Woman Entrepreneur—New Identity Constituted in Post-1978 Mainland China

New Social Identity: Women Entrepreneur

The rise of women entrepreneurs[1] exemplifies the ever-increasing linkage between economic growth and gender development. Entrepreneurship[2] is widely accepted as an effective way of promoting economic growth across the world with no exception to China (Brush, Carter, & Gatewood, 2006).Despite some reversals, starting a non-state-owned micro-enterprise[3] at the grass-root level has been gradually advocated by the central and local government agencies as an engine of economic development in China since the market-oriented reform implemented in 1978 (Zhang, Zhang, Rozelle, & Boucher, 2006; Tang & Holzner, 2007). Chinese women actively engage in self-employment with equal rights guaranteed by laws in all areas of political, economic, cultural, social, and domestic life. Resting on central and local government policy support, they have accumulated their assets at an astonishing speed, attaining economic self-sufficiency and control over their own lives (Kitching, Mishra, & Shu, 2005).

Unlike the studies looking through the economic perspective, the human sciences prefer to look at the social consequences rather than the economic outcomes of the phenomenon of

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[1] In this study, entrepreneur is narrowly defined as a business owner who starts his/her own business (Nieuwenhuizen, 2004).

[2] Entrepreneurship is broadly defined as entrepreneurship is broadly defined as an intrinsic human right to make changes to the status-quo (Beckman & Cherwitz, 2008). However, in this research project, it is narrowly defined in the business field as an attempt to create value by an individual or individuals (a) through the awareness of business opportunities, (b) through risk-taking and (c) through the exercise of communicative and management skills to mobilize various resources in an innovative way that brings the business project to fruition (Kao & Stevenson, 1985).

[3] In the U.S., micro-enterprise is defined as a small business with five or fewer employees and less than $ 20,000 in start-up capital (Jurik, 2005). Because there is no consensus on the definition of micro-enterprise in China, this definition is borrowed for consistency and convenience if the research findings are used for comparison study in the future.

female self-employment. Identity construction of female entrepreneur is a topic which

deserves lots of attention. Apart from the aforementioned positive motivations (e.g. Economic

independence, control over their lives, etc.), female entrepreneur, as a newly emergent social

identity, is inevitably subject to such old shaping forces as class, rural-urban difference,

kinship, and the remaining patriarchal structure of society[4] (Honig, 1986; Hershatter, 1986;

Perry, 1993). Meanwhile, in contemporary China, the project of refiguring female identity as

female entrepreneur has to meet the requirements of the neo-liberal world as China gets

involved in the currents of globalization and neo-liberalism. The capitalist global economy

partially replaces the state socialist system to participate in the formation of female

entrepreneur identity. This study will depict this very complex process in which a new social

identity is constructed along the lines of gender and sexuality. To be specific, I will uncover

the process by examining regulatory and identificatory practices inside and outside the

workplace from both the perspective of power and the perspective of subject.

"Half the Sky": the Transformed Status of Chinese Women

In this section, a brief introduction to Chinese women's status in the workplace will

contextualize my research project within the distinctive context of China. Right after the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, the famous political leader Zedong

Mao envisioned a brand-new China where women would be able to hold up half the sky.

Article 91 of the 1954 Constitution of the People's Republic of China supposedly guaranteed

women's equal rights with men in every aspect of life, and this equal status was reaffirmed in

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[4] For historical research projects on Chinese women in the workplace with a focus on these factors.

the 1982 Constitution[5]. Ironically, people's awareness of class equality took the place of the

laws to articulate gender equality at that time, because class is used by CCP as an ideological

construct to refresh both political and social culture in the society (Kraus, 1977; Wang, 2006)

so that the differences drawn along the lines of gender and sexuality were blurred. Class

consciousness overshadowed gender differences in a way that women and men are equal for

their affiliations to the same class (Yang, 2010). This type of homogenous force climaxed in

the period of the Culture Revolution (1967-1977), representing as " a kind of androgyny, a

sexual sameness, based on the defeminization of female appearance and its approximation to

male standards of dress, seemed to be the socialist ideal" (Evans, 1997, p. 2). Homosexual

and heterosexual relations coexisted though overt discussion of sexual issues was more

silenced and condemned in the official discourse than it is in the post-Mao era (Honig, 2003).

The ambitious reform on women's equal rights, however, failed to substantively change

women's social status which in some ways has been remained unchanged until today (Burnett,

2010). We should look no further than how women are treated unequally in the employment.

According to the laws, women are entitled to be employed and paid equally as men (Jiang,

2004). Nevertheless, women, more often than not, turn out to be victims in the workplace.

The situation has worsened since the post-1978 reform era. The progress of market-oriented

reform since 1978 smashed the old life-tenured employment system labeled as the "iron rice

bowl" and thus jeopardized job security. Meanwhile, class that was largely based on people's

affiliation to their working units is prohibited in public discourse and is conveyed through

gender, sexuality and other identities (Honig, 2003). Women are the most miserable victims

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[5] See the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (*xianfa*) arts. 33, 48 (1982).

of the reform because they are assumed to be subordinate to men in public discourse. As Liu

(2007) says, "during the reform era, the Maoist image of strong, heroic women workers was

ridiculed as a symbol of backward obstacles to China's modernization." (pp. 143-44). In

urban areas, gender discrimination in the workplace since the 1990s is apparently visible in

"hiring, dismissal, earlier retirement, fines for violation of family planning regulations, wage

differences, denial of certain social welfare benefit, and sexual harassment" (Burnett, 2010, p.

298). In the countryside, ever since the liberation, women have suffering from an extra

burden of Household Registration System (*hukou*) whose urban-rural mobility is considerably

restrained (Ngai, 2005). Combined with policy support and propaganda, all of these serious

oppressions towards women promise new opportunities offered by self-employment for them.

The above narrative of the historical transformation of women's social status displays

that female identity in China is deeply embedded in the dynamic, fundamental, and

contextual interaction among different parameters of human identity (e.g. gender, sexuality,

class, urban-rural difference, etc.). Discourses are always intertwined with the interaction and

are in partial control of which parameter is foregrounded and which one is muted. Meanwhile,

subjects draw on their agencies to engage in the self-construction of their identities. In this

way, human identity is articulated as a status of dynamic equilibrium reached in the

interaction under the collaborated influence of agency and discourse. My study will focus on

this logic of identity construction in the post-reform era.

Gender and Sexuality Constructed in the Field of Entrepreneurship

This section reviews a few prior literatures on gender and sexuality shaped in the field of

entrepreneurship in order to lay down a theoretical framework for this study. According to

naturalist and essentialist views, gender identity makes direct reference to the fixed biological

properties and negates the roles played by a social process in distinguishing men and women

(Guillaumin, 1992). A large amount of evidence reinforces the argument that biological sex

differences play a crucial role in differentiating male from female in many kinds of

capabilities and behaviors (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1993; Moir & Moir, 1998). These studies

reduce gender to sex by treating them in the same way that gender is seen as a fixed, stable,

and ahistorical category or, more precisely, an essential characteristic inscribed in women's or

men's bodies. Inspired by this essentialist thought, most previous studies focus on the

similarities or differences between men and women entrepreneurs concerning their

differentiated characteristics, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Ahl, 2002, Terjesen,

2004). Moreover, they used a functionalist paradigm, presenting a masculinised normative

model of the entrepreneur based on sexual differences (Bruni, Gherardi, & Poggio, 2004).

Nadin (2007) critiques the functionalist paradigm for (a) overlooking alternative forms of

entrepreneurship practiced by both women and men, (b) marginalizing female entrepreneurs

and the corresponding influences of structural arrangements upon their experience, and

finally (c) perpetuating the status quo of patriarchal structure within entrepreneurial activities.

A poststructuralist epistemology informed more recent scholars to figure out an

anti-essentialist view that a variety of social identities are all socially, historically constructed.

Foucault's analysis of power and its impacts on the body and sexuality has greatly influenced

the social construction of gender and sexuality and contributed a lot to the critique of

essentialism within the arena of feminism. Based on his analysis of subjectivity, 'the overall

"discursive fact" is investigated to examine the way that sex is subject to discourse (Foucault,

1979, p. 11). Also, the proliferating discourses of sexuality give birth to sexed subjects and construct sexuality as the foundation of subjectivity. Drawing on the Foucaultian notion that discourses function as a "regulatory ideal" to produce docile bodies, Butler (1993) thinks of sex and gender as repeated cultural performances "which enact or produce which it names" and finally engender the effect of identity (p. 13). Lorber (1994) also disrupts the distinctions between sex and gender, and argues that like gender, sex and sexuality are both social constructs.

Influenced by the poststructuralist approach to identity construction, many studies were conducted to explain how the wider socio-economic environment in which discourses are exercised to formulate identity of female entrepreneur along the lines of gender and sexuality in the current neo-liberal era, but few of them particularly focus on Chinese women entrepreneurs. Nadin (2007) conducted an empirical research of studying identity construction of women business owners in a British medical care sector. The research findings demonstrate that women struggled to establish a positive identity through a painstaking negotiation with both structural and local contextual factors. All these factors that were derived from inside and outside the workplace congealed to silent and foreground different components of the identity respectively. For instance, women entrepreneurs occupy a morally dangerous position which is probably critiqued for privatizing the caring services of vulnerable people. Through disguising as their multiple feminine selves (by emphasizing the low profit business and a short supply of workers), their businesses in personal health care are moralized. Another study conducted by Ngai (2005) witnessed a historical moment of constructing the gender and sexual identities of female migrant workers in a Chinese special

economic zone—Shenzhen city which is characterized as a hybrid of socialist planning and

neo-liberal capitalism. Part of her book—*Made in China: Women factory workers in a global*

workplace tackles with the political project of subject making concerning how female

migrant worker, as a new social identity, is crafted and then imprinted on rural women bodies

as they enter into a distinctive set of production, gender, spatial, kinship, and ethnic relations.

The focus on the politics of difference around economy, gender, spatiality, kinship, and

ethnicity is insightful for my research though female migrant workers rather than female

entrepreneurs are discussed in the research project.

In addition to a scarcity of prior studies on Chinese women entrepreneurs, these studies

informed by the poststructuralist approach tend to center more on a discursive operation of

power relations structured by political, patriarchal, ethical, and spatial difference and its

influence on gender/sexual identity construction. That is to say, there is a lack of systematic,

well-developed analysis from the side of subject, investigating the psychologically

identificatory practices exercised in the process of identity formation. Hall (1995, 1996)

stresses on its significance and contends that identity sutures the field of discursive operations

with the imaginary or unconscious practices of identification. To elaborate this psychological

process, psychoanalysis has to be brought to the forefront.

Theory of psychoanalysis has undergone many modifications since it was first laid out by

Freud. Lacan's contributions elevate it to be a critical analytic tool as part of "the flow of

critical discourse after the 1960s" (De Lauretis, 2010, p.3). In this study, I follow the choice

of many feminists to choose Lacanian psychoanalysis since it offers an account of elaborating

the constitution of gendered subjects (Mitchell, 1974). It is able to provide "a comprehensive

model of the human subject that includes what is…the fullest account available of the various

roles that language and discourse play in the psychic economy and thereby in human affairs

in general" (Bracher, 1993, p. 12).

　　Because Lacanian psychoanalysis is a huge theoretical framework, I will utilize the part

selected by Bracher (1993) which he thinks it is particularly crucial to tease out the

psychological effects of discourses on human subjects. In his modified framework, desire is

the desire of the Other, which is evoked and promised to be satisfied. The interpellative

power of discourses exerts its influence on and through desires and gets a purchase on human

subjects in three registers designated by Lacan: the Imaginary order, the Symbolic order, and

the Real order. Three ambiguous within the formula (desire is the desire of the Other) lead to

the taxonomy of desire: (1) desire represents itself in either of the two forms: "the desire to *be*"

or "the desire to *have*"[6]; (2) the word "of" exercises in the way that the Other ca *a* n be either

the subject or the object of desire, corresponding to the distinction formulated by Freud

between active and passive form of the libido[7] (3) "the Other" refers to either the image of

another subject in the Imaginary order or the signifier in the Symbolic order or the other Sex

and/or the object in the Real order (pp. 19-20). Finally, four basic modes of desire (passive

narcissistic desire, active narcissistic desire, active anaclitic desire, and passive anaclitic

desire) can operate in three registers to produce twelve basic forms of desire whereby an

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[6] This ambiguity corresponds to the Freudian notion of the distinction between narcissisic and anaclitic libido. The narcissistic form of desire involves libido directed towards the ego for love and identification and takes a predominant position: "there is an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexis much as the body of an amoeba I related to the pseudopodia which it puts out". In contrast, the other indicates desire for an indifferent or even inimical jouissance (as cited in Bracher, 1993, p. 20).

[7] S. Freud's *The standard edition of the complete psychological works* cited in Bracher, 1993, p. 20.

interpellative force is exercised on subject's identity constitution.

In this study, I will depart from utilizing this refined psychoanalysis framework to delve into the dynamic, complicated work of constituting identities of Chinese women entrepreneurs. However, using theories of psychoanalysis is not to say that I will totally give up the analysis of the discursive operations derived from politics of difference concerning economy, gender, spatiality, kinship, and ethnicity. As Mirchandani (1999) suggests, studies on women entrepreneurs should explore the links between gender, workplace circumstance, and organizational structure. Therefore, it is necessary to utilize psychoanalysis in conjunction with a discursive analysis of the ever-changing organizational structure for approaching the contingent, historical, and contextual account of social identity. In this way, it is also an attempt to answer the critiques for Lacan's supposed ahistoical limitation.

Methodology

As the literature review indicates, there are no prior studies on the same topic, so this study is exploratory and qualitative in nature so as to attain initial research findings for future work. Specifically, semi-structured interview strategy was employed to collect data for the later stage of analysis. Generally, women entrepreneurs keep in touch with their nearby community resident committees which assume governmental responsibilities to facilitate micro-enterprise development, so I decided to locate the specific community resident committees first and then let them help to recruit informants. I finished the fieldwork during the past 2010 summer break.

The whole fieldwork was divided in two parts. One part was conducted in Nanjing City (capital of Jiangsu Province) in order to make full use of my familiarity with the local context

for easily nurturing and maintaining field relations. My father's friend who works in a

community resident committee helped me recruit 16 women entrepreneurs from his

community. I went to their workplaces and talked with them face to face. The other part was

done in Haikou City (capital of Hainan Province). I did another 17 interviews there. One of

my friends has a brother working in the community resident committee near his home. He

contacted them before they accepted my invitations to participate in the research. He showed

them a brief introduction to my research and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed.

After they accepted, I did the interviews with them via phone. Every interview took

approximately 40 minutes. I only took detailed notes of the interviews, because all of the

interviewees felt sensitive to be auto-taped even when they believed that I am not a journalist

or a spy but a doctoral student from an American university. This interesting episode finally

sparked some unexpected insights for enriching the research findings. Among 33

interviewees, 24 of them are middle age women (aged between 40 and 55), and the other 9

are younger (aged from 23 to 35). Twenty-five women run the businesses all by themselves,

and the other 5 businesses are mom and pop stores. The remaining 3 women business-owners

who are also the only 3 college graduates collaborated with their classmates or friends. They

specialize in a wide range of low-profit business field, including grocery store, convenient

store, small restaurant, laundry, bakery and small clothing store.

   Major themes that are covered in interview questions include: Why do you start your

own business? What kind of challenges have you encountered in these years? How did you

deal with them? Where did you get any help, if any, from others? If you did, how did it help

your business? How do you think yourself and your life after you started your own business?

I paid special attention to the interviewee responses, because they are "structured in a specific socio-cultural manner" rather than "strictly personal" (Ang, 1985, p. 26). In other words, I had to look behind those words and tried to grasp the hidden relations of them to socio-cultural discourses. After the interview notes were transcribed, I began with initial coding to guide the following step of data analysis into different themes concerning the psychoanalytic effects on human identity produced from politics of difference. A second round of coding was then conducted in order to take into account emergent categories of analysis or serendipitous ideas (Lofland, 2006).

Preliminary Findings

1. "I am proud of my success"

When the subjects were asked the question "How do you think of yourself and your life after you started your own business?", they tended to achieve a consensus that they were proud of themselves for being successful women entrepreneurs. Generally, the informants had experienced the temporary or permanent termination of employment, economic difficulty, fierce competition in the labor market, and discrimination of migrant worker status before they succeeded. As a result, the unhappy experiences make them cherish and take pride in their current business successes. Quite interestingly, in addition to diligent efforts, they gave much credit to their wise decisions of following government policy in terms of encouraging women to enter into self-employment. As is illustrated in the response of a middle-age informant who owned a small restaurant by herself,

> "I come from a far-away village in the western part of China. People there are extremely poor, so I had to go out of my hometown at an early age in order to relieve the economic pressures of my family. Frankly speaking, it was really

> hard for an illiterate country woman to find a job in the city. Even if you could
> get a job and make both end meets, you would not be happy because rural
> people were assumed to be inferior in every corner of the city. Starting my own
> business is a turning point of my fate. I correctly followed the government's lead
> which required poor women to start our own businesses and work hard all the
> time. I did so, and all the previous challenges were really conquered. Now, I
> bought an apartment for my own family in the city, so we can proudly say that
> we are urban residents now."

For her, economic achievement was most important. Based on it, she could solve all other

problems.

As for this response, it suggests that the female entrepreneur was interpellated by the

discourse which derives its force from master signifiers. Master signifier is depicted by Lacan

(1991) as something that makes a discourse meaningful. Bracher (1993) clarifies it as "any

signifiers that a subject has invested his or her identity in—any signifiers that the subject has

identified with (or against) and which thus constitute powerful positive (or negative)

values—they are what make a message meaningful, what make it have an impact…" (p. 24).

Master signifiers are utilized to silent all lack and fantasy repressed to be unattainable and to

guarantee human subjects with feelings of a definite and safe identity. All of these outcomes

result in an adherence to master signifiers. In this case, master signifiers function as an

example of passive narcissistic gratification in the Symbolic register. By incorporating such

fundamental norms and values as "start our own businesses" and "work hard all the time",

identity of female entrepreneur is enticed to identify with the positive parameters of human

identity stipulated by the set of norms and values and stay away from other negative ones

which contradict with it.

More specifically, after looking through other similar responses, "successful female

entrepreneur" is found to be the supreme master signifier (which is also labeled as the phallic

signifier). Lacan defines this term as "a position free of the castration, the deprivation of

enjoyment, entailed by the various aspects of the Symbolic order or law" (as cited in Bracher,

1993, pp. 120-21). "Successful female entrepreneur" as the phallic signifier is established

clearly in an interviewee' words:

> "Every woman has to attain a totally economic self-sufficiency and
> independence just as most men are required to be. Only in this way, can men and
> women finally have equal social status. So I think starting our own businesses is
> the only possible ways to achieve the goal of gender equality."

"Successful female entrepreneur" seems to be used in public discourse as a signifier of the

ideal collective identity of all women which not only further reinforces the sense of security

and definite identity but also represses various anxieties aroused by the harms and dangers

referred to. At the symbolic level, women's aspiration of becoming successful entrepreneurs

signifies an identification with masculine manhood which is always supposed to be

self-independence and self-success. Embodiment of these masculine characters in women's

body is seen as a safeguard for protecting from gender oppression. On the other hand, the

specter of castration, to a large extent, forces to absorb these characters (which should be

dubbed as an expression of hegemonic masculinity). In their minds, lost jouissance is

intrigued by failing to adhere to the ideal model of female identity.

Moreover, these anxieties also threatened the narcissistic sense of women's existence in

the Imaginary order. As is aforementioned by the woman from a small village, her life used to

be threatened lack of confidence for being a woman in labor market and shame for her rural

background. After achieving a business success, all these anxieties did not exist any longer.

Also, the impacts of gendered discourses on women entrepreneurs are strengthened by means

of the object *a* in the Real order, which is expressed as something recoverable through the

systematic embrace of master signifiers. Some key words embodied by the object *a* can be easily found in informants' responses, such as "an apartment in the city", "urban resident registration status (*chengshi hukou*)", and so on. Lack of these good things which are relatively scarce in the society is represented as contingent and attainable. The life would be fantastic if woman entrepreneur adheres to master signifiers and then get these desired goods. Therefore, the traces of rural-urban and gender difference are imprinted on identity of woman entrepreneur in both the Imaginary and Real registers.

2.   "I am depressed sometimes but I can handle it"

Sometimes, the interviewed business women are backfired by the glorious title "successful woman entrepreneur" regardless of their various backgrounds. The bad by-products of being successful women entrepreneurs mainly come from three aspects: family, marriage, and beauty. They found that it is really hard to compensate for their tremendous sacrifice in these aspects. One middle age woman even sobbed when she said that she felt guilty for her family for a large amount of time and energy consumed on the business. She said,

> "I cannot image how my son went through these years when I did not assume the inescapable responsibilities as a good mother. Especially during some important traditional festivals, you know, it would be super hectic in my grocery. A lot of people would come to buy some food for preparing for a luxurious feast. But I cannot. I have to stay here with my husband. So we can only buy some instant food right before the holiday dinner, but it definitely cannot substitute for mother-made food. Also, I owed my husband a lot. He quitted his job to help me to get business off the ground. Every time when I see him exhausted, I feel extremely guilty for being his wife. As a wife, I should have taken care of him instead of doing my own stuff."

Besides married and middle aged interviewees, unmarried, young business owners also

experienced similar pains. One of the only three young female entrepreneurs with a college

degree confessed,

> "I am nearly 27 years old this year, so it is already a little bit late for a Chinese girl to get married. Some of my college classmates even had their babies these years. It really makes me feel jealous…you know, I like baby way too much! For my parents, it even annoys them. When I first graduated and succeeded as a self-made business woman, they felt honored to have such a good daughter. But later, they became worried and urged me to look for a good boy to get married. Otherwise, they said that I cannot marry myself out when I am close to 30. As for me, I have no idea but to agree with them though I am rather sick of what they said. After all, I am not a boy who can wait much longer than a girl to get married. More importantly, I am the only child of my parents, so I hope my future husband could share the responsibilities with me to take care of my parents."

The other two unmarried women entrepreneurs had the same situation with her. One of the

two even complained that too much time spent in her business left no time for her to get to

know new friends from whom she could look for her Mr. Right. Therefore, I find that

unmarried women business owners are pushed hard by parents, themselves, and society to put

seeking for a future partner at the very top of their to-do lists though they do not have to

worry about domestic drudgery which bothered married women all the time.

Furthermore, as is mentioned in the methodology section, people's unwillingness to be

audio-recorded provides me with an insight concerning the third source of their

depression—beauty. When I asked them if I could audio-record our talks for better analyzing

their responses, one middle aged informant said no with a laugh. When I asked her why, she

said that she looked older than other women at the same age and it made her uncomfortable

to be audio-recorded. It might be an excuse for not to be recorded, but adding some follow-up

questions does find that beauty is what she concerned very much.

Q: No! I think you are not old at all.

A: You must be kidding…I know who I am. Women like me work very hard day every day. Usually, we have to get up at around 4:30 a.m. and go to bed at 12:00 a.m.. You can hardly image that such a woman is able to keep young.

Q: You mean you do not have time to take care of yourself?

A: Absolutely not. If I can spare some time, I would have a good rest rather than do a facial treatment.

Q: So do you often feel bad about it?

A: Sometimes. I have some friends who look much younger than they actually are, but I cannot do that way. I guess this is what I have to pay for my career.

After this interview, I asked other informants the questions concerning beauty and heard the similar answers.

However, quite surprisingly, none of the interviewed female entrepreneurs decided to end their businesses. They have multiple strategic methods to deal with the depressions and continue doing their businesses. Simply put, it is a stage of reassurance. For the married female entrepreneurs, they either appreciate their kid and husband understandings or depend on their parents (or parents-in-law) to take care of kids and household chores. The woman who sobbed during the interview told me,

"I guess I am a lucky one. My son is very very good. He has never been angry with me for little time I spent taking care of him. He is self-motivated and does very well in school, so it saves me a lot of troubles. Sometimes, when he saw me tired, he would even cook for me. My husband is good, too. He is not only a good business partner but also a good example for all husbands. He never complained to me for my little work done in our home. With the support of them, I could concentrate on my business."

For younger married women, especially those with little kids, parents are more often depended on. They can both do household chores and take care of little kids for parents.

Unmarried female entrepreneurs prefer to live away from both their parents and

pressures of urging them to get married as well. All the three college graduates did so.

Besides, lack of love is filled up with the intimate relationship between them and their

female business partners. They even called each other "husband" and "wife" despite

they said they were not really lesbians. As the dialogue with one of three young

entrepreneurs suggests,

> Q: Do you think this type of relationship with your business partners can replace heterosexual marriage in your life?
> A: Of course not. But right now, I think I am good with it. We are good sisters. We encourage, console, and care each other, because we all live away from home without other relatives, friends, or parents. I am her husband and in turn she is my wife, but it is just for fun. We finally will get married with men. It is just a matter of time.

Concerning accelerated aging, they said they could put up with it. In their minds,

business success is much more significant than beauty. Some of them said that it was

equal to both women and men entrepreneurs so that women had no excuse to complain

about it. Otherwise, women business-owners were doomed to be loser in the

competition with male counterparts. Even for unmarried young women who are

supposed to give more weight to beauty, they said they actually did not care it too

much. As one of them explained,

> "I know somebody would say that I look so old due to hard work, but I just do not care what they talked. I want to be myself, a successfully business woman. If you want to say that I might not be attractive, I totally do not agree. Beauty is only part of attractiveness. My hard work and business success both weigh more than beauty. I am 100% sure some guy will be attracted than them."

Informed by Psychoanalysis theory, the impacts of official discourse expressed through

this process of from depression to reassurance can be discussed in two conflicted yet

continuous parts. The first part is to demystify women's experiences of depression which are primarily induced by evoking passive narcissistic desire. Much of the impacts of official discourses are produced by stressing on the lack in the Symbolic order. Passive narcissistic gratification in this order operates in the way that subjects are interpellated by the discourses to recognize of the ego ideal (successful business women) if they acknowledge the lack. As the interviewee responses manifest, this process of gaining recognition and acknowledging the lack precisely represents itself in an awareness of "the price" that women entrepreneurs have to pay for their careers. To be specific, as is mentioned in the interviewee responses, "the price" involves little quality time spent in family life, being unmarried over 25, and accelerated aging. In this sense, the discourses forced them to focus on their feminine characters. By acknowledging the lack—"the price" they are charged for their entrepreneurial initiatives, they are assumed to recognize that they are women entrepreneurs.

The second part is to reassure that they were still able to succeed in their businesses despite they encountered some depressions. The recognition offered by the discourses provides the same sort of passive narcissistic Symbolic order gratification that master signifiers provide. In other words, the discourses constructs lack itself as an essential component of master signifier. Through identification with the title—woman entrepreneur embodied by the discourses, the interviewed women received a signifier, the title, which is validated by the Symbolic order and passive narcissistic Symbol-order gratification. In this way, the pressures from family, marriage, and beauty were relieved as female business-owners gradually identified with identification with the role of woman entrepreneur with salient characters of masculine manhood. To be specific, in their words, they spent less

time and energy in household chores, bringing up their kids, and keeping young. Some of

them imposed feminine characters on their husbands, sons, and parents by allowing them to

help share the responsibilities in household chores which used to be assumed singly by these

women entrepreneurs. Concerning problem of aging, they set their male counterparts who

just ignore it as the good example. Moreover, as is indicated in the response of one the only

three college graduates, she played a role of husband in caring for her female business partner

through embodying more masculine components. Although she did not admit that she had

crossed the line of sexual identities between "normal" and lesbian, but at least, she sat on the

line by staying away from being normal and moving close to lesbian. After a few years, as

she said, she would get married with a man and totally return to "normal". Therefore, the

change depicted in her response can at least prove that her sexual identity is not static but

mutable.

Discussion

As is discussed in the research finding section, a conflict occurred between two

contradictory desires expressed in the process from taking pride in business success to

reassurance after experiencing depressions. In the light of Bracher's version of

psychoanalysis framework, the conflict is between master signifiers and fantasy not only

among the Imaginary, Symbolic, Real orders but also within the Symbolic register. On the

one hand, official discourses function in the three basic registers to deny radical lack (e.g.

various disadvantages caused by being woman or rural people in the labor market), whereas

they intrigue a resistance to master signifiers by reviving some of woman feminine characters.

On the other hand, concerning the conflict within only the Symbolic order, the rising of

feminine characters embodied in the informants contradicts with the attempts of reassuring

the impacts of the phallic signifier. In this situation, as is argued by Bracher's (1993), either

of two outcomes can ensue, "either the ego ideal can prevail, in which case the fantasy is

suppressed, repressed, or altered (e.g. sublimated), or the fantasy can win out, in which case

the ego ideal undergoes a change, with one or more of its old signifiers being

decommissioned and new signifiers…being elected in their place" (p. 47). The fact that the

supreme master signifier—successful female entrepreneur got the upper hand suggests that

the first outcome happened. Despite of the depressions produced by family, marriage, and

beauty concerns, the interviewed women adhere to the ideal identity of woman entrepreneur.

The findings on human identity constitution from the psychoanalytic perspective are in

accordance with the corresponding arguments made by some post-structuralists, suggesting

that human identity constitution is in the strategic control of neoliberal logic for the ultimate

purpose of "optimization". As Ngai (2005) argues, identity constitution of female migrant

worker manifests the strategic operation of politics of difference on their female bodies: the

influences of official discourses reshuffle the organism of identity parameter in the lines of

gender, spatial, kinship, and ethnic relations. Ong (2006) departs from the Foucauldian notion

of governmentality and then fills up the gap left in Ngai's arguments by elucidating in detail

how the strategic working on human identity exercises in the neo-liberal era. In her view,

neo-liberalism is "a technology of government"—"[an] active way of rationalizing governing

and self-governing in order to optimize" by means of "reconfiguring relationships between

governing and the governed…" (p. 3). Embedded in the current neo-liberal era, identity of

Chinese woman entrepreneur is always under the ubiquitous influence of neoliberal

governmentality so that it is constructed in the neoliberal logic of "market knowledge and

calculations" by employing techniques of subjectivity and subjection[8]. In this way, female

entrepreneur identity is configured at the intersection between regulatory and identificatory

forces in order to optimize such neoliberal values as competitiveness, productivity,

self-independence and son. More to the point, Ong (2006) emphasize that the advent of

neo-liberalism does not necessarily means the more serious oppression of people but

probably opens up new opportunities for them to gains some benefits in the political,

economic, and social fields. In the context of post-1978 China, the adoption of neoliberal

values, norms, and practices to the socialist market-oriented reform does promise some

benefits for women entrepreneurs who are granted to self-animate, self-govern, and even

self-construct their identities. To uncover the nature and practice of identity self-construction

from the perspective of subject is exactly why I undertake the psychoanalytic analysis in this

study. The process in which master signifiers gain ascendency over underlying fantasies in

the psychic economy of women entrepreneurs deserves lots of attention so as to explain why

subjects are interpellated to be accomplices of official discourses.

Concerning gender and sexual components of woman entrepreneur identity, the research

findings in this aspect provide another empirical evidence for reinforcing the argument that

"social identities are relational, contextual, and fundamental" (Alcoff, 2005, p. 90). Although

there is indeed a general trend for newly emerging countries to endorse hegemonic

masculinity originated and imported from the western countries in the irresistible currents of

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[8] Techniques of subjectivity refer to a type of optimizing means which depends on an array of knowledge to entice subjects to animate and govern themselves, while techniques of subjection rely is the other type which rely on political methods to regulate people (Ong, 2006, p. 6).

neo-liberalism and globalization (Mohanty, 2005), the studies on gender and sexuality cannot

be simply reduced to a universal case (Ong, 2006). As a result, special attention should be

paid to the distinctive background of China. The evidence which makes sexuality constructed

on human body differ from that celebrated by the westernized gender ideology is that the

lines of sex between homo and hetero is blurred, because the female entrepreneur admitted

that female business partner can temporarily replace male partners but she would be totally

straight later. When it comes to gender identity, in this research, female entrepreneurs are

interpellated by official discourses to incorporate some masculine characters into their own

identities to identify with the phallic signifier as a successful woman entrepreneur.

Simultaneously, people around them, including kids, husbands, parents, and female business

partners are expected to embody a few feminine characters. As Butler (1990) proposes,

"gender is repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid

regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural

sort of being" (p. 33). In this sense, woman entrepreneur cannot fully rely on her agency to

constitute her identity at will but remain subject to the effects of dominant discourses.

Conclusion

The research was conducted in two Chinese cities during the Post-reform era,

investigating the influence of politics of difference in the neo-liberal logic on human

subjectivity. A newly rising social group of Chinese women entrepreneurs was selected to be

studied. To be specific, identity construction of them in the lines of sexuality and gender was

analyzed in the light of the combination of Lacanian Psychoanalysis and the post-structuralist

approach. The research findings suggest that the influence of official discourses on subject

psychic economy interpellate them to be accomplices of regulatory power to self-construct

their subjects in accordance to the requirements of neoliberalism. Mutable, contextual, and

relational organism of their gender and sexual identities are the object and results of

exercising the interpellative power of official discourses.

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