Reading Movement in the Everyday:
The Rise of *Guangchangwu* in a Chinese Village

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Over recent years, the practice of *guangchangwu* has captured the Chinese public's attention due to its increasing popularity and ubiquity across China's landscapes. Translated to English as "public square dancing," guangchangwu describes the practice of group dancing in outdoor spaces among mostly middle-aged and older women. This article examines the practice in the context of guangchangwu practitioners in Heyang Village, Zhejiang Province. Complicating popular understandings of the phenomenon as a manifestation of a nostalgic yearning for Maoist collectivity, it reads guangchangwu through the lens of "jumping scale" to contextualize the practice within the evolving politics of gender in post-Mao China. In doing so, this article points to how guangchangwu can embody novel and potentially transgressive movements into different spaces from home to park, inside to outside, and across different scales from rural to urban, local to national.

Keywords: square dancing, popular culture, spatial practice, scale, gender politics, China

The time is 7:15 p.m., April 23, 2015, and I am sitting adjacent to a small, empty square tucked away from the main thoroughfare of a university campus in Beijing. As if on cue, Ms. Wu appears, toting a small loudspeaker on her hip.[1] She sets it down on the stairs, surveying the scene before her: a small flat space, wedged in between a number of buildings, surrounded by some trees, evidence of a meager attempt at beautifying the area. Forgotten, maybe, it mostly serves as a space of transit, existing between here and there, imperceptible in the rhythms of most people's daily lives.

What might not look like much at 7:15 p.m. becomes animated, in the words of Caroline Chen (2007), by a "daily ballet" (p. 1). Soon more women begin to arrive, lingering around the space. They go over the requisite niceties. At 7:30 p.m., they take their positions, loosely arranging themselves in rows. Ms. Wu, positioned at the front, hits the "play" button. The music begins, and the women dance, their bodies moving in rhythmic unison to a soundtrack of old favorites and contemporary pop hits (see Figure

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[1] All research participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

1). Unperturbed by the onlookers who pause on their evening walks to observe their movements, the joy is visible in the dancers' faces and movements as temporarily they are together as one. At 8:30 p.m., the last song winds down and the women dissipate as quickly as they had assembled. Now empty, the space bears no visible signs of the animated collectivity present just a few minutes prior.

Figure 1. Ms. Wu's **guangchangwu** *group in Beijing.*

Two months later, I witness a similar scene thousands of kilometers southeast of China's sprawling capital city, in Heyang Village, Zhejiang Province. This time, the organization of the dance group is looser, which belies the fact that its members are more familiar with one another. At 7:30 p.m., a small group of women have assembled in a unused parking lot in the village; one woman retrieves a loudspeaker and CD player and, using a long extension cord, plugs it in to an outlet in the seniors' activity hall (*laonianban*) fronting the lot. Another woman sets up an electric fan; the feeble breeze it produces provides dubious relief for the stifling summer heat, but testifies to the extent of the group's organization. The women begin dancing together (see Figure 2). The uniformity of their movements and evident familiarity with the songs and steps betrays their experience and expertise. Their "teacher" (*laoshi*), Ms. Yang, arrives after the group has begun dancing, and she assumes her position at the head of the group. Dancing through a repertoire of slower, more emotive tunes and energetic, upbeat songs (with flourishes in their choreography to match), the women retire from dancing at 9 p.m., but they linger in the space for at least another 20 minutes, enjoying one another's company before going their separate ways.

Figure 2. Ms. Yang's **guangchangwu** *group in Heyang.*

This is *guangchangwu*, translated into English as "public square dancing."[2] Although accounts vary, since the early 2000s, similar tableaux have unfolded every morning and evening, across China's increasingly variegated landscapes, from the country's urban centers like Beijing to rural locales like Heyang. Its rapid spread among mostly middle-aged and elderly Chinese women has made the practice a hot topic of discussion in the country, making news in mainstream media outlets such as *China Daily* and *Xinhua* as well in the increasingly popular Web-based mobile applications WeChat (*weixin*) and QQ. However, the tenor of such discussions has been largely negative and derogatory, casting the practice and its mostly women practitioners as fundamentally anachronistic and disrespectful of emerging normative ways of behaving and acting in the spaces of contemporary China (e.g., "Chinese 'Dama' Dance," 2014; "Square Dance Problem," 2014).

In light of these persisting debates, this article focuses on the idea of *movement*—that is, the shifting of positioning in time, space, and, in some cases, scale—to complicate popular understandings of guangchangwu as a nostalgic practice of older Chinese women "out of touch" with the contemporary zeitgeist. In reading guangchangwu through this lens, this article takes as its analytical landscape the

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[2] Because *square dancing* refers to a qualitatively different practice in the Western—and, in particular, North American—context, I use the term *guangchangwu* throughout this article.

geographies of everyday life in an effort to highlight the ways apparently mundane activities "jump scale" (Smith, 1993). In doing so, it sheds light on the rich and contested terrain of not only rural culture but also everyday culture in postreform China and the ways such cultural forms are both intersected and transformed by competing agents, interests, and ideas as they move between and across scales.

This article begins by dissecting dominant ways of conceptualizing movement in globalization studies to develop an understanding of micromovement in the context of everyday life. Briefly tracing the historical emergence of guangchangwu in China, it then turns to exploring the phenomenon of guangchangwu in Heyang and, through a series of ethnographic tableaux, points to how the practice embodies movement into different kinds of spaces—and across different scales. I particularly highlight how these movements represent novel and potentially transgressive forms of mobility that interface with evolving politics of gender and rescaled governance in post-Mao China. I suggest that guangchangwu embodies movement not simply by virtue of its practice, based as it is in bodily movement, but also through how it is enacted in and across different spaces and scales. In contrast to popular understandings of the dance as a mundane popular culture form, I thus argue for an interpretation of guangchangwu as a practice of embodied, temporalized place making that carves space for its practitioners and is a vehicle actively wielded by its practitioners to jump scale in the context of their everyday lives. In the context of this special issue, this study fills a significant gap in understanding the milieu of cultural and communicative practices not only within the "village" (Zhao, this Special Section) but also among rural women—a group that has arguably seen its status diminish in the wake of China's reform (Cartier, 2001a).

Thinking Through Globalization, Movement, and the Everyday

Theoretical accounts detailing the rise of globalization are near religious in delineating the novel characteristics of the world we all supposedly live in now. This is the familiar account of increasingly larger distances transcended in increasingly shorter time lines. It is one that can be mapped onto my own biography along a path that is dependent on the ocean-crossing journeys of my parents to a land completely unfamiliar to them. It is a vision, too, that manifests readily in many of the seemingly mundane facets of our everyday lives: virtual connection with globally residing family and friends; sourcing everyday objects like clothing and furniture from factories halfway across the world; the smorgasbord of international dining options available in our cities, and innumerable other dimensions of our daily experience. We are told that, more than ever, we live in a "space of flows" (Castells, 2004) dominated by a network logic of increasingly rapid movements of capital and communication at odds with a "space of places" where human experience and activities are emplaced.

Scholars have proposed a wealth of concepts to describe the impacts of these transformations in the magnitude of movements—physical, virtual, and symbolic—precipitated by globalization. For some, what results from the near-instantaneous movement of information is a world that is smaller, in which scales collapse on themselves—a "global village," as Marshall McLuhan (1962) proposed. For those working in the Marxist tradition such as David Harvey, these accelerated processes must be read not only as a consequence of technological innovation but also as part and parcel of the global expansion of capitalism. Thus, for Harvey (1989a), while "time-space compression" similarly gestures to the experience

of a contracted world, it is understood as the corollary of capital's need to render borders, time, and space irrelevant, and therefore "the contemporary form of globalization is nothing more than yet another round in the capitalist production and reconstruction of space" (Harvey, 2001, p. 24). In this regard, the present moment seems to be marked by a significant shift in what Marx (1993) famously described as "the annihilation of space by time" (p. 524) as a key principle of capitalist development. Indeed, the continued relevance of Marx's original assertion, particularly in critical political economy–based analyses, has meant that contemporary debates on globalization have largely revolved around understanding its relationship to capital.

While maintaining the insights derived from such analytical traditions, it is also worthwhile to question from what location such concepts emanate and the visions of our world that come into being as a result. As both Doreen Massey (1993, 1994) and Michael Burawoy (2000) have pointed out, such characterizations heralding the general speeding up of everyday life and the ensuing sense of dislocation by and large originate from a particular viewpoint. For Massey (1993), the continued centrality afforded to concepts such as time-space compression effaces how our individual experiences of time and space are dependent on how we are differently socially positioned vis-à-vis these flows of information, people, goods, and capital. Burawoy (2000) rather pointedly underlines this in pondering how scholars are "giving expression to their own conditions of existence" (p. 340).

Bearing this in mind, I would like to draw attention to where these visions are *emplaced*. By this, I mean how dominant theoretical frameworks used to understand globalization bring into existence a particular imagination of where it occurs and, relatedly, who the primary agents of globalization are. In doing this, I draw particular attention to how characterizations of globalization give import to a particular place: the city—for many of the oft-cited concepts used to make sense of globalization place the urban squarely in their crosshairs as the most significant analytical site. From Harvey's extensive work on the global expansion of the capitalist production of space via processes of urbanization (e.g., Harvey, 1987, 1989b, 2005) to Manuel Castells's (1989) heralding of the informational city, cities are the places that are global, and the urban has emerged as the dominant scale through which processes of globalization are most evident. As LeGates and Stout (2011) assert, "the experience of the new urban order is not to be separated from globalization" (p. 543). But this also leads one to ask: What of the nonurban? On this point, Castells (2004) offers:

> *The higher the value of people and places, the more they are connected into interactive networks. The lower their value, the lower their connection.* In the limit, some places are switched off, and bypassed by the new geography of networks, as is the case of depressed rural areas and urban shanty towns around the world. (p. 84, emphasis added)

Here, the vision of a globalized world connected digitally is suggested by the assertion that we are more connected than ever. But this vision is punctuated by the corresponding notion that we have places apparently devoid of connection. The imagined geography of globalization that emerges from such conceptual visions makes the nonurban invisible, effectively precluding its inclusion in our analyses of globalization.

For Massey (1993), this binary positioning between mobility and stasis can be traced to a historically persistent opposition between space and place. The continued conflation of these concepts results in an inward-looking notion of place as embodying an essential, bounded history (Massey, 1993). More fundamentally, the momentum of such binaries denies the potentiality of movement at scales typically subsumed under the urban, such as community, home, or body. This leaves the impression that there is no movement at these scales relevant to our understandings of the changes wrought by globalization.

As a result, villages—long positioned as the site of "stasis" and "community"—have largely been assumed to be passive "receivers" of movement, the last frontier of globalization. That is, they come into contact with the forces of globalization via contact and consumption of new cultural forms, ideas, technologies, and products. Now villagers are on the "receiving end of time-space compression" (Massey, 1993, p. 62; Massey, 1994, p. 149) and of the globalized movement of goods, ideas, capital, and culture. They partake in globalization as the "end point." The tentacles of globalization reach out to them.

Are we to truly believe that villages and other localities are deserts of movement? This lack of engagement with the nonurban is particularly striking given the widespread acceptance of the idea that the global expansion of capitalism, ever seeking a "spatial fix," is predicated on the production of an uneven landscape of places and scales (Harvey, 2001). Here I make the conceptual move to scale in an attempt to assert how globalization produces complex differentiation not only between places but also between different *kinds* of places, organized in nested, but porous and overlapping configurations (Smith, 1993). Even though capitalism has always involved scalar production, contemporary global restructuring has involved particularly significant transformations in scalar differentiation. As outlined by Neil Brenner (2001), the rise of neoliberalism has entailed aggressive reorganization of scalar global, national, regional, urban, and local hierarchies to facilitate capital flows and free competition. But it is also the case that alternative forces have sought to mobilize scale to challenge neoliberal restructuring, by organizing and enacting—moving—expressions of daily life at and into higher scales to resist containment or oppression through hegemonic scalar structuration—what Neil Smith (1993) calls "jumping scale" (p. 90). This, then, leads one to ask: How do these kinds of movements occur? What kinds of spaces and places can we move into? How is scale negotiated in jumping from the microscales of the body, home, and everyday life to regional, national, or international scales? And just as importantly, *What kinds of spaces do we create with these movements*?

At the same time, while it is true in many senses that the world is speeding up and that people and places are being linked together in increasingly novel ways, it is also true that groups and individuals are differentially related to these flows—what Massey (1993, 1994) pointed to with her famous conceptualization of the "power-geometry of time-space compression" (1994, p. 149) and what Burawoy (2000) suggested with his call to "ground globalization." Both question the situatedness from which our dominant theoretical frames to understand globalization emanate, while underlying the need for analytical work to knit together our conceptual and grounded knowledges. Such considerations are vitally important if scholarly work is to make a critical intervention in neoliberal globalized capitalism's production of uneven geographies of haves and have-nots.

Consider gender, a key dimension of analysis in this article, for example. Many feminist scholars have articulated how gender, as a primary site that signifies dynamics of power (Scott, 1999), manifests in unequal access to material and symbolic resources. Crucially, if "social processes articulate and move through scale relations" (Cartier, 2001b, p. 26), then it follows that the intersection of the various evolving contours of our identity, including, but not limited to, gender, class, sexuality, ability, and age, modulate our ability to move between different spaces, places, and scales. As a predominantly gendered activity, women are the primary practitioners of guangchangwu. This, then, leads one to reformulate the questions posed above to ask how guangchangwu embodies movement into different places. Crucially, it also prompts one to ask how everyday scale-jumping practices like guangchangwu interface with existing and evolving relations and ways of organizing power to resist containment at particular scales.

Finally, as Massey (1993) highlights, if we expand our understanding of mobility under the conditions of globalization to ground it in how we are placed in different configurations against it, then we also open up the ways we can imagine a place. This means moving *away* from a conception of the local, and, as a corollary, place as rootedness or stasis, toward a conceptualization that underlies its production through a particular constellation of social relations, at a particular point in time and space. It is an assertion that places are unique, but that their uniqueness emerges from the codetermination of its relations with both the inside and "outside," at the local or community scale and beyond it (Massey, 1993).

Understanding Movement, Space, and Place in Postreform China

Unsurprisingly, socially grounded concepts of space, power, and place making have already yielded provocative ways of thinking about postreform transformations in Chinese society. Most fundamentally, such insights consider the renegotiation of meaning attached to both place and identity against a backdrop of ongoing social, political, and economic transformation in China. They challenge any interpretation of the country's ongoing neoliberalization as uniform both in terms of process and impact and draw attention to the complex articulations of agency and meaning making in the postreform Chinese context—and how such processes are intimately tied to place making.

While much globalization literature considers changes in transnational migration, one key area of analysis in the Chinese context has been the politics of movement and place making within the rural migrant worker population (e.g., see Yuan, 2014; Zhang, 2001). As identified by Lee (2005), the restructuring of the Chinese labor force necessary for the country's massive postreform development drive has proceeded on two fronts: the "unmaking" of an urban workforce in the form of widespread unemployment, particularly in state-owned enterprises, and the "making" of a new rural migrant workforce that is moving in massive numbers from the countryside to seek employment in China's factories. The ensuing movement has led to novel configurations of power and space as these rural migrant communities—often spatially segregated and partitioned from the rest of the city—devise ways to build economic capital and community while thousands of miles away from their homes (Zhang, 2001). In some cases, these processes are interlinked, as Zhang demonstrates with consideration of the social networks migrants forge to undertake their flexible economic activities and manage their marginal political status.

Another key area of inquiry has focused on understanding how the unmaking of the urban workforce has unfolded and, more specifically, how urban workers are mobilizing space to articulate their postreform experience. The spatial patterning of everyday life according to Mao-era socialist principles, most evident in the *danwei* (the urban work unit), was a key element through which a working-class consciousness was brought to life. Danwei allowed the state to manage three key dimensions of a worker's life: the workplace, the family, and leisure (Xing, 2010). However, in the midst of economic liberalization, such compounds have been largely dismantled or dramatically downsized, raising questions about how this process has fed into the insurgent identities of Chinese workers postreform. These places, previously exalted as "workers' paradise" (Xing, 2010, p. 823), have transitioned into more individualized spaces for leisure and recreation where "workers amuse themselves" (Xing, 2010, p. 824). But as Xing (2010) demonstrates, this process is fractured: While the retreat of the state from leisure culture has meant individuals are more free to pursue recreation on their own terms, lingering socialist legacies and ideas that are literally emplaced into these spaces foster competing articulations of place and identity. Xing's work identifies an "emergent proletarian public sphere" (p. 829) where different groups struggle to voice alternative interpretations of what it means to be a post-Mao urban worker. Similarly, Qiu and Wang (2012) explore the construction of new working-class cultural spaces in the context of a retreating state. Paying particular attention to the interplay of the built environment and ICT in facilitating the production of these new spaces, they suggest that these spaces represent the production of a working-class identity in progress. However, they point to how this working-class identity does not speak with one voice or interpretation of contemporary working-class consciousness—and in fact interacts alongside the state, community, and local working conditions to produce a unique perspective in place.

By taking a spatial lens to the postreform context in China, such work allows for a fuller exploration of how individuals grapple with what it means to be a Chinese subject in the contemporary era—not only in macro political or economic terms but also in the terrain of everyday life. As a consequence, this work also draws attention to how the making of this identity is the outcome of the interplay between top-down institutional change (e.g., the retreat of the Chinese state from the sphere of leisure and recreation) and the processes of everyday production—of culture and space.

The Emergence of *Guangchangwu* in the Postreform Chinese Landscape

With an estimated 100 million participants nationwide (Q. Wang, 2015a), over the past 10 years guangchangwu has transformed into a highly visible cultural phenomenon in the Chinese landscape. Translated into English as "public square dancing," the term *guangchangwu* broadly refers to the practice of group dancing in outdoor spaces with musical accompaniment, usually in the form of a loudspeaker, and in the case of folk-style *yangge* guangchangwu, with live instruments. However, the general definition provided belies the diversity of practices under the umbrella term *guangchangwu*: from the aerobics-like steps of *jianshenchao*, to the ballroom-style dancing of *jiaoyiwu*, to the hyperenergetic jumps and turns involved in *shiliubu*. The size of these dancing groups also varies widely, as both small groups of about 10 people and larger groups of 50 or more have been observed. Less variable are the age and gender of the participants: They are typically women of middle-age or older, although it is not unheard of to see younger and male participants as well (Li as cited by He, 2014; Q. Wang, 2014).

Although guangchangwu in its present form is a relatively recent phenomenon, public dance, and collective exercise activity as a whole, has had a much longer history in contemporary Chinese society. *Yangge*, a popular folk dance believed to have originated during the Song Dynasty (959–1278 CE), is considered an early predecessor of contemporary forms of collective dance performed in public. Literally meaning "rice sprout song" (Hung, 2005, p. 82), yangge was historically performed in villages during celebrations and festivals to dispel evil spirits and ensure a plentiful harvest. As a popular folk culture form, it was incorporated as part of the Chinese Communist Party's campaigns during the Yan'an years to mobilize arts and culture for the masses (Gerdes, 2008; Hung, 2005). When the People's Republic was established in 1949, it became an "official celebratory art" (Hung, 2005, p. 84); however, this popularity was not long-lived. With the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s, yangge fell out of favor for its feudalist origins (Gerdes, 2008). In its place rose *zhongziwu* (or "loyalty dance"), a public dance practiced to exalt Chairman Mao (X. Lu, 2004). Popular in classrooms, workplaces, and streets throughout the Cultural Revolution, zhongziwu achieved near universal status in everyday life at the time. Moreover, collective exercise as a whole was embedded in the daily routine in Mao-era China, when workers and students alike would regularly participate in collective calisthenics set to music broadcast over loudspeakers (Bjorklund, 1986; Zhou, 2014).

As the Chinese state's grip over cultural and leisure practice relaxed in the reform years, these collective leisure activities began to fall out of fashion as ballroom dance, previously considered "petty bourgeois amusement" (Rolandsen, 2011, p. 2), was increasingly accepted ("China's Square Dance," 2014). It was also at this time that guangchangwu, as a form of low-cost exercise and recreation activity, gained popularity (Huang as cited by He, 2014; Zhao, 2003). Interest in the practice was further heightened when the Chinese government introduced a nationwide fitness program in the run-up to the Beijing Summer Olympics in 2008 (He, 2014).

A Note on Scale and Method

As a relatively recent cultural phenomenon, guangchangwu is just beginning to attract academic attention. Its prevalence and sudden rise in the contemporary postreform moment in China points to its importance as a key "cultural text" with which we can understand contemporary China (Q. Wang, 2015a). For instance, Qianni Wang (2014, 2015a, 2015b) reads guangchangwu as a novel form of sociality that has emerged with the rise of what she terms the "first generation of the lonely mother" (2015a, p. 97).

However, the limited academic work on this topic to date has been mostly urban-centric, and analyses have largely focused on its growth in the context of China's broader urbanization drive (C. Chen, 2007, 2010; Q. Wang, 2015a). One of the consequences of China's reform has been the decentralization of certain decision-making powers around facilitating economic development to lower scales, particularly privileging cities (*chengshi*) as key sites of accumulation. It has simultaneously introduced competition between and within these scales, disrupting the hierarchy of administrative scales (*xingzheng quhua*) that has structured political administration historically (J. Wang, 2005). The rural countryside and villages in particular have been seen as the losers in this process of scalar restructuring as they grapple with the loss of a workforce who increasingly move to the cities seeking better economic opportunity and with the question of how to best pursue economic development in the face of stifling inter- and intrascale

competition for capital flow and administrative resources (J. Wang, 2005). Therefore, this article also aims to contribute to a fuller understanding of guangchangwu from a different scalar perspective—the rural village—that occupies a contested and arguably marginalized position in the politics of scale in China.

Data was collected for this article during a two-week research trip to Heyang Village that I undertook with the Global to Village: Grounding Communications Research project team. The team selected focus groups as the primary data collection method due to their ability to foster collective conversations among participants on a range of local topics. The 12 researchers were divided into four smaller groups based on research theme, and each of the four groups held eight focus groups (for a total of 32 focus group sessions) that lasted between two and three hours each. In total, there were 94 participants, with three to four attendees at each session. Each focus group proceeded in a semistructured fashion with a moderator posing a set of prepared questions on each topic, giving participants the opportunity to reflect on the question at hand and the responses of the other attendees, before researchers prompted follow-up questions.

While these focus group sessions yielded a rich set of data in and of themselves, this article's preoccupation with scales—particularly microscales such as the body, home, and village—meant that it was important to extend my observation beyond the more controlled research setting of the teamwide focus groups to consider how guangchangwu fit within the lives of the practitioners and everyday life of the villagers more broadly. Therefore, the data collected from focus group sessions was augmented by field observations during the two-week research period when I visited Heyang's local guangchangwu groups. My interaction with these groups varied from passive observer to active participant. In many cases, a visit would span different methods of observation—for instance, beginning a visit with an interview with a practitioner before their nightly guangchangwu practice, then sitting on the side and observing the group dancing while chatting with other participants taking a break, then actively participating in the dance, then joining the group for snacks and chat afterward. During most field visits, I conducted informal interviews with both participants and observers in situ. In some cases, these informal interviews led to more formal in-depth individual and group interviews. In addition to the focus group sessions, I held 10 individual and group interviews with local guangchangwu practitioners. An incredibly rich field of data resulted from this mixed method, which forms the basis of this article's analysis of the interplay between space, place, and power in guangchangwu in Heyang.

A Dance for Our Time? Exploring *Guangchangwu*'s Engagement With Scale and Space in Contemporary China

Movement From Collective to Individualistic Leisure Space?

As discussed, the recent rise of guangchangwu in China has been popularly read as an indication of nostalgia among its mostly middle-aged practitioners who would have come of age during the pervasive collectivism characteristic of Mao-era China. Such interpretations gesture to how contemporary leisure culture, including guangchangwu, is more broadly situated in the ongoing cultural negotiation between collectivism and individualism that the reforms of the late 1980s unleashed (Rofel, 2007).

In Heyang, popular leisurely pursuits include participating in guangchangwu but also in *lao nian chao* (seniors' exercise), *taiqi*, *mahjong*, and playing cards. This is in addition to other popular activities such as watching TV, reading, and walking. Residents emphasized the variety of activities available to now partake in, framing their leisure time in terms of rest and relaxation in contrast to the hard work of toiling in the fields during the day. Participation in leisure according to individualized desire was thus conceived as fulfilling a healthy, rejuvenating function. When discussing guangchangwu's emergence in Heyang, residents consistently noted that the activity's popularity was intimately tied to the overall improvement in the quality of life across postreform China. Mr. Liu stated: "People have better lives now, and we have time to dance. Health is also a bigger concern today, so people want to do activities that are healthy." This was echoed by Mrs. Tang, who said, "People have more free time on their hands, and want to play. People are also wealthier and have better lives."

Indeed, the rising popularity of guangchangwu in China reflects the emergence of an increasingly individualized leisure culture nationwide (see Rolandsen, 2011). In Maoist China, leisure was largely shaped by a collective mode of social organization that infiltrated all aspects of everyday life. Life in Maoist China was characterized by the "enforced togetherness" (Friedmann, 2005, p. 79) of what Bray (2005) called the "public family" of Mao's masses. Personal time was collectively experienced through participation in political study groups, team sports, attending showings of propagandistic films, and, most explicitly, through mass exercise and large-scale group activities (Friedmann, 2005; Zhou, 2014). The ostensible goal of such mass activities was to instill a collective ethic,

> to create a new type of socialist subjects, known in Chinese as "Chairman Mao's good soldiers," who prioritize[d] their loyalty to the party-state over their filial duties to their parents and family and devote[d] themselves to . . . grand revolutionary goals instead of individual interests. (Yan, 2010, p. 492)

However, the postreform remapping of the individual–collective relationship provided a favorable milieu for the emergence of individualized, autonomous leisure and a plethora of culture and leisure opportunities for individuals to engage in on their own terms (Qian, 2014). Now, "one's leisure time was to be one's own" (Friedmann, 2005, p. 79). Friedmann articulates this shift as the "expansion of the personal space of autonomous choice" (p. 78). For under the new regime's slogan "socialism with Chinese characteristics," the collective that was originally known as the "ordinary people" (*laobaixing*) became a group of self-motivated individuals, set free with the power to control their own life choices (Ong & Zhang, 2008, p. 14).

Jumping From Home to the Community: Transcending Boundaries,
Connecting Through Practice, and Appropriating Space

It is against this backdrop that Heyang's guangchangwu practitioners imagine the practice as a vehicle of movement that allows them to transcend boundaries between spaces with varying degrees of mobility. A returning male rural migrant introduced guangchangwu to Heyang. Like many others, he had left the village for Guangdong Province to seek better economic opportunities—where he began participating in guangchangwu as a form of exercise. On his return, he began to practice it outside his

home with his wife—continuing the healthy habit he initiated while away from Heyang. Their friends and other villagers joined in, which prompted curiosity about the practice around the village. Now, a few years later, Heyang is home to three guangchangwu groups.

Though a male villager ostensibly introduced guangchangwu in the village through his transboundary movement, popular understanding among villagers classifies guangchangwu as primarily a women's activity. When pressed on the topic, most individuals reluctantly and discomfortingly—as evidenced by their hesitant laughter—indicated that anyone who desires to participate should do so regardless of their gender. But the taken-for-granted categorization of guangchangwu as a women's activity also gestures to how guangchangwu intersects with changing gender dynamics in the village, and China more broadly.

In my many discussions with Heyang's guangchangwu practitioners, the idea of *youmen* was frequently cited. Roughly translated to English as "weighed down" or "imprisoned," the women I spoke with commonly discussed a feeling of being constrained by their everyday home and work lives by invoking youmen. Ms. Zhang, a longtime guangchangwu practitioner in the village, pointedly underlined this when she told us, "Without dancing, I would be caged in my house" (*men zai jia li*). Over the course of several meetings, she described the twists and turns of her family's fortunes, which began with her and her husband's efforts to temporarily relocate to Guangzhou Province to raise ducks to provide for their family. A number of failed pursuits to generate income coupled with her husband's progressively debilitating health over recent years led the couple to relocate back to Heyang, where she now spends her days caring for him. Although she recognized the difficulty of her present situation, she described her time outside practicing guangchangwu as the happiest time in her day. Other women in her guangchangwu group, who also bore burdens of keeping house, caring for children or grandchildren, and assisting in the fields, expressed similar sentiments. In this sense, guangchangwu was envisioned as a practice that enabled women to move beyond the constraints and burdens of overseeing their households, albeit temporarily. The space carved out by guangchangwu was theirs and theirs alone, a practice they could participate in for their own joy and benefit.

The movement of traversing the inside and outside of the home enabled by guangchangwu is important to highlight because it interfaces with the spatial mobility of women indicated by the postreform rearticulation of femininity in China. Traditionally, prior to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, women's movements were largely constrained to the domestic sphere (Croll, 1995; Rofel, 1999; Yang, 1999a). In this sense, a woman's identity was strongly attached to her role in family life and was spatially manifest through the circulation of norms of propriety that dictated under what conditions it was proper to traverse the boundary between inside and outside, or move across scales from the home to the broader community. However, as described by Rofel (1999), under the Maoist regime in the early PRC, women's gender roles shifted dramatically with the development of a "socialist femininity" that was premised on the construction of the "new revolutionary woman" defined vis-à-vis a new standard of productive labor that measured human worth and was the basis of a new socialist subjectivity. Women were called on to support state activities, and, as a result, women increasingly moved beyond the private

spaces of the household to practice a collective socialist identity.[3] In this way the party imposed a "modern functional discourse of gender subordination, one that revolved around family and work, on an already existing cultural system of gender that depended on an entirely different cultural dichotomy, a sociospatial logic of inside/outside" (Rofel, 1999, p. 48).

With the implementation of Deng Xiaoping's reform policies in the 1970s, however, ideas about womanhood were again reshaped by the state with public encouragement for women to retreat to the domestic sphere and "return home" (*nüxing huijia*) (Cartier, 2001a; Rofel, 1999). Once again, female bodies operated as a crucial terrain on which a socialist imagination of modernity was renegotiated. In this context, Q. Wang (2015a) reads guangchangwu as a transgressive renegotiation of a postsocialist femininity, resulting in what she terms a "mixed body culture" that incorporates elements of Confucian womanhood and a post-Maoist sexualized femininity.

More fundamentally, the practice itself, through its appropriation of outside spaces, opens up boundaries between inside/outside and, in doing so—to use Henri Lefebvre's (1991) term—"produces" alternative spaces of collectivity for its female participants. It is, after all, at the moment of the group meeting and practice that a collective space is produced. In Heyang, there are three primary guangchangwu groups located in different areas around the village. The different groups chose these sites based on proximity to the homes of the practitioners and size. The largest group of about 20 uses a large empty space behind the village's main strip that is shielded from the hustle and bustle of the village's main thoroughfare by a row of imposing multistory homes, testaments to the wealth of some of the village's most prosperous residents. A smaller group of about 12 led by Ms. Yang uses a parking lot next to the ticket booth and entrance to the *guminju*, or the old village, a tourist site in development envisioned as the economic panacea driving the village's future growth (see Nicolai, this Special Section). These spaces come to life in the evenings with the cheerful music and choreography of guangchangwu. But outside of these moments, they operate as transitory spaces, sitting unoccupied for most of the day. Thus, through guangchangwu, we see a momentary crystallization of the collective. In this sense, it is the scale of the body that represents the nexus of spatialization: The body itself serves as a physical mark of a social presence in space.

Ms. Li suggested that "without guangchangwu we would not have met each other and gotten to know each other so well," indicating that if they did not dance, the women in her guangchangwu group probably would retreat to individualized forms of leisure, such as watching TV, behind the doors of their homes. Thus, in a context of increasing individualization, guangchangwu not only enables individuals to connect, but, through its very appropriation of space, constitutes an opportunity for the production of an

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[3] It is important to note that, although the Mao-era socialist reworking of femininity in a real sense opened up spatial mobilities for women, the general consensus on this project is that it was predicated not on recognizing the contributions of women but rather on the erasure of gender through the masculinization of women. As Rofel (1999) articulates, "The embrace of a class position appeared to make femaleness irrelevant to the one marker that counted—'work' itself" (p. 80). This was at least partly accomplished through the banning of visible grooming and dressing practices, which were marked as bourgeois luxuries (H. Lu, 2006; Yang, 1999a).

alternative space that makes evident the movement of its practitioners beyond the boundary of inside/outside and from the scale of the home to the community.

At the same time, the space produced by these women's practice of guangchangwu does not amount to "uninhibited breathing space" (Yang, 1999b, p. 2)—far from it. Tightly woven into the rhythms of its practitioners' everyday lives, the practice of guangchangwu is short-lived and opportunistic. Guangchangwu can thus be understood as a "*temporal articulation of place* . . . indissociable from particular moments and opportunities" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 35, emphasis added). It is an adaptation— or, to borrow Michel de Certeau's concept, a *tactic*—which "insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). Guangchangwu can thus be read as a way of occupying liminality under constraint.

Jumping Beyond Heyang

Though guangchangwu is frequently characterized by its grassroots nature—with many using the word *zifa*, translating to "spontaneous" or "grassroots," to describe it—over the past few years, the increasing popularity of the practice has made it the target of institutionalized organization and commercialization. This includes large-scale guangchangwu events, such as the recently publicized effort of 18,542 dancers in Hebei Province to set a new world record for collective line dancing (Cheng, 2015); government and private-sponsored competitions and workshops; and an entire emerging economy around the production and distribution of guangchangwu-related materials such as clothing, shoes, instructional DVDs, and even video-recording services. Musical groups have even emerged producing guangchangwu-specific songs.

The increasing commercialization of the practice speaks to the lucrative potential businesses in a range of industries see in targeting guangchangwu enthusiasts. However, I briefly highlight here how guangchangwu practitioners themselves use these materials and services—to share, connect, and create a collective space for their practice. The rising popularity of the practice nationwide has spawned an extensive network of participants who connect via cellular and Internet networks to share choreography routines. I learned of the extent of these networks, and the significant investment of practitioners in them, one evening huddled around the kitchen table in Ms. Sun's home. The group had met in their usual spot for their nightly practice, but promptly after gathering, a steady rain had begun to fall. Instead of declaring the night wasted, the group had elected to gather at Ms. Sun's home to share one another's company.

As we sat eating steamed corn and sweet porridge and chatting, Ms. Yang took out her cell phone to show me an app called *Tangdou guangchangwu* (see Figure 3). Displayed on the screen were tiny stills of videos depicting a plethora of *guangchangwu* groups in a variety of settings. Such videos are created by *guangchangwu* practitioners nationwide—often with professional help—and then uploaded to popular video-sharing websites such as Youku or Tudou, or Tangdou guangchangwu to share with other guangchangwu enthusiasts. As Ms. Yang explained the app to me, scrolling through the videos together, the other members of the group huddled in to peek over our shoulders, commenting on the music,

choreography, and difficulty of the various routines presented in the videos, discussing which routine to incorporate in their group's repertoire next.

Figure 3. Screen capture of the Tangdou guangchangwu app, featuring stills of various guangchangwu videos.

Such knowledge-sharing networks are important because they function as tools that guangchangwu practitioners across the country can use to build a collective culture regardless of geographical proximity. They are a way for dancers to connect and build links beyond their localities. For instance, Heyang's guangchangwu practitioners use these networks as a way to share their routines with others and build esteem and recognition for their own choreography. Such productions are quite elaborate. Group members will all contribute funds to hire a videographer and video editor, practice religiously in preparation, and purchase matching outfits and accessories. All in all, these videos amount

to a significant investment of time and money, but they are invested in precisely because they serve as a virtual avenue to further jump scale from the locality of Heyang to beyond.

In addition to distribution via online channels, these videos are distributed through more formal avenues on DVDs at electronics and video shops. Informal routes of distribution have also emerged, whereby guangchangwu enthusiasts burn and copy videos and music to share among themselves. For Ms. Huang, a fairly recent guangchangwu practitioner, the availability of alternative points of access to guangchangwu materials figured centrally in her decision to take up the activity. As we sat in her home perusing her extensive collection of DIY-copied guangchangwu videos, she explained that, although she did not believe that she was very skilled in guangchangwu, one of her good friends encouraged her participation and helped her copy several videos of her group's routines on a DVD. In her spare time, or on rainy days when the group's practice sessions were canceled, she would pop a DVD in and practice the routines alone. These videos enabled her to develop her guangchangwu practice in the comfort of her own home. More importantly, they serve as a means for her to negotiate the boundary of inside/outside that has been mapped onto the spatial mobility of women in postreform China, for evolving norms of propriety increasingly dictate *what* sort of bodies should perform. In this way, the availability of DIY guangchangwu videos enables Ms. Huang to negotiate the potential unease that arises with performing guangchangwu outside.

Finally, proliferating alongside these virtual networks of distribution have been guangchangwu associations and groups that provide choreography workshops and networking events for particularly enthusiastic practitioners. These events serve as key gathering points uniting guangchangwu dancers from across the country. In Heyang, Ms. Yang travels to such events often, literally jumping scale and connecting Heyang's guangchangwu community to others from geographically disparate locations across China. Such movement serves as a particularly explicit counterpoint to conceptualizations of the rural and local scale as environments of stasis, not only by virtue of practitioners physically moving themselves, but in terms of the knowledge-sharing and relationship-building networks that form and are maintained as a result.

Tensions: Guangchangwu, the Localized Politics of Space, and Governing at a Distance

Despite the momentous spread of guangchangwu across China, the practice has not been greeted with unanimous enthusiasm among citizens. In fact, many deride the practitioners' assumed socialist nostalgia and complain about the excessive noise and use of space associated with the practice. In recent years, news reports have abounded that cover escalating conflicts between guangchangwu practitioners and their neighbors, ranging from mild disagreement, such as arguing among neighborhood residents and guangchangwu practitioners, to outright rage and violence: In Wuhan, Hebei Province, one group had excrement thrown on them, and in Beijing, another group was threatened by a resident who fired his shotgun and released his three Tibetan mastiffs on the group in frustration (Ma, 2014; Xu, 2013; Yin, 2014).

In light of the conflicts unfolding over the practice, the authorities have taken a range of measures to regulate guangchangwu.[4] Attempts to manage the practice have taken multiple forms, including the introduction of noise and time restrictions with the imposition of fines for violations. The most significant intervention to date occurred in March 2015, when the General Administration of Sport of China introduced a set of 12 guangchangwu routines based on a joint study co-commissioned by the Ministry of Culture. Choreographed by an "expert panel" of dancers and fitness leaders, the routines were unveiled as part of a broader initiative that would entail official instructors introducing the dances to local guangchangwu sites across the country (General Administration of Sport of China, 2015; Sun, 2015). A rather ambivalent intervention, the introduction of these standardized routines can be seen as an attempt by the authorities to both encourage a burgeoning fitness phenomenon and regulate and authorize official ways of participating in it.

Against this backdrop, in Heyang, the government's stance toward the practice unfolded in an interscalar context of village politics and, in particular, intervillage competition. Even though villagers indicated that noise was not a prevalent issue in Heyang, both space and resources were a sore point between practitioners and the village government. Overall, most cultural activities in Heyang, including guangchangwu, were self-sufficient and self-organized. If villagers sought support, material or otherwise, for their activities, it was understood that it would not likely be provided. The exception to this is village-sanctioned special events. For such events, officials often play an organizing role to coordinate the activities of the various groups. However, many guangchangwu practitioners voiced their displeasure at the lack of consistent material support provided by the government. Rather, they described a dynamic of opportunism underlying the village committee's inconsistent decision making regarding support for the activity.

This was most pointedly illustrated in 2014, when the town government held a guangchangwu competition in which groups from around the region were invited to participate. The village committee took the initiative to organize the team representing the village. As a village official stated:

> There are several teams in the village, but we will select the best dancers from the teams and they will form a new group for the competition. The team represents the entire village, so we have to choose the best dancers to go.

Heyang's guangchangwu team placed second in the 2014 competition and was awarded a new set of loudspeakers by the town government as a prize. However, these speakers are not currently in use by any of the village's guangchangwu groups and are instead locked away in the community's cultural hall. It is the view of the village committee that the speakers are the village's property, and the committee, as proxy for the residents, should dictate their appropriate use. For the guangchangwu practitioners, however, the speaker represents a reward for their efforts that they should have access to, particularly in light of a lack of institutional support.

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[4] Because of the complicated division of powers responsible for regulatory matters in China across scales (e.g., provincial, urban, local), efforts to regulate neighborhood-level activity can vary from neighborhood organizations issuing a stern notice to cease to municipal-level authorities regulating noise.

Here we have a good example of the tension inherent in the coarticulation between neoliberal logic and socialist sovereignty in postreform China—or, in other words, the coevolving processes of the remaking of the individual and the reassertion of the power of the nation (Ong & Zhang, 2008). As Aihwa Ong and Li Zhang (2008) argue, the project of governing a postreform China is predicated on a "deliberate shift in China's governing strategy to set citizens free to be entrepreneurs of the self" (p. 2). But this shift unfolds while the state continues to regulate from a distance. Thus, Ong and Zhang term this particular configuration of state-society relations in China "socialism from afar." In this sense, we can see how Heyang's village government supports guangchangwu in particular cases when its own interests are served (e.g., as an opportunity to jump scale from village to town and county) and capitalizes on the efforts of its practitioners to improve the village's cultural capital and regional reputation. But outside of such opportunities, responsibility for support and organization of guangchangwu (in addition to other cultural activities popular in the village) is devolved to the practitioners.

Conclusion: Finding Joy and Jumping Scale in the Everyday

Time and time again throughout my stay in Heyang I found myself impressed by the depth of the local practitioners' commitment to their guangchangwu practice. Barring illness, bad weather, or special engagements, almost all practitioners would attend their daily guangchangwu without fail. Popular understandings poke fun or even deride this dedication as "addiction," but as I spent more time in the field, it seemed to me that guangchangwu was much more about finding joy—a routinized, temporary joy—and making a place for these practitioners in the midst of a society that was leaving them behind.

This article has attempted to complicate conventional understandings of guangchangwu as a simple leisure activity, or a manifestation of nostalgic longing for a China of ages past, to tell a story of how its women practitioners come to the practice in the midst of their experiences of China's broader transformations under late socialism. For the practitioners in Heyang, guangchangwu operates as a place-making practice that allows them to jump scales from inside to outside, from the home to the broader community, to produce a different kind of place—one where they can connect, come together, and bond beyond their everyday responsibilities and routines. Their experiences tell us that, although the contradictions materialized by the continual intersection of macro social, cultural, and economic forces—privatization and marketization, the entrenchment of global capital, and an enduring socialist legacy—characterizing China's reform era play out at multiple scales, they are most profoundly experienced and engaged with at the level of everyday life.

This much is clear when women are called by the state to "return home." Rooted in the village, responsible for bearing the burdens of agricultural labor, keeping house, and raising a family, rural women across the country have in many senses lost out on what Cartier (2001a) calls China's "gendered industrialization." In the face of this, women in Heyang mobilize guangchangwu as a temporary articulation of agency—and in coming together for their practice, they create pockets of space in the village that, for one fleeting hour every day, crystallize their being as a collective together. Moreover, the scale-jumping movements of individual practitioners such as Ms. Yang, who toward the end of my stay in Heyang traveled to Beijing for a guangchangwu workshop, serve to further make a place for

guangchangwu practitioners *across* scales—and arguably, in doing so assert their place in the new cultural order of postreform China.

At the same time, if, as Lisa Rofel (2007) argues, the "ideal" postsocialist transnational citizen-subject in China is defined along one dimension by a "transcendence of locality," the case of the scale jumping of the guangchangwu *dama*s beyond the scales of their homes, localities, regions, and ultimately the Chinese nation-state makes evident the inherent tensions involved in this project. For instance, in 2014, Chinese netizens were abuzz with the news that guangchangwu had made it to the global stage. In this curious instance of jumping scale, international news outlets reported the appearance of the everyday Chinese cultural phenomenon on the hallowed grounds of European elite culture as a group of Chinese women performed a guangchangwu routine at the Place de Louvre in Paris (T.-P. Chen, 2014; Ottery & Zhu, 2014). Later that year, a video surfaced online of another group practicing in the Red Square in Moscow; their performance was cut short by Russian police who requested they move their activity elsewhere (T.-P. Chen, 2014). Online, angry discussions proliferated criticizing the actions of these damas as damaging to China's international reputation as an emerging cosmopolitan power ("Chinese 'Dama' Dance," 2014).

Although the global spotlight shone on guangchangwu with its literal movement beyond its local and national origins, its assumed association with an anachronistic adherence to Mao-era norms of collectivity were constructed as fundamentally at odds with the construction of a "universal, individualized cosmopolitanism with Chinese characteristics" (Rofel, 2007, p. 119). This suggests that the transcendence of the local to wider scales is by no means clear-cut and, indeed, is possibly in tension with the changing cultural politics of China more broadly. That such tensions are fundamentally about the character and nature of scale jumping—that is, who or what is being represented across scales—is reflective of, on the one hand, the increasing blurriness between and interpenetration of scales and, on the other hand, the high stakes nature of the coarticulation of place, identity, and the everyday in our global times.

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