

Working
and Playing
with the
Electronic
Brain
电脑



A Preliminary Report on Transnationalism
and Cyberculture in Postsocialist Shanghai

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Cyberculture in Shanghai

- **What do computers mean for people in Shanghai?**
- **How has the development of computer technology industries, services, and consumption shaped Shanghai society?**
- **How has the technology itself re-defined subjectivity in Shanghai?**





Shanghai in postsocialist China

- **In postsocialist China, three competing visions of Chinese modernity, centered in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong**
- **Recapturing the glory days of cosmopolitan, colonial Shanghai of the 1920s and 1930s and the nostalgia in late 1990s Shanghai**

Nostalgia for preliberation Shanghai is visible in multiple areas of consumption: trendy cafés, colonial architecture, movies and television shows.



Colonial nostalgia is mixed with “socialist nostalgia”; trendy and expensive restaurants to “**eat bitterness**” foods from the Cultural Revolution.



Computers and Internet Usage in China

- **Ministry of Information Industry (MII) Survey information available from**
<http://www.cnnic.net.cn/Develst/cnnic2000.htm>
- **China has 4 million users**
US has 92 million (June-July 1999)
(www.headcount.com)
- **China will have the second largest population of Internet users by 2005**
(Creed 1999)



Computer technology and the internet:

technology that promises:

- national strength
- modernity
- democracy

Remember Mr. Science and Mr.
Democracy from the early 20th century



Multiple cosmologies, multiple hierarchies

- cadres maneuvering through shell of socialist government
- local “comprador” entrepreneurs living and working in the interstices of China and the global
- “foreign experts” living in postcolonial enclaves and working in local extensions of transnational capital
- everyday people working towards postmodern imaginary



Computer promises

- for cadres, the computer is central to the development of a computer industry will vault China into the information age; promising to restore China to its rightful place in the international arena
- for middle-class entrepreneurs, computers are both the tool giving middle-class entrepreneurs access to the arena of global capitalism and the proof of their cosmopolitan status
- for everybody else, they are machines linked to a wider global network that gives access to a broader world of empowering information

People using computers

- a cadre trying to improve his knowledge and marketability:
Mr. Wang from the “street committee”



People using computers

- Mr. Li, Executive at Legend Computer Systems





Legend Computers

- Legend started out as a SOE, but is listed on the Hang Seng
- Market value of \$4.3 billion in the end of 1999
- Biggest seller of PCs in the fastest-growing computer market in the world (15% of China sales in Feb 1999)
- Dell vs. Legend?

People using computers

- Ms. Liang, entrepreneur, managing her own computer retail and service store
- Mr. Zhou at Fudan, computer support and network manager



Mr. Zhou's desk, covered with the same PC magazines that I regularly read

People using computers

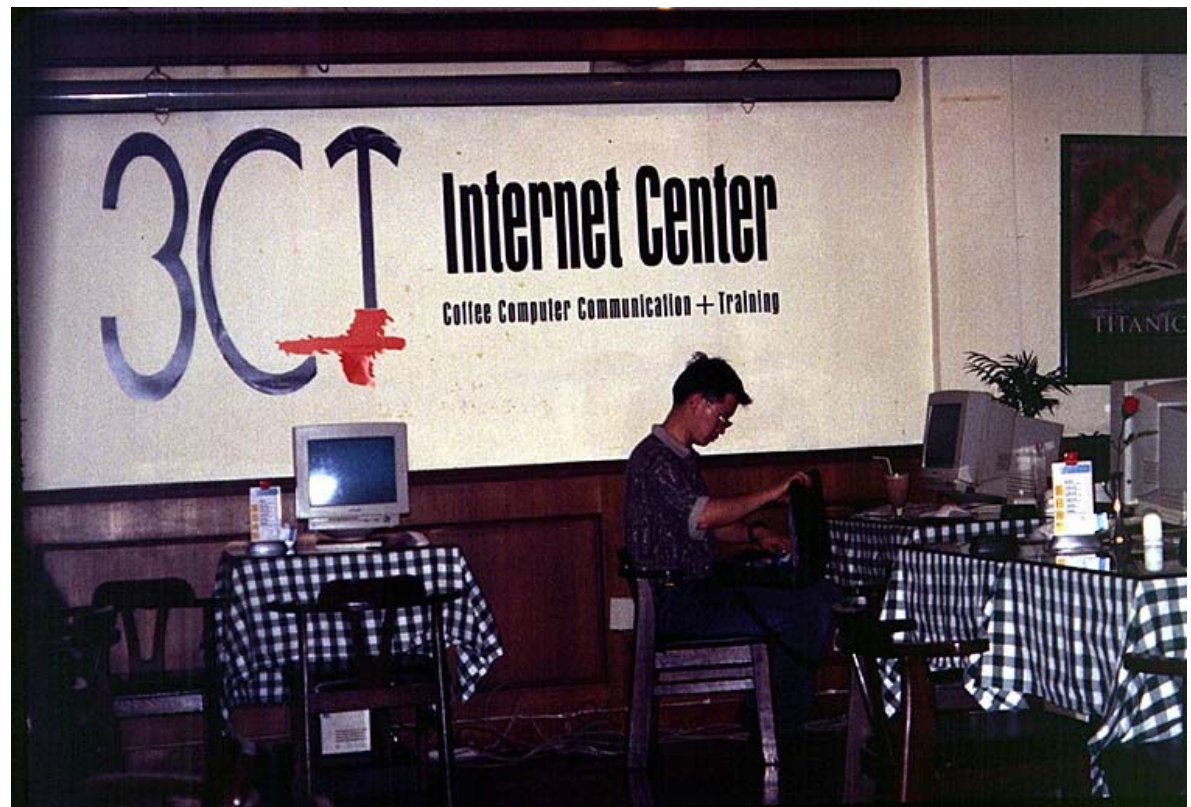
- **Mr. Cui: teaching computer classes and writing computer textbooks at a Shanghai University; setting up his parents' internet café in the Pudong area**



Mr. Cui is handicapped, but was excelled in computer science in high school; in college, he was part of a programming team sent to participate in a Microsoft-sponsored contest in Philadelphia. As a computer teacher, Cui is now a Chinese representative to the world-wide Association for Computing Machinery.

Internet Cafés

- 777 registered internet cafés in Shanghai





Internet Cafés

- President Clinton visits 3C+T Internet Café



Internet Cafés

- young office workers playing computer games at 3C+T



Internet Cafés

- school-aged kids playing computer games at Mr. Cui's store
- policing and all-night internet cafés

Patrons at Cui's internet café; high-school aged kids who play games like Mechwarrior 3 and Age of Empires for 4 RMB/hr. The games are networked, so they come in with their friends to play together.





February 2, 2000

Fears For Kids Prompt Crackdown On Shanghai's Internet Cafes

Shanghai authorities have closed down 127 improperly licensed Internet cafes in a crackdown driven by parents' complaints about uncontrolled child access to the Web, officials said Wednesday.

The illicit establishments were found during the fourth large-scale inspection the city has launched since last April, when tight regulations on the trade took effect.

Zhang Yue, an official with the local office of the National Economy and Society Information Leading Group, said there was "no real relationship" between the closures and a series of new policies that emerged from Beijing last week to control the Internet more tightly.

"It was mainly because of problems with young people that had drawn a strong reaction from parents," she told AFP.

Schoolkids were spending too much time in illicit Internet cafes that failed to observe restrictions in place since April on serving minors, she said.

The rules, relaxed somewhat last month, ban unaccompanied customers under the age of 18 from the cafes on weekdays, and put a three-hour time limit on them during weekends and public holidays.

"Often children bring in their own software to play with," she said, adding that some was pornographic or gambling-oriented.

Parents in the country's cities put exceptional pressure for success on their only children -- the products of China's one-child family planning policy -- and so prefer them to stay at home and study.

But recognizing that controlled exposure to the Internet could be beneficial, authorities backpedaled from an earlier, more blanket ban on minors in the cafes.

The Internet is "useful for developing their intelligence," Zhang said.

But small, informal cafes that lack one of four required operating permits -- including one from the Public Security Bureau -- do not enforce the rules, the official added.

To promote larger operations that are easier to regulate, rules now require Internet cafes to have at least 20 computers, 50 square meters (538 square feet) of floor space and at least two staff on duty at all times.

According to an article in the Shanghai News this week, Internet cafe customers are in theory required to leave records of every e-mail they send, including the time, the addressee and their own identification information.

There are 777 government-approved Internet cafes in Shanghai, it said, adding that the number was increasing quickly due to low start-up costs of just 70,000 yuan (8,434 dollars).

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Postsocialist China

- Shanghai and nostalgia
- pre-liberation cosmopolitanism
- investing in children: single-child family policy and improving the quality of children
- revival or transformation?



Global Capitalism

- **“socialism with Chinese characteristics” and the development of a market economy**
- **increasing stratification between rich and poor**
- **role of technology, education, foreign experience -- access to information and skills as boundary between well-to-do and getting by**



Transnationalism in China

- **localizing a technology**
 - cosmopolitans and locals?
 - global homogenization or local particularism; see Reardon-Anderson's monograph on "The Study of Change"
 - consuming modernity?



Chinese cyborgs

- **computer technology re-defining subjectivity**
- **Paul N. Edward's "the machine in the middle" -- computers and human thinking**
- **virtual worlds, real worlds**