
China across The Divide

*The Domestic and Global in
Politics and Society*



Edited by Rosemary Foot

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CHAPTER 5



Transnational Consumers

*The Unintended Consequences of Extreme Markets
in Contemporary China*

KARL GERTH

If there is any doubt that the changing appetites and desires of domestic populations have transnational political, societal, and cultural consequences, consider an American couple wanting to adopt a more readily obtainable, less expensive Chinese infant, which may lead to baby thefts in rural China that in turn require new Chinese state regulations and enforcement mechanisms. Or, consider the countless numbers of Chinese newlyweds who wish to eat shark fin soup at their reception banquets, which is leading to the extinction of shark species off the coast of Chile that in turn leads Chinese nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government officials to try to limit shark fin soup consumption and change its cultural significance within China. In such cases, the impact of consumer desires and their negative consequences stretches across thousands of miles, an ocean, and political boundaries. As such cases demonstrate, transnational consumption has had unintended consequences for the Chinese state and society, prompting regulatory and cultural adjustments that have only just begun.

Behind these cases are tens of millions of newly middle-class urban Chinese consumers who are catching up with their counterparts in wealthier countries. The measure of such "catching up" has changed dramatically over time. In the early twentieth century, electric fans, light bulbs, and

even a Western-style bowler hat set one apart. During the Maoist era from 1949 to 1976, Chinese consumers sought four functional status symbols: bicycles, watches, sewing machines, and radios, known as "the four things that go round." As expectations rose in the 1980s, wealthier Chinese hoped to purchase "six big things": videocassette recorders, televisions, washing machines, cameras, refrigerators, and electric fans. By 2000, consumers desired even more expensive items, with air conditioning units becoming the most sought-after product by consumers in the country's eleven largest cities, followed by personal computers, mobile phones, color televisions, and video equipment. In the countryside, motorcycles topped the shopping lists of 10 million Chinese as motorized vehicles increasingly replaced human- or animal-powered transport such as bicycles and donkey carts. Chinese consumer desire has also expanded to the consumption of experiences, such as private education, leisure travel, and cultural events like the Beijing Olympics. Although China remains a nominally socialist country, consumerism has indeed now become deeply entrenched in Chinese life and a key driver of global economic development.

Yet the consequences of Chinese consumers' attempts to catch up with and overtake their counterparts in the leading consumer countries also create new challenges for their country and the world. While many areas of the world stand to reap benefits from China's embrace of consumerism, including new and expanding markets for their products, nobody yet fully understands the *collective* global implications of *individual* Chinese consumer choices. While many journalists, scholars, and critics have already found much to worry about China's ascendance—the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, competition for oil and other vital resources, human rights violations, growing Chinese military budgets, and carbon emissions—they have generally overlooked the effects of something subtler but equally profound: China's rapid development of a consumer culture. Many consequences have been as positive as predicted, particularly for consumers around the world who have benefited from the low-priced goods churned out of Chinese factories. But capitalist countries have long looked to China not only for low-wage workers but for consumers to fuel another round of global economic growth, hoping that new demand from Chinese consumers would translate into global economic opportunities. Indeed, many multinational corporations now pin their hopes for future growth on consumers in rapidly developing countries such as China, where the American-based coffee chain Starbucks alone is tripling its number of stores between 2010 and 2015, from 500 to 1,500.¹

Chinese consumer demand has created market problems within China as well as unintended problems arising worlds away. Once stimulated, Chinese

consumption—like consumption based on long commodity chains in all contemporary economies—is not easily contained, creating transnational challenges along with opportunities. The problems created by the economic rise of China began innocently enough. Since the earliest days of the Deng Xiaoping era at the end of the 1970s, capitalist countries have welcomed China's policy of "opening to the outside world." In 1986, the American magazine *Time* named Deng its Man of the Year for leading "an audacious effort to create what amounts almost to a new form of society" that, in effect, would be much more "open" to capitalist manufactured goods, investment, and tourists.² Such expectations and hopes continued throughout the 1990s, when the Clinton Administration argued that delinking human rights from trade was a surefire way to develop both.³ Since then, business leaders and politicians from across the political spectrum have looked to China to do its part to drive a new round of global economic growth by implementing policies promoting domestic consumption by Chinese consumers.

Starbucks is not alone. The recent history of multinationals investing in China—first in manufacturing, now in domestic services—is well-known. Since 1992, when Deng Xiaoping reassured international investors that China still welcomed foreign direct investment (FDI), tens of billions of dollars of FDI have flowed into China, making China the leading recipient of FDI in the developing world and one of the overall world leaders. But now it is becoming easier and more obvious to recognize the importance of Chinese *outbound* FDI. Witness the endless procession of trade missions to China from both developing and developed economies not to hawk national goods and services but increasingly to solicit Chinese FDI. According to a report by the Asia Society, \$1 trillion in direct Chinese investment will pour into other countries by 2020.⁴

More difficult to track and acknowledge are the innumerable transnational linkages caused by Chinese consumers as they slowly begin to do what political and business leaders have hoped: buy and consume. While many of these linkages benefit all involved, others create complex problems not easily solved. This chapter examines those negative and largely unintentional transnational consequences of China's emergence as a consumer culture by examining four of what I am calling "extreme markets." As we shall see, these implications have in turn led to formal Chinese governmental attempts to regulate markets and in some cases to respond to international regulation of these markets.

What the Chinese have seen as fit to market and therefore to consume has changed dramatically over the past century. Under Mao, Chinese leaders attempted to eliminate markets in general and those markets deemed extremely exploitative in particular, making it difficult or impossible, for

example, to hire the services of a wet nurse, buy a bride, or sell a child. But as the state withdrew from many areas of private life and started creating new market incentives following the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China witnessed the return of pre-Communist-era markets for seemingly anything that one could buy and sell, including infants, wives, sex slaves, human hearts, and endangered species. These extreme markets illustrate how, once unleashed and prodded into action, Chinese consumers and consumer markets have unintended consequences that resist control by the Chinese government, other states, and international institutions that otherwise benefit from increased Chinese consumer demand.

FROM MAO TO MARKETS

China has had an ambiguous relationship with transnational markets. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Mao Zedong announced that China had "stood up," meaning that the country, which had been dominated by foreign imperialist powers for the previous hundred years, would now control its own destiny. For its first thirty years, as market economies from America to Japan were developing modern consumer societies, the PRC tried to develop its industrial economy with as little integration as possible into those capitalist economies and exercised its sovereignty by limiting the availability of consumer goods and channeling scarce resources to heavy industry. The state's priorities at this time were *productivist*: to make or facilitate the making of things that make more things—"producer goods" such as steel and chemicals—rather than things that could be used directly—"consumer goods" like bicycles and toothpaste.

But this all changed with the death of Mao in 1976 and the rise of Deng Xiaoping in 1978. China's leaders decided that "opening to the outside world" (meaning the capitalist world) was essential to secure the technology and investment necessary to develop its economy. The Mao era's go-it-alone approach had, they decided, outlived its usefulness, and the risks of creating inequality within China and dependence on capitalist countries seemed outweighed by the potential gain. Observance of the obvious economic gains enjoyed by other East Asian neighbors reinforced this path. Thus, with Deng's rise to power, the country's leaders began to dismantle the state-controlled planned economy and society to prepare the soil in which foreign investors were invited to plant the seeds of market-led growth. Following the examples set by Japan, Taiwan, Chile, South Korea, and Singapore, Deng created a market economy mixed with authoritarian

centralized control that he called "socialism with Chinese characteristics." The resulting massive expansion of industrialization was nurtured by a reliance on exports, foreign investment, and technology transfer to China through joint ventures with foreign companies. But China's leaders still attempted to restrict access to imported consumer goods and limit the influence of consumers on economic growth. This was born of a desire not so much to limit consumerism as to channel it, to ensure that the result was long-term growth in national wealth rather than an outrush of Chinese capital to buy consumer goods. Yet as markets have replaced the state as the supplier of goods and services, the state's power to limit or direct consumer spending has also waned, creating an opening for the reemergence of extreme markets.

As urban Chinese lifestyles become more like those of consumers in developed states, it is easy to forget just how recent the Chinese policies designed to promote consumer spending are. Since the 1990s, the country's leaders have understood that the massive budget and trade deficits of its biggest trading partner, the United States, were unsustainable and have wanted to decouple their economy from an over-reliance on economic growth fueled by exports. Even before the 2008 global economic crisis, they recognized that it was only a matter of time before American and European consumer markets were saturated with inexpensive Chinese imports and heavily indebted Western consumers would be less able to pay for lifestyles based on consuming more and more. Chinese leaders now began to view stimulating consumer desire not as a wasteful end point, the death of production, but rather as the starting point of production. This leaves unanswered, however, what China and the rest of the world should and can do when these new consumers have desires that create unintended negative consequences such as extreme markets.

MARKETS FOR CHINESE BABIES AND WIVES

It is easy to identify the domestic and global forces that create specific extreme markets within China. Take the markets for babies and wives. Culture and economic conditions there have long made sons far more valuable to families than daughters. In the traditional Han Chinese household, when a daughter "married out" of her birth family, she became part of her husband's kin. This represented a real transfer of wealth: a daughter ceased being her father's property, becoming instead her husband's. Consequently, daughters were liabilities for the families that raised them; sons were assets, as sons and their wives were expected not only to share

the work of the family but to care for elderly parents. For several thousand years, Confucianism thus promulgated the idea that failing to have a male heir was the most unfilial act.

Yet the extreme market for babies and wives is also an unintended consequence of specific political policies. China's One Child Policy, introduced in 1979 to counteract the economic pressures of the uncontrolled population growth encouraged by Mao Zedong, further heightened the preference for male children. Under this policy, the Chinese government began penalizing families for having more than one child, a policy that, when enforced, gave couples only a single chance to secure a male heir and thereby a caretaker in their old age. This traditional role took on renewed importance as the consequence of other policies ending state-provided health care and retirement benefits. As boys became even more desirable and girls less so, female infanticide, long a way to dispose of unwanted girls, increased precipitously. When ultrasound scanning became more widely available in the 1980s, providing parents with a reliable, inexpensive way to determine the sex of fetuses, tens of millions of Asian parents elected to abort female fetuses. Even though the Chinese state banned ultrasound testing in an effort to stop sex-selective abortion in 2004, the market soon provided a growing number of for-profit "maternity clinics" and back-alley stalls performing the tests for only a few dollars and offering abortions for \$15 to \$120. As with other extreme manifestations of market behavior, buying and selling such services is difficult to stop, with sellers often staying one step ahead of enforcers, such as taking advantage of China's new car culture to introduce mobile backseat gender ultrasounds.⁵

The market for ultrasound services and abortions has led to an alarming gender imbalance in China, which now has about 120 boys for every 100 girls, rising to 144 to 100 in some areas, and 152 male second children for every 100 females.⁶ And of the girls who are born, across the country a disturbing number are being abandoned, becoming wards of the state in Chinese orphanages.

At first glance, this skewed gender balance may seem merely a Chinese domestic issue. But since the early 1980s, the demand for adoptable babies in foreign markets has created new links between China and transnational markets, particularly consumers in the United States. In the 1990s, the increasing availability of contraceptives and abortion and acceptance of single mothers in the United States meant that millions of American couples with fertility problems faced a declining number of American babies available for adoption. Even when available, adopting an American baby could easily cost more than \$30,000 and might take years to complete. Thus, American couples increasingly began to look abroad for less expensive and

easier places to adopt children. By 2000, American couples were importing 20,000 children per year from Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. Between 1991, when China began to relax its adoption laws to address the growing number of abandoned girls, and 2010, China became the world's primary supplier of adopted children, sending more than 62,000 to the United States and another 10,000 to other countries.⁷ Just between 1991 and 1992, the number of Chinese children adopted by Americans rose from a mere 61 to 206, and by 2005, when the number of Chinese adoptees peaked, the United States granted nearly 8,000 orphan visas for Chinese children, making up a third of all foreign adoptions.⁸ Of these, 95 percent were girls.

Thus, American demand has helped create markets within China. Assuming that each adopting family paid an average of \$15,000 to \$20,000 for the entire process, Americans paid Chinese orphanages \$24 million in 2005 alone.⁹ Travel agencies began to shuttle adopting foreign families to sightseeing spots in Beijing, then on to the provinces handling international adoptions. Five-star hotels in cities across China have become hubs for foreigners with new Chinese babies. The best known of these is the White Swan Hotel in Guangzhou, whose rooms, lobbies, and elevators are regularly filled with multiethnic families waiting to obtain U.S. visas for their new babies. The surrounding streets are lined with shops selling silk infant clothing and renting strollers. Each family staying at the hotel receives a special "Going Home Barbie Doll," the iconic blond-haired and blue-eyed plastic figure holding a Chinese baby.¹⁰

The surplus of mostly girl babies in China has served multiple American markets, including career women, affluent single people, and homosexual couples. By 2006, however, waiting lists of up to two years, bad press, and abuse led Chinese authorities to introduce new rules that excluded homosexual couples, older couples, the obese, those medicated for depression, and families with a net worth of under \$80,000.¹¹ Since then, the number of imported Chinese babies has halved to under 3,000 a year by 2011, though China still remains the top baby exporter to the United States. As a result, Americans have returned to South Korea, which remains a leader in international adoptions, and are also adopting babies from Guatemala, which temporarily replaced China as the number-one exporter in 2008, with Russia, Ethiopia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and India also in the mix.¹² The baby export industry may soon follow the example of shoe manufacturers and shift out of China and into even less expensive, less regulated labor markets such as Vietnam.

But foreign demand is not solely to blame for this extreme market, which is also partially an outgrowth of a domestic black market in babies

serving Chinese customers. Because orphanages impose age and residency restrictions on domestic adoptions, buying a baby and legalizing the adoption process with bribes are often more convenient and less expensive than facing fines imposed under the One Child Policy.¹³ The international adoption market has skewed the domestic market, however, especially after 2001 when the China Center of Adoption Affairs (CCAA, est. 1996) ended restrictions over the number of international adoptions and orphanage directors, recognizing the high international market value of each adoptee, began to make hundreds of thousands of dollars through mandatory \$3,000 "donations" from adoptive parents. To generate more supply, some orphanages began to buy babies from surrounding orphanages not engaged in international sales. The market value even tempted desperately poor parents to sell their newborns and induced a few orphanage directors to pay for abducted infants, sometimes with the complicity of local officials enforcing the One Child Policy.¹⁴ In one case uncovered by a leading Chinese financial magazine, officials from family planning agencies forcibly removed infants from households that had violated the One Child Policy and refused to pay a 6,000 yuan fine, providing an important source of revenue for local governments in Hunan province. The local officials then sold the babies to an orphanage for 1,000 yuan.¹⁵

The profit in stolen babies is enough for some to risk the penalties. According to the confessions of baby abductors, one can earn \$36 to \$60 per child, in a country with an average income of approximately \$100 a month. Middlemen sell children to orphanages for \$400 or more. The baby market is carefully calibrated: the end purchaser pays some \$1,200 for "substandard goods" (girls) and over \$2,000 for "quality goods" (boys). Likewise, healthy babies fetch more than unhealthy ones, and good-looking babies cost more.¹⁶ In another sign of a maturing market, organized gangs are replacing family rings and freelancers in the child-theft business.¹⁷ For instance, Liang Guihong, a 56-year-old woman who claimed to find homes for abandoned infants, was sentenced to fifteen years in prison for leading a gang that had sold seventy-eight infants in 2005 alone.¹⁸ Babies have even been offered for auction on eBay's Chinese website, Eachnet, with an asking price of 28,000 yuan (\$3,450) for boys and 13,000 yuan (\$1,603) for girls.¹⁹

The exact size of this illegal market is unclear. In 2012, officials admitted that police stations across China had broken up over 9,000 groups of traffickers and rescued some 80,000 women and babies over the previous three years.²⁰ Likewise, Chinese media routinely include news stories on the arrests of child traffickers. In 2005, police busted a ring of twenty-seven

traffickers who since 2002 had abducted or bought some 1,000 children and sold them to orphanages in Hunan province for \$400 to \$538 each. Unsuspecting American families then made mandatory contributions of \$3,000 per baby, the highest of the many fees involved to adopt these children. As with other illegal market activities, local officials were often complicit and defense attorneys argued that the babies were abandoned, and heads of orphanages have tried to cover their tracks with forged reports confirming abandonment. Although China has strict regulations to avoid baby selling and Western countries refuse to permit adoptions through baby selling, lucrative market incentives make the practice all but impossible to stop.²¹ The Hengyang orphanage in Hunan, a major provider of children for Americans, was caught buying babies in 2005, leaving adoptive parents uncertain if they had adopted a stolen baby rather than rescued an impoverished orphan.²²

China often receives international media criticism for its adoption market, which puts pressure on national officials to impose restrictions, make arrests, pass laws prohibiting baby buying, and forbidding the resale of purchased babies on international markets. Parents of missing children say the state should also work to eliminate the market by severely punishing the consumers, those who buy children. At least one police officer interviewed agreed, adding that the costs of investigating and retrieving even a few abducted babies greatly exceeds local policing budgets.²³ This lack of enforcement is a consistent problem with the regulation of all Chinese markets. While baby buyers, for instance, are subject to a three-year jail sentence, few ever see jail.²⁴ And, of course, this extreme market within China also reflects problems within the other countries involved, creating transnational regulatory headaches and personal heartbreak. The market within China would not be the same without the complicity of foreign consumers willing to look the other way or to too readily believe stories of "abandoned" babies. In such countries, the regulations, penalties, and enforcements have also failed to rein in the market.²⁵

The unintended gender imbalance partially caused by China's One Child Policy has also led to the creation of another extreme market starting in China but extending abroad: brides for all those favored sons wanting to produce their own male heirs. Until the 1940s, marriage by abduction or "seizing the bride" (*qiangqin*) was common in parts of China. The buying and selling of women in pre-Communist China was sometimes a socially accepted way for the rural poor to sidestep the expensive dowry/bride-price system, often after secret negotiations with the girl's parents.²⁶ Likewise, sophisticated kidnapping gangs would also steal girls from impoverished families and sell them as concubines and slaves in other provinces.²⁷ And

desperate families might sell their own daughters and even wives as brides or maids.²⁸

While it is difficult to assess the size of this reemerging market, according to Chinese police statistics, between 2009 and early 2012, there were over 36,000 reported cases of women, girls, and babies sold.²⁹ They report that in 1990–91 Chinese police apprehended 65,236 persons for participating in female trafficking. The scale of this practice continues to rise, even as the average age of the trafficked girls has fallen into the teens.³⁰ Periodic high-profile cases confirm that the problem remains acute. In 2002, for instance, a Guangxi farmer was executed for abducting and selling more than 100 women for \$120 to \$360 each.³¹ And in the province of Inner Mongolia, another sold 112 women for prices ranging from RMB3,000 to 8,000.³² In the most gruesome manifestation of this market, in 2007 three men were arrested for murdering two women they intended to sell as "ghost brides" to accompany deceased bachelors in their afterlives. Apparently, the prettier of the two murdered women commanded twice the price (\$2,000 rather than \$1,000). Officials admitted these were not isolated cases.³³

The market in brides, like so many other markets suppressed under Mao, has now reached new extremes with international and regional dimensions and includes women from surrounding less-prosperous countries such as North Korea and Vietnam.³⁴ Other Asian countries are facing similar demographic problems, creating similar demand for brides. For every 100 girls, Taiwanese give birth to 119 boys, Singaporeans 118 boys, and South Koreans 112 boys. Consequently, the traffic is two-way. Wealthier countries such as Japan have turned to China to resolve their bride shortage, buying Chinese wives and creating entire industries. *New York Times* reporter Seth Faison found dozens of agencies brokering marriages between Japanese men and Chinese wives. Such marriages are overtly commercial transactions, such as the case of one Osaka-based Japanese customer, Hitoro, who selected his wife from photo albums and paid \$20,000. When he arrived in Shanghai, the potential bride demanded an extra \$5,000, which Hitoro refused to pay. Within a day, the broker found another woman willing to marry a stranger with whom she could not even converse. Although Hitoro had hoped they might use English as a *lingua franca*, the new bride, a retired prostitute, claimed that she knew only two English phrases: "I love you" and "I am a virgin."³⁵

As poor Chinese women are sold as brides to wealthier coastal provinces, residents of poorer interior provinces who are unable to find brides also are importing less expensive impoverished women from outside China, with prices dropping still further when multiple women are bought as part of a group purchase.³⁶ In the Tongwei county of Gansu province, one of

China's poorest regions, nine of the ten women police rescued at the end of 2011 were Burmese. One of the women told the police that she had come to China several years earlier after a fellow Burmese woman promised to find her a job in China with a 1,000 yuan monthly salary. But as soon as she arrived in China, she was sold to a Chinese farmer in Tongwei County, who paid 45,000 yuan.³⁷ The number of trafficked women and girls is much greater along the Chinese–Burma border itself, with an estimated 10,000 Burmese females working in and around Ruili, the notorious trafficking hub on the Chinese border, where the going price for a young bride in “top condition” is \$7,500.³⁸

The sad irony is that cultural preferences and, indirectly, state policies have created a shortage of brides to make the next generation of baby boys. There are at least some initial indications that this shortage may provide its own solution by raising the market value—and correspondingly the social value—of baby girls. One wonders, however, about the fate of the tens of millions of frustrated bachelors who will not benefit in time from any “market correction” or, worse, of the abducted and even murdered women and girls sold as brides.

SEX TRAFFICKING IN YOUNG WOMEN AT HOME AND ABROAD

Unsurprisingly, the lack of brides, combined with China's hundreds of millions of men of all ages with increased disposable income, also has created a major market incentive for organized criminal networks with transnational ties to build a massive brothel industry. Impersonal market forces can create new opportunities for some consumers, but they can also lead to sharpened inequalities. In China and throughout the region, these inequalities have both class and regional dimensions, as men in rich coastal regions, where the gender imbalance is often the worst, are more likely to be able to afford to pay for sex, wives, children, and mistresses. Nonetheless, markets can also provide opportunities for those elsewhere on the socioeconomic ladder: while migrant male laborers in cities may not be able to afford girlfriends, much less wives, the market allows them to buy sex. Nevertheless, the inability of China's market economy to supply wives and progeny to this new underclass of bachelors, which Beijing estimates will reach 30 million by 2020, may come to pose a serious political threat to its leaders.³⁹

The shortage of women and the demand for paid sex underscores the difficulty China's government faces when cracking down on socially dubious markets. After all, how willing (or even able) would the Chinese government be to restrict male access to sex by enforcing a ban on prostitution

within China or on sex tours to countries where it is legal? Indeed, one convicted trafficker of women claimed that he was doing the Chinese government a favor by balancing “the yin and yang” (feminine and masculine) by moving women from south-central Sichuan province to points north, where there are too many bachelors and not enough brides. He argued that he was “just trying to supply what the market needs” with an activity that “helps dissolve young guys' sexual tension.”⁴⁰

Not only is the possibility of paid sex aided by the transnational trafficking noted earlier, but the sexual revolution underlying the market is itself partially a consequence of China's “opening” to capitalist countries over the past couple of decades and new transnational linkages. In a sense, China is catching up with the sexual norms and practices, including prostitution, of its primary trading partners. With the shift in young urban Chinese women's clothing since 1978 from baggy Mao suits to revealing designer dresses, sex has gone from being invisible to being ubiquitous. Before the reform era, there were few private, unmonitored spaces such as hotels or bars with private rooms for couples to meet, and public spaces were open and crowded, making it difficult to have sex outside marriage. As with so many other changes during the reform era, the shift from suppressed to widespread sexual activity has been rapid. In the 1980s, the vast majority of Beijing residents who got married were virgins, but twenty years later researchers found that 70 percent reported having sex before tying the knot, often with more than one partner. Over the same period, the average age of the first sexual experience of people in China's seven largest cities dropped from 24 to 17. Popular attitudes affirm these changes: one Chinese magazine poll found that one-third of Chinese under the age of 26 did not object to extramarital affairs, and the vast majority did not consider premarital sex immoral.⁴¹

Along with capital and technology, China has also imported the “best practices” of international advertising, and the sexual references central to the marketing of products, rare in the Maoist era, are omnipresent on Chinese billboards, magazines, and movies and in women's fashion, especially in urban settings. Indeed, such references have become iconic of what it means to live in modern, cosmopolitan times in capitalist countries, a way of contrasting up-to-date urban life with a sexually puritanical, old-fashioned, and inward-looking countryside. After decades of supplying the globe's adult sex toys, China now has its own domestic market, including Guangzhou's hugely popular annual Sex Culture Festival, launched in 2003. Sixty thousand mostly middle-aged men attended the opening day of the 2009 festival, which included guest appearances by Japanese porn stars.⁴² Likewise, the southwest city of Chongqing is home to Love Land,

the country's first theme park devoted to sex (inspired by a similar park in South Korea) that includes displays of giant genitalia and naked humans.

In addition to making representations of sex ubiquitous in Chinese cities, markets have also created opportunities for paid sex in all manner of locations, both inside and outside China with Chinese and foreign sex workers. Buyers can buy sexual services at hostess bars, from escort services, in massage parlors, in "barber shops," in karaoke clubs, in hotels, and on sex tours to locations such as Thailand and, more recently, Vietnam.⁴³ Indeed, China now has the largest commercial sex workforce in the world. It is estimated that some 10 million women and men work in the industry—300,000 of these in Beijing alone. Rather than trying to shut it down, some local governments have moved to regulate it.⁴⁴ When the northeastern city of Shenyang began laying off tens of thousands of workers from state-owned enterprises in the late 1990s, for instance, the city legalized prostitution to offset some of the layoffs and levied a 30 percent tax on the sex trade's 5,000 "places of entertainment." The policy was so successful that other cities soon followed suit.⁴⁵ And like so many reform-era markets that spread and evolve in unpredictable ways, it is hard to eliminate once consumer demands and the state's endless need for new revenue sources both are met and legitimated.

As with other extreme markets, the sex trade within China has also expanded beyond domestic consumption and supply and become part of an international market.⁴⁶ While China now exports women and girls to work as sex slaves elsewhere, the country also imports females from North Korea, Vietnam, Mongolia, and Nepal.⁴⁷ Indeed, China appears to be on the verge of replacing Thailand as the regional human trafficking hub. According to the U.S. State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees fleeing famine are ending up in China, sold either as prostitutes or brides to poor farmers.⁴⁸

Girls are trafficked out of China primarily to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan but also to Australia, the United States, and even Africa.⁴⁹ In Malaysia, rich married businessmen, as individuals or members of clubs, visit Chinese women, often held against their will, in luxury condominiums in the afternoon to drink, eat, and have sex; in other cases, these women are escorted to homes. Known as "noon brides," these Chinese women are lured from the countryside with promises of office work. In Malaysia, the male consumers' shift in preference from Thai to Chinese girls is partially the result of changing consumer preferences and the mistaken assumption that Chinese women are less likely to carry HIV. The market is also facilitated by a growing Malaysian interest in all things

Chinese and the massive increase in other forms of contact between the two countries, including business, education, and tourism. Crime syndicates import thousands of young Chinese women on student visas, register them at schools, and then farm them out to work in the sex and service industries.⁵⁰

TRANSNATIONAL TRADE IN ORGANS

The extreme market most often decried in the West is that for body parts, such as kidneys, livers, corneas, and pancreases. Although an estimated 2 million Chinese patients are in need of organ transplants, the majority of the 20,000 or so performed each year in China involve foreign patients seeking, once again, something less expensive and more easily purchased in Chinese markets. Over the past decade, China has become a popular destination for medical tourists seeking treatments unavailable or unaffordable in their own countries. While Koreans, Japanese, and Taiwanese flock to China for such treatments, customers also come from Europe and the United States. A salesperson for Citnac, a Shenyang-based subsidiary of a Japanese firm that matches Japanese customers with Chinese organs, acknowledged, "there are so many Japanese people coming to China to get transplants we cannot keep up. Please do not encourage the French to come here!" Such transplants are pricey: \$30,000 for a cornea; \$62,000 for a kidney; \$100,000 for a liver; between \$150,000 and \$160,000 for a heart; and \$170,000 for a pancreas.⁵¹ Foreigners are not the only customers: high demand within China and a shortage of donors has also created a black market that allows wealthy Chinese to buy organs. For instance, the popular comedian Fu Biao bought an executed prisoner's liver for RMB300,000.⁵²

After the United States, China has become the world's second largest provider of organ transplants. This raises the question of how a country that did not introduce a system of voluntary donor cards until 2009 and in which many Chinese hold traditional religious beliefs that require an intact body in the afterlife manages to find sufficient organs to offer them to foreign buyers. One source long rumored and finally confirmed by the government was executed prisoners, who account for as many as 95 percent of organ donors.⁵³ China does not disclose the number of executions, but estimates by international observers range from a few thousand to 10,000 yearly.⁵⁴ Whatever the number, China harvests an estimated 3,200 organs annually from executed prisoners.⁵⁵

As China became more sensitive to its international image in the several years preceding the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government

changed its official line about prisoner donors and tried to better regulate the market. When it finally acknowledged the use of prisoner donors and cracked down on organ trafficking, it also issued new rules ensuring that written consent was obtained from donors and requiring the licensing of hospitals permitted to perform transplants. Authorities also banned the sale of organs from corpses donated for medical research, limited the types of institutions allowed to accept corpses, and regulated the international transport of corpses.⁵⁶ That year they also banned exports and stopped giving preference to foreigners on organ lists.⁵⁷ China also made it illegal to sell organs, though it remained legal to donate them to relatives, a restriction easily circumvented by criminals who supplied fake identification cards to represent the person selling the organ as a relative.⁵⁸

Since then, fewer executions and the new regulations on harvesting organs from executed prisoners have created acute market shortages for organs inside China and abroad. Consequently, demand has pushed up prices everywhere. The price for a kidney in South Korea, where more than 10,000 people are waiting for transplants, shot up from \$27,000 to \$37,000 immediately after the Chinese ban.⁵⁹ In wealthy countries, there is only one kidney for every ten people on the waiting list, which fuels international demand.⁶⁰

With prices high and supplies increasingly regulated, the black market of individuals willing to sell a kidney continues to develop. In a case that made international headlines, a 17-year-old boy from a poor province who wanted an iPad2 but did not have any money found an organ broker on the internet and sold his kidney for RMB22,000. Unbeknown to his parents, the young man went with the agent to the Number One People's Hospital in Zhengzhou where the operation was performed, and only when the teenager returned home with a new iPad2 and iPhone did his mother discover the truth.⁶¹ There is no shortage of similar stories. A poor farmer from Shaanxi, wanting to help his sick mother, came across an advertisement near a hospital offering cash for kidneys and decided to sell one of his. Once again, he used the internet to find an agent, who in turn found a buyer in Tianjin. The farmer was taken to Tianjin, where he was housed in a flat with twenty others similarly waiting to sell their kidneys and then relocated to Shandong province for the operation.⁶² Nor are such stories only about the desperately poor. A 30-year-old single woman who works in the media and makes RMB3,800 a month caused a stir when she posted on her blog site that she was willing to sell one of her organs for around RMB20,000 to raise money to buy a car.⁶³

Areas in and around hospitals in China openly advertise organ purchases and sales.⁶⁴ Those advertising this controversial service have to strike a

delicate balance, claiming to sell fresh organs free of communicable diseases such as HIV while simultaneously reassuring consumers that such organs were ethically obtained, especially with cases of organ theft on the rise, to make such consumption palatable.⁶⁵ So, while one 2005 website reassured potential clients that organs came from prisoners awaiting execution, it simultaneously assured them that prisoners' families received a donation and that advanced screening and blood tests would be used to avoid communicable diseases and ensure excellent matches.⁶⁶ As with traded commodities in most extreme markets, however, consumers of organs tend not to be overly concerned about where they originated. Perhaps reflecting a widespread attitude among such buyers, an American who paid \$40,000 for a Chinese kidney although she suspected it came from a prisoner admitted to a *Los Angeles Times* reporter that she "didn't want to know."⁶⁷

CONSUMING THE WORLD'S LAST

China is now the world's largest consumer of wild plants and animals, many of which are endangered species. Once again, the growth of such markets has been an unintended result of China's economic reforms and related policies. The end of the central provisioning of health care, for instance, has led to renewed interest in traditional Chinese medicine (and heterodox religious organizations claiming to have the secret to good health). The mass media have also contributed to the demand for such products by popularizing interest in folk medicine. Likewise, consumers expect high-end pharmacies and restaurants to sell popular treatments such as golden turtle's blood to cure cancer; sea horse for asthma, heart disease, and impotence; pickled turtle flippers to promote longer life; and owl meat for improved eyesight.⁶⁸

Rising incomes and international trade networks have made consuming rare wildlife more available and affordable at the same time that popular culture, particularly but not exclusively in southern China, holds that eating rare meat can bestow bravery or sexual prowess. Wildlife delicacies are often featured in lavish banquets intended for conspicuous consumption. Although the government has made efforts to limit consumption—in 1989, the Wildlife Protection Law banned the consumption of internationally protected species—once again the law remains difficult to enforce. Media reports of police seizures reveal the extent of the problem. One smuggling ring in the southwestern province of Yunnan, for example, was caught red-handed with 278 bear paws and 416 dead pangolins (anteaters that resemble armadillos). But the biggest bust occurred

in 2004, when Chinese customs officials seized the skins of 31 Bengal tigers, 581 Asian leopards, 778 otters, and 2 lynx—a haul worth well over \$1 million.⁶⁹

Chinese consumers have used their newfound purchasing power to buy both items long cherished in Chinese culture and items not previously available. Bear's paw, pangolin meat, camel's hump, monkey's brain, tiger bones dipped in liquor, and tiger penis, though long sought-after, were usually expensive because of short supply and thus beyond the means of most Chinese. That market has grown with the means of Chinese consumers, even though many of these items are derived from animals in short supply nationally or internationally, further endangering already endangered species. And Chinese consumers are eating not only their own rare wildlife but the world's, creating smuggling networks that stretch from China to the jungles of Southeast Asia and the coasts of Latin America. The range of exotic animals bought and consumed in China is illustrated by the story of 5,000 rare animals found drifting in an abandoned smuggler's boat off the South China coast. The 200 crates on board included 31 pangolins, 44 leatherback turtles, 2,720 monitor lizards, 1,130 Brazilian turtles, and 21 bear paws—all endangered species banned from international trade but openly sold in Guangdong.⁷⁰

Among these products, practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, including those in Korea and Japan, consider bear bile an extraordinary health elixir and a key ingredient in over 100 medicines.⁷¹ The bile, which is abundant in ursodeoxycholic acid, is converted into powder as remedies for arthritis, impotence, kidney and liver ailments, and fevers and even to rejuvenate brain cells. Demand has led to the creation of a "bear farming" industry, where caged bears are milked for their bile with catheters. Just as factory-farmed dairy cows in the United States are worked to premature deaths, since the 1980s these Chinese farms have subjected the bears to nightmarish conditions and have shortened their life expectancy from twenty-five to four years. By 2005, China had nearly 500 such "farms," but international pressure from animal rights organizations and the European Parliament has forced them to crack down, reducing the number to 68. The consolidated farms, though, are massive, each housing up to thousands of bears. That their paws are prized culinary delicacies does not help.⁷² As with so many other natural resources, demand in China has led to poaching around the world. In Russia, for instance, endangered Himalayan black bears are illegally hunted and sold to Chinese middlemen.

The Chinese have also consumed tigers to near extinction. Their numbers in the wild are down to 2,500 worldwide, and only a few dozen roam

freely in China. In 1993, again under international pressure, the Chinese government outlawed the trade in tiger parts, but demand remains strong and there is a flourishing black market: tiger skin used for clothing; bones used in Chinese medicine for joint ailments such as arthritis; tiger meat and health tonics.⁷³ Neighboring states like India are big providers of illegally poached animals, and entrepreneurs have found legal ways around the ban within China, setting up over 100 private tiger breeding "farms" housing 5,000 tigers. These farms, which are also tourist sites, legally supply parts from tigers that die from natural causes. The World Wildlife Fund, however, says they are merely fronts for illegal traders, who often transport their products for open sale in the same towns trafficking in women on China's southwest border.⁷⁴ Breeders counter that legalizing the trade would lead to less poaching and the preservation of tigers; preservationists answer that breeders have no program for reintroducing tigers into the wild.⁷⁵

Shark fin soup is perhaps the best-known Chinese delicacy, found more often on international Chinese menus than, say, braised bear paws. The soup is favored for its medicinal and aphrodisiac qualities and, above all, as a status symbol at Chinese banquets. It is often the most expensive soup on lengthy Chinese menus and, as soup is served last, considered a nice final touch to a meal. Less widely known is the international impact of the increasing Chinese demand, extending all the way to Latin America, where local fishermen hunt sharks just for their valuable fins, which end up in Chinese soups. In Ecuador, a set of dorsal and pectoral fins fetches \$100, then sells for thousands of dollars in East Asia and retails for up to hundreds of dollars for the tiny quantities served in soup. Hong Kong was the largest market for shark fins in the 1980s, but by the 1990s that distinction had shifted to mainland China. In cities such as Shanghai and Beijing, it is sold in all the fine restaurants and even by some street vendors. Between the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, Ecuador's exports of shark fins to China and Hong Kong doubled to 279,000 pounds, provided by roughly 300,000 sharks.

The impact of this particular Chinese desire on the world's shark populations has been profound. In only fifteen years, 70 percent of shark species such as the great white and hammerhead have been killed, and other species have disappeared altogether. Countries such as Ecuador have tried unsuccessfully to ban shark fishing and finning, the practice of slicing off fins at sea and dumping the carcass.⁷⁶ But lax enforcement and lucrative demand make the prospects for shark survival grim.

In addition to official attempts to curtail such consumption in China, efforts have been made to reduce demand by changing public perceptions

toward wildlife. The international kung-fu movie star Jackie Chan, for instance, made a public service advertisement in Mandarin for the NGO WildAid attacking the consumption of shark fins and other endangered species with graphic images and closed with an appeal to consumers: "When the buying stops, the killing can too."⁷⁷ Other prominent Chinese figures such as NBA basketball star Yao Ming, Hong Kong actress Michelle Yeoh, and the Olympic gold gymnast and footwear entrepreneur Li Ning have repeatedly made similar spots calling for the end of consumption of endangered species.⁷⁸ International NGOs such as the WWF have called for stepped-up campaigns to dissuade the public from buying products derived from endangered species. And in 2012, when Guizhentang, a manufacturer of traditional medicines specializing in bear tonics, applied for public listing, dozens of Chinese celebrities and hundreds of "netizens" on Weibo (the Chinese Twitter) demanded the government block the company's initial public offering application.⁷⁹ Likewise, public pressure and changing perceptions have had some effect. In 2012, for instance, the Shangri-La luxury hotel chain announced it was removing shark fin soup from the menus of its seventy-two hotels and implementing a sustainable seafood policy.⁸⁰

Animal-borne illness, though, has done more than such appeals to change public perception. The consumption of civet cats (which resemble mongooses and otters), another delicacy and traditional medicinal ingredient, was blamed by some scientists for the outbreak of SARS in 2002–03, which killed 774 people. Guangdong province responded by banning their sale, and the United States placed an embargo on them.⁸¹ There is some evidence that the negative association of these delicacies with disease is having an effect: a 2009 survey suggested that the number of restaurants serving some exotic wildlife was dropping.⁸²

CONCLUSION

Viewed individually, each of these extreme markets may seem exceptional or just a temporary phenomenon and perhaps even a necessary evil during China's ongoing transition toward a market economy. But looking at the variety and extent of extreme markets as a whole reveals the complexity of the challenges posed by deregulated domestic markets meeting unchecked consumer demand.

First, of course, China is not the only country with extreme markets. Furthermore, as this chapter has shown, all these markets are transnational, relying on the complicity of consumers and producers in other countries. The consequences of China's rapidly expanding domestic market behavior

include more Chinese adoptees to meet demand on the Upper East Side of New York, more Chinese prostitutes in Thailand and Burmese brides in Gansu, and more Chinese corneas in the eye sockets of Californians.

Second, extreme markets are neither inherent to Chinese culture nor inevitable. All the markets described in this chapter had in fact been declared unacceptable and were not legally or commonly found in China for at least a quarter-century during the Mao era. That attempts to rein them in by China's current leaders have been only modestly successful reveals just how far China's consumer culture has moved from one in which consumption was highly regulated under the Mao-era state to a freewheeling market society in which it has become extremely difficult to place checks on consumer demand. Although mainstream economists and policy makers want China to rescue the global economy by consuming more, neither they nor the Chinese government has proven capable of controlling either what the Chinese consume or the local domestic and global effects of their consumption. What extreme markets put in a particularly harsh light is the simple truth that it is difficult to have it both ways—to create a consumer culture that celebrates individual choice and also successfully regulate what is desired, bought, and sold even within a single national context, let alone internationally.

Third, the flourishing of these markets is not news to the Chinese. All these topics are heavily debated and discussed in Chinese by the Chinese press—and even more so by the Chinese blogosphere—including extremely sensitive issues covered even by China's official news agency, *Xinhua*.⁸³ In other words, this is not a case of the Chinese government simply looking the other way but rather the number and complexity of the regulatory issues involved, often as a direct but unintended consequence of the retreat of the Chinese state from its former regulatory role over the Chinese economy and society. That said, suggesting that there are unintended consequences of extreme markets is not the same as suggesting they are unexpected. The collective number of cases suggests one would have to be naïve to expect that markets would not have such consequences, though not even the most cynical would argue that the national government embraced market reforms as a way to allow local government officials to profit from confiscating and reselling "illegal" babies.

Finally, despite the undeniably grim conclusions that can be drawn from the examples in this chapter, it is also worth considering that the very Chinese consumers fueling these developments may themselves lead efforts to reform such extreme markets both in China and elsewhere. Just as Chinese celebrities are leading the fight to end shark fin soup consumption as a way to save endangered shark species, in 2012 Chinese activists

successfully undermined Canada's attempt to increase seal meat sales to China by petitioning the Canadian government to cease selling products from baby seals in Chinese markets.⁶⁴ Acknowledging and responding to extreme markets thus offers consumers and consumer societies everywhere an opportunity to confront the consequences of both desire and restraint.

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