

Ngai-Ling Sum

Ordoliberal Authoritarian
Governance in China since 1978:
World Market, Performance Legitimacy,
and Biosovereign Ordering

From Neoliberalism to Variegated Neoliberalization

The debate on neoliberalism in China started with the discussion between Harvey and Ong. Harvey, reading neoliberalism as a global class-offensive project promoted by the United States, argued that China is a “strange case” in which a “particular kind of neoliberalism interdigitated with authoritarian centralized control” aimed to restore class power through accumulation by dispossession (Harvey 2005: 79). Specifically, global capital was exploiting China’s huge labor and consumer markets as a new spatial fix for continuous capital accumulation. Ong criticized this structuralist perspective. Adopting a governmentality perspective, she saw neoliberalism as based on mobile technologies for governing “free subjects” that do not conform to a particular political project or bundle of policies. These technologies support complex and strategic governmental interventions that construct new spatial and population categories as parts of neoliberal rationalities (Ong 2006, 2007).

This debate can be contrasted with the variegated neoliberalization perspective (Brenner and Theodore 2002; Brenner, Peck and Theodore

The South Atlantic Quarterly 118:2, April 2019

DOI 10.1215/00382876-7381206 © 2019 Duke University Press

2010). This conception focuses on hybridized, contradictory, and polymorphic processes that are path dependent, unevenly layered, and geographically conditioned, but also grounded in global structural changes. It has been criticized as serving mainly to provide a useful language to identify and describe processes/dimensions in diverse sites and contexts (d'Albergo 2016: 310). Thus, the approach aims to show how particular concrete cases illustrate, complexify, converge, and/or deviate from neoliberalism. Three examples are Peck (2002) on labor markets and Wu (2010) and Lim (2014) on China. While this does not amount to the reductionism of theoretical "subsumption" (Jessop 1982: 71–76, 212–13), in which any specific case is claimed to exemplify the general features of neoliberalism, it does privilege neoliberalization as an analytical object. Other critics have defined the approach as akin to a descriptive "natural history" that discovers one or another form of neoliberalism or neoliberalization everywhere (and hence nowhere) (Clark 2008: 136–38; Le Galès 2016: 168; Jessop, this issue).

My essay addresses these issues by exploring the stepwise movement from abstract-simple concepts to complex-concrete analysis of socioeconomic changes. Here I draw on the logical-historical approach of cultural political economy (CPE), which explores how the material and semiotic are articulated not only in general theoretical terms but also in more or less specific contexts (Sum and Jessop 2013: 196–224). The essay addresses three meso-level questions that deal with the historical variegations in neoliberalism. First, is neoliberalization always the best entry point for phenomena and processes that, at first sight, could be subsumed under this notion? Second, how do discourses, the (il)liberal arts of governing, and their metagovernance mediate neoliberalization and other processes? And third, to what extent and how do hybrid forms that emerge from these contingent interactions across different sites and scales lead to new forms of contestation against exploitation and domination?

From a CPE viewpoint, with its interest in socioeconomic imaginaries, the first question broadens the examination of so-called neoliberal imaginaries and their roots in, and ties to, specific historical conjunctures and circumstances. Michel Foucault's *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010) highlighted two differentiated veridictions of the market truth posited by neoliberalism: a Chicago School neoliberal version and a Freiburg ordoliberal one. Chicagoans viewed markets as natural and capable of being extended to all human actions, subjecting them to the permanent audit of marketized principles (Gane 2008). Foucault drew on Walter Eucken, Wilhelm Röpke, and Alexander Rüstow to characterize German ordoliberalism. Following Röpke, he

identified four major differences from the Chicago School: (1) the rejection of the naturalness of the market and *laissez-faire*; (2) an emphasis on competition rather than market exchange as such; (3) competition as a governmental art to be actively pursued by the state; and (4) the state seeking legitimacy by creating a market-competition order that frames the economy, social, legal, and moral arenas (Röpke 1948: 28). In contrast to Chicagoan hostility to the state, then, ordoliberalism promotes a social market economy in which the state has an important and legitimate role in creating and governing the market through contractual, juridico-political, and moral means and ensuring market competition (cf. Oksala 2017: 198; see also later).

Regarding the second question, CPE explores how discourses mediate variegation and hybridization. Economic discourses such as economic growth, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and consumption circulate in policy-consultant circuits across different sites and scales (Sum 2009; Peck and Theodore 2015). In contrast to Ong's conception, CPE sees these mobile discourses and related practices as selectively (re)contextualized by structurally embedded actors who seek to remake their institutional-regulatory and everyday life settings (for more on selectivity, see Sum and Jessop 2013: 214–29). Some of these practices can be related to metagovernance or “governance of governance” (Jessop 2011), as they seek to establish coordinating ground rules that steer, guide, and collibrate other means of governing.

Third, hybridization refers to the selective rearticulation and recontextualization of discourses that transform meanings and practices. These involve discursive technologies of new ground rules, categories, and apparatuses that construct new meanings and marginalize others in guiding actions and processes. This is a crucial aspect in analyzing the conjuncturally specific, multispatial variegation processes of neoliberalization (Sum and Jessop 2013: 220–23).

Making Ordoliberal and Authoritarian Turns in Variegation Research

To illustrate these points, I look beyond the *loci classici* of Reaganism and Thatcherism to consider how research on variegation and hybridization can be enhanced by taking account of ordoliberalism and non-Western authoritarian settings.

Foucault's discussion of German ordoliberalism highlights the art of government in establishing a competition-entrepreneurial order to secure a social market economy. Writing in postwar Germany in the aftermath of military defeat, economic devastation, and loss of sovereignty, Röpke (1948:

243, 246) worried that uprooted masses were losing the “safety of sufficient organic social embeddedness” coming from family, church, or local community and this might lead again to overintegration as occurred under Nazism (Biebricher 2011: 178–81). Thus, the ordoliberal imaginary aimed to rebuild the state and ground its legitimacy in a new economic, social, and moral order. For Foucault, the ordoliberal art of governing was to establish a “society for the market” and cushion the “society against the market.” The former involves ordering the conditions of the market via planning for competition/enterprise, and actively intervening in the society, via legal-contractual means. The latter focuses on what Rustow called *Vitalpolitik*, or, a politics of life. It compensates for the negative effects of the market via social-political engineering of the family and community to produce a set of positive cultural and moral values (e.g., religion). These biopolitical ways of governing (Biebricher 2011: 183–88) encourage the population to become entrepreneurs of the self to improve their living standards and social integration to overcome atomization and massification (Bonefeld 2017a).

For Bonefeld (2017b), ordoliberalism involves “authoritarian liberalism”—something that can also be observed increasingly in the heartlands of classic neoliberalism. In the case of China, too, we observe ordoliberal features, such as the focus on state building for national strength/legitimacy, state interventionism to promote entrepreneurship/competitiveness, and a *Vitalpolitik* based on neo-Confucianism and nationalism. These have been hybridized and enmeshed with key authoritarian socialist ground rules/statecraft and selectively (re)programmed by the Chinese Communist Party since Deng Xiaoping to create new sites of truth claims.

Combining ordoliberal and authoritarian turns also returns us to the issue of sovereign power. Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1991) examined the historical Western transition from dynastic monarchies to liberal democratic rule in which the sovereign power to decide at a given moment whether a subject lives or dies was replaced by continuing disciplinary surveillance. Later, he introduced a further development, namely, biopolitical power (Foucault 2010). This sequencing might suggest that sovereign power is in decline or even disappearing. Yet sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical power can overlap and coexist, and this is especially so in non-Western contexts. I now explore this possibility.

In his later work *Security, Territory, and Population*, Foucault (2004, 7) proposes that sovereign, disciplinary, and biopolitical power can become co-implicated, with their weight varying as conjunctures change. Hindess

(1996), among other neo-Foucauldians, echoed this position, arguing that governmentality studies can be extended to study China, especially as the boundary between neoliberal and authoritarian governmental technologies is unclear. Likewise, Dean (1999: 154) suggests that an “authoritarian governmentality” comprises an ensemble of biopolitics and sovereignty. These insights stimulated a body of research on non-Western governmentalities in colonial, socialist, and authoritarian contexts (e.g., Legg 2006; Collier 2011; Bargu 2014). For example, working on Turkey, Banu Bargu (2014: 51–52) examines authoritarian regimes through the concept of biosovereignty as a contradictory hybridization of sovereignty and biopolitics. On the one hand, sovereign power is permeated and transformed by the rational adoption and incorporation of disciplinary and governmental techniques; on the other, disciplinary and governmental techniques are transformed through their fusion with sovereign power. Nonetheless, this mutual interpenetration and cross-fertilization of sovereign tactics and disciplinary and biopolitical governance oriented to controlling and improving the Turkish population cannot guarantee stability and is also contested.

Chinese governmentality has been experimenting with such hybridization in areas such as education, the workplace, community, and sexual health (e.g., Anagnost 2004; Sigley 2006; Kipnis 2006; Jeffreys and Sigley 2009). Some studies focus on the neoliberal-biopolitical side of governing the subject at a distance; others insist that the state remains an active participant in China’s neoliberal governance (Hoffman 2006). Sigley (2006: 489) concluded that Chinese governmentality involves a “hybrid socialist-neoliberal form of political rationality” based on the copresence of authoritarian-technocratic techniques and a governing of subjects via their own autonomy. This suggests that socialism is not dead but survives in new forms. Inspired by such work, I now introduce the concept of ordoliberal authoritarian governance to explore China’s hybridized ordoliberal and socialist authoritarian mode of governing and its contestation.

Ordoliberal Authoritarian Governance in China since 1978

Under Deng’s leadership, China opened its door to the world market in 1978. The party moved away from its centrally commanding role toward more diffuse but still authoritarian modes of intervention to build a modern nation. Ordosocialist modes of steering were selectively hybridized with ordoliberal ones to guide public and/or private actors in aiming for growth and social

stability. This hybrid form of ordoliberal authoritarian governance has been reinvented several times, notably in response to the Tiananmen movement in 1989 and China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001.

This reinvention has involved the rearticulation of micropolitical ordoliberal and ordoliberal techniques across different sites and scales. Relevant measures include (1) remaking the party's legitimacy and introducing new metagovernance ground rules (e.g., GDPism); (2) reprogramming socialist statecraft (e.g., financial control) and administrative guidelines/procedures to exercise panoptic "super-vision" to monitor subordinate units; (3) conducting biosovereign ordering of population; and (4) producing the ordoliberal art of governing via morals and desires. This hybridization is mediated by the party and other capillary networks (e.g., regional/local governments, think tanks, social communal organizations, schools, media) to govern the economy, bureaucracy, and society. They supervise, define, open up, and access domains of life (e.g., growth, migrants, population quality, consumption, entrepreneurship, moral, nationalism) for liberal and illiberal intervention.

Deng consolidated power after replacing Mao, and his supporters as the central party-state pursued modernization and opened up the economy to the world market. This strategy rested on new economic imaginaries and associated practices such as special economic zones, and concessionary strategies to attract foreign direct investment were pursued. Domestically, Deng's vision in 1979 was to build a "xiaokang society" (moderately well-off society) but with "some getting rich first" as the price of a later increase in general prosperity. New economic programs included lifting price controls and decollectivizing agriculture. These changes led to inflation, economic disparities, and rampant corruption. Mass dissatisfaction prompted students, workers, and peasants to demand changes, leading to the Tiananmen movement.

Fearful of the angry masses, Deng, in negotiation with a divided group of party elders, instigated a crackdown and pressed for a post-Tiananmen survival strategy for himself and the party (Pei 2015). Rather than basing legitimacy on Marxist-Leninist ideology, he envisioned a utilitarian turn to deliver growth and stability. The party's new rationale was mediated by new slogans such as a "socialist market economy" that regarded "plan" and "market" as mere "economic tools" and "stability maintenance" as "the non-negotiable task." New ground rules, socialist tool kits, and governmental practices were selectively redesigned to manage party legitimacy and rule.

Gross domestic product (GDP) was selected as the means to showcase the party's performance and legitimacy and to guide the metagovernance of economy and society. Before the Twelfth Party Congress in 1982, the goal

was to double real GDP to 710 billion yuan during the 1980s and quadruple it to 2,800 billion by 2000. To this end, then general secretary Hu Yaobang proposed an “8 percent annual growth rate” as “necessary to maintain social stability and provide jobs for tens of millions of new laborers swarming into the country’s crowded job market every year” (*China Daily*, 2009). This became a mainstay of official rhetoric, and “maintaining 8 percent annual growth rate” (*baobao*) underpinned the party’s performance legitimacy. Dongtao Qi (2010: 5) termed this *GDPism*, which, from Deng (1978–89) onward, has denoted “the belief that rapid GDP growth should always be the nation’s highest priority because it is the panacea for most national issues and the way to consolidate the government’s legitimacy.”

As an ordosocialist ground rule, the political arithmetic of an 8 percent growth rate made visible a desirable national policy space that could deliver the twin targets of a substantial growth rate and social stability. Foucault (2004: 57) termed this knowledging technique the “disciplinary power of normation.” In the Chinese case, norms such as those entailed in *GDPism* established ground rules to (1) distinguish acceptable and unacceptable policy actions and thus what merits promotion and funding; (2) judge collective and individual performance at different sites and scales; and (3) prescribe desirable and undesirable policy outcomes. Central party-state leaders, subnational government officials, and state-owned enterprise (SOE) executives reiterated these ground rules to showcase their performance and jostle for resources that would benefit them and related networks. Faced with deviation from the 8 percent norm, which occurred after the 2008 financial crisis, the Xi Jinping leadership developed the “new normal” discourse to negotiate this metagovernance ground rule to a lower target range of 6.5 percent in a decelerating economy.

This national *GDPist* ground rule has been hybridized through its combination with preexisting socialist statecraft of control in nonfinancial sites (e.g., appointments, appraisals, dismissals) as well as financial sites (e.g., credits, loans, licenses, permits). Financial guidance was accentuated with the appointment of Zhu Rongji to the Politburo Central Committee in 1992. The party extended its control over the financial system by channeling savings to the state-owned sector to stimulate growth. This development statecraft was partly enabled by institutional innovation put in place since 1993, such as the establishment of the People’s Bank of China and other policy banks. These intervene to provide a good investment climate, cheap loans, subsidies, and insurance for state-owned enterprises (SOEs), state-linked companies, and subnational governments and their investment arms

that could drive GDP growth and capital accumulation. As the economic and political arenas have become intertwined, a group of “princelings” (children of high-ranking party members or officials) who run SOEs/state-linked companies or global business brokerages have been able to convert family ties and political connections into wealth for their families and related networks (Brown 2014).

Apart from financial control/influence, the party has also adopted other socialist modes of intervention, including (1) using the Organization Department and Ministry of Personnel to appoint central SOEs’ top leaders; (2) instituting a Cadre Responsibility System that conducts regular appraisals against centrally determined targets (e.g., 8 percent GDP growth rate); and (3) creating a Central Commission for Discipline Inspection that investigates and punishes malfeasance. The activities of these national control mechanisms, especially the financial ones, were reduced by 2003. Ownership of the national SOEs was transferred to the State Asset Supervision and Administrative Council (SASAC) under the State Council. Its remit is to protect and enhance state asset values based on the statecraft of corporatization (or “administrative recommodification”; see Offe 1984). In China, this involves the acceleration of SOE mergers, profit-oriented management techniques, the listing of assets on stock exchanges to enhance capital/market share, SASAC control over the appointments of senior managers (not their top leaders), the introduction of party cells in business organizations, and so on. This administrative commodification was complemented by the party’s use of “atmosphere guidance” (Norris 2016: 52), together with the tightening of nonfinancial means of control, especially during leadership contests conducted in the name of anticorruption.

As for the population, most research has focused on the biopolitical side and omitted sovereignty issues. Bargu’s (2014) concept of biosovereignty offers further insights into biopolitics in authoritarian contexts. In China, the technology of *hukou* (household registration system) as a spatial practice dates back to the feudal era, when sovereign control over residences facilitated levies and conscription (Andreas and Zhan 2016: 798). This mode of sovereign control was reinvented in the Maoist era to distribute scarce resources: the population was categorized and differentiated according to birthplace rather than current residency. Those in the population with urban *hukou* are entitled to state welfare benefits such as housing, education, health care, and retirement benefits. With agricultural decollectivization and the opening to the world market, more young migrant workers moved from rural to urban areas, into township enterprises in the 1980s and industrial

enterprises in special zones in the 1990s. However, the urban hukou system excluded them from access to social resources, especially when the system was implemented in large cities.

The hukou method of national-spatial ordering of the population shows that being a rural peasant in China is a biopolitical and social status tied to one's birth rather than an occupation (Zhang 2014). Upon moving to urban areas, they are classified as *nongmingong* (peasant workers) without hukou and welfare benefits. This illiberal governing technique has been relaxed with the development of nonstate enterprises and the demand for low-cost labor since the 1980s. Several local-authority reforms, such as the blue-stamped hukou, allow some more educated and prosperous migrants to gain urban hukou. However, this de facto commodification of residence is still beyond the reach of most migrants, especially in large cities. Nonmingong remained a strategic state discourse conferring privileges on the urban elite and assigning lower economic value to the bodies of rural migrants as China became a global factory after its WTO entry in 2001.

Following this momentous move, there was a drive for further reform, when then president Jiang Zemin (1989–2004) promoted the strategy of “Three Represents” in 2002. This called for the party to (1) develop advanced productive forces (e.g., technologies); (2) promote advanced culture (e.g., high ideals, good education, and moral integrity); and (3) encourage capitalists to join the party as part of a strategy of co-option. The second goal explicitly linked the quality of the nation with the quality of the individuals. Thus education was an investment in the human body and the national *suzhi* (human quality) of the population for building productive forces and optimizing, if not maximizing, value. Urban and rural populations and their market values were judged for their skills, productivity, entrepreneurship, and mannerisms (Anagnost 2004). This biopolitical turn in party rationality involved a technology of the self that made people responsible for improving their own personal qualities and optimizing themselves as human investment capital through lifelong learning, problem-solving abilities, and general well-roundedness. The urban middle classes, especially their children, invest in themselves to raise and valorize *suzhi* via consumption, lifestyle, education, and special coaching classes. Their high *suzhi* potential is often contrasted favorably with that of the “uncultured” rural migrant workers (Wallis 2013: 345), who are considered in need of management, discipline, and training. This biopolitical technology of judgment generates an urban-rural social hierarchy based on education, hygienic conditions, lifestyle, material consumption, social etiquette, and so on.

Educational training programs, which are organized by various state units, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and commercial donors, encourage migrant workers to be more entrepreneurial and self-developmental in learning new vocational/technological skills and relevant social etiquette. Nonetheless, the suzhi-enhancing process occurs in an authoritarian setting where biopolitical governing via “freedom” and “choice” is intertwined/enmeshed with the illiberal hukou arrangements. Bargu’s concept of biosovereignty can capture some of the complexities of this paradoxical and contradictory juxtaposition of the hukou-suzhi practices. It is neatly illustrated in Cara Wallis’s work (2013: 352–53), which shows how some women migrant workers, after attaining suzhi-raising computer-training programs, were resubsumed as laboring subjects performing repetitive Taylorized processes in digital workshops as China moved from a global factory to a high-tech economy. Thus the competitive logic of global capitalism canceled the biosovereign push for migrant women to undertake life-enhancing and self-actualizing training and realize their aspiration to join the middle classes (with urban hukou). Such disappointments are also reflected in the development of the *Diaosi* subaltern identity (see below).

The cracks continuously created in this paradoxical biosovereign politics are pasted over by creating and intensifying ordoliberal techniques of governance through aspirations, desires, and morals. For Foucault (2010, 241–42), ordoliberal policies target two pillars. One is to shape “society for the market” in line with the logics of competition and entrepreneurship; the other is to cushion “society against the market” by anchoring individuals in a set of warm cultural and moral values, including nationalism. For example, regarding the first ordoliberal pillar, President Jiang Zemin’s 2002 strategy of “Three Represents” aimed to co-opt entrepreneurs, cadre capitalists, and educated professionals into the party and help to build the nation. This national official recognition (and even celebration) of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship encouraged the population to regard education as a way to improve their suzhi and possibly boost their market value. For example, families were urged to plan for their children’s education, the unemployed to become micro-entrepreneurs, and students to take responsibility for improving their training/qualifications, including periods of study abroad. New organizations, such as the New Oriental School, provided extra coaching to help students gain high TOEFL scores; and new identities such as “haiqui” (overseas returnees) provided special status and resources for returning scholars. These desires and related efforts toward career advancement contributed to the first pillar of building market society (cf. Jacka 2009: 528).

These aspirations were encapsulated in Premier Li Keqiang's speech at the World Economic Forum in 2015: "Our people are hard-working and talented. If we could activate every cell in society, the economy of China as a whole will brim with more vigour and gather stronger power for growth. Mass entrepreneurship and innovation, in our eyes, is a 'gold mine' that provides constant source of creativity and wealth" (Li 2015). These entrepreneurial desires to innovate and excel at the national and individual levels dovetailed with the imagined consumption capacities and lifestyle of the entrepreneurial middle classes. Corresponding to the official rhetoric of *suzhi*, glossy fashion/lifestyle magazines, TV programs, and other media portrayed middle-classness in terms of taste, choice, chic lifestyle, cultural activities, and foreign travel (Tomba 2009). Governing desires by dangling consumption carrots before a self-disciplined population marked the arrival of consumer citizenship in China. One's moral worth as a citizen involves asserting one's rights and choices in the market to enhance one's everyday *suzhi* capital (Hooper 2005). In turn, expanding consumption supported the party-state's claim to performance legitimacy. Maintaining this consumption-based social contract depends on the continuing ability to save and/or access credit/wealth aided by the party-state. This makes it vulnerable to excess household debt, credit, and property bubbles.

These ordoliberal policies to build "society for the market" have further splintering effects, especially when hybridized with *hukou* as an exclusionary mechanism and the exercise of state financial control to favor large SOEs, state-linked companies, princelings and their networks, and other powerful interests. This has prompted mass social unrest in the form of demands for better working/pension conditions, fair land-based compensations, and anticorruption, antipollution, and food safety initiatives. In response, the party-state introduced what Foucault designated the second ordoliberal pillar: the cushioning of "society against the market" through a set of warm cultural and moral values. The idea of social harmony has been debated since 2002 and, by 2006, Hu Jintao, then general secretary, announced the building of a "socialist harmonious society" in the Sixth Plenary session of the Sixteenth Central Committee meeting. Unlike classical Confucianism, which emphasizes humanity's innate goodness, neo-Confucianism highlights how the cultural and moral values of the national population can be guided and reshaped when faced with rapid social challenges and personal failings. In an explanation issued on March 4, 2006, Hu (Liu 2006) even identified "Eight Honors, Eight Disgraces" that marked the moral boundary between good and evil:

1. Love the country; do it no harm.
2. Serve the people; do no disservice.
3. Follow science; discard ignorance.
4. Be diligent; not indolent.
5. Be united, help each other; make no gains at others' expense.
6. Be honest and trustworthy; do not give up morals for profits.
7. Be disciplined and law abiding; not chaotic and lawless.
8. Live plainly, struggle hard; do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures.

These moral values and accompanying normative regulations are emphasized in the capacity training of officials, the school curriculum, social work, and so on. For example, social work programs are designed to build social harmony and stability at the communal level of families and neighbors. Communal social work, as a technology of care, employs many techniques to build positive interpersonal relationships and promote a psychology of community care (Yang 2015). It regulates life by getting local people to work and reflect on themselves to build consensus and positive moral values such as filial piety. This strategy has been reinforced under President Xi. His hope-based vision of the “China Dream,” nationalism, and a “new type of great power relations” encourages the release of positive energy and effort to (self-)regulate the population to build a more caring and stable society that would surpass its Western counterparts.

This ordoliberal nurturing of moral life and entrepreneurial potentiality coexist with a biosovereign exclusionary politics (e.g., hukou and suzhi), the uneven effects of socialist statecraft, and the disciplinary-exploitative nature of global capitalism. This hybridized ensemble of discursive-material elements under ordoliberal authoritarian governance has contradictory effects. On the one hand, it regularizes and sediments social relations by, for example, co-opting (cadre) capitalists into the party and creating the entrepreneurial middle classes as consumer citizens with suzhi and moral values. On the other hand, its benefits are very uneven and provoke rising resistance from subaltern groups. This is evident in socioeconomic changes in urban settings following the 2008 financial crisis.

The socialist statecraft of financial control aims to provide cheap credit, especially for urban projects that contribute toward China's GDPist project. Following the 2008 financial crisis, China's falling growth rate and rising unemployment stimulated the then Hu-Wen leadership to reignite growth with a four trillion renminbi (RMB) stimulus package (equivalent to 560 billion USD). To facilitate this package, the central government encouraged state-owned banks to lend to national and subnational governments. To

qualify for these loans, (sub)national governments had to provide matching funding and did so by intensifying land acquisition and leasing land-use rights (Wu, Jiang, and Yeh 2007; Lin 2014). Further funding came from setting up local government financial vehicles to collateralize land-use rights and raise money from state-owned banks and the shadow banking system. Subnational authorities also allied with private developers and auxiliary building industries. These measures fueled debt-based megaprojects and other real estate ventures, increased extrabudgetary government income, and boosted individual careers (Sum 2017). Along with a commercial housing boom, this inflated property bubbles in major cities and led to rising residential rents (Qing and Wang 2014).

A New Subalternity in Ordoliberal Authoritarian Governance: The Making of Diaosi Identity

Migrant workers without urban hukou endure the disciplinary-exploitative capitalist conditions in China's global factory and digital workshops. Long working hours, low pay, and lack of welfare benefits are common in factories such as Foxconn (Bieler and Lee 2017). This has provoked increasing labor resistance from the state trade union of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions and informal labor NGOs. This collective class-based labor consciousness intersects with the rise of other grassroots subaltern identities, especially among second- or third-generation migrant workers. Their agency and subjectivity occupy contradictory locations of subsisting in marginal and subaltern conditions but also aspiring to gain urban hukou and embracing the *suzhi* lifestyle.

Industrial and service migrants must also endure rising house prices or rent. They often rely on employer-provided dormitories (Pun 2005), rent substandard accommodation at the peripheries of towns, or reside in liminal spaces (e.g., balconies, rooftops, or underground accommodation) in central urban conurbations of global cities. In Beijing, some migrants rented/shared small rooms at around USD 65 per month in 2014 in underground air raid shelters/storage spaces with communal toilets/kitchens and no natural light. About a million low-wage service workers (e.g., waiters, hairdressers, janitors, shop assistants, street peddlers, chefs, security guards, and construction workers) occupied this subterranean housing in 2014 (Pulitzer Center 2015). These subaltern groups are dubbed a "rat tribe," and Sim (2015) has documented their lives photographically. I now explore the making of Diaosi identity as a mode of resistance that expresses the contradictory location of urban migrant workers.

Since late 2011, many young migrant workers, who are users and makers of internet pop culture and social media, have felt left behind. They increasingly narrate their marginality and subalternity affectively by self-identifying as *Diaosi*. The *Diaosi* subject position—literally, fans of a celebrity footballer here—emerged in online battles between rival fans. They then transposed the meaning from celebrity worship to “fans of penis,” which is a close homonym (Sum 2017). This transposition soon went viral on social media. Within two months after the coining of the term in 2011, it generated 41.1 million search results and was mentioned in 2.2 million blog posts on Google and China’s Twitter-like Weibo, respectively (Lui 2015). Young subalterns started to proclaim themselves as *Diaosi* and many chat rooms and social media forums were set up in response (e.g., YY and QQ chats).

New biopolitical meanings were added as the discourse and identity circulated in social media. The new identity soon expressed marginality, exclusion, devaluation, frustration, hardship, and social pain, as well as the unfulfilled consumer and romantic desires of migrant workers. They represented themselves as coming from an underprivileged background, earning a meager wage, consuming little, and having no social connections.² Their meager income/consumption/borrowing capacity and low social standing are coupled in social-emotional terms with a sense of living a devalued life of long working hours, poor housing, an uncertain career, living away from family, guilt over parents at home, and an empty emotional life with little love or intimacy. This emptiness and loneliness are often highlighted in *Diaosi* narratives of how they spent Valentine’s Day, Christmas, festive seasons, and the small hours of the night looking for internet companions. Such affective discourses from the margins express collective social experiences grounded in the exclusionary practices of *hukou* and *suzhi*, as well as inequalities generated in the everyday economic and social life of global capitalism.

This everyday making of *Diaosi* subalternity is expressed further through a biopolitical binary that depicts two main gendered body types based on their unequal access to power networks, consumption, love, romance, and intimacy. First, male *Diaosi* self-deprecate as “*poor, short and ugly*” losers (Marquis and Yang 2013: 3). With meager income and unattractive physiques, they construct themselves as unable to impress girls by showering them with material gifts and/or charm. They have “no house, no car and no bride/girlfriend” and spend most of their time at home, use cheap mobile phones, surf on the internet, and play media games such as *DotA*. This male-oriented *Diaosi* construction has gradually spread to female subalterns (Sum 2017: 300).

Second, the Diaosi identity expresses social inequalities by juxtaposing its own body with an elite type, *Gaofushuai*, who are (1) “tall, rich and handsome”; and (2) “princelings” with special social connections that enable them to gain socialist (non)financial advantages. Diaosi regard this second group as “superior”: they enjoy the “three treasures” (iPhone, sports car, and designer watch) (Marquis and Yang 2013: 9) and can attract beautiful girls. This binary contrast involves a mix of latent critique, self-mockery, self-protection, and self-entertainment (Yang, Tang, and Wang 2015). It is a mundane way of protesting and relieving pressure in an authoritarian system that combines the drive for GDP growth/consumption with an exclusionary statecraft tied to a biopolitical mode of governing. The resultant gaps between these two imagined groups are further highlighted online in media such as satirical cartoons, everyday photographs, TV shows, and chat rooms in which people express their fantasies. These include comparing their diverse modes of transport (bus vs. BMW), brands of smartphones (Nokia vs. iPhone); dining venues (side-street stores vs. expensive restaurants), and romantic encounters.

Diaosi also construct themselves as romantically unlucky as their ideal girlfriends (called “goddesses”) are *Bafumei* (fair-skinned, rich, and pretty) and not *Heimu'er* (“Black Fungus” women who are overly experienced sexually). Given their meager income, unattractive physique, and the existence of a match-making industry catering mainly to rich men (Larmer 2013), Diaosi expect to lose when competing for *Bafumei* girls with rich and powerful *Gaofushuai/princelings*. These Diaosi narrations reflect a mix of precarious life with little money and no background; the self-mockery of a fate with no future/hope; the emotional emptiness of being shunned/mockered by “goddesses”; the latent hostility toward social elitism embodied by *Gaofushuai/princelings*; and the despair of not being accepted. Yet these self-deprecating views also implicitly endorse the dominant norms, sexual stereotypes, and unfulfilled ordoliberal dream in entrepreneurial and consumer society.

Some subalterns reject this marginality, whereas others accept it. Some indulge in consumption and/or seek pleasure from the culture industries (e.g., live-streaming on social media). Others live in hope and assume personal responsibility for fulfilling these entrepreneurial-consumerist dreams by improving “sushi,” obtaining better qualifications, finding good jobs, meeting good marriage partners, and moving away from their underground existence and gaining hukou. This system is by no means consistent or coherent; it contains “contradictory consciousness” (Gramsci 1971: 333) and fragmentation as subalterns seek to come to terms with China’s emerging

ordoliberal authoritarian governance and its officially promoted, but unevenly developing, consumer citizenship regime.

This embodiment of marginal identity online coexists with other ideational clusters on social media. They range from pro-Mao to promarket/American as well as nationalist, religious, and social equality groups (Shi-Kupfer et al. 2017). Together with more materially based challenges such as unemployment, labor, and pension strikes, these groups are seen to threaten China's social stability. The Xi leadership is responding by tightening control via (1) intensifying censorship, firewalls, and keyword blocking; (2) promoting his personality cult; (3) placing party cells in private and foreign businesses; and (4) creating an online "social credit" system. This latter system is a 2014 government initiative to create a database capturing big data on the financial creditworthiness and social behavior of citizens, companies, and NGOs. When fully implemented in 2020, this way of quantifying "virtue" and awarding people with high "social credit" scores will be a further development for the digital age of socialist statecraft, which aims to preserve personal records from cradle to grave. As a biosovereign-disciplinary technique, it (1) encourages citizens to self-responsibilize to become trusted citizens in building national morality; and (2) enhances the party's discipline-surveillance-security mechanisms in monitoring and controlling the masses with the use of big data technologies. This kind of digital biosovereign and disciplinary technique aims to provide a techno-moral fix that will help sustain party rule. However, it will also add to the underlying unevenness and struggles of everyday life for the subaltern groups who must work to accumulate not only *suzhi* but also related moral scores.

Concluding Remarks

This essay employed CPE to pose three meso-level questions that can facilitate movement from general concepts and propositions about the hybridized, variegated nature of neoliberalization to specific empirical cases. First, is neoliberalization always the best entry point for phenomena and processes that, at first sight, could be subsumed under this notion? Second, how do discourses, the (il)liberal arts of governing, and their metagovernance mediate neoliberalization processes? And third, to what extent and how do hybrid forms that emerge from these contingent interactions across different sites and scales lead to new forms of contestation against exploitation and domination? In answering these questions, inspired by Foucault, I adopt an ordoliberal entry-point and combine it with a greater emphasis on the authoritarian nature of

neoliberalizations. Together, I suggest that these turns provide a productive perspective on variegation research, especially in non-Western settings.

I illustrated the concept of ordoliberal authoritarian governance using the case of (post-)Deng China. To maintain the party-state's performance legitimacy, new metagovernance ground rules have been developed that hybridize socialist statecraft, biosovereign, and ordoliberal techniques to govern desires and morals. This ensemble of discursive-material elements become regularized and sedimented in an authoritarian mode of ordoliberal-socialist rule. But this generates unevenness and contradictions as China deepens its national authoritarian rule and its ties with global capitalism. One contradictory response in these changing social relations is the emergence of a subaltern Diaosi identity that uses corporeal categories, humor, and social pain to subvert and submit to China's ordoliberal authoritarian mode of rule in the development of the world market.

Notes

- 1 The Diaosi subject position emerged from online fan club debates over a Chinese soccer player named Li Yi, who once compared his football skills to those of the celebrated French player Thierry Henry (nicknamed "Emperor Henry" in China). Fans thus dubbed him "Li Yi the Emperor" (*da di*). This set the scene for the Diaosi online word fest. The term *fans* was transliterated as *fē-si*, meaning "vermicelli." Yi's fans began to call themselves *di-si* (fans of the emperor); their critics responded by turning *di* into *diao*, which is slang for "dick" (as in penis), and mocking them with the new epithet, "fans of penis" (*diaosi*).
- 2 The Market and Media Research Centre at Beijing University conducted a survey on the 2014 Living Conditions of Diaosi. Of 210,000 youths interviewed, over 60 percent described themselves as Diaosi. They earned RMB 2917.7 (USD 479). From this, they spent RMB 500 (USD 81) on rent, RMB 39 (USD 6) per day on three meals, RMB 1076 (USD 174) on their parents, and RMB 500 (USD 81) on vacations.

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