Introduction: Talking to Strangers

Few observers would hesitate to characterize Chinese society as a *shuren shehui*, or a society of kith and kin held together by familial bonds, social ties, and patronage networks. Yet the economic reforms of the past decades have dramatically scrambled the webs of familiarity and thrown more and more strangers into proximity in big urban centers and small townships alike. How to relate to a person with whom you share no past and cannot foresee or desire a common future? Traditional Confucian ethics, with its preoccupation with the hierarchical institutions of family and state, provide little guidance in this gray zone of sociability. Socialist ethics, on the other hand, go to the extreme of abolishing the very possibility of strangerhood by substituting "comradeship," a political solidarity that ostensibly binds all citizens into a self-same peoplehood. Those who don't belong to the people are not mere strangers, but "enemies."

With the dismantling of the socialist planned economy and the waning of Marxist ideology, the problem of how to associate with strangers has become ever more urgent. Intermittent outbreaks of moral scandals have sent the media and the wired public into paroxysms of self-flagellation. The latest such eruption was triggered by a roadside security camera video, which captured two consecutive hit-and-run incidents in a narrow market street that left a toddler girl named Yueyue lying in a pool of blood, crushed, inert, and ignored by over a dozen passers-by. At last a ragpicker came along and brought her to the hospital where she shortly thereafter died.[1] Shocking episodes like this are considered of a piece with the more endemic problems of official corruption, resurgent social vices (prostitution, drugs, and human trafficking), and marketplace malfeasance that harms mainly unknown strangers (fake and faulty consumer products, tainted medicine, and adulterated foodstuffs)—all as telltale signs of a collective race to the moral bottom. Inevitably, social critics would sound the alarm—louder than ever before with the explosive expansion of the

Internet—about a collapsed moral bottom line, and their jeremiads have been a constant motif in public discourse since the 1980s (Deng Xiaomang 2010, 263–64; Yunxiang Yan 2011, 47–62; 2012). Amid the lamentations would come, equally predictably, the call to bring back Lei Feng (1940–62), Mao's model soldier and China's proud answer to the biblical Good Samaritan.[2] For all the terrible memories about the Mao era eagerly put behind, Lei Feng has never been more fondly remembered and the "Lei Feng Spirit" (*Lei Feng jingshen)* is embraced as the salve for China's moral ulcer. Every March the whole nation, goaded by the state with a regime of tangible and intangible rewards, goes into overdrive to "learn from Lei Feng" (*xuexi Lei Feng*). And yet moral scandals continue to jolt the collective conscience, further entrenching the perception of moral decay.

This book takes seriously the pervasive discourse of moral crisis in contemporary Chinese society instead of dismissing it as merely smoke and mirrors conjured up by a paternalistic, overwrought, and grandstanding intelligentsia. It bucks the trends in the North American academe that have for decades been drawn to identity politics at the expense of attending to the moral dimensions of quotidian life where power relations are amorphous and victimhood is difficult to champion. I contend that the perception of crisis is itself indicative of a deeper problem that has roots in both the Confucian tradition of kinship sociality and the modern state management of stranger sociality. In particular, I turn the post-Mao conventional wisdom on its head by arguing that the Lei Feng Spirit is not the antidote to China's moral crisis but rather a contributing cause as well as a symptom. To put it somewhat crudely, the problem is not too little Lei Feng Spirit but too much. Mao's model soldier has for too long furnished the alibi for the state-sponsored suspension of stranger sociality and the attendant atrophy of the moral imagination. Instead, the book argues, hope lies in the emerging civil society in which the moral faculty is exercised in face-to-face encounters and where ethical sensibilities are burnished in storytelling, especially in stories about strangers who wander into "our" midst.

Fear and Hope in China

In September 2009, a large signboard erected by the Hankou police outside the city's main train station caused considerable consternation in the Chinese mediasphere. It read: "Don't talk to strangers; beware of swindlers" (*Qing buyao dali moshengren wenhua, jinfang shangdang shoupian*) (Fig. I.1). The local

FIG. 1.1. Op-Art by Tang Chuncheng. Hankou Train Station police warning: "Don't talk to strangers" (source: People.com.cn. 15 September 2009, http://opinion.people.com.cn/GB/10059801.html).

newspaper reported that when a man from the northeast got off the train and asked for directions, people shook their heads and directed his attention to the signboard instead. He told the reporter that he was very hurt by the sign, on top of being frustrated by not getting any help.[3] In cyberspace, a debate broke out about the pros and cons of such a sign. While some defended the police's good intentions and no-nonsense approach to law and order in a society in flux, many found the sign troubling for what it unmistakably implied: that everyone is a potential menace to everyone else and that trust is officially outlawed as a currency of sociality.[4] One critic noted the tremendous irony of such a sign appearing in a country that prides itself as "a land of rites and etiquette" (*liyi zhi bang*) in which helping others (*zhuren weile*) is supposed to be a national virtue. In his view, the sign has not only hurt the feeling of the hapless northeasterner but has also sent a chill down the spine of every one of "us," for everyone can end up a stranger somewhere sometime: "Perhaps it can help reduce the number of travelers who are victimized by talking to strangers, but what it has poisoned in the meantime is the virtue of mutual reliance, trust, and help and the 5000-year-old Chinese civilization."[5]

Others found it jarring that an admonition customarily given to children by Western parents has been adopted by an arm of the Chinese state toward its cit-

izens. The government is not only infantilizing the people, but also shifting its policing responsibility onto the shoulders of individual citizens, turning each into a vigilant crime-fighter and society into a war of all against all. At the same time, it also magnifies governmental power in suggesting that anyone in need of assistance should turn to the police, instead of fellow citizens, hence binding the populace vertically to the state while vitiating horizontal ties and the civil society they bind together. The back of the signboard may well declare: "Trust no one but the government."

But even the harshest critics acknowledged that the sign was a response to a real upswing in the reform era of criminal cases involving unsuspecting strangers taken in by swindlers that typically take place in mass transit centers. The 2003 film *Blind Shaft* (*Mangjing*) (Li Yang 2003) captures the pervasive sense of lawlessness: two con men hang about the train station of a provincial capital scoping out their next victim—usually some peasant migrant freshly arrived in the city in search of work and livelihood. Once they identify a target, they convince the stranger to pass as a relation and follow them to an illicit, shoddy coal mine where he is hired as a new hand at the recommendation of his "uncle." The con artists then scheme to kill the "nephew" in the mine shaft under the cover of an accident, in order to make off with the compensation money as his only surviving kin. The general scenario seems to vindicate the Hankou police signboard: talk to strangers and woe unto you. Yet the way the main episode unfolds also gives the lie to the official vision of society. The fake "uncle" finds himself slowly taking a liking to his latest prey, a naive teenager who is all too eager to treat the con men as adoptive uncles. As (fictive) kinship affections are called into existence by the masquerade, the stranger sociality that characterizes the modern condition is redeemed, however feebly and fleetingly. In this sense the film also talks back to the state: between strangers there is more than just malice. The film ends on a highly ironic note: as the "uncle" hesitates to execute the plan, the teenager manages to escape, leaving the two men trapped behind and coming into a minor windfall paid out by the nonchalant manager for his "uncle's" "accidental" death.[6]

The film is a remarkable probe into the precarious state of stranger sociality and its intersection with kinship sociality through the trope of fictive kinship. In *Empire of Love*, anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) meditates on the dialectics of kinship sociality and stranger sociality between the two worlds that she inhabits: the indigenous community in the Northern Territory of Australia (her fieldwork site) and the progressive queer community in the United

States. Whereas the former is based on thick, face-to-face kinship ties, the latter is structured by contractual, transitory, and individual-oriented relationships between strangers. The twin concepts overlap a good deal with such sociological staples as tradition/modernity, Gemeinschaft/Geselleschaft, country/city, and folk society/urban society. But unlike these familiar dichotomies, which have more or less outlived their usefulness, Povinelli's concepts are particularly pertinent to the Chinese search for the cause and solution of social ills that seem always to boil down to the loss of "trust" (*chengxin*) among strangers in contemporary life (see Wang Xuetai 2012).

In his important study of the problem of trust, Adam Seligman distinguishes "trust" from "faith" and "confidence." Whereas faith is hinged on the ultimate unknowability of the divine, confidence pertains to the reliability of "systematically defined role expectations" (Seligman 1997, 25), which in traditional society are largely *ascribed* by religion, kinship, and territorial proximity. In modern society, however, these are mostly *achieved* through institutions of exchange and contract (market and politics). Too often confidence is conflated with trust, which is predicated on the ontological freedom of the other and exists in the open spaces beyond institutionally prescribed and enforced role performances. In other words, trust is relevant only where "the acts, character, or intentions of the other cannot be confirmed," and "when one has not the capabilities to apprehend or check on the other and so has no choice but to trust" (21). Trust takes on special salience in modernity for two reasons: the breakup of primordial forms of social organization and the greater differentiation of social roles attendant upon the greater division of labor. The former necessitates the search for a new foundation in which to root the social order in order to address the inherent but also greatly magnified indeterminacy of social life. The multiplication of roles means that their fulfillment is subject more than ever to negotiation, interpretation, and contingency, thus augmenting the "opaqueness of other's intentions and calculations" (43).

Sociologists have characterized traditional China as a low-trust society to stress the centrality of kinship and territorial ties as structuring principles of social, political, and moral life, and the corresponding marginality of mutual promise-keeping in the interstices of institutionalized roles (Fei 1992; Fukuyama 1995; Seabright 2004; Yunxiang Yan 2011, 59). The Chinese moral landscape seems starkly demarcated into the cozy oases of kinship sociality and the barren deserts of stranger sociality. Strangers, of course, have always been around, especially in a universal empire with a mobile population and

robust commercial economy. In her study of how traditional vernacular novels respond to the challenge of how groups "hang together" on bases other than blood and familiarity in late imperial China, Tina Lu (2008) highlights the novelistic ambition to map the empire in its vastness with a large cast of characters. This, however, is often overshadowed by an anxiety over "peculiar encounters" when there is no guarantee that a stranger will not turn out to be a long lost relation. The threat to kinship morality is palpably felt in the dreaded scenarios of "accidental incest" and "filial cannibalism." Wariness toward strangers seems to outstrip delight and fascination.

It should be said that the Chinese are none so peculiar in their proclivity to feel sympathetic concern for kinfolk, friends, and infants—recall Mencius's oft-cited proof of human goodness in our inability to stand by while a child is about to fall into a well—but withhold it from strangers, foreigners, and nonhuman species (except fuzzy, cute animals) (Pinker 2011, 581). Nonetheless, the primacy of what Qingping Liu calls "consanguinitism" (2003) or what Francis Fukuyama calls "patrimonialism" (2011) does distinguish Chinese society from European and South Asian societies dominated by powerful religious institutions that tend to loosen the hold of clans and lineages on individual loyalty. In her comparative study of sociability and gender relations in Chinese and Greek antiquities, Yiqun Zhou observes a fundamental divergence in the relative salience of the domestic and public sphere: "If the ancient Greek family saw an extension of the public values of competition and egalitarianism into the domestic domain, in ancient China the same principle of hierarchy (based on generation, sex, and age) underlying the functioning of the patrilineal family was extended to govern the operation of society and polity" (2010, 324). The habits of thought that enshrined the family as the paradigmatic social institution and that mapped kinship dynamics onto the social and political terrains persisted in the long course of Chinese history, giving rise to what might be called "the tyranny of the familial metaphor." Nonascriptive collectivities from the empire or the nation to the workplace have been routinely analogized as "an extended family" presided over by rulers and officials *in loco parentis* (Deng Xiaomang 2010, 16). From dynastic times to the postsocialist era, the ruling elites have deployed the familial metaphor to deny the discontinuity between family and society and to inhibit the growth of an autonomous civil society that is an extension of neither the family nor the state.

The tyranny of the familial metaphor has also had the effect of orienting scholarly writings on Chinese ethics to the traditional family system as the cit-

adel of Confucian morality, whereas patterns of indifference, dishonesty, and mistrust toward strangers are skirted for fear of straying into the essentialist minefield of "national character" (*guominxing*) or "quality" (*suzhi*). Alternatively, the sorry state of stranger sociality is chalked up to the iconoclasm of the May Fourth generation, the depredations of the Cultural Revolution, or the ravages of consumer capitalism. In non-Chinese language scholarship, there has been relatively little sustained engagement with Fei Xiaotong's contention (1992) that there is no all-encompassing moral principle in the Confucian tradition that governs both kinship sociality and stranger sociality and that might override "the differential mode of association" (*chaxu jiegou*). An exception is Norman Kutcher's (2000) work on the Confucian notion of friendship, which he argues is a marginal mode of sociability that sits uneasily on the moral map and can potentially become the vehicle of resistance or rebellion. However, be it elite bosom companionship (*zhiji*) or plebian blood brotherhood (*jiebai xiongdi*), friendship is typically ritualized as fictive kinship, so that rather than recognizing the anomaly and legitimacy of a sui generis relationship, it serves to obfuscate or negate the limits of the hierarchical system. To that extent it does not underwrite an alternative stranger sociality based on trust, which does not and often cannot rely on the fulfillment of role expectations. Within China, Liu Qingping (1999) and Deng Xiaomang are among the most vocal in faulting Confucian ethics for subordinating universal justice to kinship solidarity and for blunting the edge of the interstitial space of "rivers and lakes" (*jianghu*) where some men were "brothers" and others were fair game (2010, 3–42, 266).

If Confucianism did not provide unequivocal guidance on how to interact with strangers, the modernizing elites of the twentieth century have taken upon themselves precisely to fill the lacuna with imported or reinvented classical concepts such as *gong* (public), *qun* or *shehui* (society), *minzu* (race, nationality), *renmin* (people), *guojia* (nation), *shijie* (world), *gongmin* (citizen), *renxing* (human nature, humanity). These abstract, overarching entities have become the keystones for the Enlightenment principles of patriotism, cosmopolitanism, citizenship, justice, and human rights, instructing the Chinese on how they should relate to one another in spirit and conduct beyond the ties of blood and soil. The problem of trust is thus bound up with that of civil society, a framework in which waning confidence in the system can be made up for by mutual promise-keeping and mutual regard. If civil society and its attendant virtues of civility have been found wanting in much of the modern century—that is, the problem of "uncivil society" spoken of by some social sci-

entists (Yunxiang Yan 2003)—it is not for lack of reformist drives and intellectual hand-wringing.[7] In sociological and political science scholarship, "uncivil society" is associational life gone terribly awry, unable to check the illiberal, violent excesses as the by-product of liberal democracy's formal commitment to pluralism (Boyd 2004). In the Chinese context, by contrast, the term refers to the feeble state of civil society under the double weight of patrimonialism and socialist governmentality, with "uncivil" standing for indifference or cruelty. The borrowing is justified insofar as both kinds of uncivil society engender a state of anomie.

China scholars have generally looked with bemusement on official "spiritual civilization" campaigns, such as the 1930s New Life Movement (Dirlik 1975), the 1980s "socialist ethics and courtesy month" (Dirlik 1982), and the 1990s campaign to promote "civilized and polite speech" (*weming limao yongyu*) composed of "five courteous phrases"—"hello, please, thank you, sorry, and good-bye" (Erbaugh 2008). These courtesies of daily life, as Seligman et al. (2008, 21) have pointed out, are minor ritual invocations intended to conjure up an illusion of equality in casual encounters where knowledge of the relative statuses of the parties is either absent or irrelevant. They are meant to replace traditional hierarchy-marking etiquette. However, because these phrases are underwritten by a radically new vision of the social world as a world of strangers, they have long been resisted and even ridiculed as exotic and affected by ordinary Chinese (consider the common taunt thrown at foreigners in the street: "hello!"). The campaign to make status-independent politesse part of everyday speech amounted to an officially sponsored tutorial on stranger sociality. Dirlik contends that the emphasis on individual behavior is a symptom of the inability and unwillingness to confront structural contradictions intensified in the reform era (1982, 373). The larger context here, however, is the remission of class struggle, the rapid growth of cities, and the shifting regime of socialist governmentality. This is a context that has deep institutional roots and ideological fortifications, and has everything to do with how the state has sought to remake the citizenry, redefine belonging, and restructure duties and obligations, as well as how individual players have submitted to, questioned, or resisted state prescriptions.

Seligman argues that the quest for a political community on the basis not of blood but of mutual promise-keeping, or trust, has dominated modern societies for the past two centuries, even since modernity edged aside the society of kith and kin with the society of strangers (Seligman 1997, 15). How

strangers are exhorted, guided, or permitted to relate to one another is thus a question critical to our understanding of contemporary Chinese society as the processes of migration and urbanization throw more and more strangers together and as its internal fissions grow apace with its external ambitions. English-language scholarship on the changing contours of the Chinese moral landscape has been relatively thin, in stark contrast to the degree to which the question of morality and trust has dominated public discourse in China for years (see, for example, Deng Xiaomang 2007, 2010; Guo Qiyong 2004; Liu Zhifeng 2001; Mao Yushi 2003; Wang Xuetai 2012; Zheng Jiadong 1992; Zheng Yefu 2006). Studies of the modernization process and its manifold ramifications—national consolidation, collectivization, social reforms, uneven development, and so on—have shed light on a radically transformed world in which state imperatives routinely bear down on "the differential mode of association." But few of these studies have drawn out the moral implications, at the personal level of trust, of the nation-state-building process and the colonization of private life by an all-consuming and all-encompassing public political life during high socialism.

The rise of identity politics in the latter half of the twentieth century has engendered a great deal of scholarship sensitive to the plight of the marginal and disadvantaged, be they women, ethnic minorities, immigrants, or homosexuals. Much of this scholarship is concerned with the problem of justice, social or poetic, whereby the driving question is usually whether the subaltern other is treated fairly by social institutions or given a voice in representations, or to what extent the agency or subjectivity of the other is trimmed by racism, ethnocentrism, misogyny, or Orientalism. Seldom explored is the simultaneously destabilizing and regenerative power of alterity, a question that nonetheless preoccupies contemporary moral and political theorists endeavoring to address the challenges of immigration and globalization (Ahmed 2000; Amin, 2012; Appiah 2006; Bauman 2000; Derrida 2000; Honig 2001; Kristeva 1991; Taylor 2007; Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard 2005). If strangers have been a constant reality since the dawn of modernity, cultural producers from fiction writers to filmmakers have had diverse resources to draw on in shaping social imaginaries about how to deal with heterogeneous "others" *at one's doorstep*. For this reason, students of literature have much to contribute to the contemporary colloquy on strangers.

In delineating the social imaginaries of stranger sociality across a wide range of genres, this study hopes to cast a new light on issues such as gender,

class, racism, humanism, biopolitics, and governmentality, and in the process contribute to ongoing deliberations on secularism, citizenship, social justice, civil society, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Methodologically, it synthesizes relevant insights from the extensive but seldom overlapping scholarship in moral and political philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and literary and cultural studies. Only a rigorously interdisciplinary approach, I believe, is adequate to the task of constructing a genealogy of stranger sociality in modern China.

Strangers: A Group Biography

Let me state at the outset that this study is not a survey of Chinese representations of the Other in the usual cultural studies sense. Rather, it is concerned with a very particular kind of other: the stranger. Georg Simmel defines the stranger as a hybrid of the wanderer and the settler: "the wanderer who comes today and stays tomorrow—the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going" (1971, 143). He is also a synthesis of the insider and outsider: "[He] does not belong in [a group] initially and. . . he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it. . . . The stranger is an element of the group itself, not unlike the poor and sundry 'inner enemies'—an element whose membership within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it" (143–44). Simmel's typical example of a stranger is the Jewish trader in European history, who traditionally owns no land and is restricted to intermediary trade and pure finance—professions associated with mobility (144–45). Because the stranger is not confined by "custom, piety, or precedent" (146), he is considered to possess a degree of neutrality and objectivity not possible among the "natives," and is often entrusted with power as well as intimate revelations and confidences. His objectivity also confers on him a kind of freedom that, under adverse circumstances, easily turns into disloyalty. The stranger is thus also a source of danger, frequently morphing into a foreign emissary and agitator and being scapegoated as such.

The stranger is a stranger not because of any intrinsic personality traits but because of his (here I follow Simmel's masculinist convention) alien origin and outsider status, something he shares with others like him. Although a singular figure, he is necessarily defined collectively and perceived not as an individual but as the embodiment of a type. Again, Simmel gives the example of European

Jewry. In the Middle Ages, taxes levied on Christians varied according to their fluctuating fortune, but Jews paid a fixed head tax, for "the Jew as a taxpayer was first of all a Jew," not an individual with specific fiscal circumstances that needed to be assessed accordingly (149). Thus the stranger is always defined vis-à-vis a collectivity: the country, the city, the faith, the race, the family. However, he becomes a stranger only by an act of spatial transgression: he must wander into "our" midst and stay indefinitely; he must desire to become one of "us" and aspire to "our" way of life. If he had stayed with his own people, he would have been merely one of the "barbarians" out there beyond the pale and in many ways beneath notice. He may be grist for the exoticist imagination, but rarely a catalyst in a morality play.

In other words, the stranger is not the generic other, but the other within. Zygmunt Bauman calls him "the alien next door" who unites physical proximity with social distance. By social distance, Bauman means the paucity of knowledge about an unknown other: "The 'strangeness' of strangers means precisely our feeling of being lost, of not knowing how to act and what to expect, and the resulting unwillingness of engagement" (1993, 149). For Seligman, the stranger signifies the absence of "familiarity," or shared strong evaluations in moral questions. Nonetheless, the stranger has ventured into the radius of physical proximity and, for whatever purposes (commerce, work, love, or conquest), has intended to settle down as a neighbor, or "neighborly alien" (ibid. 1993, 153). Interaction with strangers is both unavoidable and erratic for want of rules of engagement. Most often, it amounts to a kind of "mismeeting" in which one strives for a state of "civil indifference," so that the physical space in which one moves does not have to turn into an intimate social space (154–55). Bauman believes that living with strangers is the very condition of modernity. With the intermixing of populations in urban milieus, physical proximity and social proximity no longer coincide. In our deracinated state, we routinely intrude into the physical space of those with whom we do not share strong evaluations on vital moral questions and do not wish to socialize beyond routine "mismeeting." Modernity renders everyone a stranger in some capacity. And yet the modern nation requires not a community of strangers but one of (imaginary) family members. The modern individual jealously guards the freedom to lose oneself in the anonymous sea of strangers while yearning for the embrace of an intimate community. Modern literature is centrally preoccupied with this dilemma.

The universality of strangerhood, however, should not be reduced to the

universality of the self-other relation. Rebecca Saunders points out that "to speak of the 'other' is, in a sense, to decontextualize from everyday discourse in order to carry out our analysis in the clean, well-lit space of theory" (2003, x). In her view, scholars who have investigated the specific figure of "the foreigner" have done much to illuminate the ways in which the foreigner configures the collective self and is configured (and sometimes ejected) in turn. In the broadest sense, the foreigner is the quintessential stranger. Yet I prefer the term "the stranger" to "the foreigner" because the latter is usually narrowly conceived of in opposition to state citizenship thanks to the hegemonic global system of nation-states: "[A] foreigner is a noncitizen" (5). The stranger allows us to see alternative, marginal, or soft boundaries that do not always align with national boundaries: ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, native place, kinship, language, religion, and species, to name just the most common principles of cementing solidarity in modern times.

None of these solidarities is possible without the stranger standing simultaneously outside and confronting them *and* within and striving to belong to them. Migration and globalization have engendered large numbers of voluntary and involuntary strangers who find themselves in belonging structures where they are not "at home." These are the people who are afflicted with "belonging trouble," people for whom *jus soli* and *jus sanguinus* do not coincide (ibid., 25). Stranger sociality is thus the inescapable modern condition, and how strangers are perceived and dealt with touches the core of modern communities in all their overlapping diversity and self-conscious fragility. The stranger is the quintessential Derridean supplement, both indispensable to and necessarily disavowed by the collective self, both feared and desired, both distrusted and admired, both a source of clarification and a source of compromise, both an agent of destruction and an agent of hope. Bauman uses the phrase "the stranger's aporia" (1993, 159) to capture the semantic and evaluative ambivalence toward the stranger. In the same way that dirt is matter out of place, the stranger is a person out of place who blurs the categories that ground the order of things; as such he is the gathering point for the risks and fears that accompany the mixing of disparate populations.

Invariably, strangers have been managed through a combination of "phagic" and "emic" strategies (ibid., 163), or incorporation and ejection. In traditional societies structured by kinship sociality, the two types of individuals who routinely traverse boundaries are women and service providers of all stripes (priests, healers, midwives, matchmakers, peddlers, yamen runners, actors,

prostitutes, and so on). They are also the ones who are associated with unclean substances that "pollute" the self in giving the lie to the self-sufficiency of the (collective) ego, by virtue of being exchange objects and of itinerancy. While the servitors tend to be subject to the emic strategy, women are typically absorbed into patrilineal kinship as its indispensible supplement. Both, moreover, are placed under a host of taboos and exorcisms mobilized to manage their "pollution." Both are frequently conflated with apparitions: ghosts, gods, and animal spirits. A good home must guard itself against these dangerous beings even if it cannot dispense with their services. In the same way that women's reproductive capacity is under erasure in the patrilineal discourse of male fertility (Sangren 2000), the petty professionals are placed beneath the four commoner classes (scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants) as the "mean" people. When association with strangers is unavoidable, the rhetoric of fictive kinship is used to contain the risk attendant on the absence of familiarity. Business associates, fellow scholars, and bandit cohorts, for example, are wont to consolidate their bonds with native place solidarity or sworn brotherhood—something more binding and freighted with stronger role expectations than casual acquaintanceship. Children are instructed to address nonrelated adults as uncles and aunties or grandpas and grandmas. Fictive kinship mitigates risk and transaction cost in a low trust society, for strangers are not allowed to remain strangers but are instead interpellated and incorporated phagically as fictive kinsmen and called upon to abide by the role expectations of consanguinity. In Paul Seabright's words, they are treated as "honorary relatives or friends" (2004, 28). A breach of such expectations is regarded as consequential as a breach of the most sacred of moral codes: kinship loyalty. In sum, traditional societies have found kinship an effective means of incorporating strangers, at least those who cannot be kept at bay from familial/communal structures.

Modernity, however, has by and large replaced kinship- and locality-based principles of identity with the more or less universal categories of citizenship, and created new types of strangers whose equivocal status is more than ever symptomatic of the fluid and contested nature of modern communities. The city has emerged as the paradigmatic site of stranger sociality where people experiment with new modes of sociability, most notably romance and friendship, though kinship and native place ties remain resilient while the former often prove transient and disappointing. Indeed, Chinese print media in the first half of the twentieth century was full of sensational stories about botched romantic experiments and broken friendships in the swinging coastal cities that were

magnets to provincial youth (Goodman 2006, 2009, 2005). In the second half of the twentieth century, the socialist state sought to regulate stranger sociality with the institution of the work unit (*danwei*), which bound its employees to the state through a cradle-to-grave welfare regime and thereby effectively extended traditional (fictive) kinship to the scale of a socialist microuniverse of production, consumption, housing, education, and healthcare. Confidence in the system was to be so complete that trust was a nonissue, or so hoped the state. The upshot was "a world without strangers" (Deng Xiaomang 2010, 267) and the corollary atrophy of civility and loss of the art of mismeeting. "A [modern] variant on the lineage group" in the view of one Chinese commentator (Dutton 1998, 45), the work unit was a cocoon in which no one needed to worry about having to deal with errant strangers, and in which no stranger was likely to become the source of change, for good or for ill. Any individual who did not belong properly to a work unit was nonetheless not allowed to fall through the cracks, as he or she would come under the jurisdiction of the neighborhood committee, whereby retired or underemployed women kept a vigilant watch over those who were adrift in "society" (Bray 2005, 100; Dutton 1998, 108). The peasant population were similarly immobilized geographically and administratively via the *hukou* household registration system, except that they were not entitled to many government public goods provisions. They were thus more like distant "barbarians" than strangers until they began to pour into the cities during the reform era.

Socialist governmentality did not just segregate the population geographically into urbanites and ruralites. Ideologically, as citizenship was increasingly defined in terms of class belonging, the most salient division was between the oppressor/exploitative classes and the oppressed/exploited classes, or between capitalists and landlords on the one hand and workers and peasants on the other. In this reckoning, the "class enemies" were strangers to the socialist nation who defiled its ideological purity and threatened its security, and thus must be cleansed and expurgated from the body politic. They were strangers not in the classical sociological sense, as most of them were as autochthonous as their victims. Instead, they were ideologically estranged or spectralized through the *chengfen* system of class designations in a society that had outlawed contingent strangerhood. *Chengfen* turned a person's past relations to the means of production into a hereditary identity label that served to obscure emerging class stratifications intrinsic to the socialist political economy and its vast, albeit volatile, bureaucratic machinery. Seldom recognized is the fact that

the postrevolution class formation significantly eased the nation's transition from the socialist command economy to the market economy with the Party elites (at least those who survived the purges) metamorphosing into bureaucratic capitalists. At the same time, the occultation of this emergent class formation accounts for much of the nostalgia for a supposedly more wholesomely "egalitarian" time.

The centrality of "class" (defined by past relations of production) at the political level made the class enemy the most persecuted stranger in socialist China. By contrast, ethnicity was depoliticized and disallowed to define collective identity under the policy of "solidarity of the nationalities" (*minzu tuanjie*) (Bulag 2002). The ethnic minorities in the vast borderlands of China who in recent years have sought to politicize their identities did not in the early socialist decades impinge on the majoritarian consciousness as internal others to be feared and loathed. Notwithstanding the recent riots involving Tibetans and Uyghurs, the state has kept a tight lid on images and narratives that might stoke ethnic animosity and the production of new categories of strangers along ethnic lines. Even in parts of the country where minorities and the Han majority have settled in mixed neighborhoods and intermarried for a long time, ethnic difference is rarely permitted to rise above the level of local exoticism and is rarely the fulcrum of *j'accuse* narratives about past suffering or present conflict.

In the state-controlled culture industry, encompassing education as well as literature and the arts, there has been a two-track system for Han and ethnic minorities, ensuring minimum friction and maximum social distancing.[8] In official propaganda, the minority nationalities are the brothers and sisters of the majority Han people; their diversely colorful cultures and traditions are a testament to the capaciousness of the multiethnic family-nation. Rhetorical inclusion and practical exclusion have therefore had the combined effect of depoliticizing ethnic difference and preventing minority groups from becoming the other within at the level of representation and to a lesser extent that of day-to-day experience. Ethnicity, which in many parts of the world is the primary fault line of social division, is subsumed under official fictive kinship and managed by the paternalistic state as a domestic sibling affair. Few minority figures—other than exiled (and putatively separatist) leaders such as the Dalai Lama—have dominated Han consciousness as objects of fear and suspicion or been featured in representations as internal enemies or foreign agents. This holds true even in the postsocialist period when ethnic tensions in borderland regions have on occasion escalated into bloody riots. Representationally, the