Equal Temperament: Autonomy and Identity in Chinese Public Speaking Clubs

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Abstract   Young professionals in China are eagerly studying what are called communication skills, particularly public speaking. This article reads technologies of self-presentation in the context of tentatively liberal social imaginaries, and as therapeutic resources for connecting with others. Entering Toastmasters public speaking clubs in Beijing, we see psychosocial techniques and institutional forms that anchor people otherwise floating in a fragmented urban space. Club members actively seek to be objectified on stage, to become self-aware under the gaze of an audience. They practice locating themselves within an imagined public, as individuals. However, members also repurpose their clubs into comprehensive social resources, and they construct a critical historical consciousness. While members of public speaking clubs pursue self-definition, they do so in ways that challenge liberal understandings of autonomy and identity. We can hear these tensions by listening to how Chinese therapists use psychology to articulate social critiques. While both psychotherapists and members of public speaking clubs participate in a modernist cultural politics, club members do not regard personal relationships as antagonistic. Young adults in urban China are getting on stage in order to connect with other people. Like their peers elsewhere, they are learning the power of self-definition in a world of strangers.   [self-help, subjectivity, identity, China]

The goal of therapy is the "three harmonies," she tells me: with oneself, with others, with the world. But Ling, a Beijing psychotherapist, hastens to distinguish this formula from a well-known proverb, "harmony is the most precious" (*yiheweigui*), a value that Ling sees as an invitation to "repress ourselves" (*yayi ziji*). Ling's careful distinction reveals a perceived tension between valued consonance and dangerous self-effacement. For many Chinese therapists, the bad kind of harmony is all too perfectly in tune, with authorities, traditions, and interpersonal pressures. Echoing a lineage of modernist reformers concerned with the Chinese character (Liu 1995), these experts worry that the consuming interdependence of Chinese society prevents people from developing a distinct voice. Young people in urban China are also concerned with confident self-assertion, and organizations teaching debate, stand-up, social skills, and especially public speaking have proliferated in recent years. People who earnestly study self-presentation have been depicted as neoliberal or entrepreneurial subjects, managing themselves in the name of self-actualization; but young adults in public speaking clubs are working to find social connection, to establish an identity in an urban world of fluidly mixing strangers. In the practice of public speaking, psychosocial capacities connect with shared aspirations for individual autonomy and national modernity. At the same time, young adults' attempts to develop social skills signal a contemporary social distress.

Chinese psychologists, like Ling, express concern that their compatriots don't know that they should define their own identity. Therapists in China are teaching people to assert their needs in the name of egalitarian intimacy and self-actualization; they view themselves as constructing a modern, liberal society, populated by individual citizens who have rights and obligations. Outside the harmony of an existing social network, people need to find a new basis for relating to strangers. Cross-cultural scholarship depicts highly sensitive "interdependent" Chinese (Markus and Kitayama 1991), Western CEOs read the *Art of War*, and American self-help books sound nationalistic warnings about the subtle interpersonal skills of Chinese people (Bradberry and Greaves 2009, 242). But young adults in China agree with psychologists, saying that Chinese people lack social skills. Drawing on a year and a half of ethnographic research on personal growth groups in Beijing, and on self-help and professional psychology more widely, this article shows that public speaking clubs create new forms of dissonance and harmony. Clubs provide therapeutic techniques that teach members to define themselves explicitly, as individuals set against an abstract social substance; but they also serve as spaces in which people produce local discursive, institutional, cultural, and psychosocial resources for establishing social connection.

The word "temperament" gathers together several meanings relevant to public speaking. In psychology, temperament refers to inborn propensities associated with introversion and extroversion. Psychological temperaments were once imagined as combinations of the four humors, drawing out a second important meaning: the root "temper" means to mix in moderation, to alloy. People studying social skills hope to mingle in a world of strangers: yet this imagined society restrains their combination by casting them as separate atoms. Finally, extending the meaning of measured moderation, temperament is a quality of a musical tuning. An instrument can be tempered to play a single scale, within which each note has a given place and specific harmonic effect, or it can be tempered equally, able to play many keys but in a slightly dissonant sonic space. In public speaking clubs, young adults are learning to position themselves in the imperfect harmony of a liberal society. Many club members feel temperamentally disadvantaged, unable to pursue their autonomy among the incitements of consumer lifestyles and urban lives. They have trouble talking to strangers. Public speaking and other social skill pedagogies address a disordered sociality, a dis-ease that emerges at particular intersections of economic, social, environmental, ideological, and psychophysical forces. This disorder radiates from tears in the social fabric, haunting the fervent daydreams of imagined possibility.

Attending to the "psy fever" (*xinli re*) (Zhang 2015) or "psycho-boom" (Kleinman et al. 2011, 29; Huang 2015) in contemporary China in the context of liberalism complements recent scholarship depicting self-help psychology as a mode of biopolitical governance in China (Yang 2014; Zhang 2015) and as a globalizing neoliberal technology of the self (Wilce and Fenigsen 2016). Anthropologists have closely scrutinized the role of the "psy-ences" (Raikhel and Bemme 2016) in depoliticizing and normalizing the conditions of brutal markets, teaching people to assume responsibility for conjuring a viable life for themselves, encouraging them to be "enterprising" (Rose 1998) in a risky environment. But as scholars have pointed out (Kipnis 2012; Yan 2010), in order to understand the psychological shocks rippling

through contemporary China, it is important to remember that logics social scientists gloss as late modern or neoliberal are folded into processes of "industrialization, urbanization, and nation-building" (Kipnis 2012, 5) that unfolded much earlier in the West. Furthermore, in different sociohistorical contexts psychological technologies "can have radically different meanings and effects" (Raikhel and Bemme 2016, 164). In particular, psychologists in postsocialist societies often see themselves as working to reform communist social mores (Cohen 2013, 2015; Junghans 2001; Matza 2009, 2012). Chinese psychologists promote a liberal ethos by setting up interpersonal boundaries within families, while advocating civil and equitable relations with strangers. The therapeutics of self-help psychology work in parallel, dismantling networks of kinship to precipitate a dialectic of autonomous individuals and a reified society. Young adults in public speaking clubs are learning to position themselves reflexively in a world of strangers: however, this self-definition also opens up passages to new forms of collective consciousness and social affiliation.

The tone of popular and professional efforts to develop the psychosocial capacity of Chinese people is tempered by a deep historical resonance. Since the first rumblings of anticolonial nationalism in the late nineteenth century, a supposedly flawed "national character" (*guominxing*) has been a key site of cultural reflection and progressive aspiration in China, even an "obsession" (Liu 1995, 47–51). This historical consciousness is a constant presence in Chinese public speaking clubs, where young adults imagine a confident Western modernity and transmute intimate experiences of loneliness, shame, and stage fright into collective condemnations of a society that, they allege, has never given them "platforms" (*pingtai*). While this eagerness for self-expression appears to signal a familiar striving for autonomy, even within Western self-help groups people in China are defining themselves using local understandings of the self and personal power. Using contrasting theories of subjectification, this article works to untangle the strands that tie the self to its performance on stage and to suggest how individualizing forces are shaped by historical, sociocultural, and embodied factors. In China, psychological discourses of self-actualization describe autonomy and identity in terms that sound quite foreign. By listening for this dissonance, we can better assess the role of self-help psychology in cultural globalization and its use as therapy for social disorder.

Talking to Strangers

Stella, a young blogger who has lived abroad, a woman deep in the heart of many personal growth circles in Beijing, explains that "In China we don't talk to strangers. If, say at a Starbucks or a Costa [Coffee] I walked by a foreigner and said "hi" it would be fine. But in China people would think something was wrong with me" (*wo you maobing*). In his work *From the Soil*, anthropologist Fei Xiaotong famously characterized the traditional Chinese lifeworld as "a society without strangers" (*meiyou moshengren de shehui*) ([1947] 1984, 6). When people did enter into relationships with strangers, these relationships were configured in terms of fictive kinship. Beginning in the early twentieth century, reformers worked to dissolve what were maligned as "feudal" social networks, tangled webs "that interfered with the Chinese state's attempts to establish direct relationships with individual citizens"

(Fong 2007, 94). The communist regime continued this project of severing the ties of hierarchy and kinship, but they placed people into new forms of collective life. Through the 1980s, urban lives unfolded largely within work units (*danwei*), comprehensive "urban villages" with little anonymity and little necessity for interacting with strangers (Lu 2006, 68). Historical attempts to interpellate citizens of a nation-state now gain impetus from the increasing social significance of strangers. The young professionals in public speaking clubs find themselves in mobile labor markets and interacting with strangers in person and online, in coffee shops and networking events.

Through her blog, Stella hopes to inspire a brave autonomy, to help her peers to "do what they want to do" in the face of social pressure to conform. Social skills are central to this project of self-definition: Stella tells me that her most popular, widely circulated article was about networking skills. She mentions a European man who once complained to her that Chinese women cluster together at corporate events: he suggested that "They should meet some new people." Stella takes up this social imperative not only in pursuit of professional, or romantic, opportunity, but also as a way to create a more civil society. She goes on to relate, "What I learned abroad is to be nice to people, and to assume that people are nice. You know, in China we are all used to being cheated." In China, contemporary public discourse is roiled by high-profile incidents of public indifference and corruption, by moral panics punctuated with circulating anecdotes about Western civility. For over one hundred years, Chinese modernist intellectuals have remarked on the pernicious moral effects of tight interpersonal networks, portraying a corrupt world in which people care only for kin and not at all for strangers (Lee 2014). While foreign corporate-communication specialists associate their mission with old tropes of indirect and inscrutable Chinese, native social critics like Stella adopt Western perspectives in order to criticize an uncivil society.

In China's central cities, where resources and opportunities are concentrated, economic and demographic pressures are intense. The costs of living are rising rapidly. Many single children carry their families' hopes for middle-class prosperity; at the same time, the expansion of higher education over the past two decades has devalued their degrees. But the challenges they face are not only material: young adults also feel increasing pressure to pursue leisure, romance, and self-definition. They are anxious to acquire what they call *gexing*, or "individual nature": a reified personality. Professors, undergraduate students, and alumni all told me that until recently students at top schools admired the best students, the so called "study hegemons," or *xueba*. But when I asked students from Beijing universities who they esteemed among their peers, every respondent described the new idols on campus, the so-called "great gods" (*dashen*): these are students who succeed academically while also developing their own hobbies, interests, and ideas. Current slang terms reify certain modes of self-presentation, marking their novelty: online and on the town, people want to *xiu* themselves (from the English word "show"), and to *dashan*, a word meaning to pick up a girl, or a guy, or even just to initiate a conversation with a stranger.

Young adults are stretching for the social rewards brought into reach by constructing and projecting a remarkable identity. However, the social infrastructure that scaffolds

self-definition is only beginning to develop in China, and most graduates have a very limited set of institutions and identifications that can help them find social connection after they leave school. Adolescents in China locate themselves within a large array of social categories and products, and, especially in the central cities, young adults are aware of different lifestyle subcultures. However, university students have been socialized in schools structured around classes, or *banji*, that stay together for several years. In college, they primarily befriend members of their immediate communities of fate, their dorms and majors, rather than connecting with others through chosen identifications. Counseling psychologists report that over the past half-decade many college students have begun to affiliate based on shared interests and hobbies. They told me, approvingly, that students now feel less pressure to stay within the social confines of their dorms. However, Chinese society offers relatively few of the "re-embedment" mechanisms that the West has in the form of clubs, religions, and volunteer organizations (Yan 2016, 252). As sites for voluntary association, public speaking clubs are part of an important change the ecology of identity formation.

Self-help psychology often takes center stage as the paradigmatic neoliberal technology of subjectification (Giddens 1991; Rose 1998), and the practice of public speaking has been historically central to self-help. Dale Carnegie's ([1936] 1981) seminal *How to Win Friend and Influence People* grew out of his public speaking classes. Today, public speaking courses are a lively sector in a broad self-help universe sparkling with confident communication. Not incidentally, public speaking is the lifeblood of many self-help gurus. But young adults in China are already hungry for the microphone, seeking opportunities to speak in public not only through psychological self-help, but also in rapidly expanding debate leagues, burgeoning comedy clubs, and ubiquitous English classes. In a society where education and aspiration are particularly interlocked, English classes are instrumental in generating an urgent sense of the psychosocial demands of an imagined modernity. Books extolling Western education depict students with many opportunities to speak in class, while Chinese self-help texts state that Americans are all confident and extroverted. Anxieties about self-presentation merge into aspirations for modernity, gathering together people's myriad disaffections. As young adults complain that they have never been given platforms, their worries about public speaking add emotional resonance to widespread critiques of hierarchical Chinese schools and families.

Toastmasters clubs are useful sites for studying globalizing technologies of self-presentation. Since Toastmasters International was founded in California in 1924, it has grown into an extensive network of franchised clubs in which people practice giving prepared and improvised speeches. Globally, Toastmasters is expanding most rapidly in South and East Asia; the organization held its first annual conference outside of North America in 2014, in Kuala Lumpur. The first club in China was founded in 1999, and there are now over four hundred in the country. During my fieldwork I joined one club, and attended multiple clubs as well as regional events and two district conferences. Men and women join Toastmasters in equal numbers. Members are mostly between their late teens and midthirties, with a modal age in the early to midtwenties: this is far younger than the membership of American and European clubs. There are not many foreigners in the clubs, but it is not unusual to see one at

a meeting. Typically, club members in Beijing first arrived in the city for their undergraduate studies and are now a few years out of college, busy staying afloat and launching careers. Most Chinese clubs conduct their meetings in English, and language study is an important part of their appeal. Members' command of the language varies considerably, although all can and do give speeches in English. Many Toastmasters club members work in Beijing's booming technology sector, in which there are significant opportunities for social mobility. People drawn to these clubs tend to be ambitious in the entrepreneurial sense noted by both critics and proponents of popular psychology, but their concerns are far from narrowly economic. While most club members say that they hope polished self-presentation skills will help advance their careers, even veteran members can rarely articulate how they use such skills professionally. And when club members discuss anxious market interactions, the "job interview" is almost always paired with the "date."

As research sites, Toastmasters clubs have a number of appealing features. First, they instantiate a common interest in public speaking. In addition, unlike other personal-growth groups that are organized around psychological experts, Toastmasters clubs have no professional teachers: while some members are corporate trainers, and others have charismatic power, everyone studies speaking together as formal equals and officer positions rotate through elections. This democratic organization leaves substantial room for members to use the clubs as spaces for articulating and interpreting their collective experience. Low membership fees also contribute to an egalitarian ethos, making the clubs accessible not only to a student anthropologist but to almost anyone with some facility in oral English. The young membership of Chinese Toastmasters clubs also makes them appealing research sites. Early adulthood is a critical period for studying the reciprocal interaction of subjectivity and cultural change (LeVine 2011). This phase of the life course, as people transition out of the family and university, is also important for thinking about identity formation and its effects on mental health. Thus, young Chinese adults in Toastmasters clubs are both historically and developmentally in the midst of a crisis of self-definition. My work in these groups was part of a larger research project on self-help psychology in Beijing, which included participation in various personal-growth activities, extensive analysis of self-help literature, and collaborations with several dozen corporate trainers, psychotherapists, and social activists who are promoting autonomy. People and ideas flowed between these texts and locations.

Objecting Subjects

"They don't even have to struggle to be born," the therapist tells me about young people in China, referring to the country's world-record rates of Caesarian-section births. Teacher Bai, a mother in her late forties, goes on to explain that children are born naturally active, curious to explore their world, but that Chinese parenting destroys this instinct. In contemporary China, such critiques, grounded in humanistic psychology, gather strength from concerns about the social deficits inflicted on a generation of single children by too many adults and too much educational pressure. Teacher Bai's words convey a sense that young Chinese people are unprepared to meet the world as fully formed subjects because they have not fought against it. Western origin myths of the subject are narratives of domination and

struggle. In the foundational accounts of psychology, we find ourselves in conflict with the father, the mother, biting the breast, asserting our will even in the cradle. So too in seminal expressions of Western philosophy, where in Hegel's account the subject comes into being through mortal combat. This individual is defined by negating the very grounds of existence: "it comes forward in antithesis to the universal substance, disowns this fluent continuity with it and asserts that it is not dissolved in this universal element" ([1807] 1977, 107). In order to establish its autonomy, the subject must object.

In liberal social theory, the acts of public speaking, debate, and dissent have appeared as key practices of political participation and personal freedom. While some thinkers see subjectivity as defined by oppressive or punitive power, others view domination as even more fundamental to the self, as that which induces reflexive self-awareness. In Hegel's ([1807] 1977, 117) fable of the master and the slave, the subject has to be thoroughly penetrated by terror in order to shatter its solipsism, it must be objectified in the gaze of a dominant alterity. Deeply impressed by its identity with this social object, the transcendent subject can then work to master its being in the world, thereby becoming autonomous. While attacks on this dualism are legion, dualistic ontologies remain deeply embedded in social science theories of autonomy and identity. While more recent theories than Hegel's focus on the social nature of the self, they always emphasize a fundamental tension, an agent never quite in tune with the world. Dissonance. On the stage of Western culture, the subject "disowns" the father, the pharaoh, the master signifier, the social category, or it struggles to do so. But the autonomous individual that seeks to define itself in these oppositional terms is a Western cultural constellation: theories of individualization cannot assume that this configuration emerges as a natural response to social fragmentation or that it is being transmitted abroad by globalizing technologies of the self.

Liberal elements are woven deeply into psychological theory. In Erik Erikson's ([1950] 1993, 254, 310) influential account of identity formation, for example, the free and autonomous subject can only develop within a clear and consistent structure of rights and obligations. If the individual is a sovereign bearer of rights, then social restraints must be justified by appeals to God, to reason, to social contracts. These transcendent logics and laws give people moral leverage against established, traditional authority, and against each other, and are therefore highly productive of social forms. Louis Dumont (1981, 243) explains that while a hierarchical society is not static, it is oriented towards a single vision of the whole; he associates Hegelian dialectics with modern egalitarian aspirations, which work against existing orders of value. In other words, liberal ideology favors an imperfect harmony, a discord that shifts towards ever new social arrangements. The liberal subject recognizes itself as the will, an agent standing its ground against itself, the social order, and the natural environment. The *telos* of will power is resisting the universe, putting a dent in it.

In Chinese philosophy, the will has not been elaborated as a faculty of volition, intention, and choice (Hall and Ames 1998, 37–39), nor has heroic struggle served as a model for personal efficacy. Chinese culture has elaborated nonconflictual and extralegal ways of regulating interpersonal relationships; following comparative philosophers David Hall and Roger Ames

(1998), we might state this as a focus on rites rather than rights. Within the family, paternal authority was "intense and inclusive," but it involved extensive mutual obligations rather than assuming "a one-sided command-submission pattern" (Hsu 1967, 262). Socially, there has certainly been space for private interests in China, but interests are ideally both pursued within and constrained by social networks; they are not rights to be asserted against others. Philosophically, Daoist thought has suggested powerful ways of achieving one's goals by working with and not against the environment—not will power, but sensitivity and capability. This orientation is eminently practical; however, it works within a system, not by challenging its parameters (Jullien 2004, 197). But in self-help psychology, you should not act under the circumstances: you are supposed to rise above them.

In Chinese public speaking clubs, we can examine the stubbornly embodied yet deeply contingent connections between self-assertion and subjectivity, image and identity. Erikson and his intellectual descendants have articulated psychological theories of identity formation that describe a process of explicit choices and commitments, but this is a normative and culturally patterned vision of identity. Whereas Erikson states that "True 'engagement' with others is the result and the test of firm self-delineation" ([1968] 1994, 167), this dialectical and antagonistic formulation has it backwards. Rather than constructing clear lines around ourselves and then staking the self on a tense negotiation at the boundary of self and other, we in fact construct always tenuous identities through relationships and not against them, identities that are constituted by intersubjectivity and identification. George Herbert Mead's ([1934] 1967) account of the self usefully highlights how identity is built up through processes of social participation and practice, processes that are proprioceptive as much as cognitive, ritual as much as reflexive. This account can supplement theories that focus on the subject's immediate relation to power and ideology. Building on Stuart Hall's (2000) account of identity as a discursive effect, I conceive of identity as the effect of moments in which the self is integrated into a symbolic system enabling action; however, I see the syntax of that action as structured by various points of persistence, including the self in all its complexity. This intractable psychosocial and historical material cannot be unproblematically interpellated as a liberal subject. The following section takes us into Toastmasters public speaking clubs, showing how club members not only struggle to address a public as individuals, but also construct new forms of collective consciousness and social affiliation.

Staging the Self

In Hegel's account, the autonomous subject first feels its existence as an object and then works to assert control over this externalized, dominated self. This narrative provides a useful framework for understanding the dialectical process of subjectification in Toastmasters; at the same time, practices of personal growth also reveal a more processual, less adversarial genesis for the subject. In form and in content, Toastmasters clubs are designed to first give members a sense of their existence in social space and then to help them gain a measure of reflexive control over their staged persona. Contact with the organization immediately initiates this process. As a first-time guest at a Toastmasters club, you will be given about 20 seconds to introduce yourself: if you go over this limit, as people frequently do, the host

will abruptly cut you off. Social attention appears as a scarce and valuable resource. This is also suggested by the agenda in your hands, in which every segment of the meeting is planned down to the minute.

After two months of regular attendance at Toastmasters meetings, I had internalized a sense that even the briefest of moments on stage are important opportunities. I first realized this on a fall evening, when I was a first-time guest at a club. As I prepared for my 20-second introduction, I found myself thinking about how to entertain, how to say something clever, how to share some of my good mood. Toastmasters encourages humor: every year tens of thousands of members compete in Humorous Speech Contests at local, regional, and international levels, with the winner being crowned "World Champion of Public Speaking." My club mentor, a North American corporate trainer with a booming voice, told me that when giving speeches, one should make a joke every 37 seconds: "This is religion." Club members encourage each other to be funny even when performing brief functional roles in a meeting, such as explaining the rules. Through humor and enthusiasm, the individual personality becomes valuable, can be recognized for contributing to the high-energy atmosphere that makes a meeting "good." Many people say that they attend club meetings for entertainment; tongue in cheek, some explain that they come to "inject chicken blood" (*dajixie*), a phrase referring to a quack remedy. A few club members oppose this characterization, feeling that it makes light of the steady, deep work of personal transformation. While club members are encouraged to display a unique and spontaneous personality, clubs try to contain the uncertainty of social interaction by spending about 10 minutes of every meeting explaining the rules and by adhering to a rigid etiquette: for example, anyone getting on or off of the stage must shake hands. Before any speakers take the stage, everyone in attendance is told not to discuss race, politics, sex, or religion; these very foreign-sounding "taboos" bracket divisive elements of identity, simultaneously conjuring a disembedded individual, a safe therapeutic space, and a civil public discourse.

Our Toastmasters club meets on a weeknight in a rented classroom. There are about 25 members and anywhere from 5 to 15 guests in attendance: they are students, teachers, programmers, aspiring entrepreneurs, and corporate trainers. In each meeting, about five to eight people respond to prompts by giving improvised two-minute speeches. Afterwards, several club members present prepared speeches that are between five and seven minutes long. The assembled people not only practice public speaking: they also constitute a tenuous public. Michael Warner suggests that a public is formed when people address an audience that is imagined to include strangers and bystanders, in which texts circulate, and in which discourse is in principle self-organized rather than oriented to external institutional ends (Warner 2002). Toastmasters club members actually do address strangers since every meeting includes guests and because people move between clubs in a large regional, national, and international network. On occasion, especially resonant speeches from one club are cited in other ones, and speeches are often posted online. This creates a sense of an indefinite audience that centers on the club but extends beyond it. Most speeches in Toastmasters clubs address a public of young urban Chinese, who are imagined as struggling to establish careers and struggling to define themselves.

One evening, a young woman in our club gives a speech about how "One should not only count inner beauty, but also outer beauty." She tells us that "One's appearance conveys her confidence and her attitude towards the life." Men and women in Toastmasters clubs often speak about exercise, appearance, and attractiveness. Scholars have described how psychological training guides people to reflect on their inner life in new ways, folding novel spaces into the self (Pritzker 2016; Rose 1998; Wilce and Fenigsen 2016). Yet in public speaking and social-skills training, personal growth appears to be less about discovering one's psychological depths than about feeling one's surface. By receiving feedback on their stage presence, and by positioning themselves before their peers, Toastmasters club members learn to feel themselves as social objects. In each two-hour meeting, half of the time is spent on improvised and prepared speeches and the other half on giving feedback to everyone who has gotten on the stage, with more detailed feedback for those who gave prepared speeches. Feedback in Chinese Toastmasters clubs is usually technical, suggesting that club members become aware of aspects of self-presentation such as body language and use of the stage. The number-one recommendation to speakers in Chinese clubs is to have "more energy": evaluators encourage volume and vigor. In these clubs, feedback seems less like a technology of reflexive self-management that a way to induce an interpersonal reflexivity: people are learning to see themselves through the eyes of strangers.[1]

The first prepared speech that Toastmasters give is a self-introduction called "The Ice Breaker." By giving speeches, and through regular workshops using endless acronyms to teach presentation skills, club members learn to repeat clear messages: KISS, Keep It Short and Simple. Similarly, one must squeeze oneself into a package that can be easily conveyed to a distant audience. My mentor told me that my self-introduction should be structured around humorous anecdotes. This first speech is much easier to do in what club members disparage as "the Chinese way," talking about your hometown, education, and work. Unlike their American counterparts, Chinese club members do not tend to define themselves by claiming positive personal characteristics; their self-introductions are more likely to focus on their desire to improve their personality. For her self-introduction, one woman labels herself as "awkward"; a man talks about how he became self-conscious on a trip abroad because of his strongly accented English. Toastmasters club members often use stories of personal failure to present self-help themes such as motivation and positivity. However, these inspirational presentations are outnumbered by speeches on travel, hobbies, and romance, as club members define themselves by their choices rather than by their social backgrounds. These talks are more than consumer daydreams: in seemingly anodyne speeches about photography or book clubs, people practice positioning themselves within an imagined space of lifestyles and possibilities. Yet in Chinese clubs, despite the unwritten but clear rule that speakers should be uplifting and energetic, many speeches are laments for choices foreclosed.

For example, a member of my Toastmasters club, single and in his midthirties, gave a speech about living without regrets, saying that he and his brother had both passed up marrying their sweethearts due to family pressures. Self-definition appears in speeches as both an ideal and a haunting lack, an inescapable reminder of shared social and psychological suffering.

For many young adults in China, trembling hands and thumping hearts are embodied indictments of their culture, of their parents and schools. They were never given choices, they never had platforms. In a masterful literary history of romantic love in modern China, Haiyan Lee analyzes a shy, nervous character who blames his ineptitude with girls on his being Chinese; Lee (2010, 252) reminds us that cultural critiques can serve as instruments of both national reform and personal consolation. The regrets and fears that Toastmasters club members share draw them closer together, forming a collective consciousness that articulates a broader cultural politics of autonomy.

By working to overcome stage fright, young adults are not only fighting feelings of personal inferiority and collective injury, let alone seeking to become more competitive: for many people, public speaking is a technique for developing the psychological capacity to connect with others, and with the world. A few Toastmasters club members enjoy public speaking, but most find the stage terrifying. Some members are struggling with generalized and severe social anxieties. Edgar, a young manager and aspiring corporate trainer, tells us that because of his introversion, his life had not been colorful. The future was gray and empty, he explains, showing us a hazy, colorless PowerPoint slide. Edgar shares his pain, and his triumph: he had tried various techniques to overcome his shyness, including a kind of therapy in which he visualized himself in a ball of energy. At first, he could not move. Only when he was able to take ownership of this bubble, to free himself from the gaze of others, was the curse lifted and his body free to sway, to dance. His message to our club is that we all have this inner power to be ourselves. For many people, public performance involves tension followed by release: this may be one phenomenological reason why performance can be interpreted as the expression of a truer self, even if the persona is so elaborately staged. Many Toastmasters speeches center on the metaphor of life as a play, the world a stage: the message, always, is to step up and play your part. Some club members discuss overcoming stage fright as a process of prying apart a constricting anxiety, a mystical labor of opening one's heart to the world.

Edgar and many other Toastmasters club members talk about suffering from social anxiety; however, young adults in China rarely view shy or reticent styles of self-presentation as problems in themselves. Edgar gave a speech about a frustrating experience dating a young woman; but he tells us that the woman in question actually liked his low-key temperament. When I asked young adults in Beijing who they thought was cool and popular, many mentioned that they don't like arrogant people. They feel comfortable around peers who are *zhai*, meaning domestic, and many people apply this term to themselves. Like their counterparts in Japanese public speaking classes, anxious young adults in Chinese Toastmasters clubs do not feel that difficulty speaking signals a deep character flaw (Dunn 2016, 126). Most club members describe struggles with frustrating but circumscribed limitations, anxieties that emerge in specific life stages, against particular assemblages of desire (to get a date, to get a job), and in specific psychosocial ecologies. In China, diffidence can appear as a mark of maturity, and reticence as an effective strategy, one laid out in ancient tactical treatises and in Chinese self-help books.[2] Within networks of consequential relationships, power isn't about making a stand, and one should know when to avoid making a scene: a strategic, long-term orientation is what one young professional in Beijing calls "Chinese EQ."

Hegel's image of a slave pinned in place by the gaze of a dominant Other captures a peculiar cultural configuration of the self, an individual whose future depends on a fateful, eternal moment of social judgment, and whose dignity depends on the ability to impose himself on the world. Two polarized elements of a Western liberal subject hang in this balance: while God and the law give social substance to the sacred sovereign individual, sin and guilt and excrement keep it in its place. Anxiety signals a fateful physical or moral weakness, fear and trembling before a powerful alterity. Chinese Toastmasters clubs provide settings in which people objectify, alter, and reevaluate the self, but these inner spaces of Western autonomy remain quite foreign. Yet even without a transcendent substance, without interpellation by God or the law, the self can be stripped bare to the gaze, can be shamed before parents and peers. On stage at Toastmasters events, people talk about stutters, about being mocked, about wetting their pants, filling in the painful blank spaces of confessional and inspirational narratives.

At the final of a district speech contest, a woman recounts walking down the street, painfully conscious of her appearance. "I handed over the judgment of my value to the phantoms on the street," she tells us. When she entered an expensive store, the salesperson implied that she could not afford a particular blouse. The speaker says that, to prove her worth, she handed him her wallet. She urges the audience members to "take back your control," and she asks us, "Have you done ridiculous things just to please a stranger?" She receives loud applause, and even, cheers, which is unusual. This speech describes the collective humiliations of China's stark class divide, while also implying a particular local construction of self-esteem. Both Toastmasters club members and psychotherapists use self-esteem to protest against what they see as a Chinese obsession with "face" (*mianzi* or *lian*). "Throw away your face!" suggests a venerable member of our club. "My face was once bigger than this," he says, pointing at his round cheeks. Another club member, now also a self-help author and guru, tells us the secret to success: "Don't want face!" (*buyaolian*). In speaking of self-esteem in terms of face, these actors configure therapeutic practices for overcoming their anxiety as critiques of materialism and superficiality, of parents who pressure them to choose safe careers and spouses with big bankbooks. These critiques continue a history of antitraditional politics that opposed Confucian ritual, and later Maoist collectivism, with the authentic feelings of individuals liberated from tradition, free to pursue personal truth and authentic love in the spaces of the cosmopolitan city (Lee 2010). In this narrative, self-confidence signals a successful modernity. Yet people in Toastmasters are not ashamed to talk about awkward first kisses or about being unable to get dates. Everyone is subject to new social stresses. Dating is a shared aspiration in clubs, and members do not talk about relationships cautiously, skirting them as private fields of shame or glory. People new to the club are often asked quite loudly if they are "SAA," or "single and available."

Several new self-help organizations emerged from Toastmasters while I was in Beijing. The most visible one might be translated as The Persistence Society (*jianchi bang*). More than any other self-help group that I encountered in China, The Persistence Society seems to promote a reflexive, alienated, and instrumental mode of entrepreneurial self-management. The organization makes people accountable for their self-actualization by setting up a

multitiered system of monitoring using social media, through which people announce their daily goals and encourage each other to complete these tasks. Yet these tasks are as likely to be about talking to strangers as about disciplined enterprise. At a group meeting, people share pledges to work on their confidence, social skills, and public speaking. Stranger sociality is a highly reified, aspirational commodity: using a hierarchical, Confucian phrase, one woman pledges to make a "worthy friend" every week, while another says plainly that she wants to talk to strangers (*dashan*). When she pledges to speak for five minutes every day, even if only to a mirror, people laugh: either at the image of a person conversing with herself, or in sympathy with her loneliness. The Persistence Society demonstrates how Western technologies of the self are being taken up in China, at a time in which people are adapting to the possibilities, dangers, and psychosocial challenges of life among strangers.

In their brief self-introductions, many guests will say that they have come to Toastmasters to socialize, stating simply, "I'm here for friends," or "I just want to be a part of this activity." It strikes me that such a declaration would rarely be voiced in America; because it might betray loneliness and desperation, the desire for friends would be shameful in itself and suspected of indexing deep flaws. Chinese Toastmasters club members find social support that many of their peers lack; this seems to me more valuable than the public speaking skills that they rarely use outside of club meetings. While club members practice introducing themselves to an audience, the therapeutic apparatus of the clubs also addresses a subject who is not on stage expressing herself, who is constituted through collective activity. Clubs create controlled, supportive environments in which people can slowly take on social roles. If, as Goffman writes in a passage on "Staging and the Self," the self is a "dramatic effect" of "collective manufacture" (1959, 253), then it takes many people to assemble a Toastmasters club member. Each meeting depends on numerous officers, at least seven experienced members to serve as evaluators, and a ready supply of speakers. Every week, at least 20 people have a role to play, even if is just to greet the strangers who come as guests.

And so, Toastmasters clubs support both modes of identity formation that we have described: one in which the individual is defined by choices, among possibilities and against the social order, and another mode that involves social integration through embodied practice. In Hegel's theory of subjectification, focused on dialectical extremes of domination and liberation, becoming a social object is a terrifying experience. One is under the control of a powerful alterity and incited to assert one's will against this other. Under this gaze, one feels weak or guilty, awkward or ashamed. This encounter with oneself as a social object initiates a kind of autonomy defined by self-assertion and self-justification. But one can explain how self-objectification produces the effect of identity in less oppositional terms. On stage in Toastmasters, or even while serving in a minor functional role in the meeting, people can experience what George Herbert Mead calls "The fusion of the 'I' and the 'Me' in social activities" ([1934] 1967, 273), a state in which one is familiar enough with one's role in the social process that performance seems smooth and natural. It is a feeling of fleeting integration; sometimes, when a speech goes well, it can seem like mastery achieved. Toastmasters clubs do gradually alleviate many people's social anxieties, even if, in teaching people to perform humor, energy, and personality, they reinforce standards for self-assessment that

contribute to these anxieties. Some club members, such as Edgar, become corporate trainers, seeking to teach others the skills that they have found so liberating. However, judging from the changes that I saw club members undergoing, the most important therapeutic element in Toastmasters is positive social contact, something that happens in the interstices of the organization, almost imperceptibly. Edgar found a girlfriend, and last I saw him he had a big, quiet smile.

Contracting Freedom

One evening, during the improvised speech segment of our club meeting, a young guest receives the following prompt: "If you were a mother, what would you teach your child?" Immediately, she responds, "First, please have popular." After a pause for reflection, she begins again:

> If you were my child, please fall in love in your college. And maybe even aggressive, please have popular in your high school and your middle school. Because I come from a very strict family. My parents be very strict on me. They forbid me to contact with boys, so . . . I'm single now! And second, I think I help them to choose their career and majors as they like, not for how much you can earn after graduate. Because I did wrong thing. I choose major I don't like. And I had a very bad experience when looking for a job. This kind of experience reminds me if I were a mother, I must be very patient to listen to my children. To understand what she wants, what he wants, and to support them to get his real life.

This young woman attributes her social and professional frustrations to a lack of personal autonomy; in explaining how she would listen to her child's preferences, she demonstrates how therapeutic pedagogies of communication suggest liberal political ideals (Cohen 2015, 330). Our guest clearly articulates the psychosocial foundations of a new social order: if only we listened to our hearts, and if only our parents knew how to listen. The deeply felt sanctity of self-definition weaves sacred circles around and between each bounded dominion. But Chinese psychologists often say that their compatriots lack a sense of "boundaries" (*bianjie*). They are trying to dismantle logics of kinship and reciprocity, to make people aware of themselves as social atoms, entering into contracts in order to pursue individual interests.

On the subway one evening, two members of my Toastmasters club are complaining about Chinese education. One, a young and restlessly energetic woman, says, "It's why I matured late." She tells me that in order to be psychologically mature, you need to know who you are and what you want. Our companion agrees, saying "Yeah, lots of us don't know what we like." "Maybe it would be better if parents would tell us when we were little," the restless woman continues, telling us "That we need to find out what we like." College counselors, of course, agree, as do an array of cultural activists who are teaching people to actively define an identity based on choices, preferences, and ideals. Across my research sites and in my daily life in China, I encountered young people anxiously asking how to find their passions and interests, people who bitterly reflect, in the words of one college student "I didn't know what hobbies *are*." Young people are talking about their desire to be "interesting" (*youqu*,

youyisi) and their admiration for peers with "personality" (*gexing*). In part, this is a response to new possibilities for having fun, real and imagined. Personality also functions as a proxy for class, something to acquire with the luxury of leisure. But for young adults in China, the ubiquitous desire to be interesting is also about the social, economic, and psychological value of cultivating difference in a mass society (Simmel [1903] 1950). Self-definition can work as an anchor for embedding oneself, for finding connection in an urban environment in which many young adults feel adrift. Like young adults, psychotherapists criticize Chinese families and schools (Kuan 2015; Naftali 2010) for not allowing children to develop hobbies, to have healthy social contact, to develop an identity through practices of autonomy. Parenting advice suggests treating children as equals, involving them in decision–making, and family therapists try to teach parents to "read" (*dudong*) their children, so that they will be able to treat them as autonomous individuals.

Unlike young people, many psychologists depict Chinese parents not only as overbearing but also as overly indulgent, refusing to wean their children. Remember Teacher Bai's admonition: these children "don't even have to struggle to be born." A number of psychotherapists suggested to me that Chinese people remain "infants"; by this, they mean that people expect to be taken care of by their parents, by institutions, and also by their therapists, from whom they tend to expect highly directive therapy (Zhang 2014). Attachment theory arrived in China not long ago,[3] and therapists have quickly adopted its language to critique Confucian deference to the elderly, cultural practices of foster care (*jiyang*) and the extended family's involvement in raising a child. In conversation, therapists often extrapolate from poor attachment to lack of trust, which they then blame for a variety of psychological and social diseases. These psychologists, like prominent theorists of individualization (Giddens 1991), rely on narratives of infancy that regard dependence as the very image of oppression, that depict early separation as the foundation for psychological and social well-being. The intimacy that these experts advocate is a cold separation from shared life, from the embrace of the mother and the communist state.

An equal temperament asserts itself, but it maintains a measured distance from its neighbors. Certified experts of intimacy, emotions, and communication are teaching people to distance others, encouraging them to assert their wills and suggesting that dependence is shameful. Popular advice tells parents to give children chores, to give them private space, to teach them to say "thank you": in China, such formalities suggest emotional distance. This socialization seems cruel to some Chinese parents; as anthropologist Yan Yunxiang suggests, "the Chinese understanding of intimacy is precisely the mutual transgression of individual boundaries" (2016, 254). But young couples still feel the sting of the choices they didn't make, and they see the appeal of having a room of one's own. Calls for autonomy resonate with laments for childhood lost and provide shelter from the insistent demands of kin. The number-one best-selling Chinese language self-help author, Zhang Defen (2013, 49), advocates "divorcing" one's parents, cutting away the fetters of responsibility that, she says, make others into passive infants. And in the best-selling, much maligned self-help book *Confucius from the Heart*, author Yu Dan (2009, 71) warns against coercive or grasping love, saying that the earlier children are independent, the better the parent. Yu goes on to say that

"Confucius shows us that we must respect every person equally and rationally, maintain a tactful distance, and give each other breathing space" (2009, 73). This doesn't quite cut it as an exegesis of Confucian thought, with its respectful but never equal or disembedded relationships: in fact, Yu (2009, 68) is unwittingly referencing Schopenhauer's prickly vision of society as a huddle of porcupines. In her daily life, Teacher Bai does her part to realize this vision: if acquaintances stop by her house unannounced, she sends them away on principle. If exchanges are to be governed by bounded contracts, respecting others requires explicit advance consent.

Teacher Bai proudly relates how she made her daughter pay a friend for a ride to the airport. It is easy to see the self-serving side of ideologies in which helping others is harming their autonomy. But why do people not want assistance? To make accepting favors as odious as helping one's friends, one needs to know guilt. In *The Anatomy of Dependence*, psychoanalyst Doi Takeo ([1971] 2014, 15) analyzes the Japanese concept of *amae*, a positive feeling of dependence and being cared for, an affective orientation that, Doi's friend points out, even a puppy seems to readily understand. Doi ([1971] 2014, 86) proposes that Westerners struggle with this feeling because they oppose freedom to dependence, and regard gratitude as shameful. As in Japan and many other societies, in China people often regard debts as socially productive. Accepting favors or gifts can be dangerous because they lead to entanglements, but not because they reveal the limits of a normative self-sufficiency. Confucian morality is motivated by a sense of universal indebtedness to the ancestors, and in daily life, people in China are used to pursuing their interests through personal relationships, or *guanxi*, through gifts and favors. Some Chinese psychologists, good neoliberals, teach people they are being oppressed not only by being controlled but also by being cared for. However, others are sensitive to the political economy of autonomy; "How can I be myself?" one college counselor asks rhetorically, when housing and education are so expensive.

To the extent that young Chinese people perceive opportunities for self-definition, which have grown rapidly in reality and in their imaginations, they align with psychological efforts to create autonomous subjects, responsible to their dreams. But while young professionals in Toastmasters clubs give speeches about self-creation, their ethical conflicts with their parents are not centered on guilt at interdependence; rather, they feel guilty about seeking independence. Most club members describe feeling caught in a double bind between familial pressure to settle down and the lure of uncertain enterprises. Young adults in China are asserting the right to their autonomy in the context of major life decisions: what to study, where to work, who to marry (Yan 2010, 2016). They question venerable scripts for success, but their autonomy would be injured if they were to kill the father. Young adults in China know that they gain power from being embedded in a multiplicity of networks of *renqing*, the human feelings that flow through relationships. They know that they will need help purchasing an apartment and that their parents hope to help. And while Toastmasters club members are often reserved with strangers, within clubs they are not at all shy about asking each other for assistance. Like many young Chinese people, they are eager to establish productive and reproductive relationships with their peers. Some will *xiu* off their success

by wearing matching clothes. In short, even as they claim autonomy, social relationships are not threats to their sovereignty, but the substance of their identity.

In a limited but significant sense, China has been more individualistic than the West: people have been defined less by categorical identifications than by their location in infinitely variable networks of reciprocity (Fei [1947] 1984; Hall and Ames 1998). Western philosophers struggle to think about identity in terms other than similarity and difference, while psychological theories of identity formation describe processes of conscious commitment to defined social and political categories, entailing rights, obligations, and willful efforts to authentically realize discursively articulated ideals. Young adults in urban China are learning the practical and psychological advantages of becoming socially legible through explicit identifications, from athletic pursuits to signs of the zodiac: some are experimenting with identities built around individual social ideals. For deracinated youth in China and elsewhere, identification in terms of distinct categories can provide a path to re-embedding in the social process, especially if this identification brings attention or creates affiliation. In China's central cities, young adults are drawn into a slowly expanding array of venues for voluntary association based on hobbies and interests, civic concerns and tastes in music. They inhabit these social forms in their own way.

At our club's birthday party, we are handed a packed agenda of performances and activities. One young woman, new to the club, complains that the party is so carefully planned, saying "that's not the Western way." Excitedly, she tells me that she recently visited a couple of bars, implicitly contrasting the fluid possibilities of urban life to the ordered sociality of the club. People say that they come to Toastmasters clubs to learn how to network, but in fact, they soon become a tight network. The solidarity of these clubs may appear similar to that of support groups or churches. However, while clubs draw on shared wells of suffering, they are not explicitly organized around a common identity: they are associations for self-cultivation through study, and especially for socializing. Although shared afflictions and ethical commitments are present in Toastmasters clubs, they are not central. For most club members, the act of joining a club does not signify the choice of a group or a framework within which to win recognition, although it can be that as well; it means, rather, immediate inclusion in a dense web of social relationships. Members of Chinese Toastmasters clubs turn their clubs into communities for companionship, dating, and professional networking. The clubs are knit together through joint events, speaking competitions, and by the many members who attend several clubs. Members organize frequent social activities and often become close friends.

Young adults kept telling me that they feel relaxed and happy at Toastmasters meetings, which I found puzzling: didn't they come to face their fears, to struggle with a recalcitrant self in a desperate scramble for psychological capital? But members emphasize that they are united by a common goal. Toastmasters meetings are relaxing, one young programmer explains, because they are not like work, where "you wear a mask." Club members tell me that unlike in their workplaces or at school, there are no competing interests between people in Toastmasters. In this open space, outside of a vital interpersonal whole, one need not take

so much care to sustain a tense harmony or listen quite so hard for what isn't said. Club members find the egalitarian, uncomplicated nature of this sociality refreshing. They feel that they can take off their masks. This appears at least as important to them as the masks they learn to put on.

Equal Temperament

Today, most musical instruments are tuned to an equal temperament, in which individual notes are equally distant from their neighbors. Like a society of competing individuals, this doesn't sound the most sonorous harmonies, but it can articulate tolerably good ones. The rationale for this tuning is that it enables one to change keys: any note can become the root that anchors a melody.[4] Other notes will join in, singing passably well; each reserves the right to make its own departure, composer willing. In public speaking clubs, and in wider therapeutic and cultural discourses of autonomy, Chinese people are trying to speak above the clamor of a mass society, the dissonance of competition, and the admonitions of kin. As the shared foundations of identity dissolve, there are many economic and social rewards for confident, clear, discursive self-definition. And in a society of voluntary association, social deficits can easily spiral into lonely desolation (Fein 2015). Some temperaments are more equal than others, as individual differences interact with social change in ways that shape cultural politics, subjectivity, and mental health. In pursuit of a chosen identity, people can not only lose sight of differences in class and capability, they may also fall into an endless performance, a fragile proposition threatened by the gaze of a distant audience.

Alone, we are weak, and the reflexive, objectifying spirit of modernity can collapse us into a deeper subjectivity. Erik Erikson not only brought to consciousness the fact that a "psychosocial identity" ([1968] 1994, 167) is a psychic necessity, but he also set out how identity depends on a system of cultural meanings as well as concrete paths for integrating into the productive life of society (156). In one of the unsettling tensions of the liberal tradition, competing individuals, removed from social networks and traditions, are supposed to be meaningfully integrated by new harmonies, by transcendental ideals, principles, and identifications: the correct ones, for once, somehow. Seeking to combat isolating individualism with fraught solidarity, theorists have located the battle for an autonomous identity at the tense borders between the self and others, between the self and its ideal commitments. But there are very different ways to determine an identity, even among strangers. While public speaking clubs appear to bind the self to its performance under the objectifying gaze of a public, clubs are also sites that reconfigure historical consciousness, social affiliation, and daily interaction offstage. They are places where young adults in urban China acquire tools for managing new psychosocial pressures by connecting with others, in their own way. By unearthing these processes, the anthropology of psychology can address critical issues at the intersections of fragmentation and fear, identity and subjectivity.

For very practical reasons, it is often best to avoid taking up a clear position. In China, daily sensibilities and common idioms suggest that self-definition through visible commitments is the path not to liberation but to a deadly rigidity. A well-known aphorism tells people

to "treasure confusion" (*nandehutu*) (Farquhar and Zhang 2012, 221), reminding us that it takes skill to avoid showing one's cards and being dragged into a social game. Not only that: Chinese thought and social practice suggest that even the most eloquent orator can only gesture to a living reality and that the most important moments in life rarely take place on stage. And yet, a clearly defined identity can help one to gain a purchase in many of contemporary China's diverse and rapidly changing institutions and to secure a place in the undefined space of the city. Every day, many young Chinese people are steeling themselves give speeches, addressing an imagined public. By seeking to become legible to a generalized audience, they are helping to dismantle logics of kinship, learning to experience themselves as autonomous individuals bound to a reified society. But the inside of a public speaking club can encompass the public outside. However social and political structures change, there will be strength in connecting, virtue in yielding, and the self need not be defined by tests of its sovereign will. Things play out not quite like in the liberal mythos: people feel less threatened by their neighbors than by the walls that engulf them. The tides of global change should show us ever more clearly that without a role to play, we are easily drowned.

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Notes

1. While historical studies have linked self-help psychology with the development of management science (Illouz 2007), it is also evident that companies have often adapted psychological techniques that first found therapeutic purchase in personal-growth groups; for example, in employing communications pedagogies, arguably "the new capitalism has followed rather than led" (Cameron 2002, 74). To supplement discussions of affective labor, I would suggest that many people work on their visible personalities to address a disordered sociality and not because of corporate coercion.

2. Many of the young professionals in personal growth groups want to believe that their future depends not on personal relationships, or *guanxi*, but on their performance. But the "real China," some members of my Toastmasters club claim, is a world of banquets and backroom deals. Indigenous genres of Chinese self-help, like *guanchangxue* (on the art of bureaucratic politics) and *houheixue* (on ruthless subterfuge), teach subtle tactics for thriving in hierarchical environments: they teach people to restrain their speech, to read between the lines, to assess situations, how to give others face, and how to decline offers politely. These problems simply do not appear in American self-help books.

3. Most notably through an address at the 2008 World Congress of Psychotherapy, held in Beijing (Huang Hsuan-ying: personal communication).

4. A precise method for calculating equal temperament was discovered in China in 1584, a bit earlier than in Europe, and then discarded. For anthropologist Francis Hsu (1981, 391–92), this is an example of a lack of initiative, of a sad Chinese passivity. No one took this modern path, and the West forged ahead.

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