not even exist. From the point of view of the people, this largesse shows the ruler’s disregard for selfish accumulation and his commitment to community welfare.

The text offers several arguments for how extravagant expenditure can lead to enhanced production. When people are allowed to pursue their desires for drink and food, luxury and pleasure, they are filled with a zest for life (Rickett 1998:310). When there is spending on luxuries, elaborate rituals, and temple building, there are jobs created to support people, and the rich will not be so rich anymore (pp. 318–19):

Lengthen the mourning period to reduce the time [a family] may be rich. See that the funeral escort is lavish so the rich will spend their money. . . . This is called having much but being poor.

Have the rich build grandiose tombs to employ the poor, construct highly elaborate grave sites to employ engravers and sculptors, use large coffins to provide work for carpenters, and prepare numerous sets of funerary clothing and coverlets to provide work for seamstresses.

In his study of this chapter of the *Guanzi*, Yang Lien-sheng (1961:67–68) found that although its argument for extravagant spending is rare in the historical records, it

25. I thank David Schaberg for bringing this text to my attention and Ch’i-yun Chen for referring me to Yang Lien-Sheng’s work.

26. For example, several chapters of the ancient text *Mo Tzu*, which espoused utilitarianism, vigorously condemned the useless extravagance of funeral and burial ceremonies and the wastefulness of elaborate performances of music and ritual dance (*Mo Tzu* 1963). Over the centuries, since state Confucian orthodoxy controlled writing, many heterodox texts may have been lost to posterity.

can be found from time to time in later texts. For example, in the Song Dynasty text *Mengxi bitan* by Shen Gua (Yang 1961:68), praise is bestowed on Fan Zhongyan, then governor of Western Zhejiang Province, in what is now the Hangzhou area (not far from Wenzhou), who encouraged ritual spending to help the local people recover from a famine in A.D. 1050. He gave the people permission to engage in boat racing, encouraged Buddhist abbots and monks to launch temple construction projects, and himself participated in lavish banquets on the lake every day. When his superior impeached him for his lack of proper famine relief, his lavish entertainments, and his wasteful building projects, he defended himself by writing a memorial saying that he was redistributing surplus wealth and hiring the poor.

Although the *Guanzi* was written more than two millennia ago, it resonates with mechanisms found in today's post-Mao ritual economy in rural Wenzhou, which contribute to the redistribution of wealth in the increasing income gap between the rich and the poor. We have seen that the burden of the most extravagant funeral expenditures is placed on the shoulders of the highest-ranking cadres in the local community, who are the most powerful and often the wealthiest persons around. By making donations, sponsoring opera performances, and throwing communal banquets, wealthy families give back a portion of their wealth and are made to subscribe to criteria of social honor based not on material accumulation but on material largesse. Thus, the profitable activities of Wenzhou household enterprises comprise an indigenous market economy which has carved out a space from the Maoist state economy for the revival of a household/market and ritual economy. In this *ritual-market economic hybrid*, the surplus value that is extracted is prevented from going fully toward the formation of a bourgeois class by the exactions of community, lineage, and ritual expenditure.

At the same time, the ritual economy and wealthy patronage have provided new avenues of employment to relieve people from the punishment of agricultural labor and spawned whole new occupational categories: ritual expert, fortune-teller, geomantic surveyor, lineage manager, temple architect, traditional wood carver, mural painter, Daoist and Buddhist priest and nun, temple manager and groundskeeper, tomb builder, coffin maker, lineage genealogy printer, traditional musician, stone stela carver, and opera performer. These occupations and activities have changed the physical landscape, enriched aesthetic values, and offered an alternative phenomenological experience of the sacred in a society which, on the one hand, is escaping the austere revolutionary desecralization of traditional life and, on the other hand, is being catapulted into the disciplinary age of smoke-stack industry and wage labor. It was against this new world—one that Jean-Joseph Goux (1998:196) called “the cramped and greyish world of petty calculation, quantifiable profit, and industrious activity”—that Bataille sought to engineer a “Copernican reversal.”

In hindsight, perhaps instead of the collectivization of production, more attention could have been paid to the

productivity of the peasant household as an enterprise and to the inherent collectivism of peasant ritual expenditure. This study of the general economy of Chinese peasants bears out two convictions of Alexander V. Chayanov (1966): that a peasant “family economy” constituted a fundamentally different economic structure and required a different economic theory from that which had been produced to describe capitalism and that Russian peasant household production continued to be economically viable in the face of capitalism and deserved to be preserved or combined in cooperatives rather than forcibly collectivized. (For these convictions, he died in Stalin’s prisons in 1939.) It also addresses an area for which Chayanov has been found to be weak by Western anthropologists—his lack of consideration of interfamily economic transactions. However, when Donald Donham (1999) tries to take this area into account by pointing to the labor sharing in Africa between Maale households with labor surplus and households with large numbers of dependent children, he looks only to the realm of production. By taking account of ritual consumption not only do we show how peasant households are tied together economically into communities which ensure local autonomy from external forces such as the centralized state and capitalism but also we provide a way out of the old impasse of the debate about whether peasants maximize or are irrational. The case of Wenzhou “ex-peasant” households shows that they are entirely capable of high economic productivity and maximizing their household enterprise incomes, but it is often in order to compete in giving part of their wealth away in ritual expenditures.

The modernizing state, with its discourse of modernity and unilineal evolutionism (Yang 1996), set out to “develop” China in the 20th century along rational/legal Western lines by stamping out kinship and popular religion, but its efforts did not produce the desired effect. Whereas for Western capitalism “a complete desacralization of life (inaugurated by Calvinism and carried to its limit by Marxism) was necessary for the world of production and exchange to become autonomous” (Goux 1998:198), the radical desacralization carried out by the state in revolutionary China did not propel Chinese peasants to productivity. Thus, an impoverished model of the peasant economy which wrote out peasant religion continued the impoverishment of the peasant economy. The state collectivization of rural production removed the opportunities for ritual expenditure, damaging an important mechanism, perhaps the very foundation of the peasant economy. What Foucault called “a form of thought that considers man as worker and producer—that of European culture since the end of the eighteenth century” (1998:37)—had taken over China in its very resistance to Western capitalism. Perhaps, just as for Foucault need “responds at the very least to a code whose laws cannot be confined to a dialect of production” (1998:38), so the logic of the peasant economy cannot be captured by the restricted frame of political economy which ignores an ancient economy’s inextricable entanglement in the realm of the sacred (Bataille 1985).

## A Provisional Conclusion

What the journalist in the *New York Times* called “capitalism” in rural Wenzhou is actually a series of hybridizations of different economic forms—indigenous (ritual, tributary state, and household/market economies), state socialist, and overseas capitalist elements—which combine and recombine in novel and contradictory ways. A hybrid product not examined here because of its relative weakness in rural Wenzhou is the conjoining of the modernist state socialist economy with those of transnational capitalism, especially overseas Chinese. In the emerging hybrid of modernist *developmental-state capitalism*, the socialist state increasingly reconciles itself with capital by actively seeking investment from abroad, promoting local capital accumulation, courting and monitoring local entrepreneurs, and helping to regulate and manage the labor force. Given its stress on accumulation and production, the modern state is hostile to the economies of expenditure, festival and ritual, since these economies produce consumption patterns which do not plow back all profits into further capitalist accumulation. Thus, the rational/rigid restraining hand of the state continues its long tradition of antipathy to popular ritual: whereas the premodern imperial state sought to impose orthodox ritual over the threats to social order posed by popular ritual spontaneity and effervescence and the Maoist state abolished community rituals outright to smash the past, now the developmental state continues to clamp down on ritual activity to direct profits back into production or absorb them into state taxes.<sup>27</sup> However, this state is not monolithic, since tensions exist between different levels of officialdom, and the ritual economy has infiltrated the state at local levels. The developmental state must develop a working relationship with the local community, and so it is more likely to work within the logic of the ritual economy, as in the funerals given by local cadres who must display public generosity.

There is another dimension of capitalism that has arrived in rural Wenzhou and merged with both indigenous market and ritual economies. Consumer capitalism has made inroads in rural Wenzhou, mainly in the larger towns, in the form of a panoply of consumer goods and services for personal use which pamper the materiality of individual bodies: from fashion, clothing, and makeup to traditional Chinese tonic medicines and health foods, household appliances and home entertainment electronics, dance classes, interior decorating, and commercialized sex services which flourish despite police crack-downs. We can see the hybridization of the ritual economy and the consumer economy in the elaborate gift giving (*renqing*) of dragon boat rowing in rural Wenzhou (since banned in several townships) (Yang 1994a: 313–15).

One form of gift giving was by married-out women, who gave money and gifts to their natal villages to fi-

nance the dragon boats. Another kind of giving was from kin in other villages—daughters (but not sons), maternal or paternal uncles, siblings, parents and grandparents—to the boat-rowers themselves. The gifts involved could be extravagant: color televisions, refrigerators, VCRs, and even motorcycles. The rowers would then repay (*huihe*) their donors with a portion of the value of the gifts, anywhere from 30% to 80%, depending on their wealth relative to the donors'. A third kind of gift was from parents to their daughters, often living in other villages, in their first year of marriage. Thus, dragon boat rowing involved great expenditures. Although the boats were no longer allowed to race against each other, they were still engaged in competitive display because everyone knew how much each boat had received. Although the boats represented one village, intervillage rivalry was muted by the fact that each boat was financed by people in other villages. At the same time, intervillage kinship ties were cemented and strengthened through this wasteful expenditure and competitive giving.

Here a consumer economy has been incorporated into ritual exuberance and generosity but in a way which undercuts the private accumulation of capitalist consumerism with the ethics of a relational kinship order of reciprocity and obligation linking different communities together across space. In this meshing of ritual and consumer economies, the question arises whether this is an example of the latter's colonizing and penetrating the former. Since this is still a Third World society not fully extricated from the economic privations and emphasis on asceticism, discipline, and production that were the hallmarks of a modernist state socialism, more features of modernist capitalist culture are found alongside consumer culture in Wenzhou than in the modern West today. In other words, modernist features of the Maoist era have combined with the structural emphasis on capital accumulation and investment as rural Wenzhou enters a new phase of constructing factories and infrastructure. In this situation, a more likely scenario than consumer capitalism's hijacking ritual consumption is the revived ritual economy's taking advantage of the opening introduced by postmodernist consumer capitalism to make inroads against the combined modernist forces of state socialist and early capitalist productivism and desacralization. Here the postmodern consumer economy, which requires the free flow of commerce, is enlisted as an ally by the ritual economy in its eluding of state control. This is a parallel movement to Arturo Escobar's (1999:14) suggestion that the “organic regime of nature” (small-scale preindustrial cultivation which avoids a nature/culture opposition) can join forces with the postmodern capitalist “technonature regime” (whose stance toward nature is one of conservation and promotion of biodiversity) in an alliance to counter the ravages of a modernist capitalism which treats nature as a commodified object and resource.

In this *consumer-ritual economy hybrid*, the ritual economy continues to present the danger of breaking out fully and realizing its deep destructive force, of which the burning of real money and paper replicas of consumer

27. Joint-stock enterprises in Wenzhou are required by law to reinvest 50% of annual profits in expanding the company.

goods at funerals provides just a hint. Should the state further relax its vigilance over ritual and productive accumulation reach a certain point of saturation, an outbreak of ritual expenditure and material waste and destruction such as a bonfire of *real* consumer appliances at an extravagant funeral is not inconceivable. Once unleashed, the internal principles of rural Wenzhou's economy of kinship and expenditure could challenge and subvert the principles of rational productivism and private accumulation of global capitalism.

As capital and capitalist practices expand across the globe, our theoretical tools seem inadequate to capture the full complexity of these processes, especially for rural areas. Rather than assuming that capitalism immediately transforms and converts everything it encounters, it is necessary to consider the different modes and logics that it must incorporate and the fissures and tensions between them. A notion of economic hybridity is conducive to the genealogical task of tracing the historical process of cross-fertilization and fusion that has brought different economic practices and logics together into a multiplex form. We must not presume that capitalism is everywhere so impregnable that it is not altered in its forays around the world.<sup>28</sup> By taking into account the continued operation of precapitalist logics of expenditure within modern hybrid economies, rather than reducing the contradictions of capitalism to a mechanism internal to the structures of capitalist production, we open the way to addressing an issue that Marx's concern with reorganizing production neglected: the horror of endless material accumulation and productivism. It is true that capitalism has its own mechanisms of periodic self-destruction of its accumulation, a sort of "clearing of inventory" such as the military's expenditure of its stockpiles of weapons in warfare and the stock market crashes which wipe out accumulated wealth in a matter of seconds. Bataille's point is that there are better ways of consuming wealth so as to restrain the insane expansion of the system and live more lightly on the earth—giving out rather than raking in. What principles of ritual expenditure can do at the local level is to redistribute wealth between families through an ethic of competition in generosity, build up the cohesiveness of local communities and give them more autonomy against the centralized state and transnational capitalism, and prevent the reduction of existence to a utilitarian definition. At the global level, a ritual economic logic may help deflect capitalist accumulation into a rivalry between transnational corporations and states over which of them dares to sacrifice a greater proportion of its annual profits or GNP by giving it away to causes that do not feed back into production.

In a discussion of Bataille on sacrifice, Baudrillard pointed out that Bataille misread Mauss: for Mauss there was no unilateral gift which did not ask for response.

28. With ancient state (socialist) economies such as China, capitalism may well have met its match in that the state still seems dominant over capital in the new developmental-state-capitalist hybrid.

Just as for the Aztecs human sacrifice of blood to the god was the nourishing of the sun in order that it shine, there is no pure principle of expenditure governing the cosmic field of life forces but only an interrelated process of challenge and response (Baudrillard 1998:193). Similarly, destruction and expenditure are always "the inverse figure of production," so that, "in order to destroy, it is first necessary to have produced" (p. 195). Far from preventing production as modernization theory would have it, a ritual economy can actually spur production. This can be seen in how successful Kwakwaka'wakw participation in trade and wage labor in the Western capitalist economy actually introduced new wealth for the rapid expansion of potlatches (Codere 1950). Similarly, rural Wenzhou people's yearning to reconnect with powerful realms of the sacred through ritual excess and transgression has actually fueled the drive to produce and acquire wealth. In both these historical experiences, we have witnessed a process of the hybridization of economies in which what appears on the surface to be a concession to or imposition of capitalist development is actually the reverse penetration of capitalism by alien principles of ritual economies. These are instances in which a market economy has unleashed or reactivated the principle of exuberant community ritual display and consumption and the revived ritual economy has helped to launch economic production while also inflecting the process toward its own ends. To grasp this historical process in all its complexity, we must deconstruct the monolithic notion of a cohesive capitalism and move toward a notion of capitalism as an open-ended, mutating process made up of disparate and conflicting elements, some of which harbor the potential to derail its forces and harness them in new directions. The notion of economic hybridity here does not presuppose a single preordained direction for the economy, but it does suggest that theoretical reflection and discursive practice may yet be a factor in the historical direction that an assembly of economies may take.

## Comments

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The ethnographic description is the most valuable part of this piece. The facts are simple enough: "Rural Wenzhou is [in] a new phase . . . in which an interrupted native tradition of household and market economy and the introduction of overseas capitalism have released the forces of a ritual economy which had been curtailed and almost abolished in the Maoist era." This tells us what happened, but now the question would appear to be how to understand it.

Yang identifies what she calls "hybridity" here insofar

as the milieu combines aspects of modernity with traditionalism. This is nothing new, despite her attempt to construe the rest of us as blind to it. When we anthropologists do fieldwork in China, it is a constant source of irritation and displeasure to our Chinese hosts that we always seem to focus on the “old stuff.” “Why don’t you concentrate on what’s new and modern?” So there it is.

Yang finds the multiple-modes-of-production perspective inadequate and proposes to use “hybridity” in its stead. Why bother? The hybridity analogy offers no improvement on the mode-of-production perspective and indeed introduces a whole series of biological metaphors that should have no place in this kind of analysis.

On the subject of metaphors, Yang’s consistent reference to the metaphor of male penetration as analogous to the penetration of capitalism serves no purpose. Capitalism is not a literary trope, nor is its functioning understood any more profoundly by considering it as such. It is a real system of exploitation in which real people are involved in real relations with one another and with their surroundings. In the case of China’s command economy, and Wenzhou in particular, the introduction (or penetration) of capitalism has also been experienced as a liberation, just as capitalism in its infancy in the West represented liberation from monarchy and landed aristocracy even while introducing new forms of exploitation.

There is indeed a sector of nonmarket ritual transactions that has survived, even been invigorated, in the Chinese countryside since the introduction of economic reform, private enterprise, and marketing, and the potlatch analogy is the right one here for trying to understand it. But the discussion of nonproductive expenditure makes no sense to this observer of contemporary modernism. Is Yang unaware of the military budget of capitalist America when she concludes that nonproductive expenditure has been eliminated under capitalism? She comes back to the military budget later on in another context but does not invoke it here, where it would seem to undermine her argument. And her “fundamental law” that “the surplus energy and wealth left over after the basic conditions for subsistence, reproduction, and growth have been satisfied must be expended” is just nonsense.

If the “principles of ritual consumption and those of consumer capitalism are basically incompatible,” then why use Bataille to talk about consumption under capitalism? And if they are incompatible, then how are they hybridized? Maybe thinking about them as coexisting discrete modes of production makes more sense.

The carcasses of straw men, Marx preeminent among them, litter the pages of this paper. It seems to me that many of Yang’s criticisms of Marx/Marxism are wholly gratuitous. Only the most doctrinaire Stalinist reading of Marx could merit the attribution of so many inadequacies to “Marxist theory” that we need “hybridity” to improve upon the tradition of scholarship that bears the name. And who are these people who presume that “capitalism is everywhere so impregnable that it is not al-

tered in its forays around the world”? The anthropological literature is loaded with examples of the way capitalism has been inflected in the locale. Yang asserts that historical materialism and its “notions of labor and production do violence to these societies, where the point of life and structural order are predicated not on production but on symbolic exchange.” I think that one can maintain a flexible dialectical neo-Marxist stance and still be prompted to ask, “Don’t these people have to eat?” Later she does admit (quoting Baudrillard) that “in order to destroy, it is first necessary to have produced.” Well, how about old Marx, then?

What this paper presents us with, in the end, is a phenomenon described and a lot of innovative theoretical posturing, all to no apparent advancement in our understanding of the phenomenon.

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At the beginning of his now famous “Thesis on the Philosophy of History,” Walter Benjamin (1992) tells the tale of a mechanical chess player disguised as a Turkish puppet “with hookah in mouth” that could know in advance the move of every opponent and therefore beat him hands down. Appearances, as we know, can be deceptive, and this chessboard *mise-en-scène* was to prove no exception. Hidden from view was an ungainly hunchback pulling on every string in this puppet performance. It was his presence that revealed the more complex processes operative behind the “objective” actions of the machine. Victory, it transpired, was utterly dependent upon the subjective, human emotion and spirit, and this elaborate hoax of automation would be nothing if not for this human touch. For Benjamin, the elaborate edifice of automaton and puppet—which appears to win every game by itself—was a perfect “parodic” counterpart for historical materialism. Indeed, the triumphalist claims of historical materialism, much like the puppet’s victory on the chessboard, were ultimately dependent upon the alliance forged with the wizened old figure of theology.

As Yang’s article so brilliantly reveals, there is a wizened old figure lurking behind the oft-told materialist success story of the “new” Wenzhou. It is this figure of theology that has been kept far from sight by the elaborate hoax of vulgar materialisms, east and west. Repressed by a materialist state that would diagnose the malady of theology as a terminal case of feudal thought and “superstition” and, more recently, by the shortsighted doctors of Western social science, who fail to note such moments because of their pathological commitment to “convergence” and “rational choice,” Wenzhou became the model not just of economic success but of a narrowly conceived notion of humanity structured around a concept of the economic that turned on self-interest and utility. By turning to the work of Georges Bataille and resurrecting his idea of a “general economy,”

Yang reveals the wizened features of this other economy of ritual and in so doing blows apart the “double repression” of Party and paradigm. In doing this, she also puts paid to any Adornesque rendition of the commodification process as a narrowing of social and cultural options by revealing another cosmology that lurks behind and propels the economic success story of Wenzhou.<sup>1</sup>

It is through Bataille that we are told of a general economy that points to a human “curse” of wanton expenditure. It is this that takes us beyond rational calculation and into the enchanted realm of never-ending and destructive cycles of production and consumption (Bataille 1989b:40). The homogeneous world of vulgar materialist Marxism and late capitalist analysis would repress this heterogeneous realm. In resurrecting it, Yang’s work threatens the certainty of their reading but also disturbs the symmetry and unity of the Maussian notion of gift giving that is held together by the “usury round” of giving and receiving (Derrida 1992:40). In revealing this excessive aspect of the Maussian gift through tales of Wenzhou, Yang’s article speaks of the return of a repressed ritual economy. Yet it is precisely at this point, when her work is at its most illuminating, that it is also at its most forgetful. Forgetful both of the dialectic of materialism and of the nature of (the Freudian notion of) repression, her account reads this ritual economy as entirely separate from and repressed by state initiatives. Here, I think, both the recent history of China and the Freudian notion of repression have slightly different tales to tell.

“One must never forget, and precisely for political reasons, that the mystery that is incorporated, then repressed, is never destroyed. . . . History never effaces what it buries; it always keeps within itself the secret of whatever it encrypts, the secret of secrets,” writes Derrida (1995:21). The “secret of secrets” that has now been disinterred in Wenzhou and revealed by Yang was, contrary to Yang’s own reading, effaced only in the crudest and more superficial way by Maoist socialism, and it is this (history) that must now be “negotiated.”<sup>2</sup>

More profoundly than other Marxisms, writes Julia Kristeva (1995), Maoism was utterly dependent upon a type of Bataillean “inner experience.” This would, as Bataille shows, lead to an engagement with the sacred and the heterogeneous world of which it was very much a part. Thus, in bringing back to Marxism an “active subject,” Maoism, like fascism before it, drew upon the “heterogeneous excess” of peasant and worker activists and bound them into its own (allegedly secular) version of the sacred economy of symbols and representations of unity (see Bataille 1979). What is interesting in the case of Maoism is that this symbolic realm turned precisely on the types of ritualized economy that were born of lineage. Kristeva’s (1995:260) reading of Mao and Ba-

taille helps lead us to this conclusion, for she is insistent that the “non-site where opposite tendencies struggle” and the drives, desires, and needs revealed in the Marxism of Mao are as much a part of the world of “affective (parental, love) relations” as they are of class struggle. Little wonder, then, that in viewing the fever of the cultural revolution, a time when the exuberant, destructive urge of Maoism was at its height, Zhou Jihou (1993:128) would refer to the badges of Mao as “totems” of a new revolutionary lineage emerging under the patriarch Mao. Little wonder, too, that the red rays of sunlight that radiated from Mao’s head on so many of these badges mimicked the representation of that most destructive of worshiped icons in the Bataillean rendition of the religious, the sun.

Here, then, is a link between the excess of revolution and the abundant excessive exuberance of clan or lineage group. Mao as a moment in this ritual economy of erotic, dangerous, and “accursed” expenditure should never be rendered “secular,” for it is in him that the “wizened old fellow of theology” within Marxism would reveal himself as excessive. Moreover, the return of more conventional renditions of lineage sacredness and excess can take place only once one has passed through the narrow gates of disenchantment with this form of sacredness. Indeed, by the time it hits the streets and alleys of Wenzhou, this more modest, conservative, and limited rendition of the heterogeneous world is really a sign of the wizened character of theology. The question now is who pulls the puppet’s strings.

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Yang’s article aims, with the help of Wenzhou’s ritual economy, to “unmask and undermine the larger economy’s hegemonic principles,” which are themselves described as a mix of state socialism and market economy, both considered capitalist. For me, this raises three questions: Does ritual expenditure constitute a practical critique of capitalism? What is the hybrid whole inflected by the ritual economy? and Does this article succeed as an opening of prospects for possibilities other than capitalism better than does the Marxist conception of communism?

All three questions raise the issue of the reproduction of an economy, extensively discussed in the literature on articulation but rejected here and elsewhere as outmoded. Crucially, the literature dismissed also includes the encapsulation and enclosure of noncapitalist units of production and whole enclave economies within the greater articulation of capitalism (for instance, the discussion of Chayanov and “peasantry” by Ennew, Hirst, and Tribe 1977). It was already well established that “peasant” household economies include a large proportion of expenditure on gifts and rites (e.g., Wolf 1966: 7–9). Along with rent, taxes, and fees, this was treated

1. I am, of course, thinking here of the line Adorno takes in relation to the culture industry, which, for him, heralds the final moment of disenchantment and, ultimately, the end of the enlightenment project (see Adorno and Horkheimer 1992:120–67).

2. Here I am referring to Yang’s own desire to negotiate Chinese history.

as “surplus,” and surplus was where a unit of production was linked into a larger economy of appropriation and its reproduction.

This conception of the economy is regrettably missing from Yang’s hybrid because of her attack on Marx’s productionism. Instead of reading into Marx a utilitarian and bourgeois concept of work as she does, via Baudrillard, a more generous critique such as Hannah Arendt’s elaboration of work, labour, and the life of action, which includes the ability to produce stories and create meanings (1959:297), could also have included producing for extravagant public expenditure. What keeps all this from being included in Marxism is not productionism or Eurocentrism but Marxism’s aim to become a transparent consciousness of the whole. Ritual and the sacred are to be demystified rather than treated as collective imagination. In short, a far more salient problem, as the theoretical thrashing of the concept of ideology after Althusser made so clear, is Marxist epistemology. One figure which appeared out of the conceptual dust in the seventies was the imaginary as a universal human condition and therefore as part of the work, labour, action, and all kinds of knowledge. The issue is not correspondence with (or holistic consciousness of) reality but whether an ideology and an imaginary lifeworld serve or do not serve exploitation—the stunting of capacities and competences for work, thought, and the life of action.

It is surely right to seek an alternative to privatized consumption as Yang does. What is preferable in the ritual economy is that it enhances leisure and social generosity—that it locates and creates spaces for public action and public good. But does the success of the ritual economy in Wenzhou constitute a practical critique of capitalism? Here we come to a question of the level at which Wenzhou’s ritual economy is reproduced. Beside the surplus gloriously spent on public works and rivalry in ritual extravagance and gifts, the surpluses of profit, interest, rent, and taxes enter into the reproduction of a larger economy within which the spaces and expenditures of the ritual economy are separated out. There are such spaces of local ritual economy all over China, but they are not linked as a generalized ritual economy. The ritual economy carves itself out or is for political, economic, and its own reasons separated out as a local one. The Chinese mainland economy is made up of a number of linked regional economies (including that of Wenzhou). They and the whole are linked into other partially self-reproducing economic units including transnational corporations and other nations.

Accepting that the linkages are capitalist, though of different kinds of capitalism, in what way are they undermined by what is almost the most local of their partially self-reproducing units or inflections? This question of fact brings with it a question of concept. “Economy” in this article ranges from Bataille’s universalizing notion of an economy of need-driven energies which accumulate and must be dissipated or expended to a society-economy treated as historically specific. They are merged in the metaphor of the “body,” but “body” asks how its life is reproduced, and that comes down to the

prosaic question of linkages and levels of reproduction. These are simply not addressed, and this is surely a fault in Yang’s idea of “economy.” The fault prevents a serious questioning of the so-called larger economy which encapsulates local ritual economies. Ritual extravagance may be ancient and a fulfilment of a primordial need, but it is local. Does it undermine and unmask the larger economy? Is the larger linkage capable of being replaced by another linking of surplus appropriation, a greater economy of fulfilments suggested by ritual expenditure?

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Revived religious practice and the extravagant celebration of life-course events, ritual expenditure on spectacular performances of sacrifice and destruction—these are not activities usually associated with rapid regional economic “development.” And yet, in rural Wenzhou, a place heralded by the state as an “economic miracle,” a model of private commercial growth, there has been an upsurge of these practices. Yang’s fascinating discussion of the parallel growth of a “nonprofit ritual economy” alongside privatization and entrepreneurialism in Wenzhou offers enticing theoretical insights into how to think through such a surprising juxtaposition and in the process forces us to reflect upon the sparse conceptual resources at hand to “capture [their] full complexity.”

In this paper Yang resists the temptation to fold stories of religious squandering, indulgent consumption, generous sacrifice, and competitive communal feasting and tomb building into the dominant narrative of global capitalist penetration. In this frame such practices might be identified as aspects of “social capital,” “cultural embeddedness,” “Confucian network capitalism,” or “Chinese-style postmodern consumerism.” They would thereby be yoked into a unilinear and centered discourse of development in which all processes are seen as enabling, supporting, or deriving from capitalism in its latest phase. For Yang, this conceptual move would be to undermine the specificity and enabling force of what she prefers to see as “economic hybridity.”

It is heartening to see our deconstruction of capitalism (Gibson-Graham 1996) providing one of the inspirations for Yang’s own search for antiessentialist and nondeterministic frameworks with which to apprehend the flows and connections between small rural household industries, overseas Chinese investment in capitalist businesses, local state enterprises, and a multifaceted nonprofit ritual economy in which individual and community consumption, gift, sacrifice, and destruction all play a role. In this paper she adopts a discursive strategy similar to our own, highlighting economic diversity as a way of challenging the hegemony of capitalocentric



discourse. Whereas we have pursued the tack of developing a language of “diverse class relations” as a way of making visible the multiple capitalist and noncapitalist economic and noneconomic flows that constitute a social landscape (Gibson-Graham, Resnick, and Wolff 2000, 2001), Yang employs a concept of “economic hybridity.” She argues that this notion allows for the interaction in an undetermined way of multiple and competing logics (emanating from, for example, the peasant ritual economy, the market economy, or various production economies) and the creation of a system in which fragmentation and dissonance function alongside integration and unity.

What Yang confronts in her search for new conceptual vocabularies with which to speak of economic hybridity is the lingering influence of economic determinism even in those thinkers such as Bataille who saw themselves as offering critiques of political economy. The very terms “system,” “logic,” and “economic compulsion” resonate with conceptions of self-regulation, directionality, and necessity that threaten to undermine the quest for new antiteleological ways of thinking about the economy. Yet the link to Bataille is also extraordinarily productive. His ebullient and confrontive focus on “ancient economy’s inextricable entanglement in the realm of the sacred” prompts us to consider how modern economic thinking has tamed and distanced the sacred and what is usually associated with it—the emotive and affective registers of life and “wasteful” excesses of expenditure on ritual, celebration, and festival.

Political economic discourse has traditionally employed the productive/unproductive distinction as an accounting mechanism for distinguishing those activities that are deemed as generating new value and growth in the economic system from those that are “merely” a drain on created value. The origin of this invidious calculative frame is entangled with the rise of liberalism and the elevation of secular practices and the public sphere of reason and morality over sacred rituals and the private realm of kin, feeling, obligation, and visceral experience (Connolly 1999). That economic discourse mirrored the cultural valuations and devaluations occurring in political theory during the Enlightenment is not surprising if we take a Foucauldian genealogical perspective. What is interesting is to calculate some of the effects of this demarcation and derogation of “unproductive” expenditure on our conceptions of economic possibility, just as William Connolly is exploring the limiting effects of the secularists’ devaluation and demotion of the visceral register, the sacred, and the emotive upon postmodern political possibilities.

Yang’s challenging and evocative paper suggests many ways of thinking about the enabling effects of extravagant expenditure, the “efficacy of generosity in sacrifice,” and the capacities of a community “ablaze with pleasant memories for months to come.” This wonderful discussion of Wenzhou prompts us to speculate on the ways in which noncapitalocentric discourses of economic diversity and visions of economic

possibility might be energized and expanded by a closer “economic” reading of pleasure, spirituality, and performances of excess.

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This exceedingly interesting paper takes as its starting point J. K. Gibson-Graham’s exhortation to find new theoretical languages to explain capitalism’s supposed triumph without reproducing the self-justificatory narratives of its inevitability and global dominance. Yang crafts such a theoretical language, using tools derived from Bataille, Baudrillard, and Bakhtin and through an insightful and nuanced analysis of apparently “irrational” ritual expenditures in Wenzhou, a region often touted in the press as a success story of capitalism and free markets in the “new China.” Specifically, Yang develops two models. One is a model of ritual expenditure that attends to the sacralization of the putatively economic. It is meant to address the shortcomings of other models of peasant economies, the author arguing that peasant economies are never, strictly speaking, merely economic. The other is a model of economic hybridity that directly answers Gibson-Graham’s call for a critique of global capitalism as all-conquering and capitalist economic development as a one-way street. This model is meant to address the shortcomings of the articulation-of-modes-of-production models of an earlier moment in economic anthropology.

While we wholeheartedly endorse the project of the paper and are convinced by the fine analysis here, we have two minor queries about the models presented, queries that have more to do with the author’s sources of theoretical inspiration than with her subtle use of them. Our comments derive from our concern that such new analyses of capitalisms and economic hybridity not simply turn into—or be misread as—old modernization theories. We offer them in the spirit of exploring the rich theoretical landscapes Yang presents.

First, we question whether Bataille’s vision of capitalism is not itself caught in capitalism’s self-mythologization as a desacralized and productivist space. Interestingly, Yang draws most directly from Bataille rather than from Mauss, from whom Bataille derived his analysis. We quibble with the suggestion that postmodern consumerism “is still in the service of production and productive accumulation, since every act of consumption in the world of leisure, entertainment, media, fashion, and home décor merely feeds back into the growth of the economy rather than leading to the finality and loss of truly *nonproductive* expenditure.” As Mauss argued, one who engages in the ritual consumption and even destruction of objects of economic value, rather than serving the interests of production, is in fact pur-

chasing prestige in the eyes of a community of other consumers.

To take just one striking example, in 1925, the same year that Mauss published *Essai sur le don*, F. Scott Fitzgerald (1953) offered one of the greatest tributes to the potlatch in all of American literature, *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby, in the economic expansion of the Jazz Age, buys an enormous mansion and throws lavish parties every night for a summer to try to raise his social stature in the eyes of Daisy, whose voice, famously, “sounds like money.” Of course, the ritual, even magical, fetishism of commodities had already been observed by Marx in the 1850s. Gatsby’s consumption, furthermore, is performative; it constructs his identity, not unlike the “distinctive feature” of the economy that Yang identifies in rural Wenzhou that works toward the “reconstitution of local kinship relations and structures.” This sacred and exuberant quality of consumption, inscribed into American literature by Fitzgerald in the 1920s, troubles the periodization implicit in Bataille and in Yang’s extrapolation of his argument of there being distinct precapitalist, capitalist, and postmodern capitalist formations following one another in time and tied to varying degrees of desacralization. Gatsby, we suggest, both foretells and disrupts the forward and backward temporal narratives of modernization theory.

Second, Yang makes good use of Bakhtin, but we worry about the slippage between the linguistic and the biological notion of hybridity. We believe that Bakhtin’s notion of hybridity works for the register of speech, where we can imagine a room of people shouting or debating, but *not* for the register of biology and speciation. For the latter, the metaphor too easily slips into the classificatory grids of separate bodies and body types and permits too ready an acceptance of a vision of transformation and mutation linked to reproductive couplings. For example, in the moments in the essay where Yang refers to “archaic,” “ancient,” or “precapitalist” economic formations, she seems caught in the speciation model of hybridity, which presumes bounded (economic) bodies which can then mutually penetrate, for example, to create new hybrids. In defending the ritual practices that she observes in Wenzhou against charges that they may have been co-opted into postmodern consumerism, Yang does not escape the paradigm; she reproduces it by calling them archaic. Emphasizing the linguistic notion of hybridity gets around the problem of positing species by foregrounding the arena of utterances.

In much the same way, Yang’s striking imagery (via Grosz) of the “gay male body” as “both penetrator and penetrated”—“enabl[ing] us to envision economic encounters in modernity as a process of *mutual*, albeit not necessarily equal, penetration”—might preserve the directionality and temporality of modernization theory. Bodies, human ones at least, have a front and a back, and mutual penetration does not have to be but is nevertheless often enough actually sequential penetration. Mutual penetration can easily become a possibility, however, when one breaks with the reproductivist logic that assumes all erotic activity to involve the kind of coupling

from which speciation springs. Here we follow Yang’s crucial insight that, in order to contest the vision of capitalism as monolithic and cohesive, we must “move toward a notion of capitalism as an open-ended, mutating process made up of disparate and conflicting elements, some of which harbor the potential to derail its forces and harness them in new directions.” Perhaps, then, the metaphor of the gay male body needs to be supplemented with the metaphor of the Catacombs, the arena of unbounded bodies and complexly rendered relations described by Gayle Rubin (1991), where insides and outsides get confounded and redefined in the enactment of new pleasures and powers.

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Yang’s “Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place” provides a bold, provocative argument about local cultural autonomy, subversions of “global capitalism,” and the complexities of socioeconomic and cultural transformations in contemporary China. Yang proposes an original concept, “economic hybridity,” that we might use to critique assumptions about a uniform capitalism, and, in the spirit of Sahlins, she stresses the capacity of local culture to resist and rework the incursions of what she interchangeably calls Western or global capitalism. Her essay certainly points in the direction that several anthropologists have sought to go in recent years—developing ethnographically rich accounts that might challenge a framework of “global capitalism” that seems at once overarching, homogenizing, and universalizing. I engage with it at several key points: (1) tropes of place and locality, (2) issues of power and inequality, and (3) the category of global or Western capitalism.

Yang’s title evokes Appadurai’s (1988) groundbreaking “Putting Hierarchy in Its Place.” Appadurai taught us to be wary of cultural tropes that stand in for places, which reveal as much about the histories of power embedded in our representations as they do about the places being described. He and others have encouraged us to analyze these constructions of place rather than assume them. Yang, too, is concerned with culture and place. Taking inspiration from Gibson-Graham she searches for an “outside” to capitalism that might help us conceptualize resistance inside our critiques of capitalism. Gibson-Graham’s spatial metaphor is not tied to place; the “outside” to capitalism in this framework is found in activities. But for Yang, ritual expenditure is tied to a “local” culture that stands outside of a capitalism that is located tropically in the West. What exactly is “local” about the revitalization of lineages and ancestor worship, festivals, and funerals in Wenzhou? Surely not the fact that they occur only in Wenzhou (as Yang acknowledges, they occur throughout rural China). And if not only in Wenzhou, then we would not want to pose (as Yang does not) a “local” Chinese culture of lineage mentality against a “global” Western one in which kinship is irrelevant.

Wenzhou, as Yang's rich ethnography allows us to see, is a welter of cross-spatial, cross-cultural activity. Yang's creative study of ritual expenditure might fruitfully be recast if we thought of "local" and "global" not as transparent spatial arrangements but as analytic categories given meaning through specific representational practices. Locating activity, rather than "local" activity, might also help us to position the "global"—and analyze its emergence—in determinate cultural practices rather than treating it as a deterritorialized phenomenon or wholly a penetration from the West. We would then have to recast the term "culture" to refer not to a set of shared meanings in a bounded space but to the links between cultural meaning, social inequality, and power. We would need to ask whether lavish ritual expenditure might not be a cultural practice that engages capitalism rather than subverts it and that is imbricated in other socioeconomic activity across spatial boundaries (such as overseas Chinese investment). Yang makes an extremely insightful and important point when she argues that ritual expenditure might be what fuels capitalist activity and the desire to create wealth rather than the reverse. Precisely these kinds of specificities offer an original analysis of the heterogeneous and uneven practices that create what, only after we have traced their motivated interconnections, we might call "global capitalism."

To address the critical question Yang poses about subversions of capitalism requires attention to power, including the discursive or signifying practices by which meanings are produced and contested. Culture in Wenzhou is not shared equally but positioned within a field of inequalities, more the outcome of events than their precondition, and as readily manifested in conflict and fragmentation as in order and stability. To desire the subversion of capitalism is to desire, of course, the subversion of the forms of oppression, inequality, and perversion of life that capitalism engenders. The question, then, is how these revitalized cultural practices establish or reestablish forms of power and social inequality. This question is strangely elided in Yang's essay, but the rich ethnography allows us to formulate possible answers. Yang explains that ritual expenditure is a burden shouldered by the wealthy elite, including, tellingly, local cadres who feel a certain noblesse oblige. They are clearly in the process of constructing a hierarchical moral economy (though her table shows that, like American taxes, the burden is borne unevenly by the poorer inhabitants of the region as the elite garner the prestige). Yang goes farther to argue that the wealth they return, in part, to the community also creates new jobs. Here, rather than allow local elites to stand in for local culture, we might ask after the process by which kinship-based alliances and activities construct forms of cultural hegemony that produce contested interpretations of their import. Various positioned people in Wenzhou might indeed embrace lineage beliefs and practices, but we have only to turn to Chinese history, as Yang does, to understand that in the past as well kinship ideologies structured various inequalities of gender, wealth, and prestige.

Elision of this question of cultural power and investment diminishes the potential of Yang's concept of economic hybridity. Spatial metaphors of economic activity lead Yang to separate what she slides into calling the "ritual economy" from capitalism. But these separations are artifacts of a structuralist approach. Rather than demonstrate the imbrications of hybridity, they take us back to the convention of modes of production which Yang legitimately rejects. They allow us to line these activities up side by side but not to understand how one might subvert the other. How might we link consumption to production? How might we understand the intimate connections between lineage cultural beliefs and practices and household factories that hire cheap labor—often among kin—and give differential access to the wealth produced and thus the prestige produced in the ritual expenditure? Yang argues that the antiproductivist ethos of ritual expenditure is subversive of capitalism and of the sober mentality of the Chinese state, but the Chinese government recently gave a full week's vacation to workers in honor of International Workers' Day so that they might spend more of their savings on consumer goods and invigorate an economy that has had enormous ups and downs in the past year and a half. The Chinese state is not against consumption, "wasteful" or otherwise; rather, in line with its prerevolutionary practice, it opposes the kinship-based power and allegiances that threaten its own.

Finally, the categories of "capitalism," "Western capitalism," and "global capitalism," remain, ironically, untouched. Yanagisako (n.d.) in her ethnography of family firms in Italy challenges us to break up the monolithic "Western capitalism" of our analyses by finding not its outside but the heterogeneity within. In this regard, we might return to the metaphors of sex and gender which Yang borrows from Gibson-Graham. Rather than hope to move beyond the binary of femininity and masculinity, feminist theorists today have found that a proliferation of gender categories—transgender, drag queen, female masculinity, etc.—does more to undo the sex/gender system from within than continually trying to find the place that exists above and beyond it. Our ability to conceptualize resistances to "global capitalism" might well follow suit.

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Yang's article raises important issues. What sort of conceptual framings can best accommodate the complexities that characterize social life in the modern world? Yang adds her voice to a growing chorus criticizing variants of the notion that globalization and capitalism are sweeping over the world, erasing differences (i.e., pre- or noncapitalist social formations) and subordinating the local to the relentless force of history. With specific reference to China, Yang disputes the idea that social change is adequately cast in terms of a "transition from

socialism to capitalism," arguing (correctly, in my view) that such rubrics fail to illuminate the complex nature of change. More pointedly, Yang argues against the analytical utility of Marxian notions of "articulation of modes of production" as a means of addressing the complexity of present-day local social formations. Instead, she favors a view (derived from the writings of Bataille and Baudrillard) of precapitalist "ritual economies" as radically different and essentially unassimilable archaic elements "harbored" within capitalism—forming what she terms "hybrid" social formations. Whereas ritual destruction (or consumption) is productive of social capital, she argues, capitalist consumption is productive only of further commodity production.

I have a more sanguine view than does Yang of the trajectory and potential of broadly Marxian approaches to these issues, on the one hand, and a more skeptical view of the utility of the uses of Bataille and Baudrillard suggested by Yang, on the other. The concept "articulation of modes of production"—associated mainly with the "structural Marxism" of some French anthropologists in the 1970s—was devised to address the complexities of local social formations in colonial situations in which elements of pre- or noncapitalist social relations persisted within wider, broadly capitalist, regimes. Although one might justifiably criticize some of these efforts for focusing too narrowly on economic causalities, in the last instance, there are other trajectories of Marxian thinking—trajectories that have moved farther in the directions anticipated by Meillassoux (and, arguably, prefigured in the writings of Marx and Engels themselves) by substantially expanding economic notions of production to include the production of people's social roles, wants, motives, and desires (Turner 1979a, b). Still, Yang's critique draws attention to the fact that we have yet to see many thoroughgoing analyses from the viewpoint of production of the *complexity* that characterizes situations in which noncapitalist elements coexist with capitalist ones. Unlike Yang, however, I do not conclude that this difficulty recommends jettisoning the analytical advantages of approaching such complexity as an aspect of productive processes, broadly conceived.

Against Marxian emphases on production, Yang follows Baudrillard in emphasizing consumption as marking "the radical difference of precapitalist social formations." In my view, this notion sets up a romantically tinged dichotomy, denying the utility of efforts to develop analytical concepts that would allow us to comprehend cultural differences (such as those that distinguish capitalist and noncapitalist forms) as variations of processes manifest in all social systems. "Hybridity," in Yang's usage, thus emphasizes thinking of complex social formations as, in effect, characterized by lack of internal coherence—as composed of irreconcilably contradictory elements.

It is important to remark in this regard that the reasons Marx emphasized production stem less from his alleged economic reductionism than from his effort to link institutional forms to the dynamic processes that account for and, in this sense, *produce* them. At this level of

abstraction, then, an analytical emphasis on social life as productive process boils down to a logical imperative; insofar as they may be characterized as manifesting any coherence through time, social systems *are* patterns of social production and reproduction. Marx's emphasis on production is thus best viewed as an attempt to provide a set of concepts that would allow comparative analysis of such processes in holistic terms. In contrast, to insist on the radical difference of noncapitalist and capitalist social processes is to play down (perhaps unwittingly) analysis of processes of exploitation and alienation in noncapitalist societies—amounting to what Donham (1999:15) terms "romantic anticapitalism." Many of the tensions manifest, for example, between locally preferred and state-encouraged practices in China can be construed as having to do with whether control of social production should be in the hands of local leaders or the state.

Viewed in these terms, Yang's criticism of Marx for apparently underestimating the importance of consumption by terming it a "moment" in a more widely conceived notion of production seems to me to miss the point. The point is less that consumption is subordinate to production than that consumption is production in one of its valences or manifestations and must be understood with reference to social production as a whole. Thus, ritual destruction, insofar as it is constitutive of local forms of social authority and an important element in the wider process of social reproduction in "ritual economies," is also, clearly, productive.

In this regard, I detect in Yang's analysis a tension between its worthy attempt to show how different institutional contexts—families, communities, the state, markets—exist in relations that are simultaneously competitive and mutually reinforcing, on the one hand, and her insistence that this sort of complexity is usefully viewed as "hybrid," on the other. The problem with this notion of "hybridity" is that *all* social formations are hybrid insofar as individual, familial, communal, and higher-level arenas of social production inevitably exhibit some measure of such complexity. As Yang herself notes, both tension and complicity among these levels have characterized Chinese civilization since long before the advent of either capitalism or the socialist state. By the same token, as feminist critics of Marx and Engels point out, even their analysis of capitalism was incomplete in that it insufficiently developed the complexities linking family and gender as productive arenas, on the one hand, and capitalist production, on the other. In other words, "capitalism" is itself, even in its most ideal-typical form, a "hybrid" social formation in Yang's terms.

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Yang here pushes her study of the state political economy and the popular gift economy (Yang 1994a) in a new direction. Drawing upon her field materials from rural

Wenzhou and her extensive reading in social theory, Yang replaces “monolithic global capitalism” with “economic hybridity.” Her article highlights “instances in which a market economy has unleashed or reactivated the principle of exuberant community ritual display and consumption and the revived ritual economy has helped to launch economic production while also inflecting the process toward its own ends.” She describes how “unconquered remnants”—so-called premodern social and ritual forms—have been revived as alternative rationalities of capitalism. In her focused depiction, the popular “ritual economy” in Wenzhou has facilitated the accumulation of wealth and interactions among various socioeconomic forces—the developmental state, global capitalism, the overseas Chinese, small enterprises, common household economies, and so on. Ritual has also exerted one other important effect on the regional economy: as something resembling the potlatch, ritual in Wenzhou enacts and reenacts an equalizing mechanism in which economic wealth is reciprocated with social recognition. Having pointed out the dual function of ritual, Yang urges us to move toward “a notion of capitalism as an open-ended, mutating process made up of disparate and conflicting elements, some of which harbor the potential to derail its forces and harness them in new directions.”

The revival of “superstition,” or what Yang has alternatively termed the “ritual economy,” in post-Mao China has been phenomenal. Existing studies have mostly paid attention to the folk ideological alternatives to the state’s discourse of history and political rationality (Anagnost 1985, Feuchtwang 1989). I myself have argued that the resurgence of popular religion has formed a challenge to official and intellectual “break-with-history histories of modernity” (Wang 1997, 1998). Yang’s economic-cultural analysis of ritual has shed new light on this issue. By positioning popular ritual in her “economic hybridity,” she argues that the popular “ritual economy” (“superstitious practices,” as they are called by officialdom) is not at all “wasteful” and “irrational”; instead it is part and parcel of the *other possibilities* of capitalism.

The place where Yang seeks to situate global capitalism has evolved into a model because of the conjuncture of these two different ways of domesticating the “capitalist spirit.” The open-door policy of the socialist state that has authorized Wenzhou as an open zone of economic cultural contacts seems to have been based upon the conception that capitalism is an external element that China can mobilize to enhance its internal economic progress. The Wenzhou model, which stems from the anthropologist Fei Xiatong’s thought on grassroots industrialization and commercialization, instead refers to a indigenous “type” (*moshi*) of economic culture. To a great extent, this model is Fei’s remaking of the South-eastern coastal tradition of commerce, although Fei himself says nothing about it. With some relevant to this, Hill Gates (1996) has recently described such a tradition in terms of “petty capitalism.”

My question is how Yang has distanced her argument from the official ways of capitalist domestication. In

some places she adopts a nonreductionist view in which the symbolic in popular ritual is not dissolved into social and economic infrastructures, but her essay as a whole seems to be suggesting that her Wenzhou examples should serve to “put global capitalism in its place” in order to gain their meanings. In fact, according to her there is no such thing as “global capitalism” in Wenzhou. What we can discover there is instead a number of histories that have come to be relived by different social forces in the contemporary. To be specific, these are “confused” histories of resurgent traditional commerce and overseas trade, of popular subversions of cultural standardization, of the tributary mode of production, of national renewal of traditional China’s glories, of domesticated global goods and imaginations, and so on (Wang 1999).

It is in the regional realm of histories that popular ritual has a special place. In the search for the perfect language for their “great histories” of the nation, indigeneous politicians and intellectuals seek to mark out and maintain the boundaries along Sinified modern lines of the economic, the political, the social, and the symbolic. Popular ritual is interesting not because it offers a new category of economy but because it is an ever-resurgent *syn-text*, a mixture of commemorative myths, cosmologies, and practices, in which the “perfect language” of the “enlightening categories” (see Eco 1995:293–316) finds little relevance.

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For those who have eyes to see, the contemporary world has never been one which can be divided into the categories that anthropology uses to describe it: modern and premodern, culture and nurture, gift and commodity, and, of course, capitalism and precapitalist economic formations. But to raise this point is not merely another modish gesture of antibinarism. Rather it is to remind oneself that such discriminations have entered anthropological analysis because of the need to conceptualize and thus give shape to the fluidity of the ethnographic situation. If that purpose is common enough, less often acknowledged is our ideological heritage of such discriminations, a heritage which can be traced back to responses to the social and cultural disruptions of capitalist modernity as articulated in the works of masters from Tönnies to Durkheim to Marx. Europe’s transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* sociality and the rupture brought about by capitalist development are always described with a sense of nostalgic regret and hope and, in the case of Marx, a revolutionary vision.

It is a remarkable achievement of “Putting Capitalism in Its Place” that it unsettles one of the major orthodoxies of economic anthropology: its dominant productivity stance. Drawing on a wide range of works from Bataille to Sahlins, Yang engages the debate very much from within the discipline. Perhaps for this reason, her

monumental treatment of “economic hybridity” gives one the uncanny feeling of covering familiar ground at the same moment as it struggles for a new theoretical departure. One cannot but empathize with Yang’s attempt to move economic anthropology beyond its self-obsessive productivism, and, thinking of the bloodletting rituals still being performed by trance medium in the Housing Development Board public housing estates in Singapore where I used to live, it is clear that predictions of modernity’s steamroller effect on traditional cultural forms is not always sustainable. Yang is no doubt correct on this score, but one is less sure whether her collapsing of production and consumption into a single sphere is ultimately able to do its methodological work.

My misgivings about the concept of economic hybridity have to do with its poor dialectic. It seems to me that because ritual expenditure—in China as in Singapore—does not simply feed into the productivist end of the economic equation, both production and consumption have to be treated in their respective realms of “relative autonomy” just as they should be seen as interlocked in a relationship of mutual influence. If the concept of economic hybridity is a bold and innovative attempt to dissolve the binary of production and consumption, modern and premodern cultural aspirations, it also verges on adjourning whatever ontological integrity these concepts may still have and, at worst, invites the temptation to see the economic sphere as a conceptual no-man’s-land where all things are found and yet nothing is left standing. It seems to me that the concept is incapable of answering questions about the different—and differential—consequences of capitalist development: why, for example, in post-Mao Wenzhou (or in contemporary Singapore, for that matter) it has not had the massive alienating effects that Taussig so dramatically describes among the disenfranchised peasantry in Latin America. These questions understandably still fall within the realm of Marxist scholarship, yet the social effects—negative or otherwise—of capitalist modernity are crucial ideological questions in terms of which the analytical potential of “economic hybridity” may ultimately be assessed. One thinks in this context of Bataille’s own proposal in “The Notion of Expenditure.” While his emphasis on the inherent cultural and aesthetic principle of consumption may argue for a non-reductionist approach to expenditure and loss, his critique is an attempt to come up with a—remedial—position with regard to the devastating effect of excluding nonproductive consumption from social life.

“Putting Global Capitalism in Its Place” offers a sobering reflection on the nature of global capitalism and, not least, on the current fascination in management-school circles with the phenomenon of so-called Confucian capitalism. As Yang herself has pointed out, Confucian capitalism is a discourse which questions the separation of culture and the economic. From the perspective of my own project, the Chinese diaspora facilitates the fetishistic construction of premodern values and practices long lost in Western modern businesses

but now miraculously (re)discovered among the Chinese Other. The proponents of such an approach would find comfort in what is going on in Wenzhou, for the ritual consumption taking place there helps to illustrate the remarkable endurance of “traditional culture” that Chinese, in their supreme pragmatism, are turning into an instrument for profit making. When Yang suggests the reverse flow of ritual consumption into the productivist sphere, one has the feeling that she is in the company of strangers.

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In this very thought-provoking article, Yang has shed further light on a subject that has attracted anthropologists’ attention since the 1980s—the increasing popularity of rural ritual practices in reform-era China. Using ethnographic materials collected in Wenzhou to support her arguments, she critiques the theoretical tools used to tackle worldwide capitalist practices in general and Chinese rural ritual practices in particular. Drawing upon a wide range of social theory, she calls for an understanding of capitalism as “economic hybridity” and “an open-ended, mutating process made up of disparate and conflicting elements,” thus demanding that we examine Chinese rural ritual practices from new angles.

This article contributes to growing theoretical sophistication in the areas of both anthropology and Chinese studies. The theoretical positions are articulated so elegantly that I believe that few will disagree with them. The task awaiting us, however, is applying them to the analysis of concrete social phenomena. Here Yang differentiates her argument from the old analytical models and gives it force by emphasizing the full complexity of the processes of Chinese economic reform and rural ritual practices. The way she proposes to tackle this complexity involves “negotiating history” and historicizing the reform process, an approach I endorse.

My comments on Yang’s article will focus on the issue of how to “historicize” the processes. They are not so much criticisms as points that may complement what she has said and help to carry the issues under discussion further. First, we need to discuss how we view the popularity of rural rituals in China today. Are they merely a “resurgence” of traditional ritual practices suppressed by the Maoist state, or are they “restitutions” under new social and economic conditions? In her study of rituals in the Pearl River Delta, Helen Siu (1989) points out that both forms and meanings of ritual practices have changed in the post-Mao era. Has the same thing happened in Wenzhou? If so, which elements of ritual practices have changed and which have not? Only after we have examined these issues can we proceed to discuss what the ritual practices mean today.

The second issue is that while Yang focuses her critique on the logic of “modernist” or early capitalism, the

revival of ritual practices in Wenzhou has occurred in the era of so-called postmodern capitalism. To see the picture more clearly, we have to historicize postmodern capitalism in the Chinese context. In fact, the revival of rural ritual practices has had close relations with the promotion of overseas Chinese capitalists, especially in southern coastal areas. In many cases, the developmentalist Chinese state has been willing to make concessions to the overseas Chinese to attract foreign investment. While these factors certainly do not escape Yang's notice, she does not explore the overseas Chinese connection "because of its relative weakness in rural Wenzhou." (She does, however, mention an extravagant funeral involving the son of an overseas Chinese.) A thorough consideration of the very fact that ritual practices have survived modernist capitalism's supposedly one-way penetration in overseas Chinese capitalist communities might, in fact, serve to reinforce her claims regarding hybridity and the mutual penetration of capitalism and existing culture. Overseas Chinese capitalism itself can be seen as a thoroughly hybrid version of modern capitalism. This realization might lead us to ask whether postmodern overseas Chinese capitalism is more flexible in hybridizing itself with the existing diverse economic systems in China. Knowing more about the interaction between postmodern capitalism and local culture will help us historicize the ritual revivals in Wenzhou in reform-era China.

Finally, while Yang tries to correct the unidirectional emphasis on production and accumulation in modernist capitalism, she seems to invest too much in the alternative she follows—a concentration upon the economy of expenditure. Talking generally about an archaic economic logic focusing on consumption and redistribution may be helpful in outlining an alternative to modernist capitalist logic, but this "archaic logic" needs to be historicized to be meaningful in the case we are considering. Similarly, claims that the ritual economy in Wenzhou contributes to the redistribution of wealth between the rich and the poor and that it plays a crucial role in establishing local autonomy need to be further substantiated. Moreover, ritual expenditures by local entrepreneurs and cadres are not merely public displays of generosity mainly aimed at gaining prestige and status. It might be more convincing to view the phenomena as processes of power negotiation and social realliance. We need to explore further both how different people perceive those who hold the rituals and the status and expectations of all those who take part. Examining ritual practices from the perspective of power relations among class, gender, kinship groups, local communities, the state, and market forces will thus help us to grasp their complexity in the historical context of contemporary China.

## Reply

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It is both a great challenge and a pleasure to respond to such a rich diversity of comments and critiques coming from different orientations and backgrounds. They stimulate me to rethink and deepen my argument, to consider issues that escaped my notice, and to reaffirm my theoretical standpoint with better persuasive strategies and new avenues of thought. I want to begin by thanking those whose comments represent more a highlighting and elaboration than explicit questioning of my article. Since their ideas provided an important force in my piece, it is gratifying that Gibson and Graham take the spirit of my paper as compatible with their own. I am also glad that Wang, a native anthropologist and fieldworker with an intimate knowledge of the history and contemporary situation of ritual life in Fujian, another Chinese southeastern coastal culture, also seems to have no major problem with the main outlines of my article. I am pleased that Yao, who has been studying the discourse of "Confucian capitalism," points out that my orientation is at odds with that of the proponents of this discourse. Let me now address the criticisms and suggestions to consider areas I neglected.

Two commentators, Feuchtwang and Sangren, remain unconvinced by a turn from the Marxist paradigm to Bataille and Baudrillard, who emphasize consumption. They argue that the notion of production can be expanded to encompass "thought," "the life of action," and social meaning and that the Marxist framework allows us to think about both economic and ritual processes as the "social production and reproduction" of systems of exploitation. What I would like to emphasize here is that Marx developed his powerful ideas to address the alarming problems of industrial workers in the 19th century, when capitalism was in its early phase stressing production, accumulation, and rationalization. We do not see this emphasis in precapitalist societies, and in 20th-century consumer capitalism, as Baudrillard shows, we see the rise of the "political economy of signs," with the media and advertising making production dependent on consumption, or the culture of needs and desires. There is no doubt that Marx's insights on class and exploitation and on economic formations have been invaluable and revolutionary, and as China becomes more capitalist and income gaps increase dramatically, Marxist class analysis again becomes relevant (though not sufficient). However, we must also consider some of the devastating effects of both liberal capitalist and Marxist productivist discourse on precapitalist societies. There is the destruction of cultures by Western colonialism, but there is also the cultural damage and death suffered by the peasantry during state collectivization in China and the former Soviet Union. It is the latter experience that propels me to see new, non-Marxist critiques of cap-



italism and state economy. After seeing the exhaustion of 20th-century social experiments surrounding the relations and means of production, we can no longer afford to think in this way. As Foucault has explained, exploitation is not the only form or strategy of power, repression does not exhaust the possibilities of power, and power can also work through incitement (here it might be revolutionary incitement). Thus, our analyses of power must also be alert to its diverse historical operations. Finally, what interests me is not “social reproduction” but the derailment of a dominant economic process by alternative logics within it.

A number of commentators raise questions of practical and empirical import. With great insight, Feuchtwang points to the fact that these ritual economies in China remain local and sometimes regional and asks how such fragmentation would make them pose any challenge to capitalism. The question of linkages between local ritual economies is an important one, and I agree that right now in China they are not linked up with each other very well, except through the mediation of state administration and such quasi-state forms as the upper levels of the Daoist and Buddhist Associations. In fact, it is mainly the state, not capitalist links, which prevents ritual effervescence from spreading and increasing in strength. Links made through the market economy, such as domestic tourism, actually help strengthen ritual economies. As I write this in Taipei in June 2000, an important new sort of linkage is becoming more evident—that with overseas Chinese ritual communities. Matsu cult worshippers in Taiwan are pressuring both the Taiwan and the mainland state authorities to permit direct ferry connections for Taiwan pilgrims to visit Meizhou Island in Fujian Province across the Straits. Here we see a female celestial authority directly challenging two earthly (male) state/capitalist authorities that have missiles pointed at each other.

Feuchtwang, Rofel, and Zhou imply that there may not be sufficient empirical evidence to conclude that the ritual economy is subversive of capitalism or the state. I agree about the paucity of empirical knowledge, which is due to the difficult political situation for doing fieldwork both for foreigners and for natives in China. I did state that Bataille’s principle of ritual expenditure can be found in “muted form” in Wenzhou. In other words, I see the seeds, revitalized remnants, and promising possibilities there, but its future development is an open question. The last sentence of my article suggests that, at the very least, “theoretical reflection and discursive practice” may contribute in some way to the direction that a hybrid economy takes. I hope I have taken a first step in giving theoretical significance to ritual revival in rural China.

Rofel points to the fact that the Chinese state recently offered workers a week’s vacation for Worker’s Day as an indication that the state is not against consumption. This new pro-consumption attitude of the state is very recent, however, and must be seen against the larger 20th-century background of East Asian states’ scaling down rituals and festivals—the Kuomintang with the

*pudu* rituals of the month of ghosts in Taiwan, the South Korean state with wedding rituals, and the Chinese Communists with funeral and burial practices. The Chinese state is now promoting a consumerism which feeds back into state-capitalist production and not the ritual consumption which rechannels capitalist wealth into another sort of project, a nonproductive one. Here I cannot agree with Perry and Maurer that Bataille’s ritual expenditure can be found in *The Great Gatsby*. As I recall it, that sort of consumption was very much in keeping with the basic principles of capitalism (love and sex), and it did not divert resources from capitalist production toward alternative faiths. Unlike ritual generosity in rural Wenzhou, the acting of giving was directed only at members of the same class and not at the larger community of different statuses.

Another empirical question raised by several commentators is the construction of a new system of inequality and a power elite at the local level. Zhou wants to know whether the ritual economy actually redistributes wealth in rural Wenzhou, and Rofel thinks that I elided the question of the formation of a new system of unequal relations. Sangren warns against “romantic anticapitalism.” The question of the formation of new structures of unequal relations in the ritual economy is something that must be addressed. This article, however, is primarily interested in how a ritual economy challenges a different power order and how their basic principles of operation differ and clash. Of course, power never goes away to open up a space of total liberation; it always reconfigures itself into another form. There is of course gender inequality, as men are the main managers of temples and lineages. The rural Wenzhou industrial economy is increasingly relying upon ethnic Sichuanese peasant workers from the interior. A new entrepreneurial class is developing, but my point is that in the absence of an effective income taxation system the “obligation of wealth” becomes very important as redistribution. In addition, it is not only the wealthy who can monopolize prestige. A new social group based on ritual prestige is beginning to emerge: Daoist priests, temple and lineage managers, Catholic priests, and Yi Jing diviners. These figures cannot be reduced to either political or business elites and sometimes find themselves in opposition to them.

Yao’s point about the importance of historicity and the question of the differential reception of capitalism is well taken. Why did capitalism have an alienating effect on Latin American indigenous and mestizo people while it was received and adapted better in 19th-century Northwest Coastal Native America and in postsocialist rural southeastern China? One is here reminded of Perry and Maurer’s comment about how the gay male body has a front and back and therefore there is a temporality and a sequential aspect to the process of penetration, even if it is mutual. The process of encounter and hybridization depends upon the historical situation and internal dynamics of the host society as well as those of the guest or robber economy. The temporal process of internalization, digestion, intercourse, and reinvention may occur

at the same time or as sequential processes, and the outcome is always subject to historical contingency and cultural predisposition.

On the subject of historicity, it is curious that none of the commentators discusses the genealogical tracings of the ritual economy in imperial and ancient China. Here I would have to disagree with Rofel that it is better to critique capitalism from *inside* (Western) capitalism than from outside. Given the historical social domination of Western culture in the world and the domination of Western self-knowledge, we must draw upon the many valuable cultural resources from non-Western traditions for new avenues of critique of modern state and capitalist economies. In both Western and Chinese modernist discourse, Chinese traditional culture has for too long been portrayed as backward and authoritarian. I hope that other China scholars can dig up more of the buried cultural resources that have been overlooked, such as popular ritual excess and exuberance, Daoist anti-authoritarianism, and the *Guanzi* philosophy of expenditure.

Finally, with great relish, I turn to the critique of a commentator who has imbibed even more of Bataille's mysticism and poetic eloquence than I. It is thrilling to find someone who has also engaged deeply with Bataille. I agree with Michael Dutton (and Julia Kristeva) that Maoist revolutionary excess gathered together the strands of sacredness that the doctrine of historical materialism sought to extract and that Maoism cannot be understood as secularization. My point is that Maoism was able to harness such explosive and destructive revolutionary-religious energy *because* it first destroyed or overcame an older ritual economy. However, the history of state socialism is not merely Maoism. The Maoist impulse was at odds with another force closer to Leninism and Stalinist bureaucratism. In my chapter on the Mao cult in *Gifts* I show how these two forces of fluid revolutionary explosiveness clash with the rigidity and discipline of state bureaucratic rationality, which is also the force of desecralization. Not long after reading Bataille, I had an epiphany in a museum of modern German history in Bonn in 1999. After walking through the section on Nazi history and the Allied bombing of Germany in World War II, with its displays of concentration camp ovens, the statistics of military casualties on all sides, and the twisted and hollow buildings in cities like Dresden, I understood why Bataille was warning against the dangers of unexpected wealth and endless production. I remember reading that he had witnessed the horrors of World War I as a soldier and then lived through the calamities of the next great war. The destructive explosion of modern warfare as a form of expenditure of unreleased energy and the religious force of fascism that animated it were events not to be celebrated but to be avoided through learning from how ancient societies expended accumulated energy and wealth in ritual sacrifice. In the same way, I think, the near-Holocaust quality of Maoist religious destructiveness was horrifying, and it gained its explosiveness through blocking out the traditional religious expenditures. What Dutton calls the "more

modest, conservative, and limited rendition" of ritual economy in Wenzhou today should not be disparaged but promoted.

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