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Research on Chinese Nightlife Cultures and Night-Time Economies

Guest Editor's Introduction

Abstract: This article is a theoretical map that delineates the fledging field of Chinese night-time economy studies, highlights its significance, and suggests possible future directions for its development. It will briefly explicate the night-time economy's significance for the state, society, and economy in China. It will map out current developments in English-language studies of nightlife and the night-time economy and the present state of the field in China. It will also identify several problematics and analyze why they are especially theoretically relevant to the immediate development of the field.

The “night-time economy,” a subset of the cultural economy composed of bars, dance clubs, karaoke establishments, rave parties, live-music venues, and other nightlife forms (while not including the commercial sex industries), has increasingly gained the attention of policymakers and scholars in the West since the 1990s. A contemporary night-time economy began to emerge in China in 1979 (Zhu 2006a), but its growth remained slow in the 1980s and early 1990s. In the second half of the 1990s, this night-time economy expanded exponentially as urban Chinese began to earnestly pursue cultural consumption and the young enthusiastically embraced rave party–inspired

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club culture, the globally dominant nightlife culture at the time. After a brief period of harsh suppression of rave-inspired nightlife in 2000 and 2001, the Chinese night-time economy entered another era of rapid growth. In contrast to that in the 1990s, the present period of growth receives substantive support from all levels of government, is enjoyed by a widening social spectrum, and receives positive reportage in the mass media. Since the late 2000s, the Chinese night-time economy has been commercially successful, culturally vibrant, and conspicuously present all over the country.

Despite the Chinese night-time economy's phenomenal growth, research on it is almost nonexistent in China and elsewhere. This is not only because scholars have not yet noticed the rise of the Chinese night-time economy, but also because it is still not well understood among China studies scholars that nightlife is a worthy academic topic. It is easy to misperceive the Chinese night-time economy as nothing more than the backdrop of social problems or a playground for urban middle-class men. The research gap is also partly caused by the practical difficulties and personal dangers involved in collecting data on the night-time economy. Because of ongoing semi-legal activities, government involvement, and organized-crime participation in the majority of nightlife venues, industry insiders and relevant government officials heavily guard nightlife institutions against investigation by outsiders.

Political, Economic, and Social Significance of the Chinese Night-Time Economy

The night-time economy is recognized as having concrete social and economic impacts in the contemporary Western context. The concepts "night-time economy" and "twenty-four-hour city" have been broadly and enthusiastically embraced by urban planners and local policymakers since the 1990s. Many cities, especially European ones, constructed nightlife districts in order to facilitate urban renewal, tourism, taxation, and the cultural economy. The negative urban and social consequences of night-time consumption—including violence, drug use, crime, noise pollution, traffic, and many other problems—are also being discussed as night-time economies keep expanding.

The Chinese night-time economy may be less massive than those in the developed West, but its social, economic, and political significance are not any less remarkable given its rapid development in a contracted period and its embeddedness in a paternalistic, sociopolitical context that has been very hostile to nightlife. This section explicates how the night-time economy is theoretically intriguing for and practically relevant to China's polity, economy, and society.

Political Significance

Until very recently, few would have imagined that the Chinese state would formally approve or proactively construct local night-time economies. International discourses speak of “discos and democracy” as emblematic of Western institutions desired by Chinese society yet suppressed by the Chinese state (Schell 1988). The Chinese state has granted special allowance to Hong Kong to indulge in “horse-racing and dancing” (*mazhoupao, wuzhaotiao*) to assure Hong Kong citizens that their city will be administrated separately after the Handover—with the implicit understanding that the mainland will remain impervious to such decadent activities. The state was still orchestrating a heavy-handed and nationally coordinated effort to crack down on the rave party-inspired local club culture in 2000.

Why was the Chinese state willing to drastically reverse its long-standing suppressive policies of nightlife beginning in the early 2000s? The motivations of local governments to proactively support the night-time economy are likely to partly overlap with those of local governments in the West: increasing local tax revenues, regenerating urban areas, and facilitating tourism (Roberts 2006). But do they have additional motivations not observable in Western contexts? And how do we explain the central government’s favorable treatment of the night-time economy—as reflected for example in new administrative instructions on the nightlife industries that emphasize providing a nurturing environment for the industries rather than preventing the industries from harming mainstream society (Zhu 2006b)?

Another important question is whether nightlife consumption in the night-time economy will subvert the current political status quo, as the state had worried in the past and as Western observers had hoped. Approaching the same question from a different angle, one may ask whether state support of the night-time economy signals a political shift toward democratic recognition of citizens’ personal freedom. These two questions might appear unsophisticated if one assumes nightlife consumption to be culturally neutral entertainment enjoyed exclusively by elite social groups. If this is true, state support of the night-time economy has nothing to do with freedom. But that is not the case. There are inherent qualities in nightlife consumption that promote hybrid identities, promiscuity, disorder, freedom, liminality, and deviant subcultures (Hobbs et al. 2000; Lovatt and O’Connor 1995). The social groups that participate in nightlife consumption in China are also very diverse, including factory workers, homosexuals, young people from low-income families, middle-aged men and women, and ethnic minorities. If it is meaningful at all to ask whether cultural consumption can potentially contribute to democracy and personal freedom, it is meaningful to examine the case of nightlife consumption in contemporary China.

Economic Significance

China is urgently attempting to develop its cultural industries and cultural market in order to upgrade its economy in the twenty-first century. It is increasingly understood by the state that the cultural industries offer numerous practical advantages—including precisely those needed in the present stage of Chinese economic development. These advantages are industrial restructuring, reduction of environmental pollution, employment of a large number of workers, urban regeneration and development, facilitation of domestic consumption, and provision of local tax revenues. The nightlife industries potentially offer all these advantages, even though they are not formally designated as creative industries by the authoritative Department for Culture, Media, and Sport of the United Kingdom. The night-time economy is at once a high value-added cultural service, a consumption outlet of local creative products, a provider of a large number of jobs, a strong generator of local taxes, a cultural clustering base that facilitates productivity of the creative class, and an infrastructural component of urban regeneration and tourism. Understanding the night-time economy will help China fine-tune and enrich its long-term strategic economic-development plans.

In addition to the various advantages commonly offered by other creative industries, the nightlife industries offer the potential for quick and substantial profits. The animation and comics industries, for example, have been lavishly supported by central and local governments for years but their business performance is still subpar. The nightlife industries, in contrast, have always performed well commercially in spite of social disdain and government suppression. One of the most successful dance clubs that I have investigated yielded annual gross profits of over RMB75 million in 2007 (US\$1 = RMB6.5). Considering that the total number of nightlife venues in the country is in the tens of thousands, the annual contribution of the nightlife industries to the gross domestic product should be very substantial. It could well rival that of the game industries and television, the two most commercially successful local creative industries in China.

But systematic data on the economic performance of the nightlife industries are seriously lacking. The operations of the nightlife industries remain dominated by cash transactions, underworld connections, and semi-legal practices. No one, including veteran industrial insiders, knows exactly how large the national night-time economy is or how many individuals it employs. Without these basic data, it is difficult to design cultural policies and business models for local nightlife business, regulate and reform the structure of the industries, or monitor the work conditions of nightlife labor.

Social Significance

Measuring the social costs incurred by the Chinese night-time economy is highly policy-relevant. If the magnitude of the night-time economy's negative social impacts is excessive, it is unjustifiable to develop it even though it brings substantial economic benefits. Local nightlife districts have been built in numerous cities regardless of size, geographic location, and level of economic development. Extravagant hostess nightclubs are operating in Sichuan's mountainous villages, for example. The Chinese night-time economy is expanding through extensive restructuring of urban spaces. This gentrification, privatization, and disneyfication of urban spaces greatly affect urban residents, including those who have no interest in participating in nightlife. For example, noise pollution and late-night traffic can affect residents near nightlife districts. The encroachment of upscale nightlife entertainment on urban spaces originally used for noncommercial night-time entertainment by the masses represents the night-time economy's displacement of public spaces. How are urban residents in different Chinese cities responding to this urban restructuring? Are residents resisting, subverting, and perhaps even appropriating the restructuring?

Major social problems generated by the Chinese night-time economy do not necessarily coincide with those in Western contexts. Violent crimes are a serious problem in the United Kingdom's night-time economy but only a secondary problem in China, for example. What then are the social problems specific to the Chinese night-time economy? An example is conspicuous nightlife consumption and its implications for the already dangerous level of socioeconomic disparity in urban China. Are social problems such as these being confined largely within the social sphere of the night-time economy, or are they also overflowing into day-time society and affecting mainstream social segments? Answers to these significant questions cannot be found in current studies of night-time economies in Western social contexts. They can only be found through research on the Chinese night-time economy.

Research on Nightlife Cultures and the Night-Time Economy

Social studies of different aspects of nightlife have been undertaken by scholars for many decades (Jayne, Holloway, and Valentine 2006; Melbin 1978). But a visible field of scholarship that systematically addresses nightlife cultures and the night-time economy did not emerge until the 1990s. The timing of the field's rise was connected to the considerable social impact of rave-party culture from the early 1990s in Europe, the embrace of the idea of night-time

economy by policymakers and its heavy impact on city planning, and global recognition of the economic significance of the cultural industries.

We can analytically distinguish between two subfields in the area: studies of nightlife cultures and studies of the night-time economy. The former subfield deals with cultural consumption of nightlife while the latter engages issues related to night-time production. The two subfields do not initially overlap—few scholars work on both of them. But some of the most recent studies of the Chinese night-time economy address issues and adopt perspectives from both subfields (Grazian 2008; Lee 2004; Talbot 2006). Both subfields emerged in the early 1990s, but the subfield of nightlife culture developed more quickly and has currently generated distinctive sub-subfields that tackle very different problematics and empirical materials. A major strength and characteristic of these studies is their adoption of social critical perspectives. At the same time, studies of nightlife cultures also share a common weakness to different extents: their relatively light emphasis on the urban-spatial, social-structural, and political economy aspects of nightlife.

The largest body of literature in studies of nightlife cultures is that on electronic dance-music cultures. Some scholars focus on the cultural innovative aspects of music content (Gilbert and Pearson 1999; Reynolds 1999). Others deal with the social-activist implications of electronic dance-music culture (Hill 2002; McKay 1998). Still others investigate how electronic dance-music culture relates to subcultures and sociocultural stratification (Bennett 1999; Thornton 1996). The study of the rave-party format constitutes another branch in the subfield of nightlife cultures (Malbon 1999; McCall 2001; Skelton and Valentine 1998; Wilson 2006). Rave parties and the rave-inspired club scene have been interpreted in terms of youth subcultures and sociocultural resistance (Huq 1999; Martin 1999; Redhead 1993) or as sociocultural space utilized by marginalized groups (Buckland 2002; Pini 2001; Rietveld 1998; Sylvan 2005). The investigation of rave culture through the framework of religion has also grown into a sizable sub-subfield (Gauthier 2004; St. John 2004, 2006).

One sub-subfield focuses on the drug culture (mainly Ecstasy) embedded in rave parties and the rave-inspired club scene (Blackman 2004; Collin and Godfrey 1997; Hier 2002). While there are a large number of medical and criminological studies of Ecstasy and Ecstasy users, I do not classify them under this sub-subfield because they do not primarily deal with the cultural aspect of drug use. Gender issues constitute an important aspect of nightlife that still have not received the attention they deserve (Buckland 2002; Grazian 2008; Hutchins 1999; Hutton 2006). Another sub-subfield deals with clubber identities and the self, and its participants are scholars from a variety

of disciplines (Communication Studies 298 1997; Goulding, Shankar, and Elliott 2002).

The subfield of night-time economy studies did not gain momentum until the early 2000s and has not yet generated as large a number of sub-subfields as the subfield of nightlife cultures did. The intellectual orientation of night-time economy studies is generally not as culturally critical as that of the nightlife cultures subfield. At the same time, most studies of the night-time economy adequately attend to the urban-spatial, social-structural, and political-economy aspects of nightlife. Another contrast is that while all scholars in the nightlife-cultures subfield are personally familiar with nightlife practices, a significant minority of scholars in the night-time-economy subfield are not personally familiar with or sympathetic to nightlife.

The seminal work of Paul Chatterton and Robert Hollands (2003) examines the political economy of nightlife industries, corporatization, and loss of cultural dynamism in the contemporary club scene. A large number of scholars approach the night-time economy from urban-planning and local-governance perspectives (Jayne, Holloway, and Valentine 2006; Ocejo 2007). One of their recurring themes is the measurement of how socioeconomically worthwhile the night-time economy is when its social costs are taken into account (Measham and Brain 2005; Roberts 2006; Thomas and Bromley 2000). Another is their demonstration of the many negative urban impacts resulting from the operation of nightlife districts, impacts that challenge the “twenty-four-hour city” ideal (Critcher 2000; Hobbs et al. 2000; Sanders 2006; Winlow and Hall 2006). Only a minority of scholars emphasize the positive practical consequences of the night-time economy (Hesmondhalgh 1998; Latham 2003; Sellars 1998). Night-time labor—though agreed by many to be a crucial aspect of the night-time political economy—remains a rather neglected area taken up by few scholars (Böse 2005; Hobbs et al. 2003; McRobbie 2002; Monaghan 2002).

It is possible to identify a third subfield that does not fit into either the category of nightlife-cultures studies or that of night-time-economy studies: public health, criminological, and police studies of nightlife practices as a social problem. This subfield barely existed in the 1990s but has grown rapidly in the 2000s. Studies in this subfield view nightlife as a deviant, drug-infested, and risky generator of social problems. Their research objective is to design policies, legislation, and strategies that effectively regulate nightlife (Anderson and Kavanaugh 2007; Berkley and Thayer 2000; Sanders 2006). The main problem of this subfield is that it is pragmatic policy research rather than academic research. Additionally, it focuses on a very narrow range of issues in nightlife (mainly drugs, youth deviance, and violent crimes) and entirely ignores social, cultural, and economic values of the night-time economy.

Studies of Chinese Nightlife Cultures and the Night-Time Economy

State of the Field

Research on Chinese nightlife cultures and night-time economies constitutes a much smaller field than those of its North American and European counterparts. Despite that, available studies demonstrate a considerably wide range of perspectives and problematics. There are scholars who work on Chinese nightlife cultures and there are those who work on the Chinese night-time economy. A number of different sub-subfields under the nightlife cultures subfield are also being explored.

The subfield of Chinese nightlife cultures took shape in the early 2000s when English- and Chinese-language studies on different aspects of Chinese nightlife cultures started to get published. One of the most productive contributors to the subfield is James Farrer, who examines the sexual culture aspect (Farrer 1999, 2002) as well as the social-stratification implications (Farrer 2000, 2001, 2008) of nightlife in Shanghai. Matthew Chew examines the local reception of electronic dance-music culture in Hong Kong and local nightlife practices in China (2009a, 2009b). Andrew Field (2008) investigates contemporary dance-club culture and its sociocultural impacts in Shanghai. Lu Deping (2007) provides an interesting semiotic reading of Chinese dance clubs as a social text that reflects the interactions between youth subculture, class, and the state. The several authors of the book *Shanghai jiuba* (Shanghai Bars) offer cultural critical interpretations of Shanghai's bar cultures, linking the contemporary bar and club scene to nostalgia, consumption, and social stratification (Bao et al. 2001). A few graduate students are also working on the topic. For example, Lau Gar-lum (2004) adopts a social-constructionist perspective to interpret rave-party culture and youth in Hong Kong.

Although the subfield of Chinese night-time economy emerged a few years later than the Chinese nightlife-cultures subfield, a larger number of scholars are interested in it. Almost all of these scholars are publishing in the Chinese language. This is unsurprising, given the Chinese state's proactive development of local night-time economies. Chinese scholars are eager to supply policy research to advise the state on economic development issues. The majority of them are enthusiastic about the night-time economy. These scholars argue that the night-time economy is a new economic productive force (Li, Zhang, and Ma 2008), that the night-time economy facilitates regional development within China (Dong and Han 2007), and that it fuels urban regeneration (Cao 2008). A minority of them, however, adopt a stance that is similar to that of some Western critics and question whether the night-time economy can deliver enough economic benefits to cover its social costs (Wei 2004). Specialized

studies of the relationship between the night-time economy and urban tourism have formed a vibrant sub-subfield that is nonexistent in international scholarship (Wen 2007). There are also less pragmatic policy-oriented studies in the Chinese language. They include Eric Ma's (2006) social-critical investigation of night-time labor in a dance club in Shenzhen and Zeng Guohua's (2006) critical geographic analysis of the emergence of the Shichahai nightlife district in Beijing. English-language studies of the Chinese night-time economy include Cheng Sea-ling's ethnography of cosmopolitan consumption in the Lan Kwai Fong nightlife district in Hong Kong (2001) and Feng Chongyi's historical account of the transformation of nightlife forms in Hainan (2005).

The scholarly quality of current studies in the field is uneven. Although many of them show high-quality scholarship, there is a problem shared by a significant number of scholars: inadequate understanding of the practical context of nightlife and the intellectual context of night-time economy studies. This problem is especially serious for Chinese scholars working on the Chinese night-time economy. It is due to various reasons including nightlife studies' lack of legitimacy in the Chinese context, funding problems, and difficult access to data.

Another problem of the field is that because commercial sex forms an extremely integral part of Chinese nightlife, research on Chinese night-time economy and nightlife cultures cannot easily bracket the commercial sex industries as international research on Western nightlife does. Middle-class clubbers sometimes club at hostess karaoke nightclubs without the intention of procuring sex services, for example. Hostess karaoke nightclubs and other commercial sex establishments in China are being studied by scholars who specialize in sex and gender rather than those who focus on nightlife. Their works are useful to scholars interested in the Chinese night-time economy. The most notable among them are Zheng Tiantian, who has published profusely on hostess labor and hostess karaoke nightclubs (Zheng 2006, 2009) and Pan Suiming, the prominent scholar of sex studies who has done extensive ethnography on China's red-light districts (Pan 1999).

Unsurprisingly, research on nightlife as a social problem is a rapidly developing field in China, given its demand by the paternalistic state and conservative public. Numerous articles on drug use and policy can be found in police studies journals in China and numerous social policy studies are funded by conservative social groups in Hong Kong, for example. The studies suffer from problems that are similar to their North American counterparts, as described in Anderson and Kavanaugh (2007). And they suffer from them more deeply because intellectual institutional mechanisms of safeguarding scientific objectivity against ideological imperatives are far less established in the Chinese academy than in Western ones.

Major Problematics of Nightlife and the Night-Time Economy in the Chinese Context

A lion's share of current studies of nightlife cultures and the night-time economy focus exclusively on the case of the United Kingdom. Not many studies are conducted on Australia, Japan, and other economically developed societies where domestic night-time economies have already prospered for decades. Even fewer studies focus on developing economies such as China, where domestic night-time economies are rapidly growing. It is doubtful that the findings based on the United Kingdom's night-time economy are generally applicable to China, given their very different local political, economic, cultural, and social contexts.

For example, the China case apparently betrays two major findings based on research done on the United Kingdom case. Violence, which is found by scholars to be a primary social problem of the night-time economy in the United Kingdom and Europe, has not developed into a particularly serious problem in Chinese nightlife (Hobbs et al. 2003). Other problems, including drug abuse, noise pollution, and urban displacement, are considered more urgent in the Chinese context. Corporatization of the nightlife industry, which is found as a primary agent that undermines the progressive sociocultural impacts of contemporary club culture in the West, has not developed to a significant degree in China (Chatterton and Hollands 2003). Other agents, including harsh suppression and paternalistic governance by the state, are playing a more central role in undermining underground club cultures in the Chinese case (Chew 2009c).

These significant differences suggest that the field of Chinese nightlife cultures and night-time economy studies has to innovate in terms of frameworks, problematics, and research orientation. It cannot entirely rely on imported Western ones.

Social Costs and Impacts of the Chinese Night-Time Economy

Scholars studying European night-time economies concur that many of the current economic benefits derived from the night-time economy are unsustainable, cost-ineffective, or achievable only in a limited number of cities (Hadfield et al. 2001; Mommaas 2004; Roberts 2006; Roberts et al. 2006). The substantial commercial success and moderate social impacts of night-time economies in Chinese cities may not entirely corroborate with the European finding. The Chinese case compels us to reevaluate the night-time economy's urban impacts through taking into account a more comprehensive range of contextual factors. For example, my preliminary observations suggest that

night-time violence in China has been quite effectively contained by semi-private order-keeping solutions in various cities. Such solutions provide an empirical basis to rethink whether violence really is an inherent problem of the night-time economy or whether it is contingent to the specific legislation, urban-governance structures, and social norms of different countries.

Another problematic associated with the social cost of the Chinese night-time economy can be seen as a subset of a general problematic debated in urban studies, geography, architecture, and sociology: What are the social impacts of contemporary urban-regeneration strategies that promote tourism and cultural consumption? For over a decade, numerous critical scholars have focused on the negative consequences of gentrification, disneyfication, marketing, and privatization of urban public spaces (for example, Bryman 2004; Harvey 2001; Miles and Paddison 2005; Soja 1989; Zukin 1991). Only a minority of critical scholars argue for alternative assessments that recognize positive social implications in culture-led urban renewal (for example, Forsyth 1997; Latham 2003). The Chinese night-time economy may be able to provide evidence to substantiate the alternative assessments and to explore how exactly public spaces could be appropriated by marginal groups despite the macrocontext of undesirable urban-reconstruction trends. For example, usage of public space in Chinese nightlife districts is spread rather widely across the social spectrum. Based on preliminary data I have collected, I find for example that low-income groups often appropriate open spaces around nightlife districts for their own leisure purposes. Local neighborhood communities' utilization of the upscale amenities around nightlife districts is also generally tolerated by the state and middle-class nightlife participants.

Sociocultural and Sociopolitical Implications of Chinese Nightlife Consumption

Many scholars have worked on the sociocultural implications of contemporary club music, party format, and club cultures. They find many positive implications, including providing world-making opportunities for marginalized groups, subcultural formation, and social subversive potentials, as well as some negative implications such as social stratification. Many of these positive implications become unavailable or weakened when club cultures diffuse to non-Western social contexts such as China. For example, whereas electronic dance music was consumed (at least in the beginning) in a grass-roots, subcultural mode in the United Kingdom, it has been consumed largely as a globalized, upper middle-class, and elite cultural genre in China and other non-Western contexts (Sliavaite 1998). The negative implications of nightlife-based social stratifica-

tion also tend to be exacerbated in China. For instance, extravagant nightlife consumption has become a major means used by the nouveau riche in China to conspicuously show off their wealth.

Research on the sociopolitical implications of nightlife consumption can shed light on a major theoretical question debated among China studies scholars as well as China's social critics: the ambivalent social characteristics of heightened cultural consumption in post-reform China (Davis 2000; Wang 2001). The night-time economy—with its promotion of hybrid identities, promiscuity, illegal activities, liminality, and deviant subcultures (Hobbs et al. 2000)—inherently encourages social disorder and personal freedom. Does it do the same in the Chinese context? If it does, then the case will undermine current dismissals of post-reform cultural consumption as a sophisticated kind of ideological pacification and post-industrial capitalist operation (Pun 2003). At the same time, it should supply a more nuanced evaluation of the different social implications of consuming different popular cultural products in China.

Labor in the Chinese Night-Time Economy

Night-time labor deserves scholarly attention as the sizes of night-time economies around the world continue to grow. The Chinese case promises to offer a handle for us to develop a critical research agenda that is tailored to understanding the circumstances of night-time labor in culturally peripheral societies. For example, because much of dance music, alcohol, and fashion styles in Chinese nightlife are imported from the West rather than produced by local creative labor, the majority of Chinese night-time labor focuses on low-end manual service work. How does global cultural imbalance affect the nature of work, career prospects, and wages of local night-time labor? What are night-time labor's plight and exploitation specific to this context?

Parts of Chinese night-time labor are also very different from their counterparts in the West. For example, it has been found that the occupation of bouncers in Western dance clubs is deeply connected to organized crime. The analogous occupation of club security guards in China is associated with organized crime, the army, and the police. Do the social identity and network of club security guards help to suppress crime more effectively or less effectively in Chinese nightlife?

Gender Issues in Chinese Nightlife

It is well understood that gender operates in different ways in China than in the West. At the same time, nightlife is a highly gender-differentiated and

sexually charged social sphere. The Chinese case therefore provides a window through which scholars can investigate a wide range of local Chinese gender and sex issues, including femininity, masculinity, homosexuality, pornography, prostitution, promiscuity, dating practices, and sexual deviance.

Attention to Chinese gender issues can potentially pose a conceptual challenge to the current definition of “night-time economy.” Commercial sex establishments in the West constitute a relatively limited share of night-time practices and they are relatively clearly separated from clubs and bars. That is why Western scholars can implicitly and completely bracket out commercial sex establishments in defining and discussing Western night-time economies. But commercial sex establishments constitute a relatively large share of the Chinese night-time practices and they are inextricably enmeshed with regular bars and clubs. A definition of Chinese night-time economy that completely brackets out commercial sex establishments is problematic.

Because many bars and clubs in China informally provide sex services and because many sex workers (including those who work there and those who are off work) hang out in bars and clubs, the gender dynamic in bars and clubs in China is markedly different from that in the West. For example, whereas the problematic gender dynamic in the American dance-club scene can be characterized as the “girl hunt” (Grazian 2008), that in the Chinese one is different and should be described as male clubbers’ tendency to treat all female clubbers as prostitutes. Much future research is needed to uncover the social implications of this and other local gender dynamics in Chinese nightlife.

Conclusion

The previous analyses have outlined the night-time economy’s significance for the state, society, and the economy in China. I have provided a review of current developments in English-language studies of nightlife and the night-time economy and the present state of the field in China. I have also explored four problematics in the Chinese nightlife context—social costs of the night-time economy, social implications of nightlife consumption, night-time labor, and night-time gender issues—and illustrated why they are theoretically relevant to the future development of the field.

The theoretical map I am offering has some limitations. I have not discussed alternative ways to delineate subfields in research on nightlife cultures and the night-time economy. For example, one can identify bodies of literature that deal with different nightlife institutions or industries (for example, bars, dance clubs, and karaoke establishments). Or one can classify relevant studies geographically because many night-time economies are city

based. While I try to be as comprehensive as possible in discussing the state of the field, there are still a few minor sub-subfields that I have left out for different reasons. One of them is historical studies of nightlife (Field 2009, for example). I also have not reviewed the literature on nightlife in Japan, Thailand, and other countries that are tangentially relevant to the Chinese case (Ueno 1999). The four problematics that I explore here are not meant to be comprehensive. Additional problematics will be formulated as the field of Chinese nightlife cultures and the night-time economy attract the participation of more scholars.

A Note on the Issue

The four substantive studies comprising this issue have been chosen for their potential contribution to the field as well as their collective display of academic possibilities that the field offers for China studies. The four pieces deal with four major nightlife institutions in China: James Farrer's article focuses on bars, Anthony Fung's explores karaoke clubs, Zeng Guohua's examines nightlife districts, and Matthew Chew's investigates dance clubs. The essays of Fung and Zeng are especially innovative in that they adopt a night-institutional perspective to organize their analysis. Each of the four essays deals with a different geographic location: Farrer's article focuses on Shanghai, Fung's on Beijing, Zeng's on Guangzhou, and Chew's on Hong Kong. The articles by Farrer and Zeng are especially valuable as they represent the pioneering attempt to elaborate the contemporary history of two major city-based night-time economies in China.

Qualitative data and methods—including ethnography, interviews, and documentary data analysis—are emphasized by the four authors. This choice partly reflects the difficulty of collecting quantitative data on the night-time economy. Despite this methodological similarity, the approaches and problematics of the four essays are very different. Farrer analyzes the transformation of Shanghai's bar scene in terms of microsocial interactions in the contexts of cosmopolitan influences and class stratification. Fung reads the details of karaoke entertainment production and consumption in terms of cultural conflict among different social strata. Zeng interprets the transformation of Guangzhou's nightlife districts through macroanalyses of urban planning, local governance, and local economic changes. Chew uncovers the subversive sociocultural meanings of club music. The wide range of theoretical orientation, framework, and problematics of the four articles demonstrates how much the field of Chinese nightlife cultures and night-time economy studies can potentially enrich China studies as well as just night-time economy studies.

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