35. Ibid.
36. Zhou Xiaohong 1998:193.
37. Song 2000:94, 228.
38. Tong 1995:94.
39. Tong 1995; Wang and Guo 1993:31–35; Liu 1995:199–200.
40. Tong 1995:103–4.
41. "Culturedness" here means "modesty" and "refinement."
42. Lin 1999; Shen 1999; Wen and Ma 1991:224.
43. Bai 1998:1.
44. See also Gladney 1994.
45. Chatterjee cited in Parker et al. 1992:6.
46. See Clarke 1999; Cook 1996; Finnane 1996.
47. See Liu Li 1998; Zhou 2001.
48. This title is a reference to the title of Pun's 1999 article.
49. Butler 1993.
50. See introduction, this volume.
51. The latter is a strip show performed under the influence of the drug Ecstasy. After dosing, the performer cannot stop shaking her head and dancing until the drug wears off.
52. Bourdieu 1984:57.
53. Information in this chart is drawn from interviews with more than a hundred hostesses and participant observations in hostesses' everyday life.
54. Bourdieu 1984; Ellen 1988.
55. Cheng 1999; Li 1999.
56. In reality, police did stop them on the street demanding a display of their TRCs. However, they were extremely reluctant to admit the fact that their hyperbolic "modern" appearance gave their identity away.
57. See Brownell 1995.
58. Baudrillard 1997 (1981). He argues that consumption is more important for its symbolic meaning than for its instrumental use. See also Liechty 1995. Lietchy argues that individuals use consumption to construct their imaginative identities, to draw social boundaries and improve group solidarity.
59. Ellen 1988:229.
60. Yang 1994.

Wanning Sun

3. Indoctrination, Fetishization, and Compassion: Media Constructions of the Migrant Woman

THE STORY OF AN ANHUI WORKING SISTER / AN INTRODUCTION

>> Hong Zhaodi[1] is a twenty-year-old woman from a village in Suxian county, Anhui province. She, her parents, and two brothers live off the land. Poverty forced her to drop out of school at the age of thirteen. In early 1998 she heard from one of her friends that an acquaintance named Liu Feng ran a factory in Guangzhou and was looking for someone to do the bookkeeping. Seeing this as a way to get herself and her family out of poverty, Hong left home and traveled south. After arriving in Guangzhou, Hong was taken to see her prospective boss. Little did she know that she was heading for hell. She was hired, but on June 12, 1998, Liu told Hong that she was to work as a prostitute. She refused. Liu then kicked her in the groin many times, stripped her naked, and photographed her. Two days later, Hong started to hemorrhage and was taken to the county hospital. She appealed to the hospital staff for help, asking them for permission to notify the police. Her appeals were ignored. Out of despair, Hong attempted to end her life. She threw herself out of a second-floor window and ended up with first-degree spinal damage.[2]

Hong's desperate suicide attempt finally caught the attention of local police, who took Hong to the city hospital. On June 22, 1998, *Guangzhou Evening News* (*Yangcheng Wanbao*), a metropolitan commercial paper in

Guangzhou, ran a story about Hong entitled WORKING SISTER PUSHED TO HELL—KILLS HERSELF TO AVOID PROSTITUTION[3] that gave detailed coverage of the incident. The provincial authorities subsequently took note and issued an order to prosecute the perpetrators and penalize the apathetic hospital staff. The story also moved the readers of *Guangzhou Evening News*, who donated 60,000 *yuan* to help with Hong's medical expenses. Liu, the perpetrator of the violent crime, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and required to pay compensation of 120,000 *yuan*. Various levels of the All-China Women's Federation (*Quanguo Funü Lianhehui* or *Fulian*)[4] also reacted to the news story and public outcry. Money was raised in support of Hong's brave action and she was praised as a *lienü* (a woman who would rather die than have her virtue compromised).

The day after the story appeared in the *Guangzhou Evening News*, Gao Fumin, the president of the Anhui Women's Federation, was interviewed by the paper. Gao praised Hong's bravery, thanked the paper for exposing the crime, and extended her appreciation for the support from various women's federations and other organizations in Guangzhou province. On the same night, the vice president of the Anhui Women's Federation reported the incident to the provincial authorities, who, in turn, issued instructions to the various departments concerned to handle the matter with sympathy and care.[5]

At the end of June 1998 representatives from the Anhui Women's Federation, together with a reporter from the *Hefei Evening News* (*Hefei Wanbao*), a provincial commercial paper, journeyed to Guangdong to see Hong. They told her that she exemplified dignity (*zi zun*) and self-respect (*zi zhong*) and had brought pride and honor to the women of Anhui. In July *Anhui Women's Movement* (*Anhui Fuyun*), an official monthly journal of the Anhui Women's Federation, ran an article calling on Anhui women to learn from Hong's brave action and also urging them to learn a lesson from the violent incident. The article advised rural women not to leave their hometown and to seek work locally instead. It also cautioned those intending to migrate to be careful and wary of possible deceptions and criminal activities.[6]

The story of Hong Zhaodi is worth recounting at length here because it raises some important issues concerning representations of the young, rural migrant woman, or working sister (*dagongmei*), in Chinese media. Regardless of differences in ideological orientations, audience segmentation, and institutional contexts, both "official" and "commercial" media[7] have paid constant and consistent attention to the phenomenon of the working sister in the reform era. In this chapter I shall argue that these

various representations construct the working sister at the intersection of indoctrination, fetishization, and compassion, all of which subject her to a "controlling gaze"[8] and none of which adequately expresses her agency and subjectivity. I shall demonstrate that the representational strategies of indoctrination, fetishization, and compassion point to the complex interplay and complicity among the socialist state, the market, and the emerging middle class. More specifically, I will show that both the official and the commercial press construct stories of crime and the abuse of migrant women's human rights in sometimes lurid and gory detail, not only to shock and titillate but also to assist in the construction of party-state hegemony. Dramas about working sisters routinely feature the stock characters of the victim, the villain, the kindhearted, the police, and the paternal figure of the party-state. Such dramas usually end with all the characters getting "what they deserve," but, more importantly, it is almost always the state, as embodied in the police and the Women's Federation, that is given the symbolic power to rename these women as "good" or "virtuous." I shall also argue that, as the example of Hong Zhaodi makes clear, stories of the working sister may sometimes be a voyeuristic peep into the private lives of an "other" community. However, at the same time, they highlight the importance of equality and basic human rights and, in this way, may be seen as contributing to the formation of "cultural citizenship."[9]

My comparison of representations of migrant women in official and commercial media throws open the fundamental question of the relationship between the power of the state and that of the market. Are the images of migrant women in these representations competing or complementary, and how do they reflect and reproduce the contradictions of the post–Mao socialist state in the throes of commercialization and globalization? The analysis also raises the question of the prospects for democratization. While official media may be losing ground in the ideological battle to define "good" or "bad" citizens, may the commercial media create new possibilities for cultural citizenship, not through indoctrination but through democratic participation, albeit limited? Within the parameters described above, and in the hope of shedding some light on these questions, I will turn to the figure of the working sister from Anhui[10] and examine first the official position—via some publications of the Women's Federation—on issues relating to rural female migration: "staying home," "leaving home," and "working away from home" (*dagong*). I refer to this position as "indoctrination." I will then consider the burgeoning voyeuristic and fetishistic representations of the working sister in the commercial media. Finally, I will discuss representations of the working sister in what

I refer to as "compassionate journalism," which has emerged as an important reporting practice in some segments of the commercial media as well as among some of the official media, and address the questions of whether or not such journalism contributes to cultural citizenship and whether or not it offers a space for migrant agency or voice that is denied in other forms of journalism.

THE WOMEN'S FEDERATION, INDOCTRINATION, AND THE "IDEAL WOMAN"

The Women's Federation is what is termed a "mass organization," with the official dual role of furthering the interests of women and promoting party policy among them. In practice, the federation comes under the direct leadership of the party and, at all levels, receives its funding from the government. It should therefore be considered part of the state apparatus. Its publications are part of the official media and are largely mouthpieces for party rhetoric, even though, like other official media, it has had to react to competition from the commercial press and has become more diversified, both in appearance and in content.[11]

As may be clear from its somewhat tardy and weak response to Hong Zhaodi's case and the moralizing tone that it took in reporting her story, the role of the Women's Federation is increasingly ambiguous and awkward as it contends with the rapid economic and social changes of the reform era. It tries to provide support to women, but it does not work effectively and is certainly not feminist in intent or practice. This is because the Women's Federation is largely devoted to mobilizing women around state expectations of the "ideal woman," or what Tani Barlow refers to as the "imbricated national Chinese woman subject."[12] Such discourses, according to Barlow, assume that the interests of individual women and the interests of the state are one and the same. Women are encouraged by the Women's Federation to be four things: independent (*zili*), strong (*ziqiang*), confident (*zixin*), and proud (*zizun*). They are also expected to acquire four qualities: to be motivated (*you lixiang*), to be educated (*you wenhua*), to have a strong determination (*you zhiqi*), and to have goals (*you baofu*).[13] Women's Federation publications routinely exalt exemplary individuals who qualify for the title of *si you* (four qualities). Since stories of model women appear in a rhetoric that places family, community, and nation above individuals, they should be understood in exactly this context. In other words, although these concepts, in a different context, may sound strikingly similar to what some western feminist discourses would privilege, they are nevertheless intended to shape and mold women into citizens who can be re-

cruited into the political, social, economic, and sexual roles carved out for women by the Chinese state. It is precisely for these reasons that Judd argues that the "desirable" qualities listed by women's federations are imposed on women externally and from the top, and serve as much as to sort women into hierarchical order in the state's nation-building project as to strengthen their competitiveness in the market economy.[14] Claiming to promote the interests of women, but obviously part of the project of nation building at a time when economic reforms have exacerbated the disparities and inequalities between the sexes, classes, and regions, the Women's Federation is having an increasingly hard time explaining its function and justifying its existence. Many of its publications, as certainly is the case with Anhui Women's Federation publications, are therefore fraught with tensions and contradictions: they preach the ideals of independence and gender equality to women but are not critical of structural inequalities between the sexes.

Its response to female migration is one of the most telling examples of the Women's Federation's ambivalent position. The movement of women from the countryside to the city, and between provinces, is considered to be beneficial to the national economy, since it enables gaps in the labor market to be filled. A mobile, readily available, and flexible workforce is an important component of a successful market economy. Therefore, the Women's Federation helps to connect village women and their prospective employers in the city to create employment opportunities in domestic service and other types of work. It also publicizes stories of rural-to-urban migrant women who return to their villages with entrepreneurial skills and capital. Zhao Yuemin is one such success story publicized by the Women's Federation. She was born and brought up in Wuwei, Anhui, the hometown of the famous Wuwei *baomu* (maids). Zhao's mother and grandmother had been domestic maids in Beijing. In 1985 Zhao followed in their footsteps and went to Beijing as a maid. However, she refused to see domestic service as her fate. While working as a maid, she started studying modern techniques for raising chickens. She subsequently left her job as a *baomu* and started her own chicken farm outside Beijing. Finally she returned to her hometown and became a shareholder and manager in the village-run farm, generating an annual income of 200,000 *yuan*.[15]

Zhao's story of entrepreneurial success, however, is not typical of most women migrants. Women's experiences of leaving home and venturing into the unknown cities are often treated with ambivalence and suspicion by the Women's Federation and its media. The visibility of certain mobile people—particularly prostitutes and criminals—in the already crowded

cities is often seen as a source of anxiety, fear, and moral panic. Mobile women seem to compromise the implementation of location-bound family planning policies and to threaten to erode traditional feminine values and destabilize the institution of the family, since the traditional view holds that a woman's place is in the home and tends to equate women with domestic duties and men with public affairs.

This contradictory view of female migration is symptomatic of the conundrum facing the cadres of the Women's Federation in the new socioeconomic reality. While "thought work"[16] in the socialist era aimed at the mobilization and socialization of women, this ideological task today is much more challenging, due to the fact that more women than ever are on the move. On the one hand, rural women like Zhao are seen as successfully indoctrinated; they exercise the four qualities of "independence," "strength," "dignity," and "self-respect" in the domestic realm of the home or the village, returning to the village after a brief period of time in the city. Those rural women who "go out" and do not return to the village, or become "fallen" by turning to vice or crime, are not seen as "good" or ideal. Certainly, the qualities expected of women are impossible goals for many who, with limited resources and options, are forced to take up work that is "indecent" or criminal, and therefore morally unacceptable to the Women's Federation.

The official narrative of the ideal woman is overtly anti-individualistic and, at the same time, implicitly patriarchal. Hong Zhaodi is a "good woman" in the official view and was given both financial and moral support because she refused to work as a prostitute and preferred to die to maintain her virginity rather than to surrender. She is therefore decorated as a *lienü*, a Confucianist concept that describes a woman who defends her virtue by taking her own life. Although a *lienü* is a strong-spirited woman defying masculine oppression, her virtue lies as much in her determination to defend her virginity and reputation as in her feistiness and strong will. In other words, where a woman's virginity is not the issue, a woman who allows herself to be exploited and oppressed in other ways is a "virtuous wife and good mother" (*xianqi liangmu*), and hence an exemplary citizen. She is an "ideal woman" because she works to reinforce the stability of the state and of the family. A virtuous migrant woman, by this logic, is therefore one who allows herself to be exploited for the sake of national development.

While Anhui Women's Federation publications tirelessly promote "ideal women" like Zhao and Hong, who are docile and "disciplined,"[17] they consistently shun the presence of "bad" women and their "unruly" bodies. For instance, the topic of prostitution seldom appears in Women's Federation publications, and when it does, it always has a condemnatory undertone. The following commentary from *Anhui Women's Movement* adopts such a moralistic position:

> In recent years, as many of 70 percent of divorce cases have women as the guilty party. The "third-party" phenomenon and extramarital affairs are also caused mostly by women. It is no longer unusual for a woman to assume the role of a "personal assistant," mistress, and concubine. . . . These women do not hesitate to sell their body for money; some women seek lovers outside marriage. In the shameless business of prostitution, some women appear both as victims and perpetrators, polluting the morals of the community and poisoning the soul of people.[18]

The complicity between the discourse in some Women's Federation publications and the patriarchal position on the issue of prostitution is most clearly evidenced in the official interpretation of the relationship among migration, prostitution, and erosion of the family, according to which prostitution is a result of women succumbing to the seduction of a materialistic and hedonistic lifestyle brought about by westernization and made possible and easy by the growing number of mobile women. In other words, official representations of migrant women reflect the Women's Federation's discourse that rewards *lienü* and those who value virginity (*zhenchao*) and chastity (*shoujie*), denies the possibility of political agency to women who become prostitutes, and fails to recognize the oppression experienced by the vast number of women forced into prostitution by violence or poverty in contemporary China. In praising Hong, who preferred death to loss of virtue and forced prostitution, the Women's Federation's discourse of the *lienü* rescued her from the status of a "fallen" woman and through renaming restored her "virtue" and moral "purity." This is how the power of the state is seen to work most effectively, as Anagnost argues succinctly:[19]

> The bestowal of status honors, through the issuing of ritual markers and public processions, demonstrates the power of the state to define discursive positions in political culture through its classificatory strategies, its power to name, to sort persons into the hierarchically arranged categories of a moral order.

Through Hong's story the Women's Federation conveyed two clear patriarchal messages to rural women: "don't leave your village home" and "your life is not worth living if you are a 'fallen' woman." By linking prostitution and

sexual servitude to morality and by disassociating it from economic and political realities, the state, through the Women's Federation and its press, appears to adopt a fundamentally sexist position akin to Confucianism. The Women's Federation must portray migrant women ambivalently—as both positive and negative. Portraying them as "fallen," as the above commentary from *Anhui Women's Movement* does, justifies paying little attention to their individuality and to the social causes of their condition, thus allowing the state to sidestep the contradictions that economic reform poses for rural women. Should the government admit that economic reform is exploitative of rural women, it would lose legitimacy and support for its reforms.[20]

FETISH, VOYEURISM, AND THE "OTHER" WOMAN: THE WORKING SISTER IN THE COMMERCIAL MEDIA

Officially the Women's Federation, in line with the state's approach more generally, does not encourage rural women to stay in the city long-term and, therefore, rarely promotes rural women who have "made it" but who live permanently in the city. Furthermore, in response to cases of gross exploitation or abuse of migrant women, the federation tends to offer little, if any, support and makes little effort to challenge the institutional and ideological underpinnings of such abuse. As we have seen in the example of Hong Zhaodi, it is often only when incidents or events involving individual women victims reach the commercial media, arousing public sympathy and pressure, that the Women's Federation and other authorities are forced to take action to protect women and punish the perpetrators. On the other hand, judging from the content of the commercial media, one can also surmise that, as in the West, sex, violence, and crime sell well in contemporary China. Commercial Chinese media rely on images and stories of women to sell. For both these reasons, while the Women's Federation's press can afford to ignore stories of "fallen" working sisters, in commercial publications, including *Xin An Evening News*,[21] such stories abound.

In other words, while official journalism represents migrant women only through model images and deals with issues such as prostitution and sexuality by avoidance and censure, commercial media represent working sisters as alternately the objects of fetishization and voyeurism and the objects of moral outrage and compassion—in both cases, as voiceless and passive. The working sister of popular urban myths falls into several tropes. She is sometimes a country girl who becomes a *baomu* (maid), a *xiaojie* (an euphemistic term for prostitute), or the victim of abduction and human trafficking. Or she might be a *xiagang nügong*[22] (laid-off urban woman worker), who leaves

home to seek employment in a distant city. I argue that, whether a *baomu*, a prostitute, or an abducted woman, the rural migrant woman is portrayed as a social vagrant, occupying the liminal space between the "civilized" and the "uncivilized," the urban and the rural, the public and the private, or what Stallybrass and White refer to as the "cultural categories of high and low."[23] For this reason, stories of working sisters generate sales because they suggest the possibility of transgressions—moral, cultural, and ideological—that are not tolerated by the state or represented explicitly even in the commercial media. Very often "transgressive acts," when told as media stories, can only be hinted at or implied. Yet it is precisely the hidden or forbidden nature of such transgressions and their representations that promises both voyeuristic and fetishistic pleasures.[24]

The voyeuristic gaze of urban readers is clearly present in most popular representations of migrant women. The construction of the *baomu*, for instance, exemplifies the nature of this gaze. Urban, well-to-do residents—both male and female—often find themselves caught in a situation where they cannot trust their *baomu* yet have to put her in charge of duties in the house involving a great degree of intimacy, responsibility, and confidentiality. Like the maid in Victorian England, whom Anne McClintock describes as "a threshold figure,"[25] the *baomu* transgresses the boundaries of the public and the private, the paid and the unpaid, and those of the family. For this reason, she is the object of intense social scrutiny, anxiety, and fascination. Consequently, mass-appeal papers often tell stories about maids' escapades, ranging from stealing money from employers, being negligent of babies in their care, or seducing the man in the household (sometimes the husband and other times the son) to being sacked after proving to have unclean habits or being diagnosed with a contagious disease.[26]

The voyeuristic gaze of urban readership as well as a controlling gaze of the state—embodied in the enforcement of law and order—are both clearly present in the trope of the abducted woman. Her experiences of being lured, drugged, kidnapped, and sold by traffickers far from her hometown, then rescued or saved by police, provide rich fodder for recreational reading in the commercial media and inspire the "action story." The popularity of this journalistic genre involving police, the perpetrators of crimes, and the victim lies in its dramatic effect. The use of catchphrases such as "night raid" (*yexi*), "narrow escape" (*tuoxian*), "operation" (*xingdong*), "bizarre crime" (*qi'an*), and "crime scene" (*xianchang*) heighten the suspense and drama. These stories also appeal to readers' voyeurism by including detailed information on the abduction, rape, and assault of rural women or lurid scenes of prostitution.

Xin An Evening News runs regular columns entitled ANHUI POLICE (*Anhui jinfang*) and EVENTS AND HAPPENINGS (*shishi zongheng*), which supply a regular diet of dramatic stories of this type. The following *saohuang* (crackdown on prostitution) "raid story" is typical:

> Headed by Chief Inspector Kong Xiaoliang, a special team from Hefei's Public Security Bureau heads for a dance hall on Suixi Road for an unexpected inspection. Our reporter is allowed to come along. Upon arriving they are greeted by a cacophony of music coming from those private rooms with closed doors. The boss standing in the foyer spots the "uniform," gives his employees a wink and a nod, and then walks up to us with an ingratiating smile. Our team is not to be distracted by him. Inspector Yu heads straight for one of the rooms and forces the door open with a violent push, revealing a good-looking *xiaojie* in a mini-skirt and a skimpy top, struggling to sit up from the arms of a middle-aged man.[27]

The most horrifying tales relaying the worst forms of female mobility, stories such as these probably appeal because they present a familiar and clear narrative structure, the innocent victims versus the evil perpetrators, and definite closure, since usually they end with the "rescue" (*jiejiu*) of the helpless woman and her "escape from danger" (*tuoxian*) with the help of the police. They may also have the mythological function of providing acceptable explanations for frightening or baffling events, such as abduction, or undesirable phenomena, such as prostitution, and reassuring responses, such as evidence that justice is done and the law enforced. These stories are usually presented to the urban readership as "bizarre" and "horrific" tales involving criminals deprived of human decency, to be read and savored at a safe distance and with an unambiguous sense of moral superiority. More important, they appeal to an urban middle-class sensibility. This, I argue, is characterized first of all by an intense curiosity about the lower classes[28] and secondly by a paradoxical relationship to the notion of privacy. On the one hand, a secret self that needs privacy is regarded as a signifier of middle-class status, but on the other hand, middle-class readers are often very interested in learning about other people's private secrets.[29] Finally, the urban middle-class sensibility is marked by a desire for basic social justice, the protection of individual rights, and the certainty and effectiveness of the law.[30]

The multiplicity of gazes directed at the migrant woman in the commercial media in contemporary China is exemplified by exposé journalism, written by reporters working undercover (*anfang*) and almost always claiming to be eyewitness (*jishi*) accounts. The selling point of these tales is that they expose a shady world of which ordinary people are unaware or that they have not experienced. Although the rationale for *anfang* and *jishi* reportage is supposedly to expose what is wrong in society, its real appeal lies in its capacity to blend moral surveillance and control with titillating sex, crime, and intrigue, the object of the gaze being, in both cases, the migrant woman.

For eight consecutive days in July 2000, *Xin An Evening News* published a group of undercover investigative and eyewitness accounts of the sex industry in Anhui. The editor noted:

> Currently, the provincial police have mounted a campaign to crack down on the rampant practices of prostitution, gambling, and drug trafficking. In order to collaborate with this initiative, this paper sends our own staff reporter to investigate undercover a number of recreational business premises. What follows is a series of true accounts of these investigations.[31]

A closer reading of these stories reveals that this form of investigation satisfies a desire to know an "other" world, including the interior of a brothel, the appearance of the women working inside, and the brothel clients. Written by an anonymous "staff reporter," the series publishes, sometimes in great detail, the undercover reporter's detailed descriptions of brothels found in several counties and towns of Anhui, and his conversations with brothel owners, prostitutes, and clients. Such reports, while arousing and satisfying the reader's curiosity about the other world, are nevertheless inscribed with a sense of secrecy and intrigue: the "brothel" and "prostitute" are seldom overtly labeled as such, and sexual services are usually described in coded language:

> A "cultural and recreational center" appeared on Xiangyang Road, Wuhu City on July 1. Though it's only been half a month since its business started, it has already gained quite a reputation. According to local taxi drivers in Wuhu, the center is definitely the "fun" (*hao wan*) place to go. Exactly how is this a "fun" place? On July 18, we sent one of our journalists there to check it out. The center is a five-story building, offering, as listed on the notice board in the foyer, a range of services including sauna, massage, foot bath, and karaoke. The floor manager walks up to our journalist the moment he walks in. "Welcome.

We have all sorts of service provided by our *xiaojie*," the manager says. "Do you have *that* kind of *xiaojie*?" our journalist asks. The manager replies, "The *xiaojie* I refer to is exactly *the* kind of *xiaojie* you ask about. This is your first time, so I don't want to be too explicit." The manager walks the journalist up to the fourth floor and introduces him to a *xiaojie*. She charges an x number of *yuan*, and is willing to perform all duties short of "*daowei* [climax or orgasm]."[32]

The *xiaojie* in these "cultural and recreational centers" and "entertainment clubs" are portrayed as shadowy figures, some of whom promise to deliver "all-channel services" (*quan pindao*, implying the entire range of sexual services). Exposed, but somewhat indirectly, they are constructed as symbols of danger or taboo and as objects of the voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze.

Police/action stories and exposé/investigative stories, as discussed here, constitute staple reading in entertainment-oriented dailies such as the *Xin An Evening News*. In the former the controlling gaze comes from those representing law and order, whereas in the latter it comes from reporters and the media institutions they represent. The popularity of both genres derives from these stories' capacity to provide, first, a clear-cut delineation of what is right and wrong, moral and immoral; second, voyeuristic or fetishistic pleasures through reference to a dark, forbidden, and hence intriguing world; and third, assurances of law and order being upheld. For this reason, stories from both genres are significant in articulating and reinforcing a middle-class sensibility.

The juxtaposition of these stories with the moralistic discourse on prostitution and the stories of "ideal women" found in the Anhui Women's Federation publications points to the complex and paradoxical nature of the relationship between the state and the market: while they are sometimes competing and oppositional, often what we see is more of an ideological alignment and coalition, with both subjecting the migrant women to a controlling gaze. It is also conceivable that such a complex and paradoxical relationship nevertheless contains a democratizing potential: while the moralistic indoctrination of "good" or "bad" citizens promulgated in official publications may be seen to be virtually bankrupt, popular narratives in the genre of police stories and investigative stories, both of which are framed within a law-and-order discourse, seem to demonstrate a new possibility for the formation of civic consciousness, characterized by a concern with law and order as well as a respect for human and individual rights.

SYMPATHY AND CARE: THE POLITICS OF COMPASSION

While the commercial media actively participate in exploiting the image of suffering women as objects of fear and desire, they also provide one of the few contact zones between individual victims of abuse and the public. This contact zone—though highly problematic—is nevertheless one of the few places where victims can air their stories to the public and the authorities. For example, Hong Zhaodi's luck turned not so much with the assistance or support from the state authorities like the Women's Federation but as a result of the initial exposure of her misfortune by the commercial media and the reader sympathy it generated. Despite their fetishized images of sexuality and crime, some stories in the commercial media, including Hong Zhaodi's, appeal to readers' concern for social injustice and compassion for human suffering. As the gap between the rich and the poor widens, the lives and misfortunes of the socially marginal become objects of intense curiosity and staple fodder for urban folklore. Hong's change of fate was thanks to compassionate journalism, or what one might term "perennial stories."[33] These are tales of the misfortunes of the poor, the vulnerable, and the powerless that struggle to negotiate an underlying tension between discourse on the commonality of humanity and fellow citizenry and an innate "us-versus-them" narrative structure.[34] Perennial stories articulate the concerns with social justice and individual rights that, as I argued above, are characteristic of the urban middle-class sensibility. Increasingly, journalistic professionalism is defined, in both commercial and state media, not only as the courage to expose evils and uphold justice and morality but also as the capacity to sympathize with and care for the weak, the poor, and the downtrodden.[35] Some media are particularly known for sympathetic attention to the suffering, misery, and hardships of certain social groups. Examples are commercial media such as the *Southern Weekend* (*Nanfang Zhoumo*) and *Southern Metropolitan Daily* (*Nanfang Ribao*) in Guangdong, and state media outlets such as the TV show *Focal Point* (*Jiaodian Fangtan*) in Beijing, the highest rated current affairs show on Central China Television (CCTV).[36]

While some perennial stories invite readers to take direct action, as in the case of Hong Zhaodi, others encourage less concrete forms of sympathy. One example of the latter is the regular stories run by *Southern Weekend*, drawing urban readers' attention to the injustices, inequalities, and poor working conditions suffered by rural migrants. According to one report, tens of thousands of migrant workers from inland and northern provinces working in places like Shenzhen live in extremely basic conditions with no

privacy and little comfort. Moreover, due to the long hours of factory work, stringent management regulations, and low pay, married migrant couples cannot even live together. The editor's note says:

> We must pay attention to this marginalized and exploited community. They exist at the bottom of our society and their basic rights as private citizens are being taken away from them. Yet nobody can deny that these people have already sacrificed too much for the development of our society. They deserve more sympathy and care.[37]

We may do well to juxtapose the exposé of the brothels from *Xin An Evening News* with this story of a migrant community. Both bring the private lives of individuals to the public's attention, thus rendering the invisible visible. However, these stories operate according to different social semiotics of the migrant body. The former uncovers the prostitute's body yet still withholds it from full view, adhering to the principle of fetish and disavowal, thus appealing to the voyeuristic desires of middle-class (and other) readers. The latter also directs the public gaze onto the migrant body, but only to evacuate eros and desire from it in order to articulate another aspect of the middle-class sensibility—the concern for justice and individual rights.

Although the article advocates for migrants' human rights, it does not point to the fundamental social and economic inequalities that have given rise to the violation of those rights. In this type of narrative, migrant workers frequent the discursive field of urban middle-class audiences, but mostly as objects to be represented. Stories such as these, with their detached language of reason, law, and human rights, may not elicit emotional identification or immediate action such as donations, but may do just as much as Hong's story to humanize migrants and change perceptions of them, or even effect a change of policy toward them. Perennial stories are thus another example of how the commercial media may do more to develop a consciousness of cultural citizenship among urban middle-class readers by encouraging compassion and care than do the official media with indoctrination into state-prescribed understandings of citizen rights and responsibilities.

I speculate that the appeal of these compassionate stories derives from their capacity to generate a range of emotional responses, which in turn can be translated into various types of reading pleasure. For instance, stories of gross injustice such as Hong's elicit moral outrage. Such outrage can be closely linked to a "feel-good" factor, for stories such as these with a "good vs. bad" structure can have the function of validating and confirming one's moral beliefs and values. In addition, the communication of this sense of outrage through the regular consumption of media gives readers the pleasure of being connected to a community of other like-minded, though anonymous, readers. Furthermore, these stories of compassion deliver a reassuring sense of familiarity and continuity: a feeling that in spite of the injustice and ugliness in the world, at the end of the day, justice is done, life is blessed with human kindness, and society returns to a "normal" state.

Another kind of reading pleasure may come from the "do-good" capacity of the reader, which in turn can produce a "feel-good" effect. No longer given the likes of Lei Feng, the model soldier and icon of socialist heroism during the Mao era, as a standard to follow, audiences of compassionate stories are not likely to be burdened with the high socialist rhetoric of altruism. Rather, they may simply desire to live with a good conscience or gain empowerment through generosity and morally uplifting deeds. The hundreds of readers of the *Guangzhou Evening News* who donated money to Hong Zhaodi upon reading of her misfortune were probably not expecting public recognition for their generosity, but it may have made them feel good nevertheless. In other words, although their action may have made a difference to the victim, it may also have benefited them morally and emotionally.

Readers of this and other perennial stories may also gain pleasure from the affirmation of a class- or geography-based difference between the self and the other. Although the "other"—those rural migrants who live at the periphery of "our" existence as the most economically disfranchised, culturally inarticulate, and socially marginalized group in Chinese society—deserve "our" sympathy or help, they are nonetheless not "us." To put it another way, urban middle-class readers may sympathize with those they help, but their feelings and donations do not necessarily erase their sense of a class-based difference. In fact, as I have shown, such a juxtaposition of sympathy and class consciousness is essential to the formation of a middle-class sensibility.

It is clear by now that compassionate journalism may take a number of forms, ranging from issue-related social critiques (e.g., the migrant couples' bedroom) to emotionally stirring narratives of the misfortunes of the weak in the hands of the strong (e.g., the story of Hong Zhaodi). As a narrative form, it is testimony to a growing civic consciousness of the urban middle class. It appeals to the public's sense of justice (*zhengyi*) and moral conscience (*liangzhi*). At various times and under different circumstances, compassionate journalism has the effect of raising awareness, inviting sympathy, or generating social action. It has attracted a growing urban readership and

generates profits, not in spite of but precisely because of its attention to the socially disadvantaged. This is the paradox of compassionate journalism: its emergence is a response to increasing social stratification and inequality in the era of globalization and urbanization, yet the effect of stories from this genre is to reproduce the very social inequalities that they purport to address and evoke outrage about.

CONSTRUCTING THE WORKING SISTER: A BRIEF SUMMARY

My analysis of some Women's Federation publications points to the increasing ineffectiveness of the state in addressing problems of injustice and inequality arising from female mobility, and its inability to step beyond orthodox party discourse on social issues such as gender and sexuality. At the same time, the analysis highlights an unyielding desire of the socialist state to maintain ideological supremacy and a strong capacity to make its presence and power felt in a market culture.

Unlike official media, commercial journalism eschews indoctrination. However, much like some Women's Federation publications, the commercial media treat migrant women as either victims of crimes in need of rescue or figures of transgression in need of control. In both state and popular narratives, migrant women are the objects of a controlling gaze, although in the former the gaze is controlled by the state, whereas in the latter it comes from a fetishistic and voyeuristic urban readership.

It thus appears that the politics of representation of migrant women is indeed complex. Any argument for giving an institutionally sanctioned voice to the working sister has to contend with both state and market forces as well as growing social stratification along the lines of geography, class, and gender. In spite of the apparent tension and contradiction between the state and the market, the ideological positions and discursive strategies of representing migrant women in the two domains appear to be convergent rather than divergent. The strategies of indoctrination and fetishization both contribute to a hegemonic representation of the working sister. Consequently, she has emerged as a highly popular trope in urban narratives, but as a speaking subject she remains faint-voiced and largely unheard. Therefore, the prospect of constructing an array of female subjectivities *of* and *by* the working sister looks remote.

The politics of representing the working sister in contemporary China is further complicated by the emergence of compassionate journalism across state and commercial media. On the one hand, like the state's discourses on female mobility, the humanistic discourse of compassionate journalism renders invisible the structural inequalities causing social stratification. This allows the urban middle class, including both media practitioners and their audiences, to sympathize with the disenfranchised without threatening the foundations that underpin the middle class's relative comfort and superiority. Consequently, migrant women—cast in the light of difference, however sympathetically—suffer a reproduction of their deprivation that is both social and discursive.

On the other hand, like many stories in the "action" and exposé genres in the commercial media, stories of compassion are usually told within the framework of law, order, and human rights, and therefore constitute a significant discursive space where a civic consciousness and a concept of citizenship that is an alternative to the state may gradually emerge. Thus such stories generate some hope for the prospect of a more profound social change in the direction of empowering the working sister.

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NOTES

1. *Zhaodi* means "beckoning a younger brother" in Chinese.
2. Information about the incident used in this chapter comes from the article "Hong Zhaodi shijian fasheng yihou (After the Hong Zhaodi incident)," published in *Anhui Women's Movement* (*Anhui Fuyun*), an official publication of the Anhui Women's Federation (Anhui Province Women's Federation's Legal Consultation Office 1998:20–21). This publication is publicly circulated but targeted toward women cadres.
3. The story in the *Guangzhou Evening News* is entitled "Dagongmei bei ren tuijin huokeng, Hong Zhaodi ningsi bukeng maiyin (Working sister pushed to hell—kills herself to avoid prostitution)," June 22, 1998, quoted in the article from *Anhui Women's Movement*, cited above.
4. The All-China Women's Federation is a mass organization under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, comprising a hierarchy of organizations reaching from the national level down to the village. For a discussion of the relationship between the Women's Federation and the Chinese Communist Party, and of the structure, power, and status of the Women's Federation in the reform era, see Judd 1994:213 and Judd 2002.
5. See Anhui Province Women's Federation's Legal Consultation Office 1998:20–21.
6. Ibid.

7. Economic reforms and subsequent processes of globalization and commercialization in the media have resulted in an uneasy coexistence between the "party line" and the "bottom line." On the one hand, media outlets under the auspices of the Communist Party and mass organizations such as the Women's Federation continue to "toe the party line"; on the other hand, there is a burgeoning media sector, largely funded by nonstate sources, which is profit-seeking and entertainment-oriented and has broad popular appeal. See Zhao Bin 1999:291–306; Yuezhi Zhao 1998, 2000:3–24. Also found in the commercialized sector are "metropolitan" papers and evening dailies, such as the *Southern Weekend* in Shenzhen and Guangzhou and *Xin An Evening News* in Anhui, which are considered to have the function of articulating sensibilities of the emerging middle-class and urban readership. In addition, this bifurcated media structure is unstable and subject to ideological convergence and splintering. For instance, although Central China Television's (CCTV) *Focal Point* (*Jiaodian Fangtan*) is a television program under the direct auspices of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), it nevertheless relies on advertising income and therefore has the imperative of ensuring ratings. Its high-quality investigative journalism appeals to a broad cross-section of the Chinese audience, including urban and rural, rich and poor. By the same token, the metropolitan presses, which are often referred to as "mass-appeal papers," also operate along a spectrum ranging from tabloid sensationalism to socially responsible serious journalism.

8. The concept of "the gaze," which has been widely used in critical media studies, originates in film theory. In a seminal article called "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema," Mulvey (1975:6–18) observes that classic Hollywood films present men as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire for men in both the story and the audience, and do not allow women to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right. Such films, she argues, subject women to the controlling male gaze, presenting woman as image or spectacle and man as bearer of the look. I am appropriating the concept to include a way of "looking" sanctioned by both gender- and class-based inequality and the political and institutional power of the state.

9. "Cultural citizenship" refers to the "broadening of the traditional idea of the rights and responsibilities of states and citizens" (Rowe 1999:87–88). The importance of the media in the formation of cultural citizenship lies in their ability to contribute to the "creation of informed, critically reflective persons capable of taking an active part both in their own lives and in those of the collectivities of various kinds." Also see Hartley 1999.

10. Anhui is a largely rural and underdeveloped province in central eastern China. Many rural Anhui residents have migrated to the city, including the well-known figure of the "Anhui maid." See Sun 2002:153–78 for a detailed discussion of economic and social change in Anhui.

11. For instance, while the Women's Federation of Anhui runs a boring, didactic, and monochrome publication called *Anhui Women's Movement*, the women's federations in some other provinces have taken on a much more colorful, entertainment-oriented format, and appeal to a wider female readership.

12. Barlow 1994b:345.

13. See Gao 2000:15–16.

14. Judd 2002.

15. See Yang and Guan 1999:24.

16. "Thought work" (*sixiang gongzuo*) is an official Chinese term referring to work for the purposes of ideological indoctrination.

17. Anagnost 1997:95.

18. Wang Xia 1999:19.

19. Anagnost 1997:100.

20. I am indebted to both editors for helping me to clarify this connection.

21. Like thousands of other tabloids in China, *Xin An Evening News* is funded purely by circulation and advertising. Unlike *Anhui Daily* (*Anhui Ribao*), the mouthpiece of the provincial CCP, or the *Anhui Women's Movement*, which are noncommercial publications funded by the state, *Xin An Evening News* strives to keep its circulation high through retail and subscription sales.

22. A social group that is rapidly becoming the urban underclass, it is also one of the most visible casualties of economic reforms. Although the misfortune of being laid off (*xiagang*) falls on both male and female workers, women bear the brunt.

23. See Stallybrass and White 1986:4. This is not the place to discuss the politics of transgression in detail, but suffice it to say that I have found their framework of theorizing transgression, whereby they conceive the high-low opposition in "four symbolic domains," psychic forms, the human body, the geographic space, and the social order, useful. According to Stallybrass and White, there is an undeniable ambivalence in European bourgeois representations of the "lower strata" (of the body, literature, society, place) in which the "low" are both reviled and desired. The "top" discriminate against the "low" for reasons of status and prestige, but at the same time find themselves dependent upon the low; in other words, the "low-Other" are excluded and opposed at the social level but desired or eroticized at the level of fantasy.

24. Mulvey (1975) distinguishes between two distinctively male modes of looking by the film spectator: voyeuristic and fetishistic. Voyeuristic looking is marked by a distance between spectator and spectacle, which allows the spectator a degree of power over what is seen. Fetishistic looking, in contrast, abolishes the distance between the seer and the seen, thus involving direct acknowledgment of the object viewed. As Ellis (cited in Neale 1997:332), explaining Mulvey, puts it succinctly: "The voyeuristic look is curious, inquiring, demanding to know. The fetishistic gaze is captivated by what it sees, does not wish to inquire further . . . and has much to do with display and the spectacular." Voyeurism and fetishism, though representing different ways of looking, are nevertheless imbricated in each other. Hall (1997:268) points out that fetishism operates at a level "where what is shown or seen, in representation, can only be understood in relation to what cannot be seen, what cannot be shown." This desire to both expose and hide is a paradox crucial to the strategy of fetishization, which, as Hall (Ibid.) observes, "is a strategy of having-it-both-ways: for both representing and not representing the tabooed, dangerous or forbidden object of pleasure and desire," and as such [it] inevitably "licenses" voyeurism.

25. McClintock (1995:77) examines the relationship between power and desire in the imperial metropolis of Victorian England through a case study detailing well-known Victorian barrister Arthur Munby's lifelong obsession and erotic fascination with his maid, and maids in general.

26. The experiences of *baomu* and their relationships with employers also provide staple fodder for feature films and television dramas. See, for example, the

films *The Girl from Yellow Mountain* (1984) (*Huangshan Lai de Guniang*) and the television dramas *Professor Tian's Household and Their 28 Maids* (1999) (*Tian Jiaoshou Jia de Ershiba ge Baomu*).

27. "Muji shengcheng 'saohuang' (Eyewitness to Heifei's crackdown on prostitution)," *Xin An Evening News*, July 30, 2000, 15.

28. Writing about the emergence of the penny press in the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century, Hughes (1968) considers the ways newspapers cater to the taste of the middle class and the wealthy in the city in the process of urbanization and immigration. She observes that one of the traits of the middle class is its increasing curiosity about the poor and immigrants.

29. For a full statement of this point, see Teng 2000. Teng argues that the paradoxical relationship to the notion of privacy is clearly evidenced in the popularity in the late 1990s of "*yinsi* (hidden self) literature," which describes and narrates the secret world of the private self.

30. This is obviously not the place to discuss and debate in detail what constitutes the middle class in contemporary China. However, I agree with Robison and Goodman's observation that the question of what constitutes the middle class in Asia is complex. I also find their description of the middle-class outlook to be very useful: it is marked by "high levels of consumption and a greater emphasis on leisure; a greater concern for education as a central mechanism for securing positions and wealth; a desire for predictability and certainty of laws; and access to information and analysis" (Robison and Goodman 1996:11).

31. Editor's note, alongside Liu Weizhang and Yang Sheng's news story "Shuishang leyuan le zai hechu? (Where is the fun bit in the fun park?)," *Xin An Evening News*, July 17, 2000, 1.

32. "Women zheli ershi si xiaoshi yingye (Here, we are open 24 hours a day)," *Xin An Evening News*, July 22, 2000, 1.

33. I am borrowing this term from Hughes (1968), who uses it to describe stories with "human interest," such as those of lost children, hurt animals, and change of fortune, which frequently and regularly circulate in the American penny press. According to Hughes, they are age-old stories that will remain popular due to their enduring humanitarian interest.

34. This common journalistic narrative structure is extensively discussed in Hartley 1992.

35. This emphasis on justice, equity, and conscience is evidenced in, for instance, the titles of the anthologies of the best news stories written by reporters from *China Youth Daily*. The trilogy *Bengbao Jingri Chuji* (The Target of Today's Paper) is thematically organized respectively around the themes of *liangzhi* (conscience), *gongping* (equity), and *zhengyi* (justice) (Lu and Luo 2000).

36. There is a popular saying in China about quality journalism: "In the north we have *Focal Point*, and in the south we have *Southern Weekend* (*Bei you Jiaodian Fangtan, nan you Nanfang Zhoumo*)." It is estimated that as many as 0.3 billion people watch *Focal Point* every evening. This is a state television program that is, however, funded mainly by advertising revenues. It is, therefore, an example of the "bifurcation" of official-commercial media. For a good discussion of *Focal Point* and the impact of investigative journalism, see Li Xiaoping 2002:17–34.

37. Sun Baili 2000:16.

>> Part 2

SEEKING A FUTURE