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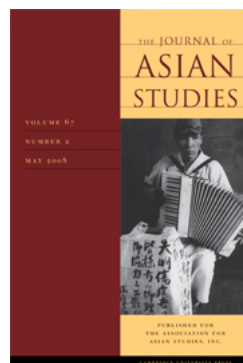
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***Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture.* By Lisa Rofel. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007. x, 264 pp. \$74.95 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).**

Yan Hairong

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(pp. 167, 280), but Miles does not explain this trend. Did the decline have anything to do with the Hakka-led Taiping Rebellion or the Hakka-Punti wars that raged in the Pearl River Delta during the 1850s and 1860s? As James Polachek has demonstrated (see *The Inner Opium War* [Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1992]), Ruan Yuan was at the center of the literati factionalism and foreign policy debates that pushed the Qing into the Opium War. Where did Ruan's students at the Xuehaitang stand in these internal power struggles? Perhaps a bit more attention to this sociopolitical context would have made this rich portrait of the cultural world of the Xuehaitang even richer.

MICAH S. MUSCOLINO

Saint Mary's College of California

Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture. By LISA ROFEL. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007. x, 264 pp. \$74.95 (cloth); \$21.95 (paper).
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China's postsocialist transformation in the past couple of decades challenges us to comprehend its explosive capitalist growth, its multiple social contradictions, its tumultuous strategies of re-linking with global capitalism, its apparent lack of coherence between theory and practice, and its transformation of the social body into emerging interest groups. China's increased globalization has also kept the mainstream media in the United States ever on edge in producing interpretations of what China's transformation means, ranging from coming collapse to inimical rise, with uncertainty and ambivalence in between. While this colossal transformation has been central to contemporary China anthropology, Lisa Rofel's volume is distinguished by its explicit engagement with U.S. politics through an extensive examination of China-in-transformation.

Rofel's analysis centers on public cultural spheres and foregrounds the thesis that globalization is no longer external to China but internal to its economic and cultural productions of commodities, public spheres, subjectivities, and desire. "Desire," encapsulating longing, aspiration, and needs, is at the heart of her ethnographic analysis and ties together the different topics, which span a decade. Rofel uses the keyword "desiring" to capture both the piecing together of disparate social practices and policies and the active re-making of human subjects in the re-worlding of China; she calls this new China "desiring China." Rofel's approach to desire is discursive rather than psychoanalytical: "Desire in China ... is about public narratives and the novel grounds they constructed for knowing and speaking about a post-socialist reality" (p. 22).

The introductory chapter provides a lineage of China's postsocialist experiments that is at once informative and interpretive. It is the laying out of this lineage that moors discussions of desire in what may seem to be disparate practices and spheres in later chapters. Each chapter could serve as an

open-ended and independent reading on a particular moment or axis of desire. Each invites the reader to ponder unresolved contestations and contradictions that desiring subjects try to sort out, if only with momentary success and coherence.

The late 1990s saw neoliberal policies of privatizing much of the state-owned economy and the laying off of a disproportionate number of urban women workers. Revisiting the 1991 popular television series *Yearnings*, Rofel demonstrates to today's reader yesteryear's representation of lived friendship, bankrupt love, and class conflict between workers and intellectuals in the making of families and nation. While this revisit takes on an added ethnographic significance of making alive the earlier form of the problematic and debates, it also reminds the reader just how the earlier articulations of longings on the basis of naturalized "personal life" laid the groundwork for an embrace of later neoliberal policies. Also, Rofel's guided tour of Li Xiaojiang's museum opens up the controversy surrounding this feminist figure. To discuss Li Xiaojiang is to engage in interpreting and evaluating her feminism among feminist perspectives in a context triangulated by the market, the West, and Chinese postsocialism. However, I cannot help noting Li's association of women's creativity with rural and ethnic minority women; an enigmatic absence of urban women in this women's space raises questions about Li's crafting of womanhood in relation to socialism, state, and market.

"Desiring China" is featured centrally in subsequent chapters that discuss gay identities, cosmopolitanism, desire, and self-regulating interest, as well as China's entry into the World Trade Organization. Rofel locates the emergence of desiring China in the aftermath of the 1989 student movement and argues that the construction of desiring China has facilitated neoliberalism in China. In postsocialist cultural production, quality-based desire is opposed to class-based consciousness and the movement-based passions of Mao-era socialism. Rofel defines the "desiring subject" as a new kind of human being whose self-representation and self-narrativization are associated with consumption, transnational cultural production, articulations of sexuality, and possessive individualism, each examined with ample evidence. Desiring China and the desiring subject produce each other, as much as public cultural imaginary is constitutive of self-representation. However, desiring China only appears to be coherent and inevitable in the same way that the desiring subject may appear to be stable and insistent. Rofel makes it an ethnographic and political project to show desires' instability, ambivalence, and unpredictability, while they become fastened to neoliberal policies.

While Rofel makes "desiring China" an ethnographic object, she also seems to use it as an interpretative tool, especially in her later chapters. Desiring is active and agentic and makes "desiring China" both an object and a subject. It is an innovative ethnographic strategy, but one wonders whether writing on desire could be linked not only with the discourse of self-regulating interest of the individual subject but also more with political and economic interests.

YAN HAI RONG

Hong Kong Polytechnic University