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The Use of Western Brands in Asserting Chinese National Identity

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Chinese consumers employ Western brands to assert competing versions of Chinese national identity. These uses emerged from findings that Chinese form meanings of Western brands, drawing from select historical national narratives of East-West relations: the West as liberator and Western brands as instruments of democratization; the West as oppressor and Western brands as instruments of domination; the West as subjugated and Western brands, by their own subjugation, as symbolically erasing China's past humiliations; and the West as partner and Western brands as instruments of economic progress. Our emergent theory elaborates processes by which Western brands are shaped by macrolevel, sociohistorical forces to motivate consumers' responses to them as political action tied to nation making.

Changes in consumer habits have now rendered some old stereotypes rather dated, especially where it concerns China's rising upper-middle class in the first-tier cities. Sophistication has become more important and taste among the upper-middle class is increasingly converging towards that of the Western consumer, especially as many international magazines are publishing local editions in China (fashion magazines and even *Elle Décor*). International designer brands are now increasingly hosting high-profile promotional events in first tier cities like Shanghai. (Garner 2005, 84)

Consumer nationalism could become a barrier to multinational companies as they expand into overseas markets. . . . By highlighting their respective national origins and identities, consumers impute a form of undesired "otherness" to international brands. (Wang and Wang 2007, 136)

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As illustrated by these quotes, two opposing consumption motives dominate business and academic discussions about Chinese consumers' responses to Western brands. Discourses that depict the transformation of China's citizenry from comrades to consumers (Croll 2006) advance the view that emulative motives render Western brands desirable to Chinese consumers (Garner 2005; Wang 2000). These discourses implicitly draw from Veblen's (1925) theory of conspicuous consumption to suggest that Chinese seek to advance their social standing by imitating the consumption practices of Westerners to the extent their incomes allow (see Friedman 1994; Garner 2005; Wang 2000). Challenging views, although rare, proffer that steadfast or resurgent nationalistic motives render Western brands undesirable to Chinese consumers (Wang and Wang 2007). These discourses claim legitimacy through their relation to each other. The emulative model carried to its full fruition portends a homogenous world culture (Wilk 1994) against which nationalism asserted through Western brand resistance can be understood. Further, as evidenced by recent conceptualizations of "consumer nationalism" (Wang and Wang 2007, 135), discourses linking nationalism to Western brand resistance are seemingly self-evident, naturalized to the extent that they give little pause.

If there is cause for critical analysis of these asserted motives, it resides in the absence of voice given to consumers (Askegaard 2006; Campbell 1994). Studies offering these explanations entail estimates of branded consumption based on China's gross domestic product, observations of Western brand purchases or purchase intentions (Garner 2005), interpretative analyses of Western brand advertisements (Wang 2000), case studies of Western brand producers operating in China (Wang and Wang 2007), and advertising

executives' views of Chinese consumers' motives (Wang 2008). While these methods produce insights into marketplace practices emerging in China, they necessitate that researchers infer consumers' motives. Behavior, of course, can be undertaken for multiple motives, and a given motive may be asserted through various consumption practices (Campbell 1994). Inferring motives in the absence of Chinese consumers' viewpoints and an understanding of their experience of the world leads to invoking and propagating motives deemed universal (Veblen 1925) rather than challenging these (Campbell 1994; Friedman 1994). Motive refers to the complex of subjective meaning shaped by local cultural forces, which seems reasonable ground for the conduct in question and connects it to the hopes and fears of the individual (Campbell 1994). Efforts extended to understanding motives for exotic behavior are often lacking for activities that seem commensurate with Western norms (Miller 1994) such as brand consumption (Askegaard 2006).

Jing Wang (2008) hints that present motivational understanding of Chinese consumers' responses to Western brands is shallow, in her report of a puzzling 2003 Ogilvy and Mather survey finding. Labeled the "Patriot's Paradox," this finding disclosed that Chinese youth who are the strongest patriots used Western brands almost to the same extent as those with lesser feelings of nationalism (Wang 2008, 19). An explanation is not offered beyond the qualification that participants were from the Pearl River Delta near highly westernized Hong Kong. Unquestioned are the cultural meanings of Western brands and local understandings of nationalism to Chinese consumers, who might challenge whether this combination is paradoxical from their experience of the world. Research in other contexts finds that consumers and local producers appropriate foreign goods in the assertion of local identities (Askegaard and Csaba 2000; Miller 1998; Wilk 1995).

In this article, we challenge popular explanations for Chinese consumers' responses to Western brands, arguing that they oversimplify the consumption motives of Chinese people. We show different ways that nationalism is conceived and used by consumers to infuse Western brands with meaning, rendering them politically useful in articulating a reaction to the West and realizing imaginings of the future Chinese nation.

Our research goal at the outset was to identify dominant structurings of Chinese consumers' meanings of Western brands that comprise consumption motives (Campbell 1994; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Wilk 1995). The emergent structurings we identify are reflective of Abu-Lughod's (2005) suggestion that nation-states can be analyzed both as cultural artifacts produced through the imagination and as structural modes for ordering everyday life. Our participants used narratives of East-West relations to imbue Western brands with national identity meanings (Friedman 1996). These narratives portray the Chinese nation in the imaginary, through historical contrasts and interactions with Western nations. By using narratives to ground Western brand meanings, consumers selectively appropriate governing practices

of the nation-state, inclusive of both past and present administrations. These practices entail official speeches, published discourses, policies, and state-sponsored programs that assert political ideologies that comprise the official vision of the future nation. By grounding meanings of Western brands in reconstructed cultural histories, Chinese consumers render brands useful in contesting the official state vision of the future China (Wilk 1994).

In examining nation-state governance as a constitutive part of the culture industry (Abu-Lughod 2005), we balance the emphasis within consumer research on the structuring of consumer motives and brand meanings wielded by transnational corporations and their market ideologies (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006). As a discipline, to leave the ideologies of the nation-state as the backdrop against which Western brand promotions operate is to risk portraying the consumer-relevant influence of transitioning nation-states as static, relegated to a constraining influence in the past. Absent focused analyses of the nation-states' influential dynamic role, the field of consumer research exhibits something akin to the "virginity complex" (Wilk 1994, 100). That is, the moment of transitioning to a market economy is deemed the critical moment, and what comes before and what happens after is deemed stable and unproblematic (Wilk 1994, 100). An exception to this inert treatment recently entered consumer research discourses (Zhao and Belk 2008). In a semiotic analysis spanning the 25 years following China's initial transition to a market economy, this work reveals that brand producers iteratively adapted their advertising strategies to accommodate shifting governing practices of the nation (Zhao and Belk 2008). While commercial producers remain the focus, the work recognizes that nation-state governance is responsive to global forces and influential in continually shaping representations of consumption goods. Our work offers a complementing extension, revealing the nation-state's influence on consumers' meanings and political uses of Western brands.

Recognizing that the nation-state is not static but a dynamic force challenges academic discourses of nationalism that assume its assertion through domestic brand choices and the boycotting of Western brands (Wang and Wang 2007). The counterpart here is that Western brand choices reflect a desire to emulate Western lifestyles and thus ambivalence toward nationalism (Pecotich and Rosenthal 2001). If we take nationalism to be "that outlook which gives absolute priority to the values of the nation over all other values and interests" (Hroch 1996, 62; Wang and Wang 2007, 136), at what point after a nation sanctions participation in the global market economy do we alter these concepts of nationalism? It also seems simplistic to assume that national governing bodies assert open trade policies without contending with past positions casting use of Western brands as emulation of Westerners, unpatriotic, or "treasonous" (Gerth 2008, 42). We neither expect that governing bodies of transitioning nation-states lie dormant in the anticipation that citizens will "catch on" to the ideological changes, nor

do we expect that their efforts to shift citizens' values will go uncontested (Gries 2004; Liu 2004).

Our interpretive analysis follows Wilk's suggestion for advancing a theory of consumption in less affluent societies: "The challenge for a theory of consumption . . . is not to choose one bias or the other (coercion or autonomy, hegemony or resistance). The task is instead . . . to seek explanation . . . for the way in which coercion and autonomy interact and obscure each other . . . [and to] concentrate on process, on the ways that people actively dispute and debate the meaning of different kinds of goods, and on their different strategies of using commodities as tools for constructing personal, gender, ethnic, and political identities" (Wilk 1994, 101). Gerth (2008) likewise laments that polarized positions characterize discourses of nation making, which emphasize either state coercion or individual autonomy. In light of these insights, our interpretive analysis addresses three questions: (1) What are Chinese consumers' subjective meanings of Western brands? (2) How do the nation-state's governance and consumers' meaning-making autonomy interact with and obscure each other? and (3) What importance do such interactions hold for shaping the motives that direct Chinese consumers' responses to Western brands? Our emergent theory elaborates how China's historical context shapes the meanings of Western brands in ways that motivate brand choice as political action tied to nation making.

THE MAKING OF THE CHINESE NATION THROUGH CONSUMPTION

In a novel turn, historian Karl Gerth (2003, 2008) challenged the prevailing view that consumerism was a by-product of the modern nation-state. Gerth (2003) asserts instead that in early twentieth-century China, a burgeoning consumer culture defined and spread modern Chinese nationalism. Nationalism recursively shaped a growing consumer culture. As he argues, "Nation-making included learning, or being coerced, to shape preferences around something called the Chinese nation and away from items deemed foreign" (2003, 17). Gerth elaborates the institutional and discursive processes through which consumption became a primary means engaged by people in China to conceive of themselves as citizens of a modern nation. At the same time, his work challenges two common assumptions, namely, that consumerism is a uniquely Western phenomenon (Hamilton and Lai 1989) and that the Communist Revolution and ensuing reign of Mao Zedong represented a total cultural break with China's former capitalist period (Wang 2000). Transformations of structure do not imply a total cultural discontinuity, except when former life strategies are replaced by new ones (Friedman 1996). Gerth's analysis makes apparent that cultural continuity existed across the early capitalist period and the ensuing communist period. This continuity was experienced as valuation of domestic-made goods and devaluation of things foreign, as a way to articulate Chinese nationalism.

Gerth (2003, 3; 2008) explains the historical cultural practice of dividing consumer goods into China-made goods deemed "patriotic" and foreign goods deemed "treasonous" as occurring through a diffuse movement, the national products movement. The movement's dominant actors were unified by a desire to halt the influx of imported goods and an inability to secure direct state intervention, as the Chinese state lacked tariff autonomy. "Unequal treaties" that "opened" China to trade following the opium war (1839–42) denied China the ability to restrict imports by raising tariffs until the late 1920s (2003, 5). Interested actors included politicians worried about trade deficits, Chinese manufacturers faced with inexpensive and superior imports, and intellectuals concerned with loss of sovereignty.

To mitigate the effects of imports, the movement sought to make product nationality the preeminent meaning of a commodity, more salient than price, quality, style, or brand loyalty. Patriotic appeals dominated the movement's advertisements, exhibitions, nationalistic commodity spectacles, and organized rallies. These venues suggested that consumers should honor product nationality above other criteria as the ideal patriotic, nation-saving sacrifice. Further, the movement advanced the belief that powerful Western nations and Japan had already established product nationality as the dominant consumption criterion (Gerth 2003). Notions of pure Chinese products, uncontaminated by foreign components and workmanship, and a pure economy were promoted in movement literature that often represented China-made goods as "the national blood" and invoked eugenics slogans (8). Campaigns promoted negative social labeling of those who bought foreign goods, announcing that authentic Chinese people did not consume imports, lest they betray their nation (299). To do so would be "an immoral act" and "an unsurpassably shameful thing to do" (296, 285), marking the consumer the equivalent of an "inferior product," "drifter," or "prostitute" (306, 301, 305, respectively). Receptivity to these campaigns intensified the need for explicit standards that identified which products to buy and which to boycott. Certification standards emerged first in nongovernmental organizations but, in 1928, were formalized as law by a new government. In addition to patriotic appeals and use of legal institutions, the movement's influence was wielded through brute force (Gerth 2003). The notion of national products likely abetted the Communist Revolution and Mao Zedong's ensuing administration by legitimating the abolition of private enterprise: If China-made products were "national" and all Chinese people should make sacrifices to consume them, then why should the profits be private and benefit only a few capitalists? (Gerth 2008, 49).

We extend Gerth's (2003) work to the present-day context of globalization, suggesting that Chinese nation making via branded consumption choice continues. Consumers shape the meanings of Western brands through various reconstructions of the past to assert competing versions of Chinese national identity and to realize their preferred visions of the future nation (Belk 1992; Friedman 1992b; Wilk 1994).

While nation-state governing bodies strive toward an ideal of a strong social project and the assimilation of their citizens into that project, with globalization they are besieged by a process of fragmentation that dissolves their former unity (Friedman 1997; Wilk 1994). This fragmentation emerges from various groups asserting competing notions of social identity that are constructed and legitimated by attributing a meaningful past to a structured present (Friedman 1992a, 1997). Our findings suggest China's twentieth-century history prior to market reforms is a meaningful past that carries forward a common experience that becomes relevant in present-day Chinese individuals' various assertions of national identity (Friedman 1996) through their consumption practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

In commenting on Western nations or their brands, Chinese individuals' conveyance of praise, affinity, or relational harmony may or may not be taken at face value, depending on the context. In China, indirect forms of communication, such as the use of metaphors, historical allegory, and discourses in which the surface reading is contradicted by the underlying meaning, are the cultural norm for expressing criticism (Gries 2004). In Chinese terms, one must "listen to the sound of the gong" (*luo gu ting yin*), to discern whether it is rejoicing (announcing a marriage) or mourning (tolling a death; Gries 2004, 9). This aspect of culture guided our method design, which combined survey-administered projective techniques with personal interviews. Across methods, our questions were phrased to elicit consumers' meanings of foreign brands (*wai-guo-pin-pai*) as an important consumption category in China's history (Gerth 2003).

Our interpretive analysis draws from textual data collected over 6 months, with 3 months spent on-site in China. We analytically orchestrated our data from multiple methods to offer a complex understanding of Chinese consumers' meanings of Western brands (Arnould and Price 1993; Price and Arnould 1998). Participants across methods were aspiring-professional-class or professional-class individuals, as the Chinese group best positioned to acquire Western brands (Wang 2008). Participants in our projective-task survey were selected from four cities that vary on factors likely to influence local meanings of Western brands: population, status as a municipality, location, and degree of urbanization as a characteristic related to Western cultural exposure (Wang 2008). Beijing, with a population of 12.8 million, hosts a variety of international commercial activities, yet it is also a municipality that hosts the nation's military headquarters. Tianjin is an industrial (cargo) ocean port city of 10 million people and home to nearly 10,000 foreign firms. Shanghai is China's largest port city with 14 million inhabitants and, comparable to Tianjin, has a high level of exposure to Western cultures. Baoding, a rural industrial city of approximately 553,000, has had the least exposure to Western culture of the four. Considered Beijing's southern gate, Baoding hosts military forces deemed important to protecting the capital city. Participants for personal interviews were drawn

from three of these cities and included only one of the two port cities, Tianjin.

We distributed a Chinese-language survey containing a series of thought generation tasks to university students in China ($n = 280$ of 285 distributed): 100 from Beijing, 66 from Tianjin, 25 from Shanghai, and 89 from Baoding. These participants are all members of the fourth People's Republic of China (PRC) generation. The survey began with sentence completion tasks. The first asked for responses to the statement stem "I think 'foreign brands' mean" Participants could choose any or all of the following responses: "made abroad, imported to China," "originated from abroad, made in China," "product of independent foreign business in China," "product of joint ventures of foreign businesses in China," and "other." The next nine statement stems were adapted from Mick and Fournier (1998) and included items such as "Foreign brands always . . ." and "The more foreign brands I own . . ." Six additional sentence completion items elicited examples of "good" and "poor" and "best" and "worst" translated brand names, along with explanations. The sentence completion items were followed by a dream elicitation task. Participants were asked to "please imagine you or your friend had a dream about foreign brands when sleeping" and to describe the dream, which could be either a good or a bad dream. The questionnaire was drafted in English. Following refinements informed by members of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the questionnaire was translated into Chinese. Additional academy members provided feedback on the Chinese language version, until all items were deemed appropriate.

The first author also conducted 24 Chinese-language personal interviews with consumers from Beijing, Tianjin, and Baoding, during meetings in their homes or in restaurants. All but two were of the third-generation PRC, born in the 1960s and 1970s, but varied in gender and income level. Participants were asked to share their knowledge of foreign brands and translation practices. They were then asked to tell a story of both a favorite and a disliked foreign brand. Subsequent discussions flowed much like a conversation.

The transcribed Chinese language textual data were translated into 205 single-spaced pages of English text. The survey data contain references to 102 different foreign brands, largely from product categories for which foreign brand ads are prominent in China: soft drinks, fast food, electronics, and health and beauty aids (Belk and Zhou 2001; Wang 2000). The dream elicitation task produced 247 consumption fantasies.

As regarding our interpretive team's background, the first author, a U.S. resident for over 10 years, is a Chinese citizen who lived in China for over 30 years, serving 6 years as a translator for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Translation Bureau. The second member, a U.S.-born citizen, offers an outsider's perspective. We tacked back and forth between the data and Chinese cultural studies and political science literatures that review China's relationships with Western nations from the Chinese perspective. Immersion in this literature assisted us in identifying national

narratives of East-West relations, which our Chinese participants used to imbue foreign brands with national identity meanings. Following identification of narrative themes from the collective texts, we returned to the interview data, in which a case-oriented analysis offered evidence of the relevance of these narratives to Chinese consumers' lives (Friedman 1996).

CHINESE NATIONAL NARRATIVES OF EAST-WEST RELATIONS AND THEIR USE TO HISTORICIZE WESTERN BRANDS

Participants' fantasies and discourses about foreign brands employed multiple narratives of East-West relationships that vie for Chinese national identity (Martin 2004). From this perspective, nationalism may be described as "an ensemble of discursive practices, functioning through interaction between historically changing fields of struggle and 'habitus' of discrete dispositions, in which ideologies are legitimated and delegitimated" (Liu 2004, 68).

A couple of insights from our findings are useful prefaces to our narrative themes. First, the consumption category of "Western brands" emerged as the relevant one to Chinese consumers. This category reflects a phenomenological view of Western brands that emerges from their historical use in the construction of Chinese nationalism (Friedman 1992a; Gerth 2003). Chinese national narratives that seek to solidify a collective national identity through discourses that place China in opposition to the West include Japan as part of the West. In part, this is because Chinese individuals learned about the West through Japan. Japan is not west of China, but Chinese people often include Japan in both the noun and the adjective *Xifang*—"the West" and "Western" (Gries 2004). Participants' responses mixed references to brands from the United States and Western Europe with those from Japan and excluded those from other nation-states. Second, participants' designations of Western brands depended less on an objective assessment of the country of origin and more on a brand's possession of four attributes: international popularity (status as a "world famous brand"), technological superiority to domestic brands, expensive price, and foreignness as conveyed through Western brand name translations into Chinese.

The West as Liberator and Western Brands as Instruments of Democratization

Many participants' dreams reflected a national narrative disseminated under Deng Xiaoping's *gaige kaifang* (reform and opening up), the early years of which spurred a populist resurrection of a narrative of the West as liberator and Western brands as democratizing (Gries 2004). In such dreams, our participants praised the entrance of Western corporations into the Chinese market, imagined becoming more confident upon acquiring their brands, and dreamed of consuming these brands as symbols of achieving a wealthy leisure class status.

[The more foreign brand products I have] the more confident

I would feel about myself. Dream: In my dream, I drive a Benz car, wear a Swiss watch, and drive freely. . . . How comfortable Nike tennis shoes are, how successful Samsung and BMW are, the Piao-rou [Pert] shampoo really has made my hair smoother. . . . After that, we go to eat at KFC, and while wiping our mouths we praise foreigners for coming to China and bringing convenience to our people. (Survey, female, 20, Beijing)

I became a rich person . . . driving my own BMW sport car . . . wearing Nike clothes and Nike shoes. I am on the green grass, holding golf clubs, swinging under the golden sunshine, with a happy smile on my face. Actually this is . . . one of my earnest wishes. When someone owns all kinds of famous world brands, his life would be incomparably bright. (Survey, male, 20, Tianjin)

Despite surface appearances, these seemingly apolitical fantasies of Western brands reflect views disseminated under Deng Xiaoping's administration to bolster support for *gaige kaifang*. *Gaige kaifang* reintroduced foreign brands into China that had been absent since the inception of Communist governance in 1949. *Gaige kaifang* has involved an abandonment of Mao Zedong's revolutionary idealism and an elevation of economic development in order to build a modern, market-oriented nation. The effects of Deng Xiaoping's reform contrast the declined economic state of China following Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and the perestroika of Gorbachev that led to the collapse of Soviet-style socialism (Liu 2004). Since its 1979 inception, *gaige kaifang* has succeeded in bringing fast-paced economic development and material prosperity to China while managing to maintain the political status quo under the rule of the CCP (Liu 2004).

The absence of identity conflicts or ideological tensions in the introductory dreams is notable. These dreams revealed desires for the Western brands offering personal or individual gratification among citizens of China, where socialism with its collectivist focus is still the state-sanctioned ideology. Yet this quality mirrors discourses introduced with Deng Xiaoping's administration. Under this administration, the contradictions posed by increased integration into the capitalist world system have been strategically downplayed (Liu 2004). One strategy has been the discursive positioning of the reform in terms of commonsense pragmatism rather than in terms of ideologies of state (Liu 2004; Zhao 2004). During his tenure, Deng Xiaoping made a host of speeches that discursively prioritized economic development while sidestepping debates over whether development, undertaken via China's fuller integration into the capitalist world system, undermines and compromises socialist ideology (Liu 2004). In vernacular language that still resonates with both rural and urban working people, Deng Xiaoping condensed debates and dismissed ideological conflicts with the Principle of Cat and the Principle of Fumble, which have been widely circulated in popular culture (Liu 2004). The first is an aphorism stated by Deng Xiaoping in the 1960s: "As long as a cat can catch a mouse, it is a good cat whether it

is black or white” (Liu 2004, 52, translating and quoting from Teng 1993, 105). Applying this to calm ideological debates, Deng Xiaoping reiterated the cat principle in his 1992 Southern Tour Talks: “Now the key issue is whether it [the reform] is named ‘capitalism’ or ‘socialism.’ . . . The criteria for judging [the success or failure of reform] lie mainly in whether it benefits the productivity of socialist society, and whether it promotes the synthetic power of the state, and whether it raises the living standard of the people” (Liu 2004, 52–53, translating and quoting from Teng 1993, 105). Under Deng Xiaoping’s reform, performance legitimacy derived from high-speed economic development has been substituted in the place of the revolutionary legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism (Zhao 2004). The Principle of Fumble, put forth in the 1980s, reflects upon the spontaneous and initially covert act of rural peasants, led by farmer Lao Zhang, to privatize the collective commune that provided the momentum for the reform: “[In launching the reform and opening up] we’ve fumbled our way to cross the water” (Liu 2004, 52, translating and quoting Teng 1993, 232). As an acknowledgment of the passivity of the CCP leadership in the economic reform from the beginning, this declaration credits the impetus to rural workers (Liu 2004). This discourse positions and bolsters the reform as emanating from the masses and as modeled after their down-to-earth pragmatism (Liu 2004). In the spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping reinforced this strategy by announcing a 3-year ban on any theoretical discussion of the ideological nature of reform (Liu 2004). Critiquing this act, Liu (2004) notes that it produced the irony of rendering questions of Marxism and socialism taboo in China. State efforts to reframe and largely diminish historical moments that pose positions counter to reforms have further encouraged the public’s receptivity to *gaige kaifang* (Zhao 2004). For example, the late nineteenth-century Boxer Rebellion, one of the first nationalist calls to boycott foreign brands following Western invasions, was considered a patriotic movement during the Cultural Revolution. After the launch of Teng’s reforms, PRC publications criticized it as an “irrational and fanatic anti-foreign movement” (Zhao 2004, 55).

Some participants’ Western brand fantasies seem modeled after Deng Xiaoping’s unconventional promotion that “getting rich is glorious” (Liu 2004, 62) and his counsel to “let a part of the population get rich first” (Kuhn 2000). The previously quoted participant echoes these discourses about Chinese wealth in his dream in which a life of wealthy leisure is his

earnest wish [because] when someone owns all kinds of Western brands, his life would be incomparably bright. (Survey, male, 20, Tianjin)

Others dreamed of the type of “moderate affluence” that Deng Xiaoping established as the goal for the masses (Liu 2004, 62). Dreams of moderate affluence often featured a single Western brand that magically transformed its user into someone more cosmopolitan and desirable.

[The more foreign brands I have] the more internationalized I am personally. . . . Dream: At a clear autumn dusk, I lightly leaned against the big window that faced the open field and blue sky . . . [when] a Gucci silk scarf floated to me from the universe, and it gently landed around my neck. Extremely excited, I stood up, . . . then a pair of soft but powerful arms held around me from behind, and a sweet kiss fell on my neck. (Survey, female, 20, Beijing)

Since silk has been an iconic domestic product throughout China’s history (Hamilton and Lai 1989), this participant expresses ambivalence to domestic brand loyalty by opening her window to “the universe” to receive a Western brand silk scarf. Acceptance of the Western gift is accompanied by the embrace of a powerful but protective and gentle liaison. On one level, the embrace reflects immediate magical transformation into a more socially desirable self. At a higher level, it conveys a liberating access to a broader world backed by a powerful, friendly supporter. The dream echoes the prevalent 1980s view of the West as a beautiful imperialist that liberates China (Gries 2004).

Western Brands Animated as Teachers That Liberate Chinese. Some participants’ dreams entailed fantasized liberation. Participants praised Western corporations and their brands for setting Chinese consumers free from restricted or confined ways of thinking. They also imagined Western brands as teachers (*lao-shi*) who taught Chinese consumers new practices or exposed them to new ideas. In the following examples, the Oil of Ulan brand is embodied as a fashion consultant who offers instructions on how to succeed in the recently created job market (as opposed to the government-assigned jobs of the past). Likewise, the wise Microsoft brand introduces new knowledge, thoughts, and experiences.

I was going to the interview, and I was so nervous at this time, I wanted to try to dress myself appropriately. . . . However, I . . . knew nothing about cosmetics, and I was really stuck. . . . Suddenly my Oil of Ulan [Oil of Olay] turned into a little angel, and she naughtily asked me, “Why are you looking blank?” . . . Thus I told her my problem. The little angel just said one thing: “Leave everything to me, the Oil of Ulan little angel. Within a few minutes, I will turn you into a beautiful little angel.” Then she started applying her skills on my face. . . . Within a few minutes, the me in the mirror was totally a different person: “Youthful, beautiful, white, and flawless.” I was very satisfied. . . . I thanked the little angel, immediately went to the interview place. I believed that, with the encouragement of Oil of Ulan, I would surely be extremely confident and perform well. (Survey, female, 22, Tianjin)

Microsoft turned into a young, energetic, and knowledgeable wise person. He took me into the Microsoft world. . . . I wanted to see the sea; he would . . . give me a virtual experience of being there. Then I wanted to know about the

universe. He could give me a totally new thoughts and feelings. (Survey, male, 23, Tianjin)

The teacher-student metaphor that entered Chinese discourses in the eighteenth century was used prior to the Korean War by Mao Zedong, who at that time deemed America a teacher (Gries 2004), or *bang-yang*, a model or example from which China could learn. From this view in which America is deemed teacher or model, Western brand consumption marks the Chinese “student” as wise, able to assert the freedom of choice and a voice in the new market economy.

Western Brands as Agents of Democracy. Access to Western brands marks the global spread of capitalism, which for some presages increased democratic freedoms. Numerous dreams like the Microsoft dream involve imaginings of Western brand communication goods, particularly Internet services. Web-based interactions offer an experiential slice of liberal democracy by giving rise to a plurality of opinions, offering exposure to new aesthetics and politics (Gries 2004; Liu 2004) and providing access to information about the world (Arnett 2002).

In other product categories, Western brands were imagined as liberating agents that offered individuating assertions (table 1, comment 1.1) and access to new experiences (see 1.2). Dream symbolism also depicted Western brands as freeing Chinese from a devastated economy, by offering a foundation that sustained survival (1.3) and a solid platform that supported upward climbing in China (1.4).

For some, the imagined transformative powers of Western brands rendered them an esteemed “star” (table 1, 1.1), cosmopolitan world travelers (1.2), or capable of better performances (1.4). Shaped by Deng Xiaoping discourses in which wealth and consumption of the few propels improved living standards for the masses (Liu 2004), individuating assertions cannot be taken as comparable to individuating assertions in Western culture. Rather, individualistic displays are also pursued for the symbolic and economic value conferred upon the collective to which the individual belongs (Miller 1994; Wilk 1994). This is illustrated in dreams in which Western brands transformed consumers from desperate seekers in a barren desert into “hopeful” survivors of a plush land (1.3).

The West as Imperialist Oppressor and Western Brands as Instruments of Domination

Other dreams either subtly or directly reflect a national narrative in which the West is deemed an imperialist oppressor and Western brands are instruments of domination. The subtler dreams entail imaginings of a self that revels in a seemingly unbounded consumption of Western brands. Yet, expressions of gratitude are absent. Without direct challenge to Deng Xiaoping’s discourses, these dreams symbolically convey a longing for iconic China-made goods, echoing the earlier national products movement (Gerth 2003,

2008) and subsequent protectionist policies that existed prior to reform.

In my dream I come to a palace, where every column is a Western brand name. The words on the columns mean to invite me to participate in a game. So according to the game rules, I devour every brand just like a worm eating beans. . . . Then I come to a big door behind the palace, open it, there is the prize for my winning the game. The room is filled with Western brands, for home use, including electronics, basic commodities, cosmetics, expensive clothes. But before consuming them, I hope to make a last request of the game designer: please give me a pure silk sleeping gown made in China, because it is very comfortable, and I believe I’ll feel very peaceful in it. (Survey, female, 20, Baoding)

In this dream, an image of Western imperialism is detected, in which Western brand corporations establish the rules of the (marketplace) game. Within the Western palace, consumption is rewarded with further consumption. The dream’s moral coda—that peace can only be found in a silk sleeping gown from China—subtly introduces a renouncement of Western brands, which challenges the image of the West as the beautiful liberating imperialist (Gries 2004). The subtle emergence of repressed discontent parallels comments of interview participants who questioned the pursuit of Western brands. Several lamented, “Chinese still believe in foreign things.”

I think Chinese are too stubborn in this respect. Everybody thinks this way, that anything Western is good. But I think it [valuing Western brands] will have some negative influence on my family in the future. I won’t influence them towards these things. (Interview, female, 23, Beijing)

Amplifying the subtler expressions, imaginings of Western brands as instruments of Western domination were quite pronounced in other dreams (table 1, 1.5–1.8). Many envisioned Western brands as a form of attack from the outside or as invasion from the inside.

[The more foreign brand products I have] the harder the blow is to domestic products. . . . Dream: In the world of foreign brands, King Valentino and Queen Lancome bring their daughters Head & Shoulders and Colgate, and their sons Nike and HP, to ride a Goodyear airship of Crocodile style with Coca-Cola as fuel. Holding a big flag of Safeguard, cruising on the 5th Avenue, with the help of Angels, Pampers, and Nokia, they are planning to launch an all-round attack on the Chinese market! (Survey, Baoding, no demographic data)

In their call for earlier protectionist principles of the nation-state, these dreams reflect anti-Western views disseminated during Mao’s administration through “red posters.” Contrary to assertions that nationalism is an anomaly in Marxist theory, Mao instantiated a Chinese Marxism integrated with nationalism (Zhao 2004). His project of an alternative modernity opposed Western capitalist modernity

TABLE 1

WESTERN BRAND MEANINGS GROUNDED IN CHINESE NATIONAL NARRATIVES: EXEMPLARS FROM THE DREAM ELICITATION TASK

Western brands as liberation	Western brands as domination	Western brands as subjugated to erase Chinese humiliation	Western brands as partners
<p>1.1. Several major famous brands that represent luxury and extravagance were all owned by me at the same time. While having these, it seemed like I became a star, wearing Rolex watch, dressed in Chanel clothes, driving Benz car. . . . It may be only a daydream, but I'm still very happy. (female, 20, Beijing)</p> <p>1.2. When I get married, I am wearing Chanel wedding gown, Christian Dior shoes, Debeer diamonds, riding in a extended model of Cadillac, going to Europe for my honeymoon—to Paris, Italy, Milan, New York, and London. I go shopping and buy LV handbag, Prada bag/purse, CK [Calvin Klein] clothes, Poison perfume. And I also go to the longest-for Disneyland, European theme parks, and global movie city [Hollywood] in Los Angeles. . . . Such a beautiful dream. (female, 21, Beijing)</p> <p>1.3. A person . . . is deserted in the desert; thirst and hunger makes him feel the threat of death; he is desperate and starts digging in the sand, digs and digs; finally he digs out a box. . . . There are five cans of Pepsi with a note: wherever you are, you always have my support. He feels the warmest thing in life and . . . finds the green land and regained life and hope. (no demographics; Baoding)</p> <p>1.4. On a bright afternoon, my friend and I went to climb the Great Wall. We hiked for a long time, then my friend found that her shoes were broken, the sole was worn out. And my shoes. . . weren't. . . I proudly told her that I was wearing Nike. Nike adds splendor to my steps. (female, 23, Tianjin)</p>	<p>1.5. The market is glutted with foreign products, and the packages are all covered with foreign languages. . . . Many domestic products are overstocked, national enterprises bankrupted, and workers laid off. Horrible, too horrible. I can't determine my nationality while in the sea of these foreign products. (no demographics; Baoding)</p> <p>1.6. I use L'Oreal moisturizer, . . . Saseign brands for my hair, and . . . [foreign brands for hair color, underwear, sweaters, and perfume], slowly walk into Starbucks. . . . My boyfriend is wearing Adidas. . . . Our faces . . . are so obviously possessing Chinese characteristics—yellow skin, black hair, black eyes. Is this an inevitable trend of the world's grand assimilation, or is it the sadness that we have forgotten about our own national industry and blindly crave foreign brands? (female, 23, Tianjin)</p> <p>1.7. After Microsoft escaped from disintegration, it expanded with a faster speed and learned its lessons, started to control the government so that it would not be sued again. . . . Not long afterward, governments of all countries in the world are under its control. . . . Political imperialism was established. (male, 20, Beijing)</p> <p>1.8. I was wearing a Crocodile [Izod] leather belt. As a result, it turned into a real crocodile that twined over my body, and sucked out my blood and sweat. . . . From then on, [I] felt allergic to Crocodile leather belt. [I] would never buy Crocodile leather again. (male, 22, Beijing)</p>	<p>1.9. Foreign brands are defeated completely by domestic brands overnight. Chinese people are proud of buying domestic products, and Chinese products are recognized by the world, like Haier. (no demographics; Baoding)</p> <p>1.10. One day, streets of foreign countries are running Chinese Red Flag [a car brand], foreigners all wear Double-Star [a Chinese shoe brand] and Pu-dun pants [a Chinese brand], (no demographics; Baoding)</p> <p>1.11. What is thought in dreams, is actually the wish to make up what is missing in reality. . . . In any country, the commodity concept a brand represents is unchangeable; there shouldn't be any quality discrimination based on country or region. (female, 24, Beijing)</p> <p>1.12. BMW rushed in front of me and invites me to sit in. I'm so surprised that I throw up; me as a salary income class deserve sitting in such a famous car in this lifetime; I won't regret it even if I die. I shout, "it does not feel as cool riding you as riding my electric donkey [nickname for motor cycle]!" You should change your name to wild donkey brand. . . . All right. Going country is the destined route for aristocrats to become common people. (no demographics; Baoding)</p> <p>1.13. Because [I] couldn't meet [my girlfriend's] needs of being covered all over with famous brands, we fought, got mad, I said "bye-bye." . . . From then on I hated famous foreign brands, which represented people of vanity. I was determined to have my own company, beat foreign brands; my dream finally came true. . . . People all over the world, even people from other planets were using my company's products. (male, 23, Tianjin)</p>	<p>1.14. I imagine that Western brands and Chinese brands are two people with high quality, optimistic, and positive attitudes. They walked together and became best friends! They learned from each other and helped each other to make up for each other's weaknesses. The Chinese brand was down to earth, and the Western brand was gorgeous. The Chinese brand drew on the Western brand's advanced technology and management experience, and at the same time, it entertained the Western brand and made the Western brand benefit greatly from the Chinese brand. Hand in hand, and shoulder by shoulder, they worked hard together for mankind's happiness. (female, 29, Beijing)</p> <p>1.15. One day, the beautiful girl, Head & Shoulders, with a head of floating elegant long hair; the boy, Nike, in sport clothes; and I went to Disney together. This was a Disney in China, I was very happy that the two foreign friends could come to China to play in a foreign amusement park. After that, we went to the Great Wall. . . . They were very glad and said they . . . wanted to marry spouses in China, have children, plant their roots in China, and they even wanted to change to Chinese citizenship. (male, 21, Tianjin)</p> <p>1.16. I thought my Haoshi (Hershey's) might have turned bad. Just when I was throwing it away, suddenly a voice said to me in Chinese, "Oh, no! Please don't throw me away! . . . I have enjoyed living in your home." . . . I kept it. From then on, I found a heap of Hershey's chocolate at my desk corner everyday. . . . It was my good friend repaying me. (female, 20, Beijing)</p>

at the same time that it opposed the imperialism of China's old empire (Zhao 2004). Mao's vision of an alternative modernity—one based on ideological and cultural revolution grounded in egalitarianism, economic self-reliance, and a one-party political system—has been interpreted as a powerful counterempire movement during the formative years of capitalist globalization (Liu 2004).

These dreams expressing protectionist sentiments draw from postreform state discourses that have employed Maoist revolutionary ideology as a legitimating force for the CCP (Liu 2004). As the pragmatism characterizing Deng Xiaoping and subsequent administrations has undermined Marxist and socialist ideals, the CCP has employed Mao Zedong's image as a cultural symbol while decoupling it from its revolutionary meaning (Liu 2004). In illustration, administrations advancing the economic reform have financed a flourishing revival of *qunzhong wenyi* (folk arts) practices. Mao Zedong had introduced these practices during the Cultural Revolution to supplant bourgeois culture and to privilege folk arts. The cohesiveness amassed through present-day reenactments has then been discursively channeled toward Deng Xiaoping's development agenda through discourses of "national spirit" and pride in attaining "moderate affluence" (Liu 2004, 62). The reenactments emphasize a national identity constituted by symbols of nationhood, shared historical experiences, and a common language. Related to this strategy, official CCP discourses that consider the Cultural Revolution a tragedy largely exempt Mao Zedong. These practices engender dormant anti-Western sentiments. Such sentiments are awakened by Western confrontations that pose new threats to the identity, interests, or integrity of China (Zhao 2004).

Western Brands as Weapons of Cultural Dominance.

Some dream fantasies of Western-initiated war, attack, and invasion seem metaphorical. They exemplify a broader collection of dreams expressing concerns that an authentic Chinese culture is on the edge of demise. The fantasies share a common plot in which the Chinese consumer is seduced by lures of individualism into Western brand consumption and becomes displaced from Chinese culture, which leads to her/his demise. These dreams mirror a narrative in which Western corporations possess motives to dominate or destroy Chinese culture or its collectivist citizenry and undermine individuals' national identity (table 1, comments 1.5 and 1.6).

[The more foreign brand products I have] the more it marks my own "value." Dream: One day, Lao Zhang was driving a BMW car, and he suddenly entered ancient times, where people were all surprised and wondered, what is this thing, why haven't we seen it before. Then they asked Lao Zhang what it is. Lao Zhang answered, this is my Precious Horse [BMW's Chinese name]. Someone said, I also have a precious horse, why do they look so different. Lao Zhang said, my Precious Horse is very fast; that person said, let's race. Lao Zhang agreed and they got started. . . . In less than two seconds, Lao Zhang's Precious Horse was out of sight. Everybody said, it's really so fast. Suddenly he heard a [warn-

ing] scream [from them], there's a cliff ahead! (Survey, male, 21, Beijing)

This participant reflects on the destruction of the Chinese self with Western brand consumption that commodifies people (marks their "value"). In the dream, he reiterates this theme for the collective self by imagining a centuries-old cultural icon, Lao Zhang, the Chinese god of immortality, being seduced by a status good into a perilous and destructive high-speed competition. Lao Zhang is also the name of the farmer credited with the first act of privatization in China, an interpretation that likewise suggests cultural demise. Constitutive of this demise has been the fast-paced commodification of people. Cultural studies theorists note that in the emergent fashion, modeling, and commercial job markets, Chinese individuals now position, brand, and sell the self (Brownell 2001; Hoffman 2001).

In some dreams, the loss of culture at the hands of Western brands was conveyed as a loss of self for the Chinese consumer (table 1, 1.5 and 1.6).

One day, Ronaldo drove a Benz to my home and said, "The car is yours. Bye." Then I arrived in a grand stadium in France. I suddenly turned into an Adidas ball, and Trezeguet kicked me against the post again and again. (Survey, male, 21, Shanghai)

In the preceding dream, overt seduction through the offer of a luxury good is followed by abandonment, cultural displacement, transformation of the self into a commodity, and then torture. Other dreams convey a sense of being drawn into Western brand consumption, with faint suspicions that the foreign Western brand seducer is a thief or a bandit. Nonetheless they imagine being unable to resist an ironically involuntary sense of freedom.

[The more foreign brand products I have] the higher standard of living I have. Dream: Clear and bright moon light beams into the room through the open windows, sprinkles all over the room, and sprinkles all over my bed. My body feels like flying up; I know that I'm flying with help from someone. The fragrance of Chanel is floating in the air, I want to resist, but can't, because I like flying in the perfume rain. I don't care whether that someone is a thief or bandit, I like flying like this, on and on. (Survey, female, 20, Beijing)

As symbolized in the mistrust and hesitancy that belie the pleasure and freedom of "flying in the perfume rain," for some, the promises of liberal democracy embodied in Western brands is an artifice to charm Chinese consumers away from their traditional culture. In numerous dreams, participants expressed views of Western corporations as domineering forces that imposed the acquisitions of Western brands on people. Subsequently, Chinese cultural life eroded to the narrow preoccupation of disposing of these goods.

[The more foreign brands I have] it shows I have some trust crisis towards domestic products. Dream: A sales represen-

tative from Adidas sent me a truck load of basketballs. I didn't want them, because I don't like playing. They said no (I can't refuse), if I didn't accept the truckload of basketballs, they would bury me alive with those basketballs! . . . Since then, my family has been living nervously in a basketball flood: a basketball placed on the TV; a couple of basketballs would jump out when opening the fridge; even when we eat, we would sit on basketballs instead of chairs! How to get rid of the basketballs has become the main goal that my whole family tries to achieve. (Survey, female, 22, Beijing)

Concerns expressed in these dreams parallel popular press reports that debate the presence of Western brands as corrupting, contaminating, or diluting Chinese culture and cultural space. In illustration, a controversy initiated first as Web site debates followed the fall 2000 opening of Starbucks café in the Forbidden City, which was deemed by many to damage cultural heritage (*People's Daily* 2000). In the burgeoning tourist industry spawned by *gaige kaifang*, the Starbucks café was part of Forbidden City administrators' attempts to improve service. Culture has repeatedly become a battleground in popular discourses since the 1990s, as clashes between Teng's development strategy and China's espoused socialist ideology have become more apparent in everyday life (Liu 2004). The clashes have been attributed to the absence of a clear vision of social and political values of *gaige kaifang*, which initially aided acceptance of economic policies (Liu 2004). Subsequently, in a reversal of the 1980s fascination with the West, this ambiguity intensified the legitimacy crisis of administrations advancing the economic reform (Gries 2004).

Dream imaginings of a Chinese culture under attack and invaded by Western brands reflect a historical embellishment of brand fantasies (Martin 2004) with what Chinese political and cultural studies scholars call China's reemergent victimization narrative (Gries 2004; Liu 2004). This narrative of Chinese suffering at the hands of Western imperialists is reportedly popular among China's fourth generation that grew up during the 1980s and 1990s under the relative material prosperity following Teng's *gaige kaifang* (Gries 2004). Propelled by a number of popular nationalist diatribes, like best sellers *China Can Say No* and *China Can Still Say No* (Song et al. 1996a, 1996b), some fourth-generation Chinese people began to define themselves in opposition to the pro-Western 1980s experience, claiming a usurping of China's culture as their generation's victimization (Gries 2004). Not incidental to formation of this narrative were the CCP's 1990s campaigns of education in patriotism, launched as a response to U.S. sanctions. Tied to a narrative in which China was presented as besieged, the CCP campaign called for national unity under one party rule and territorial integrity (Zhao 2004). Through this campaign, patriotic values were fomented by a shared Chinese tradition that, although previously devalued by the Communist state, became an essential value of nationalism (Zhao 2004).

Western Brands as Weapons of Military Dominance.

In concert with our dream data's more explicit expressions of "attack" and "invasion" of China by the West and Western brands, the victimization narrative also entails the traditional militaristic meaning.

[The more foreign brands I have] the less I am like a Chinese. Dream: The Western brand turns into a person, and he is Napoleon or Hitler, holding his iron rod and marched over the earth. Wherever he passes, dead bones are scattered all over the ground. White bones fill the streets, not even a chicken is left within thousands of miles. (Survey, male, 21, Shanghai)

The concerns apparent in this dream and others have been fueled by incidents such as the 1999 North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, the 2001 U.S.-China standoff over an American spy plane that collided with a Chinese jet fighter, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan, the deployment of the National Missile Defense, and U.S. reports that China poses a threat to the present order of world powers (Gries 2004; Liu 2004; Zhao 2004). These incidents, which are often publicized in China as threats to national security, prompt more overt attempts by Chinese institutions and individuals to conspicuously politicize Western brands and their consumption. Following the 1999 American bombing incident, for example, public protests challenged American media reports that the bombing was an accident, claiming instead that it was an intentional act aimed at undermining China's international image and power (Gries 2004). Public protests further framed the bombing incident as linked to China's semicolonial past to suggest China would not allow this latest in a long series of Western aggression (Gries 2004; Han 1999). Blog postings on the *Guangming Daily* Web site admonished the consumption of a host of Western automotive, clothing, fast-food, electronic, and computer software brands and called for Chinese companies to revoke contracts with American consumer products corporations (Gries 2004). In solidarity, Chinese corporations pledged to halt business relationships with companies such as Microsoft (Gries 2004; Liu 2004). In protests that erupted in over 2 dozen major cities, Chinese individuals carried signs to "Kick American hamburgers out of China," alongside placards declaring "Punish the war criminals!" (Gries 2004, 14). In some discourses, American brands, as goods that vitalized the economic power of the United States, were deemed the ultimate source of funding for the U.S. military (Liu 2004). Calls for boycotts highlighted the large numbers of Chinese upon whom Western corporations relied for profits and the power in numbers amassed through Chinese unity (Liu 2004).

Parallel themes exist in our participants' dreams that call attention to the power of individual choice when it is replicated across the Chinese nation. Some dreams linked individual choice of Western brands to an imagined apocalypse for the collective citizenry of China.

I'm driving a BMW, listening to Sony music, drinking Coca-

Cola, and come to a wild and empty place. With Nike shoes on my feet, I run like crazy, running, running. On the grass, beside the tents, there are many red flags with five stars [Chinese national flag], around them are herds of cows. Many workers are milking the cows, they milk like crazy. Up in the sky, floats a slogan "Bright Dairy" [a Chinese dairy brand]. . . . The workers are dying one after another. . . . I have sold all my foreign brand products including my BMW and Sony video camera, etc.!!! Then I buy "Bright" milk to feed pandas. (Survey, male, 23, Baoding)

In his fantasy of renouncing Western brands in the interest of the common good, this participant clarifies the ambiguity of the values of *gaige kaifang* while alleviating the identity threat it poses. Mao Zedong called attention to the exploitation of individuals at the hands of capitalist globalization (Liu 2004). From this perspective, individuation sought through the use of Western brands resulted in a loss of face, that is, a loss of social esteem. In his dream of Bright milk, the Baoding participant preempts this loss of face by renouncing Western brands. His goal of aiding the survival of the indigenous culture is embodied in feeding Bright milk (a domestic brand) to the panda, an iconic, endangered but protected Chinese species. In other dreams, the loss of face or esteem is somatic, symbolized in disfigurement of the physical face (Tung 1994).

In the dream, I saw myself . . . holding a Chanel hand bag, wearing Red Earth cosmetics on my face, Shi-si shoes. Suddenly, it started to rain, I ran forward, then my shoe sole broke along with the tearing sound of the clothes. I tried to run home, looked into the mirror, found the "water-resistant" cosmetics ruined by the rain, and I became a big colorful cat. Thus I threw them away, never sought after Western brands. (Survey, female, 18, Beijing)

Although also a common metaphor for a child's dirty face, the transformation into a "big colorful cat" in this context can be read as contesting the Cat Principle used to advance the reform. This principle dismisses the black or white color of the cat as insignificant and, by allegorical association, also dismisses the debate as to whether *gaige kaifang* is capitalist or socialist in nature (Liu 2004). While the Cat Principle delivers the moral that if the cat catches the mouse it is a good cat, regardless of whether it is black or white (Liu 2004), the Beijing participant sees that an outcome-driven assessment can have a transformational impact that is undesirable. Her image of a colorful cat names *gaige kaifang* as markedly individualistic, capitalistic, and an undesirable transformation. In other dreams, somatic symbolism was expressed as the loss of Chinese sweat and blood "sucked out" by Western brands (table 1, comment 1.8) or as contamination or deterioration of the body, as representation of the self (Gerth 2003; Tung 1994).

Notably the vast majority of those employing a narrative of the West as imperialist oppressor were residents of Beijing and Baoding. The presence of military forces in both Beijing and Baoding would be expected to heighten militaristic

views of East-West relations. Further, the numerous heritage sites in Beijing that benefit from the international tourist trade render this locals' cultural space more frequently contested. In contrast, Baoding is an industrial city whose manufacturing facilities have faced bankruptcy in the aftermath of *gaige kaifang*. Unlike port cities, rural places of employment, having no precommunist experiences with capitalist competition, have adapted to competition drawing from military experiences, as the only accessible history tied to foreign competition (Kuhn 2000).

The West as Subjugated and Conquered Western Brands as Chinese Redemption

In many dreams, our participants fantasized scenarios of successful Chinese brands that restored national pride by conquering Western brands in the market (table 1, comments 1.9–1.13). Underpinning such fantasies is the cultural memory of China's century of humiliation at the hands of Western imperialists, including Japan. This remembrance draws from a victimization account in which the Chinese plight is often referenced as *luohou aida*, interpreted as "the backward will be beaten" (Gries 2004, 50–51). This account explains China's defeat as resulting from China's economic and technological backwardness (Gries 2004). The legacy is one that many Chinese individuals feel and seek to erase (Gries 2004; Zhao 2004).

[The more foreign brand products I have] the more I feel lack of national self-esteem. Dream: Domestic brands enter into the international market and achieve good results. Chinese people hence no longer look down upon themselves. The Chinese economy soars. Every Chinese voluntarily supports state enterprises and Chinese enterprises. Our reputation gets better. What Westerners can do, Chinese can also. What Westerners cannot do, Chinese can also. We have been suppressed for too long. (Survey, Baoding, no demographics)

Chinese products' quality improves very fast. . . . Then . . . I come to Las Vegas of America, take Chinese products with me, and hold a "Chinese product news release." I compare them with American products on the spot, and immediately beat the foreign products, winning honor for China. (Survey, male, 24, Beijing)

Redemptive narratives that seek to redress China's past humiliations draw from interwoven national discourses of victimization that emerged at different historical moments, spanning the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War up until the British return of Hong Kong "to the Motherland" in 1997 (Gries 2004, 49). Although diminished for a period by Mao Zedong's China-as-victor discourses (Gries 2004), this victimization narrative has been revived by best sellers such as *The Rape of Nanking*, which chronicled Chinese suffering during the Sino-Japanese War (Chang 1997). Postwar humiliations continued into the 1950s and 1960s, during which America blocked the PRC's entry into the United Nations, delaying it until 1971 (Gries 2004). As Gries (2004, 51)

notes, the more popular interpretation of “backwards/ beaten” has become “backwards *because* beaten” (*luohou yinwei aida*), implying Western aggression has kept China backward. Postreform assertions of victimization include humiliation inflicted upon the Chinese people by Western capitalist corporations that price Western brands out of the reach of the masses. In Chinese popular culture, parody ads have emerged to dramatize this form of humiliation. In illustration, one depicts an aggressive Ronald McDonald forcing a Chinese consumer to bow at the base of the golden arches, while refusing the consumer’s pleas for a discount (<http://business.sohu.com/s2005/maidlad.shtml>). Further, our Chinese participants found it humiliating that some Western brands in China were of inferior quality to similar brands offered in Western nations (table 1, 1.11, and table 2, 2.11).

Redemption was imagined in our participants’ dreams, not in terms of protecting cultural icons and heritage sites nor in terms of protectionist policies or Western brand boycotting practices. Rather, participants fantasized Chinese products would be sought by Chinese people because of their superiority (table 1, 1.9 and 1.10), while the status and prices of Western brands in China would decline (1.12).

Chinese products will someday fill people’s thoughts and lives all over the world. On that day, I will have a dream, Western brands will no longer be arrogant. Just like that I throw out a few coins, wow, foreign stuff all come together! (Survey, Baoding, no demographics)

By contrast to the former narrative that is driven by efforts to shape nationality as an inward-directed sentiment that seeks to hold a nation together and guard against alien rule, this national narrative operates by directing efforts outwardly (Comaroff and Stern 1995). In the redemption narrative, the view of Western brands as instruments of aggression produces expansionist attitudes with triumph sought through international marketplace dominance (Gries 2004). The currency for this narrative is heightened at moments posing threats to China’s commercial success in the global economy, such as disputes with the United States over trade deficits and China’s alleged violations of intellectual property rights (Gries 2004). Redemptive fantasies entailed imagined transformations into a more esteemed self in the global arena (table 1, 1.13), although this was often expressed as a collective self (1.9).

[In talking about best translation practices] A Western name, Chinese people can accept. I think the biggest shortcoming of Chinese people is that I feel Chinese worship Western things too much. This is an undeniable fact. It’s been like this since 1840. Any Westerner . . . will be adored like God in China; . . . if I go abroad, to Europe, how they treat Chinese people. Respect can’t even be mentioned. . . . I think about China wanting . . . [to host] the 2008 Olympic games. How would we have the face to apply for the Olympics? What do we want Westerners to see? Whom are we going to compete with in terms of equipments and culture? Although China has a history of several thousand years, you

can’t live by holding onto history. The history is almost eaten away. Forbidden City? How long is it going to last? Will the Great Wall never fall? Why has the U.S. developed so fast? . . . So the current development is the most important, not the history. (Interview, female, 23, Beijing)

Desires to reorder hierarchies, such that the oppressed become the oppressor, are not unique to Chinese people but are common to postcolonial nationalism throughout the developing countries (Gries 2004). Cultural studies theorists have noted that many Chinese today want to change roles within the teacher-student relationship, such that China is the teacher to the United States and other Western nations (Gries 2004). This national narrative of redemption has been prompted by academic writings that have crossed over into popular culture, such as Fang Li’s (1996) “Our generation’s America complex,” which depicts America as a teacher to rebel against. Expansionist ideas have emerged to oppose anti-China discourses in popular writing like Samuel Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations* (1996). These Western writings argued that as China became stronger it would seek expansion, and therefore the United States should build an alliance to contain China (Gries 2004). In response, numerous Chinese popular books “carried a warning to Washington that any containment effort was certain to fail” (Zhao 2004, 10–11). The opposition to containment fantasized by some participants parallels strategic moves by some Chinese manufacturers to become global brands. Personal computer manufacturer Lenovo, brewer Tsingtao, appliance-maker Haier, and automobile-maker Cherry are all seeking to become global brands (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008; Wang 2008), with some leveraging from sponsorship of the 2008 Olympics. The currently popular catch phrase “created in China,” has been interpreted by Jing Wang (2008) as capturing the vision of a transformed global image of China from that of world factory to that of exalted heaven for brand innovators. Again, and related to the previously noted local cultural differences, the use of this narrative was more common among those from Beijing and Baoding.

The West as Economic Partner and Western Brands as Instruments of Economic Progress

Other fantasies in our data reflect a national narrative that promotes hopeful idealistic views of China-West relations. Foreign brand corporations were deemed eager to share technology and to adapt and adopt Chinese cultural ways (table 1, 1.14–1.16). At the same time, Chinese producers were deemed capable of creatively adapting to globalization in a manner that sustains valued aspects of Chinese culture.

In a quiet mountain village everything was so pure and clean. One day came a traveler, trying to sell to those simple and innocent villagers a kind of good drink, that is Coca Cola. . . . I tried it. It tasted bitter. “It tastes so horrible!” I said. This time, grandma walked over. “Wrong. You should not drink it this way. You should drink it as if you were drinking Chinese herbal medicine. Add water and sugar.” Then

TABLE 2
SELECT CASES FROM INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS REFLECTING NATIONAL NARRATIVE DISCOURSES OF WESTERN BRANDS

Western brands as liberation: Ms. Roma (30, Beijing, director and editor of news organization)	Western brands as domination: Ms. Nice (40, Beijing, manager, foreign company)	Western brands as subjugated to erase Chinese humiliation: Ms. Sun (26, Tianjin, pharmaceutical sales representative)	Western brands as partners: Ms. Jin (28, Baoding, accountant)
<p>2.1. Cosmetics. I switch a lot, mostly foreign brands. Now I'm using Lan-kou [Lancome]. Before that I used Bei-jia-en, American brand Ya-shi-lan-dai [Estée Lauder]. . . . The glasses I wear, Calvin Klein. . . . They are available at Sai-te [Japanese-run department store] and Tai-ping-yang [Atlantic Ocean] Department Store. . . . I use Swatch a lot. . . . Everybody knows it's made in Switzerland. . . . Because [being overweight] I can't buy too many clothes [laughs]. I still have to spend my money. For shoes . . . it's probably an Italian brand; most of my leather shoes are this brand [Jade Peace]. . . . I like Lancel the most; it's for bags, a French brand. I think the brand's style fits me very well.</p> <p>2.2. I often read the <i>Fashion</i> and <i>Elle</i> magazines. They often promote some new items. When they do, I'll cut the colored page and look to buy them when I go shopping. . . . I don't plan very much. Like setting a maximum amount of money. . . . [laughs] I never think about prices.</p> <p>2.3. [Prompted for the best foreign brand name] Lancome: "Lan" for "Lan-hua" [magnolia or orchid flower]; "kou" for "Dou-kou-nian-hua" [early teens of a girl—refers to beautiful age]. . . . Its advertisements are usually around a petal. When we are talking about it now; I feel as if I can see it.</p> <p>2.4. [Prompted to speak about protecting national industries] I feel that we should choose products based on our own comfort. . . . I won't have any hostility because something is a foreign brand.</p>	<p>2.5. Actually, before we renovated this apartment, we bought everything of domestic brands. . . . Actually we are very patriotic.</p> <p>2.6. We bought this [TV] this one time because we needed a big one, and our domestic brands don't have this. And its color and size fit this place. Thus we had to buy theirs [a foreign brand].</p> <p>2.7. The same is with cars. The quality of our domestic brand cars is poor, always have problems. [Before] I had a Santana 2000 [domestic car]. When it's hot in summer, you couldn't start it, or it quit while running. This may not sound so good, but anything linked to domestic, their quality will not be good. [Now I have] a Japanese Nissan. . . . Many domestic brands just don't work.</p> <p>2.8. [Unprompted] My efforts do not fall short of my patriotism, but my satisfaction does. You spend a lot of money, but they [domestic brands] always make you uncomfortable. There is nothing you can do about it. Finally we decided to buy imported goods. Why do so many people buy famous brands? The quality is there. . . . There are famous domestic brands too. For example, Hai-er air conditioner.</p>	<p>2.9. [For] necessities, I use Colgate toothpaste a lot and like it OK. Another reason is that it has lots of advertisements. In fact, I didn't really find anything better than other brands such as Zhong-hua [China]. . . . A couple of years ago, I used to use Paio-rou [Rejoice], Panting [Pantene], Sha-xuan [Sassoon], and Li-shi [Lux]. But in recent years, I found that other, domestic brands, even those not very famous brands, have similar effects, but their prices are much lower. So, I sometimes use those brands.</p> <p>2.10. Since childhood, we progressed from hair-washing paste to shampoo; the popular brands were Feng-hua [bee flower]. . . . Later when Paio-rou and Pan-ling entered the market, they immediately took over the domestic market because after you use them, the effect is really good. . . . But in recent years, I feel all brands are similar. . . . Except for their fame and ads, there isn't much difference in quality. . . . No domestic appliance brand is satisfactory to me. . . . I use Sony and Aiwa.</p> <p>2.11. I read an article which suggests that . . . Japanese products made for Europeans are better quality than those made for Asian people. After reading it, I was very angry and really didn't want to buy any Japanese products. Why is it that way? . . . Supermarkets such as Jia-le-fu [Carefour], . . . it's from France, . . . there are occasions when the quality is not good; it's really discriminating against Chinese. . . . They know that Chinese consumers are just that, thus they aren't as strict with some products as they are in France. But it still is better than others.</p> <p>2.12. If something feels good to use, I would be satisfied, whether or not it's foreign.</p>	<p>2.13. Under the presupposition that the quality of both domestic and foreign products are the same, I'll definitely choose our national brand. But if that condition is not met, it will depend. If our domestic products don't have good quality, buying them does not mean patriotism, but it will even hurt the economy's growth in the long run.</p> <p>2.14. When you buy computers, you choose Lian-xiang; you would think it's a Chinese brand. But as a matter of fact, its core technology is foreign with a Chinese shell. I think in these instances it does not matter if you choose Chinese or foreign.</p> <p>2.15. I think medicine has its special characteristics. Chinese medicine, it has to be domestic; Western medicine or antibiotics, it has to be foreign.</p> <p>2.16. In the clothes category, I never buy any foreign brands because they are all made in China anyway, only they changed into a foreign brand name. China is the number one clothes manufacturing country in the world, including many famous Italian brands.</p> <p>2.17. I like shopping at Yi-jia [IKEA] furniture store. It's Swedish, and its items are really very expensive. . . . If something is too expensive, I will go to other stores and buy something similar.</p> <p>2.18. Brands are not important; the first consideration is price, then quality, and third is brands.</p>

grandma took over the Coca Cola, mixed a big cup for me. . . . Wow! It tastes great! Thus, I cheered, "Everywhere is home." (Survey, male, 23, Beijing)

The sense of international harmony expressed in this dream and others was also found among some of our interview participants, who made comments like "The world is one entity now. It's not necessary; . . . one should not refuse to buy it because it's American." In other dreams, China's relations with the West enabled it to reach the pinnacle of Deng Xiaoping's development policy whereby moderate affluence is achieved for the majority. This occurred through international business partnering and improved consumer offerings, spurred by cross-national competitive rivalry.

The Influence of East-West Narratives on Consumers' Responses to Western Brands

Our projective data revealed that Western brand meanings were embedded in various reconstructions of China's history. Fantasized positive and negative transformations of the self and of the collective Chinese nation reflect imaginings of the social consequences and legitimacy of Western brand consumption. Such imaginings suggest that a conscious political motive is operating and that Western brand consumption is not routine apolitical behavior (Campbell 1994). Our interview data extend these findings. We offer four cases to illustrate how imaginings of China drawn from these narratives precondition consumers' responses to Western brands (table 2).

Ms. Roma, like others, possessed a profile seemingly shaped by discourses of the West as liberator. She acquires a host of Western brands (table 2, 2.1), which are abundant at the level fantasized by some student participants. They are primarily from categories of conspicuous consumption: cosmetics, apparel, shoes, jewelry, and accessories (2.1). She reports feeling liberated because she has choices and an opportunity to find brands that are compatible with her own style. A student of Western cultural practices, she studies Western fashion magazines for instruction on Western brand purchases (2.2). She saves and savors the visual imagery of brand advertisements. In her discussions, she is an unabashed consumerist, who in her Western brand pursuits "never think[s] about price." During the interview, when talking about specific Western brands, Ms. Roma spontaneously imagines them. She uses both the phonetic sound and meaning of the brand name to mentally picture the brand and visualizes images from Western brand ads she has seen (2.3). Exhibiting compatibility with Deng Xiaoping's discourses that forgo political debates to emphasize benefits of the reform (Liu 2004), throughout the interview, Ms. Roma never speaks of political ideology and its relationship to Western brands. Near the end of the session, when questioned on this, she declares that personal comfort with the brand is the only salient criterion (2.4). From this profile, we suggest that the national narrative of *gaige kaifang*, and its offshoot narrative of the West as liberator, alleviate iden-

tity conflicts of Western brand consumption with nationalism and socialism. For Ms. Roma, Western brands are associated with liberation, yet her choice of this category does not seem politically motivated (Campbell 1994). We attribute this to the alignment of her values and consumption practices with those sanctioned by the current nation-state administration. For those who see Western brands as building blocks for liberal democracy, Western brand choice may remain politically motivated.

Ms. Nice is our exemplar for participants whose brand discussions appeared shaped by a narrative of the West as imperialist oppressor (table 2). Unlike Ms. Roma, early in the interview and without prompting, Ms. Nice associates loyalty to domestic brands with patriotism (2.5). She does not avoid all Western brands. In contrast to Ms. Roma, Ms. Nice's Western brand acquisitions do not include those in personal care/appearance categories but instead are only for electronic/mechanical goods that constitute large financial commitments (her television and automobile). For these, she is compelled to offer justifications (2.6 and 2.7). Her justifications suggest a theme of bittersweet liberation in which Western brands free her from the exhausting, restraining effects on everyday life wrought by poor quality, unreliable domestic brands (2.7). Western brand acquisitions pose an uncomfortable social identity conflict for Ms. Nice. She laments that her patriotism is not rewarded with satisfaction when buying domestic brands (2.8). Interestingly, unlike Ms. Roma, at no point during the interview does Ms. Nice speak of searching or shopping for Western brands. She does not imagine Western brands, brand name meanings, or their advertisements. Instead Ms. Nice seeks active participation in an imagined China that draws from past constructions of the nation-state—a society that shares collectivist concerns and a desire to assert them through choosing domestic brands (Gerth 2003, 2008). Her desire to be within this imaginary setting frames her responses to Western brands. She rejects Western brands or offers justifications, suggesting that a conscious political motive for choice is operating (Campbell 1994).

Ms. Sun represents our participants sensitive to what they deemed humiliating or disrespectful practices of Western brand companies. Ms. Sun's brand choices involve reflection on historical victimization at the hands of Japanese and seem shaped by a narrative of "erasure of humiliation." Like Ms. Nice, Ms. Sun acquired both domestic and Western brands, using assessments of quality to judge their merits. There is, however, a reversal of the preference order reported by Ms. Nice. Ms. Sun reports early use of better-performing Western brands, followed by a switch to domestic brands that over time offered similar quality at a lower price (table 2, 2.9 and 2.10). She asserts a belief in the emergence of domestic brands as global brands. Ms. Sun is sensitively aware of specific Western brands whose manufacturers treat Chinese consumers disrespectfully. While this took various forms, one form was the discrimination found in offering Chinese consumers Western brands that were inferior to similarly labeled brands sold in developed Western nations (2.11).

Ms. Sun's consumption ideology did not involve wholesale boycotting of Western brands (2.12) or avoiding Western brands in luxury or personal care categories often associated with individuating displays and conspicuous consumption. Rather, she selectively avoids those Western brands whose corporate practices have been revealed to her as racially/nationally discriminatory, particularly the offering of inferior quality goods under the same brand as better quality goods offered in Western nations (2.11). Her concerns almost mirror the wished-for reversal of such discrimination expressed in the Western brand fantasies of our student participants (compare table 2, 2.11, with table 1, 1.11). The case of Ms. Sun also offers a striking contrast to that of Ms. Roma, who embellished her imaginings of Western brands by drawing from Western brand icons and advertisements. During the interview, Ms. Sun comments on Western brand advertisements as well-funded manipulative tactics to generate perceptions of familiarity and fame, irrespective of meaningful quality differences (table 2, 2.9 and 2.10). Vigilantly skeptical, she processes Western brand promotional stimuli more analytically than imaginatively. Her response reflects a politically motivated decision to participate in China's redemption through recognizing the quality of China-made brands and demanding quality of Western brands.

Ms. Jin represents those who embraced the ideology of Western brands as both partners and rivals that spur improvements in marketplace offerings. Some of these participants spoke of Western brand boycotts following the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy and other conflicts, asserting that such responses did not make sense. Ms. Jin finds it nonsensical to avoid Western brands. She argues that to choose an inferior quality domestic brand does not at all reflect patriotism. Ms. Jin argues that indeed, to prop up inferior quality goods is detrimental to China's economic growth (table 2, 2.13). Ms. Jin notes the irrelevance of brands due to increased China-West partnering in assembly and manufacturing (2.14 and 2.15). Where Western versus domestic designations have relevance is in areas in which product development is tied to cultural history (2.16), as occurs when one seeks Western antibiotics or Chinese medicine. She recognizes that Western brands, if unaffordable, can be imitated by domestic goods at lower prices, with satisfactory results (2.17). As she sums up, "brands are not important" (2.18). Ms. Jin, and others possessing a similar profile, never mention imagining Western brand advertisements, icons, logos, or phonetic sounds. This group does, however, remain aware of the political significance of this category to other consumers.

DISCUSSION

Western Brand Responses as Political Action Tied to Nation Making

Our emergent theory elaborates processes by which meanings of Western brands are shaped by China's sociohistorical conditions to motivate brand choice as political action tied to nation making. We summarize our theory as follows.

Nation-state governing practices exert influence on consumers' meanings of Western brands and are guided by a particular vision of the future nation-state. In China, this official vision is of a nation that remains open to capitalist markets, encourages conspicuous consumption, and does not promote a division of brands as domestic and foreign, as was the case historically (Croll 2006; Gerth 2008), but rather forges national unity through reviving iconic images and social events from the culture's past (Liu 2004; Wilk 1994). Threats to the official vision prompt governing administrations to use historical referencing practices to legitimate power and amass support (Liu 2004). In China, however, this revived past is also one in which anti-Western values were officially sanctioned (Gerth 2003).

Faced with this state influence, consumers nonetheless possess autonomy. Autonomy is exercised by engaging national narratives to historicize Western brands (Martin 2004). These narratives, as cultural histories that Chinese individuals use to construct and ground their social identity (Gries 2004), embed Western brands in contexts of meaning that draw selectively from past moments and historical referents. Through their use of these national narratives, consumers reinstate consumption categories that mark brands as Western versus domestic, reorganize their meanings in terms of present-day local logics, and wield these categories as instruments for realizing visions of the future nation-state that differ from the official vision (Wilk 1994). Each narrative reconstructs a viable Chinese history, appropriating official governing practices from select moments in the past such that they all claim legitimacy (Friedman 1992b). These appropriations also obscure whether given responses reflect state influence or consumer autonomy. This aids the survival of these identity positions that otherwise might be construed as challenges to state sovereignty and risk censure and penalty. These reconstructed cultural histories reflect Friedman's (1992b, 853) view of social identity as a "game of mirrors" involving "a complex temporal interaction of multiple practices of identification external and internal to a subject or population." Competing national narratives of East-West relationships promote different nationalist identity meanings of Western brands and prescribe different marketplace responses to them.

The tensions stemming from these different nationalist identity meanings render the decision to acquire Western brands meaningful and a form of political action, rather than behavior that at a conscious level is politically meaningless (Campbell 1994). Constituting political action, imagined social legitimacy of consuming Western brands, as opposed to actual experience, is sufficient to constrain or propel future responses (Campbell 1994). As illustrated with the case of Ms. Roma, our theorized process is qualified where consumers' visions of the future nation align with the official vision. To the extent an individual consumer's brand meanings are not challenged, tensions tied to competing meanings of Western brands are mitigated, political meanings atrophy, and Western brands become an end in themselves (Campbell

1994). That is, their consumption is driven by motives unrelated to national identity.

Subjective Meanings of Western Brands

Content Meaning. Western brand meanings are formed by local cultural understandings of China's historical relation to the forces of capitalist globalization along with present discourses of China's future in the global economy. Understanding of the motives for consumption practices must start with understanding consumers' world of subjective meaning and discovery of "how it is divided into units" (Campbell 1994, 45). Our inquiry began as an exploration of the meanings and motives for foreign brand consumption as a historically significant consumption category (Gerth 2003). However, we found that Chinese consumers selectively impute foreignness to brands associated with the West. This is a West of the imaginary that includes dominant nation-state powers in the globalization of capitalist ideology: the United States, Western European nations, but also Japan.

While most Western brands noted by participants qualify as global brands, the concept of Western brands is more narrowly bounded. Except those from Japan, global brands from Asia-Pacific nations were rarely noted. The exclusions may reflect the effectiveness of brand campaigns that cultivate a regional Asia-Pacific identity and market (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008) and that operate in the absence of cultural memories of conflicts. Although a design goal of these campaigns is to elide past conflicts (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008), our participants' view of Japan as a Western "other" suggests that cultural losses are not easily forgotten.

Although Western brands are associated with select nation-states, consumers do not identify them through objective assessment of their origin. Rather, Chinese participants' concept of Western brands reflects localized attempts to creatively deal with the country-of-origin confusion produced by outsourcing practices and complex international chains of assembly. Resolving this confusion, they find the legitimacy of Western brands resides in their global-brand status; that is, Western brands also must be world famous brands. Drawing from local knowledge of quality control measures demanded of exports in postreform China and survival-of-the-fittest notions of capitalism, our participants reason that Western brands must possess higher quality and be technologically superior to domestic brands since they have gained access to China's market. From their perspective, owing to China's protectionist history, very few domestic brands are global brands and thus have not met the same product standards of the international marketplace. The significance of Western brands' global stature is underscored even if challenged by local media stories, noted by our participants, that draw attention to cases in which Western brands exhibit lower quality in China than do the same brands in developed nations. Brand names aid designations of Western brands but are not as defining as attributes of global fame, quality, and technological superiority. This re-

flects local experiences encountering a proliferation of domestic goods branded to convey Westernness and capitalize on presumed positive associations. Responses to translated brand names reflect a practice that Gerth (2008, 41) labels "*nationalistic visuality*, centered on training the eye to identify visual clues and to distinguish between the foreign and the domestic across social life."

Meanings Tied to National Identity and Nation Making. Our findings reveal that Chinese consumers engage the past to imbue Western brands with national identity meanings tied to four different imaginings of the future China. As Wilk (1994) asserts, objects play an active role in constructing images of collective futures because they represent aspirations and create directionality; they make a given future seem concrete. In contests for desired futures, groups engage goods in different ways to stake their claim and convince others of its inevitability (Belk 1992; Wilk 1994, 98). The use of branded goods to materialize the future nation extends research in which consumer goods are engaged to imagine the national past (Peñaloza 2001).

In our study, one vision is that of a future China that becomes transformed through democratic practices. By engaging the narrative of the West as liberator, consumers use this imagined future to reconstruct the past in the present (Friedman 1992b). This appropriated narrative capitalizes on present-day official discourses that espouse the depoliticized nature of Western brands, rendering their consumption constitutive of the spirit of nationalism and essential to promoting the national economy and elevating citizens' standard of living. This narrative draws Western brand meanings from nineteenth-century historical movements that embraced Western goods because they brought with them ideological insights pertaining to democracy (Liu 2004). Summoning this past lends present-day meaning to Western brands as instruments of freedom, voice, and choice, not only in the present economic realm (Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003) but also as tools for realizing political freedom in an imagined future China transformed by new ideas. Contrary to a notion holding that nationalist narratives are synonymous with discourses of protectionism and domestic brand loyalty (Wang and Wang 2007), this narrative encourages global exchange and Western brand consumption. Although it calls upon Western nations for insights tied to improving national circumstances (Western culture as teacher or model), it is not absent nationalistic concerns and sentiments of patriotism. Rather, it reflects a different view of the process of gleaning and asserting political and economic power for the nation-state.

A second vision is a future China that returns to trade protectionism of the prereform period. The narrative of the West as imperialist oppressor projects China's past subjugation of the semicolonial era onto the future. This historical projection heightens fear of a territorially dominated China. This narrative links marketplace invasion to threat of military invasion, through a logic in which profits from Western brands fund Western military operations. Within this narrative, Western brands are demonized for instantiating the

practice of individualistic, conspicuous, and leisure consumption, echoing past criticisms levied in socialist discourses of the Mao administration. The elevation of Mao Zedong as a heroic cultural figure in official state discourses of subsequent administrations that advanced the market-oriented economic reforms renders this past accessible. Leveraging from this past, this narrative emphasizes that these present-day consumer practices mark a divide-and-conquer strategy of Western powers. As this narrative asserts a political agenda of protectionism, ownership claims to physical territory become essential. This narrative represents China's territory as marked with Western brand dominance, as exhibited in homes, on store shelves, and in retail centers within heritage sites. These images render a serious and compelling narrative of an invaded China that facilitates imagined invasion of China's less tangible spaces in the cultural, economic, and political spheres. The narrative resolves the invasion fears by calling for a return to trade protectionism in which, as existed in Mao Zedong's administration, domestic brands once again become the staple of lived experience. Abstinence from Western brand consumption is a political act, marking a call to construct a future China whose physical borders are not transcended by foreign trade.

A third vision is a future China that rises to a dominant position in the global market economy. Emerging from a narrative in which China subjugates the West, this imagined future China guides a reconstruction of the past in terms of the present (Friedman 1992b). The envisioned capitalist expansion of China via the dissemination of China-made brands around the globe is grounded in the selective cultivation and creative combination of China's precommunist, capitalist period with Mao Zedong's (socialist) expansionist aspirations. Here there is also a call to buy China-made goods, yet no protectionism is sought as this constrains the realization of the imagined future China that ascends in the global capitalist economic order. The West-as-subjugated narrative also revitalizes cultural memory of Western military aggression in the past. Yet it transforms the meaning of these losses in terms of present-day circumstances and values (Friedman 1997), faulting these aggressions with China's failure to rise to the top ranks in the global economy. Western brands that possess inferior quality to the same versions sold in other countries or whose local representatives offer poor service are reminiscent of the semicolonial period of humiliation in which China's ports were forcibly opened to foreign trade. Envisioning a future China that has risen to preeminence in the global economy, Western brands are a domain for close censorship to screen those that attempt to reimpose past humiliations.

The fourth vision of the future China is something of an existentialist Chinese nation that is always changing through contact with global forces while remaining distinctively Chinese through grounding in indigenous ways and values. This vision comprises the narrative of the East and West as partners in elevating the conditions of all mankind. Accented in this narrative are the value-added components brought to

the table by each partner. Balancing the West's contribution of technological know-how, this narrative conjures a Chinese heritage grounded in harmony with nature and an appreciation of the elderly and their wisdom. This heritage has been iconized in practices of traditional Chinese medicine, notably a premodern practice and one of China's most renowned exports globally. This practice of locating social identity in ecofriendly or rural pasts that have become valued in the present has also been identified among movements that seek to reinstate indigenous identities (Hawaiian, Native Americans; Friedman 1992b, 1996; see also Manning and Uplisashvili 2007). Leveraging from this heritage, the envisioned future China is one that makes its own distinguished contributions to the world economy while creatively engaging products from abroad in a manner that is uniquely Chinese. Cultural style of consuming and using goods rather than buying China-made goods is the basis of social identity. Much like the official vision of the Chinese nation-state, this narrative works to unify categories of Western brands and domestic goods. Yet, its proponents find themselves defensively lodged against other nationalistic narratives. These proponents' ambivalence toward Western brands is a self-conscious choice that reflects awareness of the national identity politics at stake and the seriousness of brand choice in the eyes of fellow citizens (Friedman 1997).

Obscured State Influence and Consumer Autonomy

Consumers' selective appropriations of nation-state ideologies drawing from different time periods and governing practices obscures whether Western brand meanings (and marketplace responses) reflect state coercion or consumer autonomy. This obscurity is not inconsequential. Throughout history and across cultures, the emergence of a competing view of cultural identity has implied the fragmentation of a larger unity that is always experienced as a threat (Friedman 1992b). The threat resides in the use of cultural identities to claim visions of the future nation-state (Friedman 1992b; Wilk 1994). Such threats are often criminalized and punished (Friedman 1992b). The legitimacy claimed by linking to discourses of governing administrations perhaps reveals a cultural adaptation. Social penalties for violating consumption norms associated with nationalism as has occurred in China's history (Gerth 2003) seem avoidable to the extent that all choices hold meanings of nationalism.

As differing visions of a future China are similarly legitimized through links to the past (Friedman 1992b; Wilk 1994), they contend with each other. Notwithstanding the noted rural/urban differences in narratives, we see this contention not as one that emerges from a hierarchy of social order in which some visions of China and their constitutive identity and brand meanings are privileged as emanating from a group of cultural elite (Friedman 1997). Rather, our multiple narratives emerged from a participant group that was homogenous with respect to age, education, and professional status. These groups seem better represented as "a

puddle of different colors of paint, with little vertical order . . . [that] only blend at their margins. Any attempt to rise out of the puddle is met with opposition" (Wilk 1994, 111).

The puddle mitigates select national narratives from socializing individuals' responses to Western brands as something of a routine, national civic ritual. Nationalist narratives if uncontested may serve much like a ritual script in that they offer prescriptions for individuals' marketplace behavior (Rook 1985). As ritual repeats received ideas (McCreery 1995), an individual reacting to a Western brand offering in a manner prescribed by a nationalist narrative is engaged in a civic ritual performance role that makes use of brands as ritual artifacts. However, in the face of competing narratives that prescribe different responses to Western brands, the performance does not become routine and political meanings do not atrophy (Campbell 1994). The most striking voices indicative of this tension were participants who spontaneously defended Western brand choice as good for China and the Chinese people. In the absence of narratives that disseminate values of protectionism and domestic brand loyalty, such defenses would be unnecessary. These defenses suggest that a heightened drama becomes attached to Western brand consumption through the tensions posed by competing narratives.

This drama is further accentuated through narratives that heighten the seriousness of brand choice by highlighting its social consequences. Prior consumer research treats assertions of national identity as experiences of solidarity with fellow citizens achieved through expressing similar consumer tastes and values (Mick and Buhl 1992). For our Chinese participants, Western brands were not mere symbolic identity markers. Rather, Western brand choice emerged as important to the cultural, economic, or militaristic security and survival of the nation-state. Consumers' political use of Western brands to assert social identity emerges as a "deadly serious" contest reflecting that the historical conditions in which social identity is grounded are deadly serious matters (Friedman 1996, 128).

Our emergent theory lends itself to applications and extensions in other cultures that offer theoretically relevant contextual differences. Historical movements to buy national products have been noted in India, Nigeria, Korea, Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and the United States (Gerth 2003). These histories and the ways cultures reconstruct them today (Friedman 1992b) would extend the insights offered here into consumers' shaping of brand meanings in acts of nation making. Further, as recent research notes that commercial producers of brands also forge imaginings of the nation-state (Cayla 2009; Manning and Uplisashvili 2007; Mathew 2009; Zhao and Belk 2009), research assessing the ways these constructions interact with governing practices and local narratives would add a layer of complexity to our findings.

In conclusion, to limit explanations for responses to Western brands in China, or in other developing or transitioning countries, to either emulation of Western tastes and lifestyles or to mere symbolic gestures of resistance is to miss the

serious historical underpinnings and future directedness of consumers' motives. By highlighting how Western brands are used in contests for national identity, we provide a partial answer to Gries's (2004) inquiry as to whether Chinese nationalists today allow for a Sino-Western space where Chinese can love China without hating the West. We find that in the multifarious versions of nationalism and visions of the future China, there is this possibility.

APPENDIX

BRANDS OF NATION MAKING IN CHINA: THE HISTORICAL EMBELLISHMENT AND USE OF WESTERN BRANDS TO ASSERT CHINESE NATIONALISM

This supplemental photographic portfolio and analysis (available in the online version of the *Journal of Consumer Research*) shows how iconic images from China's history are revived and reconstructed in ways that shape meanings of Western brands and their relationship to notions of Chinese nationalism. These historical images traverse the opium wars of 1839–42 and 1856–60, through former Chairman Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966–76), up until Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms toward a market-driven economy. Our analysis reveals that consumers' revivals of select historical images and icons to shape meanings of Western brands are driven by their preferred imaginings of the future China.

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