Introduction

The God of Wealth, as Ikels wrote almost two decades ago, has indeed returned to Guangzhou.[1] Residents are without doubt better off than during the Maoist period; their incomes are higher, their living standards better, their life expectancy longer. At the same time, these advances are also significantly more unevenly distributed than before the reform period.[2] As elsewhere in urban China, wealthy Guangzhou residents today buy apartments at prices that could compete with metropolises such as Hong Kong and New York. They own luxury cars, travel internationally, and buy high-end consumer articles. There is also a growing middle class, owners of home(s) and, more and more often, cars who, favored by government policies targeted at increasing this group, lead a comfortable life. Yet, despite growing affluence, a large number of urban Chinese do not fall in either one of these categories. These are low-qualified laborers, the self-employed, laid off, elderly, and disabled people who often live precarious lives. The combined social, economic, and political transformations of the last thirty-five plus years since the beginning of the reform period has not only improved peoples' livelihoods but also caused strain and new challenges. As a result, significant numbers of urban residents have problems making ends meet or live in potentially precarious conditions.

This study started as an inquiry into what has happened to the *laobaixing,* the "common people," under the economic, social, and political transformations. More precisely, I examine the issue of social support among Guangzhou residents. This topic is prompted by the transformation of the social contract since the beginning of the reform period. Whereas Maoism offered urban residents a complex net of social welfare that effectively resulted in their state dependency, the last three decades have been marked by the continuous curtailing of public provisioning. When the "iron rice bowl" was smashed, the cradle-to-tomb social security vanished and urban residents had to organize their own social welfare, at least much more than before.[3]

At first, social support might not appear to be a very innovative concept or concern.[4] Yet, turning the issue into a question—who helps whom, how, when, and why—shows its fundamental scope and importance. Inquiring into social

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Endnotes for this chapter begin on page 20.

support means examining the social contract of a given society, that is, ideologies and practices of social interaction and relations. Thus, the aim of this book is to examine how China's dramatic urban transformations have affected urban residents' social relations and networks of support. The focus is on the "common people," though this is a slippery term. Here it is used to refer to urban residents who are on the lower rungs of, or just below, the much discussed "new middle classes."[5] My interlocutors were lower rank white-collar employees, workers, or self-employed. Almost all were homeowners and referred to themselves as "just in the middle"—neither poor nor wealthy.

What distinguished them from the upper ranks was mostly their disposable income and (sociopolitical) connections or social capital. Thus, they managed to get by, but an unexpected turn of life—unemployment or illness, for example—posed a serious challenge to their household economy. In this context the question arises of how people deal with uncertainty. How do they ensure their own and others' well-being in the present and future? More specifically, what forms and possibilities of support exist on the level of family (household and kin), neighborhood/community, and larger society? How do people justify and/or explain their ideas and practices regarding help? And what are the challenges that arise individually and collectively in the context of support practices and expectations?

I began this study focusing on two extended families and determined to follow their interactions, interchanges, and ideas as practiced and articulated in their everyday lives. Yet it became quickly evident that focusing narrowly on the kin group excluded a number of significant social relations and domains of people's everyday lives. While the two extended families remained at the center of the project, I expanded the scope of analysis to include religion/church and volunteerism. Other institutions certainly also played a role, yet these two domains were by far the most common and significant to interlocutors. Thus, what might appear from the outset as a scattered focus in fact is a "classical" anthropological study in that it follows leads from the field.

Soup, Love, and a Helping Hand provides an in-depth analysis of a society in the midst of a massive generational, social, and economic transformation. Based on participant observation, formal and informal interviewing, surveys, and mapping I examined different modes and ideologies of help/support, as well as the related issues of reciprocity, relatedness (kinship), and changing state-society relations in contemporary China. Importantly, the picture presented here is not based on economic indicators; "hard" data on the support that people receive or provide is impossible to obtain. Favors, goodwill gestures, and even in-kind support are impossible to objectively measure. While interlocutors constantly assign value to gifts and favors—money or time spent, status or debt acquired—this is highly subjective and cause for major disagreements. Moreover, articulating this measuring process commonly caused discomfort or embarrassment.

Thus, even though throughout my research I frequently asked people about the amount of money they earned and how much time and money they spent on others, there was no reliable means to confirm and probe my interlocutors' answers. In effect, the picture I present here is based on the subjective experiences and reflections of the people at the center of my investigation in combination with my own observations and conclusions. Throughout the study I foreground interlocutors' thoughts, including their fears, anxieties, and worries, as much as their ideas about (moral) obligations, social expectations, and visions of contemporary (urban) Chinese society revealed in conversations and observations. By putting this ethnographic and local data into conversation with other studies and theoretical reflections, I hope to contribute to a general debate about the interrelation between social support, morality, and kinship in contemporary China and beyond.

Before outlining the themes and domains that feature prominently in my research, let me briefly introduce the city of Guangzhou and its surrounding province Guangdong.

Guangzhou

Guangzhou, located about 120 kilometers inland on the Pearl River, is the capital of Guangdong province on China's southeastern coast. Naturally hot and humid in summer and cool and humid in winter, climatic conditions are worsened by environmental pollution. Thick gray smog produced by increasing traffic and the large number of factories throughout the Pearl River Delta covers the sky practically year round (Figure 0.1).

Looking back on more than 2,000 years of history, we see that Guangzhou has a long tradition as an international trade center and port. The "southern gateway to China" was the beginning of the Silk Road of the Sea that brought Arab and Indian traders to the city in the second century AD. The city was also one of the first trading posts for European powers in the sixteenth century and declared a "treaty port" after the Opium Wars. Guangdong province (and neighboring Fujian), furthermore, was the origin of most eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Chinese emigrants, a fact that gave the region a competitive advantage in the reform period. Since its pacification in the twelfth century, its geographic distance from the political power center in China's north guaranteed that the province maintained its distinct character and culture, which is expressed in language, diet, and an alleged "receptiveness to influences from outside China."[6]

After the Communist Revolution in 1949, Guangzhou's history as a center for trade and commerce came to haunt the city. The new Communist government was suspicious of city life in general, and especially of the treaty ports with their foreign-influenced culture. Located at the coastal "front line," Guangzhou had a very low priority in receiving state investments and effectively went into decline.[7]

Figure 0.1. Contamination. © Author

With the reform period, however, the region's distinct history turned into an advantage: in 1980 three of the first four special economic zones were opened in the province with the intention of attracting the investments of the overseas Chinese who had local connections. When the city of Guangzhou was granted special economic zone status in 1984, the municipal authorities decided on a set of prefer-

ential regulations. Again these were intended to encourage overseas Chinese and Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao "compatriots" to invest in the city. The strategy was successful: joint ventures and foreign-owned enterprises' share of total value of industrial goods and service rose from 1.9% in 1985 to 23.0% in 1991 (Figure 0.2).

Notwithstanding its well-established status as the commercial, business, and administrative center of southern China, in more recent years Guangzhou has been facing increasing economic competition from nearby cities in the Pearl River Delta, especially Shenzhen and Hong Kong, which is reflected in indicators like its gross domestic product (GDP) share in the province, GDP per capita, export, and economic growth rate. Moreover, with the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 and Macao in 1999, Guangzhou lost its gateway role. Finally, the Pearl River Delta as an economic region faces increasing competition from Shanghai and the Yangtze River Delta, snatching investment and human capital.[8]

General Social and Economic Situation of Guangzhou Residents

Beginning in the 1990s, the national government gradually reformed the iron rice bowl, transforming the system of guaranteed and subsidized employment, housing, healthcare, and pensions into a social security system based on individuals'

Figure 0.2. Guangzhou City Center: Old and New Buildings. © Author

and employers' contributions. A series of laws and stipulations, such as the 1994 Labor Law and the 2008 Labor Contract Law, initiated the reform period social security system. A comprehensive new social security law was, however, issued only as recently as 2011. Generally speaking, under the new system, registered urban residents of Guangzhou (i.e., those with Guangzhou urban *hukou*)[9] have some form of social insurance, which is either provided by their employer or (if they are self-employed) bought from the government, which covers basic medical expenses and provides a pension.[10]

In addition, almost all interlocutors owned their house, which ranged from commercially constructed, Western-style apartments of eighty square meters and larger to barren, concrete floor, forty square meters flats in buildings from the Maoist period that were occupied by three or more persons. The majority of people had bought discounted apartments from their work units when these were required to sell off their housing stock to occupants at highly subsidized prices beginning in 1989.[11] These typically six- to ten-story buildings, built in the early 1990s, offer modest comforts, such as tiled floors, a private kitchen, and a bathroom, but usually have no elevator. A few of the older people in my study lived in Guangzhou-style houses (*zhutongwu* or *qilou*) that date from the beginning of the twentieth century (or older). Some of these narrow but deep three- to four-story buildings have a receding first floor used as a store with living quarters above. In both types, bathroom and cooking facilities are minimal (Figures 0.3 and 0.4).[12]

The majority of interlocutors did not feel that their basic livelihood was in jeopardy. Their overall living situation was comparably much more secure than that of China's rural population. Problems and hardship could occur, however, in the following situations: medical expenses in case of illness; frail elderly people needing practical and financial support; and unemployment. Other factors contributing to financial strain and insecurity were a child's education; the purchase of a new house[13]; and rising costs of living.[14]

All of these factors had an effect on urban residents either directly or, if they applied to kin, indirectly. As a result, despite their basic living provision, there was a general sense of insecurity and of having to look after oneself—a need to plan ahead and to be prepared. Even the poorest of my interlocutors tried to save money. Wealthier people bought commercial insurance (most often, however, for their children) and/or government bonds and stocks. Yet as the recent (August 2015) stock crash shows, the latter is certainly not a foolproof investment.[15] Thus, one of the most important economic assets is the ownership of more than one flat, with rent producing additional income. Access to this asset is, however, far from equal; state policies clearly favor certain population groups over others.[16]

Bankruptcy of a company, being laid off, or voluntarily leaving the public for the private sector can (further) jeopardize households' economic situation. Due to the general pattern of the economic reforms, all three of these possibilities have

Figure 0.3. Old *Danwei* Apartment Block. © Author

disproportionately affected less-skilled, middle-aged persons. Even if their companies thrived and they could withstand the competition from younger colleagues, especially in the mid-1980s when wages stagnated and the danger of being laid off loomed large, better trained workers gave up the apparently waning security of state sector employment.

Figure 0.4. New Commercially Sold Apartment Blocks. © Author

After they ventured into the private sector, severing their connection with the state sector and giving up the remaining privileges this brings, many had to realize that "doing business" (*zuo shenyi*) was not as easy as they might have initially thought. Even more, especially the Cultural Revolution generation's general lack of education eventually caught up with them, putting them at a competitive disadvantage in the open labor and economic market.[17] While the government offers insurance schemes for people who are not connected to the public sector, these are less encompassing; they pay less for medical expenses and do not provide a pension. Moreover, monthly contributions present a financial challenge. Thus, several of my interlocutors who had either left or never entered the public sector did not have any such provision. Illness and loss of work were therefore the most imminent threats to their well-being. In sum, even if not living in precarious circumstances, there were numerous occasions when interlocutors needed material or practical or emotional support from others.

Research in the 1980s and 1990s examined the effect of Chinese urban transformations on social relations and family life.[18] These studies showed, for example, that greater economic opportunities and the greater availability of housing units allowed young married couples to set up their own households earlier than before. Nevertheless, this did not result in less close relations between adult children and elderly parents. On the contrary, the two generations remained emotionally and physically close, commonly interacting on a daily basis. Since then, the

deepening of reforms, especially in the new millennium, has continued to transform cities and urban social networks.

More economic opportunities in combination with more curtailing of state-provided benefits only increased socioeconomic and spatial differentiations. In addition, the first generation of only children has reached adulthood. New ideas and ideologies of how to lead a meaningful life have taken hold. What does all this mean in terms of social support? In the radically transformed urban environment, who do people turn to for help? Why and how is support extended?

Studying Social Support

Social support is most commonly defined as "various types of support (i.e., assistance/help) that people receive from others and is generally classified into two (sometimes three) major categories: emotional, instrumental (and sometimes informational) support."[19] This focus on "purposive action," however, is somewhat limited in that it focuses on functions or strategic conduct. Yet, whether a transaction and its consequences are considered support and who is recognized as supporter and supported is open to negotiation and subject to a host of factors.[20] Thus, Schlecker suggests the notion of "encounters" to conceive of social support as "continuously redefined in interactions."[21] While I second the move to broaden our approach, this conception runs the risk of diluting social support to the extent that it becomes mere chance. Therefore, here I highlight the wider field through and within which social support is constituted. This includes ideologies and practices of social relations, kinship, and morality, as well as the larger politicoeconomic context. At the same time, I emphasize the general uncertainty and risk implicated in social support.

My approach is inspired by recent writings on sociality. As Long and Moore elaborate in their introduction to the edited volume *Sociality,* the concept highlights the processual nature of social relations; human sociality is open to (conscious or unconscious) manipulation and transformation on the part of social actors.[22] Sociality in this view is understood as "a dynamic matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable."[23] This approach builds on thoughts about sociality by Strathern and Toren.[24] The importance of sociality, say Strathern and Toren, is that it highlights "dynamic social processes in which any person is inevitably engaged, rather than a set of rules or customs or structures or even meanings that exist *as a system* independently of the individual who is to be socialized."[25]

Similarly, to study who helps whom, when, and how, we cannot simply look at acts of support in and of themselves. Individuals are enmeshed in complex webs of meaning that affect not only their own practices and how they relate to others but also their interpretation of the world. Moreover, moral imperatives compete with

personal desires in shaping social relationships, as do (shared) experiences over time. Social support, I thus suggest, is not a fixed set of rules and practices that exist independently of persons and specific sociohistorical contexts. Instead, it is a social process between two or more locally embedded and socially positioned actors. It is informed but not determined by, and at the same time influences, changing practices and ideas about morality, kinship, and social relations more generally.

This approach highlights not only the situatedness of social support but also its inherent uncertainty and incalculability. It redirects us from purposive action, from material and economic indicators—money and time spent and given—toward the larger context, the matrix within which social agents are interacting. Thus, instead of reifying or even fetishizing social support by focusing on (material) exchanges, here I will examine how it emerges in and through changing social relations and in dialogue with practices and ideologies of kinship and morality.

This approach is supported by numerous studies that have shown how in China kinship, reciprocal exchanges, and feelings are indeed intimately tied together.[26] Important organizing moral principles such as *renqing* (human feelings) and *liangxin* (conscience) guide reciprocal exchanges of favors and resources. Good feelings between people are expressed through material exchanges. At the same time, these exchanges can create, maintain, or intensify good feelings since gifts "embody the desired closeness of a relationship, which they help to construct."[27] Kinship or relatedness, in turn, it has recently been argued is less guided by ideology as was previously assumed but intimately linked to practiced relations of exchange.[28] Thus, Jankowiak suggests that "kinship is a form of relatedness or connectiveness most saliently revealed through its transactions or social flows that always extend beyond a community's formal genealogy."[29]

The author, moreover, draws attention to the link between kinship, exchange, and morality when he notes that in order to make such interchanges more than ephemeral, individuals "have to recognize sharing a common identity that always involves some form of ethical entanglement."[30] *Soup, Love, and a Helping Hand* explores practices and ideologies of social support as constituted within and through kinship/relatedness and changing moral orders. Moreover, the research sheds light on the larger themes of individualization, disembedding, and the search for meaning in contemporary urban China. The project thus contributes not only to the study of contemporary urban life in China but also to more theoretical debates in the social sciences about morality and relatedness in the context of economic transformations.

Morality/Ethics

Morality or ethics, that is, the question of how people should act in contemporary society, is an ongoing debate in China. It has become fairly common to diagnose a

"moral vacuum," a lack of mores or civility.[31] The Internet is filled with examples exposing both officials and common citizens' transgressions. Both party-state and society call for a renewal of the social contract and for more solidarity. That something is amiss also finds expression in the government's campaign for a Confucian-inspired code of ethics as well as the explosion of religious activities and the growth of the nongovernmental organization (NGO) sector in the recent decades. Yet, what is behind the apparent lack of ethics or civility?

The anthropology of morality (or the study of ethics) has exponentially grown in the past ten years. Historically not an explicit focus of anthropological research, the questions addressed under this label have implicitly been present all along. Kinship and social organization, religion, norms, and beliefs all relate to questions of morality or ethics. The recent emphasis, however, puts morality at the center and addresses larger issues of comparability and difference between different societies or cultures. At the same time, there remains much debate about how to define ethics/morality and how to investigate the issue.

In the much cited introduction to the edited volume *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action,* Lambek defines ethics as practices and culturally legible frames for assessing and indexing the "goodness" or "rightness" of human conduct.[32] It is a "property of speech and action, *as* mind is a property of body."[33] Beneath every action lie ethic sensibilities. Yet, ethics is so thoroughly implicated in the social nature of human beings that it cannot be delimited as an ethnographic object in its own right. Thus, inspired by Aristotle, Lambek proposes a practice-centered approach that focuses on performative acts, including utterances. He calls for a study of "ordinary ethics," emphasizing that ethics is "relatively tacit, grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself."[34]

Only a focus on such ordinary ethics allows us to understand that morality is not simply a question of "moral breakdowns."[35] Morality, Lambek says, is something somewhat implicit, "not necessarily requiring much reflection or even articulation." Moreover, morality is not a prescription; individuals seek to act according to moral norms through their own volition and/or to conform to expectations and obligations. Judgments about one's own and others' actions, finally, are a central element of morality.[36]

This practice-oriented approach toward ethics/morality has gained traction in the China field of studies. Thus, Stafford and collaborators in *Ordinary Ethics in China* also put emphasis on the everyday and practice in their inquiry of ethics in contemporary China.[37] Similar to Lambek, the authors of the volume highlight that there is often a gap between "how things should be and how they really are."[38]

> The setting of a moral standard, and making it "real" through material means, does not ensure that people will live up to it, or even want to do

> so. They may actively challenge and contest the way things are. Along the way, complex emotional ties to others help shape their actions, thus playing a central roles in the production of given ethical outcomes.[39]

Yet, in contrast to Lambek's more implicit and practiced approach to ethics, Stafford emphasizes explicit and conscious deliberations. Here he draws on philosopher Peter Strawson, who suggests that the tension between laying blame and being generous and forgiving is a crucial one in everyday ethical experience.[40] Stafford observes that in China the lack of compliance with moral standards is a subject of much debate and ethical comment.[41]

Santos, in the same volume, expands on these ideas. He emphasizes that collective ethical imagination is highly mutable, since broader sociocultural and politicoeconomic transformations cause moral frictions. Moral reasoning, Santos suggests, is a constructive imaginative activity that is importantly influenced and shaped by specific contexts. Individuals are not mere "slaves to custom" in their ethical engagements. But while individuals have some degree of choice these are neither unconstrained not without consequences.[42]

In her monograph *Drink Water, but Remember the Source,* about moral culture in rural Guangdong, Oxfeld emphasizes the multiplicity of moral orders.[43] According to the traditional "hermeneutic order," society and polity are seen as a cosmically ordained hierarchy and a person's behavior is supposed to reinforce this hierarchy. Maoist morality, in contrast, pretended to overturn traditional hierarchies and to install a new socioeconomic organization that would address people's needs. In practice, however, Oxfeld points out, these very different moral orders were not mutually exclusive; older notions continued to be relevant during Maoism. With the reform period, this has become even more complicated, with some researchers suggesting that certain traditional notions of morality have been revived, whereas others suggest that both older and Maoist moralities have lost importance.[44]

To account for the uncertainties apparently inherent to morality, Oxfeld, inspired by Bakhtin, conceives of morality as "dialogic." That is, far from having a fixed meaning, morality instead is based on a common language for arguing about values. Similar to Stafford, Oxfeld emphasizes how villagers constantly argue and disagree about right and wrong. Yet they share common terms, some traditional, some Maoist, and some more recent. Importantly, however, the interpretation and practice of these terms has changed over time and continues to be influenced by competing moral discourses.

The challenges and contradictions related to ethics in contemporary China come clearly to the fore in the present discussion of social support in Guangzhou. Interlocutors' practices and discourses were shot through with moral concepts and ethical considerations. Discussing and often disagreeing about who should help

whom, and why and how, social support became a practice in ethics. Indeed, social support is one of the domains in and through which ordinary ethics—in practice as well as in private and public debates—is articulated and lived. Whether kin, friends, neighbors, church visitors, or volunteers, helping behavior was explained or justified through reference to different moral orders and concepts. The traditional notions of, for example, *renqing* and *xiao* feature prominently in interlocutors' discourse, as do ideas associated with Maoism, such as thrift, egalitarianism, and selflessness.

Yet such concepts do not determine interlocutors' actions. On the contrary, as will become apparent, influenced by personal circumstances and subjectivities these concepts are creatively applied or rejected. They are also differently interpreted, especially by different generations.[45] While often cited, they are in fact subject to debate—both with others and with oneself. These deliberations, in turn, importantly influence the judgment of others' actions.

Thus, this study shows that what some observers interpret as a lack of ethics actually is a lack of correspondence, or divergent approaches and interpretations of moral concepts and moral orders. In contrast to other studies on morality, which have been largely based in the rural context, here we will see how the ethics of social support plays out in the urban realm. Greater anonymity, high residential fluctuation, and spatial obstacles all affect practices of social support and become important factors in the negotiation of the ethics of helping behavior. As we will see, one of the biggest challenges or reasons for concern and complaint is what Yan has called "the rise of the individual."[46]

Individualization

Intimately connected with social support and the ethics implicated in and expressed through the practice is the issue of individualization. Theorists such as Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, Giddens, and Bauman have described individualization as the structural transformation of social institutions and concomitant changes in the relationship between individual and society.[47] These include the dissolution of traditional social ties, contexts, meanings, and collective structures. As Mills notes, "The implicit assumption is that the detachment from traditional ideas, values, norms, beliefs, and ideologies generates greater individual autonomy and freedom of choice for individuals to shape their lives."[48]

It is evident how the transition from Maoism to the reform period, with the concomitant release of the masses from previous forms of social organization, could be interpreted in these terms. During Maoism, people were organized in communes or work units. Living and working closely together, these close-knit institutions were life-worlds that defined individuals' identity and social position. With the dissolution of these collectives in the reform period, people have much

more freedom and choice as regards their personal lives, including their norms and beliefs. Yet, while Chinese today undoubtedly have greater autonomy and freedom of choice to shape their lives, there is also something decidedly distinct about transformation processes in China, namely the continued role of the state.

Thus, Zhang and Ong suggest that even though the individual has taken new importance in post-Mao China, there are limits to liberalization.[49] According to the authors, individuals in China today are caught between neoliberal competition and socialist state control. "Governing from a distance," the Chinese Communist Party is always present and maintains a tight grip on power. Similarly, Yan argues that Chinese society is being transformed by the "negotiation and contestation between the rising individual and the various forms of collectivity, including the Chinese state."[50] But he also emphasizes the differences to European individualization processes, highlighting that individualization in China remains underdeveloped, as the individual is perceived as a means to an end both by the state and society, and often even by itself.

Yan argues, moreover, that the seeds of the nascent individualization were already planted during the collectivism of the Maoist period.[51] Individualization is thus not simply a by-product of economic restructuring or "neoliberalism," as suggested by some, despite being tightly connected to the language of market economy and privatization. In fact, today there are two parallel processes going on, according to Yan: the rise of the individual on the one hand and the individualization of the social structure on the other. "Whereas the rise of the individual is primarily reflected in the changing patterns of individual biographies, the structural changes mostly result from institutional reforms, policy changes, and the impact of the market economy."[52]

While generally agreeing on the processes described as "individualization," observers differ in how to frame or interpret them. The main contention is between those who, like Yunxiang Yan, apply Western individualization theory and those who argue that despite similarities what is happening in China is distinctly different.[53] Among the latter is Andrew Kipnis, who rejects sociologists' equation of individualization and modernity.[54]

Kipnis draws attention to the role of the individual in premodern times as well as the long trajectory of the state in China, which distinguishes the country from Western nations on which individualization theory is modeled. In addition, the author emphasizes the modernity of Maoism itself. Instead of relying on theories about individualization in late modernity, Kipnis suggests that insights from classical social theorists about Western modernization might offer more important insights as to how to understand what is happening in China. After all, industrialization, urbanization, and nation building—cornerstones of Western modernization—are happening in China on an unprecedented scale. What distinguishes China, however, is that it is simultaneously undergoing processes associated by

theorists with "second" (liquid or high) modernity, namely, globalization, the Internet, space-time compression, postindustrial societies, heightened reflexivity, the dismantling of the welfare state, neoliberalism, and so on.[55]

Kipnis contends that there always exists a tension between the individual and society; this is not something exclusive to modernity. The individualization of modernity, the author suggests, must be seen as "a myth, or a structure of feeling, or a problematic."[56] "What changes are particular social relationships, discourses, and tensions that constitute the social environment and, consequently, the structures of the individual psyche that are immersed therein."[57] Thus, "it is not the arrival of a Western, capitalist modernity alone that explains the structures of feeling around the individual psyche in contemporary China. Legacies of China's premodern and socialist modernity remain important and China's capitalist modernity leads not only to individuation."[58]

> The liberation of the individual is simultaneously his or her enslavement to wider social forces; differentiation is often accompanied by conformity, and estrangement or alienation by freedom. Premodern people were individuals as well and modern people remain socially constructed. In short, the . . . "rise" of individualism [is] more of a psychological problematic than an absolute fact. The attention paid to the individual psyche by governments, by educational and medical institutions, and by factories may increase and people may feel increasingly alienated, liberated, lonely, isolated, and free, but that does not mean that human beings have become social isolates.[59]

Similarly, while acknowledging processes of individualization, here I would like to draw attention to the emotional and social effects of transformation processes as experienced by my Guangzhou interlocutors. They certainly enjoyed more personal choices and expressed individual concerns and desires. Yet, especially for the generation of 50 to 70-year-olds, these new liberties could be confusing. Interlocutors sometimes felt tremendous stress trying to juggle personal desires with a strong sense of obligation to adhere to older notions of social group responsibility.

But even the postreform generation, who grew up in a more individualistic world and follows its personal agenda, was not untouched by more social concerns and considerations. They still felt value in, or obliged by, traditional notions such as filial piety—even if they might interpret these concepts differently from their parents. Moreover, as especially exemplified by believers and volunteers, interlocutors keenly sought to construct and engage in new socialities exactly because they experienced their individualistic existence as lacking. Against the feeling of disembedding and anomie, they engaged in a continuous weaving of social relations and a search for meaning.

Disembedding, Anomie, and the Search for Meaning

The dissolution of previous collectives such as the commune and the *danwei* as a sociospatial entity, together with the 1990s housing reforms, the flexibilization of the labor market, and easing of migration restrictions, have disembedded Chinese individuals. Before the reforms, urban Chinese residents lived, worked, and politically rallied in the close living quarters of their work units. The *danwei* functioned as a quasiparent institution, distributing not only all basic necessities but even functioning as matchmakers. Workers identified not so much by their last name but by their profession and work unit. Since then, growing socioeconomic stratifications, greater availability of residential space, and changed lifestyles have dramatically transformed the urban living experience. This disembedding has spatial and emotional dimensions: people might feel close to others who live far away while not even knowing their neighbors. Individuals today define themselves and secure their livelihoods in wider, non–face-to-face networks.[60]

Combined with the alleged moral crisis—often exemplified by the supposed cult of money (*baijinzhuyi*), selfishness (*jian yi wang li*), private desires placed before the common good (*sun gong fei si*), and growing distrust[61]—what characterized the lives of interlocutors was a general disquiet, a sense of loss, and a retreat into the private—all of which are reminiscent of Durkheim's notion of "anomie." Durkheim coined the term "anomie" in his study *Suicide* to describe a psychological state in members of societies in which common values and common meanings are no longer understood or accepted and new values and meaning have not developed.[62] As a result, individuals in such a social system feel a sense of futility, a lack of purpose, emotional emptiness, and despair.[63]

While there was also a sense of pride in China's recent rise and confidence in the government to keep the economy growing, anomie describes quite well how interlocutors felt in their private lives. A much repeated comment, for example, was "today *renqing* [human feelings] is as thin as paper." Older people lamented that today nobody offered them a seat on the bus, that they did not know their neighbors any longer, and that nobody had time anymore. They also emphasized how *they* had been educated to share and to help one another, values that had apparently been abandoned in the present. Independent of the veracity of such claims, this nostalgia for a supposedly better past clearly expressed the older generation's sense of loss in the present. Yet even younger people felt alienated by extreme competition, high expectations, and a lack of purpose. They were aware of their responsibilities toward their parents, while also experiencing a disconnect from the older generation: "They don't understand."

Kleinman suggests that as a result of the contradictions between entrepreneurial freedom and continued political control, Chinese have developed a "divided self," that is, a self that suppresses sufferings and opinions in order to allow the

entrepreneurial self to succeed.[64] Yet, Guangzhou interlocutors actually continuously worked against their alienation, their sense of anomie, at least in their private lives. In an effort to reembed they engaged in a continuous weaving of new, and maintenance of already existing, social relationships with kin, neighbors, and beyond. Similarly, Ma observes that "'the self' is often managed in tandem with 'intimate relationality,' despite popular rhetoric on the so-called 'self-reliant' timbre of modernity."[65] Importantly, this intimate relationality, the weaving of connections, happens through exchanges of material and immaterial support.

Disembedded from previous social contexts and webs of meaning, interlocutors, moreover, aspired to new metanarratives and trusted relations. It is in this search for meaning that new socialities acquire heightened importance: a hiking club, a *taiqiquan* group, the church community, or a volunteer association provided not only community but also purpose. Interlocutors sought ideational connections, communities in spirit. Family and kin relations were increasingly strained by conflicts and competition, and neighbors were becoming strangers one could not trust because one did not know who they were. The church family or the volunteer community offered new sociality, that is, trustworthy social relations because they were based on similar convictions and ethics.

This sentiment is maybe best described by the desire to belong. Disembedded and not content with previous and prescribed identities and social contexts, interlocutors continuously worked on creating new nests, new moorings in the sea of an individualized, privatized, and morally undone society. Indeed, as the present study will show, social support in all its different forms and meanings—soup, love, or a helping hand—was the means and practice through which social relations, communities, and meanings were established and maintained.

Outline of Chapters

The book is structured as follows. Part I, "Soup," focuses on household, kin, and neighborly relations. Chapter 1 offers the portrait of the extended Chen and Wang families with additional information from other interlocutors. My focus is on their household composition as well as more general kin relations. I describe their personal backgrounds, their social networks, and the implications of the recent demographic shifts. I ask, how do these affect urban Guangzhou residents in their everyday lives? Further, I examine the issue of solidarity and conflict as it occurs in the household and among kin and how this is interconnected with the question of support. As we will see, to a great extent my Guangzhou interlocutors relied on kin for social, economic, and emotional support.

Yet, these relations have become increasingly distressed, because of, for example, greater distances between residences and more traffic, time constraints, socioeconomic stratifications, and changing notions of propriety and lifestyle—

all of which affect support. I show that help and support were actually practices through which the very nature of social relations was negotiated. Conflicts and emotional strain have become increasingly more common and sometimes resulted in the breaking of kin relations and thus the most common channels of support.

The second chapter, "Neighbors and Friends," discusses changes interlocutors experienced in their neighborhood and in their relations with friends. The emphasis is on people's subjective experience and reflection upon these transformations. I begin by outlining the living environment and neighborly relations. In the following section I discuss the importance of friends and how friendship relations are established, maintained, and also broken. We will see how the social, political, and economic transformations of the reform period are reflected in the built urban environment and how people's lives are significantly affected by these interlinking factors. The close-knit work unit community of the Maoist period is slowly dissolving or opening up. New residents move into *danwei* compounds; old residents move out. Newly constructed residential neighborhoods are marked by anonymity and very limited if any interaction between residents.

In addition, relations with the state have become more distant and depend more on personal relations or initiative. As before the reforms, interlocutors work on establishing and maintaining a circle of family and friends within which people exchange help and support. Yet, with growing social and physical distances this circle has contracted; at least, the maintenance of these social relations has been affected by socioeconomic stratification and the changing urban landscape. An important practice in the establishing and maintaining of social relations remains the sharing of substance, to bring soup or to go out and have tea.

In Chapter 3, "Support and Reciprocity," I discuss the changing notions and practices of reciprocity in interlocutors' lives and the conflicts that these transformations have given rise to. I highlight how the social, spatial, and economic transformations of the past thirty-five years have affected and complicated reciprocal social relationships. Guangzhou interlocutors' social relations play out within the complicated web of multiple economic realities, social contexts, ideological concepts, and personal desires. While interlocutors frequently refer to traditional notions of propriety and moral conduct, today these are quite differently interpreted and applied. Moreover, in the contemporary urban context, different moral orders compete. Differences are greatest between the Maoist and post-Maoist generation, but conflicts and misunderstandings also happen among peers and between kin. What is more, individuals themselves are not always clear about how to behave and what to consider right and wrong.

As residential communities break apart or grow more anonymous, new forms of sociality emerge. Numerous new social institutions become the focus or center of social relations, replacing old networks of colleagues who reside together. Among these are sport clubs, community centers, and religious communities. In

Part II of the book, "Love," I discuss these new forms of sociality with the example of a Protestant church community in an old part of Guangzhou. The focus on religion in this part also highlights the spiritual aspect of interlocutors' reform period living experiences, an important addition to recent studies emphasizing privatization, individualization, and morality.[66] Chapter 4, "Religious Revival," explores the attraction of religion and its various forms in the reform period.

Chapter 5, "The Church: Social and Religious Services," zooms in on the Xiatian church, where I conducted research, and introduces its different services. Here we will see how the combination of religious and social activities attracts a large and diverse audience. Chapter 6, "Love: A Community of Believers," examines the practices and ideologies related to the church community in more detail. I show how the church works through different modes or realms—as a community center, a place of religious worship, a social service center, and a source of practical and financial support. As will become apparent, it is exactly this multifariousness and ideological openness that attracted interlocutors. Together they envisioned and practiced an alternative community based on love and general acceptance and markedly distinguished from contemporary urban society.

In Part III of the book, "A Helping Hand," I examine the Chinese "volunteer phenomenon" as another important area in and through which contemporary social relations, ethics, and aspirations are renegotiated in the post-Mao period. Chapter 7, "Philanthropy, Charity, and Volunteerism," begins with a short history of philanthropy and charity in China, highlighting cultural specificities and challenges. The second section introduces volunteerism in the reform period, its organizational structure, and the party-state's efforts to promote the practice. Following this, I offer some numbers on volunteering on the national level and related to my own study in Guangzhou. The chapter closes with an introduction of the two organizations the majority of my interlocutors were involved with. As will become evident, the volunteer phenomenon is a reflection of larger social, economic, and political processes in contemporary China. Only if we understand volunteerism as an embedded phenomenon can we fully comprehend its popularity in the post-Mao period.

In Chapter 8, "Inspirations and Motivations to Volunteer," I discuss inspirations and motivations of volunteers. As will become evident, volunteerism in Guangzhou (and more generally in China) is so broadly defined that it allows greatly varying projections and gratifications. This vagueness is volunteerism's strength but, I argue, also its major limitation. Chapter 9, "Volunteering: Governmentality and Agency," contrasts the party-state's project to promote prosocial practices with the desires of young volunteers and shows the limits of the government scheme. As will become apparent, without being adversaries to the political system, interlocutors had their own ideas about volunteerism; their practices did not square neatly with the government's expectations. The chapter shows that vol-

unteerism is both a technology of self and a technology of power, a phenomenon deeply connected to present-day urban realities. Yet none of these technologies has predictable outcomes. Instead, volunteerism is a realm in which agency and governmentality are continuously negotiated.

Finally, in the general conclusion to the book, I summarize the findings of my study and show the interconnection between the different parts. Social support, I argue, is at the very center of society making, connecting kinship, morality, and the individual while concomitantly shaping the very conception of these realms. Morality and relatedness are the domains within and through which social support practices and ideologies are enacted and envisioned and at the same time continuously remade. The picture that emerges is of an urban society marked by growing differentiation, socioeconomic stratification, and a generational divide. As a result, interlocutors of all ages feel a certain anomie and uncertainty regarding their future. Against this, they continuously knit new relations and cultivate old ones, not only to guarantee their own and dependents' well-being but also to fulfill their desire for meaning.

Notes

1. Ikels 1996.
2. Wang 2008.
3. The "iron rice bowl" refers to the Maoist system of guaranteed lifetime employment and benefits for urban workers.
4. But see Schlecker and Fleischer 2013.
5. Opinions about the use of the term "class" and how exactly to define it are divided. Yet, most commentators agree that Chinese society is increasingly divided between rapidly growing and increasingly wealthy and self-conscious middle and upper classes and various working- and lower middle-class groups (Pieke 2014; see also Tomba 2004; Zhang 2010).
6. Ikels 1996: 8. See also Tsin 1999.
7. Vogel 1969.
8. Xu and Yeh 2005.
9. The *hukou,* or family registration system, issued at birth, divides the Chinese population into rural and urban populations. Introduced in the late 1950s, it was a measure to control population movement from the countryside to the city, where residents enjoyed substantial social benefits. After its introduction, a rural resident could only move to an urban area with official approval. In the reform period, rural *hukou* holders are allowed to "temporarily" reside in cities, yet remain excluded from an array of urban social service, including access to subsidized housing and medical services.
10. The new pension system was introduced in 1997 and is based on both workers' and employers' contributions. Workers pay about 8 percent of their wage into an individual account. When they retire, this money is divided into 120 installments that are paid out monthly over a ten-year period. Employers contribute around 20 percent of the total wages paid to their workforce to a general pension fund. This provides retired workers with an additional pension payment. The amount of the payment is calculated based on the length of employment, the average local wage, and life expectancy. Employees are

eligible for pension payment when they reach the legal retirement age (sixty for men and fifty/fifty-five for women) and if they paid contributions for at least fifteen years. If they fall short of contributing years, employees can delay retirement. Alternatively, they can pay the remaining contributions, transfer to a pension plan for nonemployed urban residents, or opt to receive the money they contributed to their individual account with interests in a lump-sum payment.

The new medical insurance scheme, in turn, came into effect in 1998. Again, employees and employers both contribute to the insurance that also combines individual and pooled funds. Contributions vary according to locality, but usually 2 percent of an employee's wage is paid into the individual account. Employers contribute 6 to 12 percent of their workforce average salary. Roughly 30 percent of this sum goes to the employees' individual account and the rest is pooled in a public fund. Individual accounts cover medical costs that amount to a maximum of 10 percent of the local average annual wage. Medical costs beyond that are covered by the pooled funds but are limited to five times the average annual wage. Employees have to pay for medical costs that are higher than that. Experts point out that especially low-income workers struggle to reach the 10 percent threshold. See "China's Social Security System" 2017. As a result of the reforms, Ringen and Ngok (2013) report that whereas urban households had 40 percent or more of their income made up of social benefits at the beginning of the reform period, in 2007 this share was down to 20 percent. The bulk of the remaining benefits were made up by social insurance.

11. The already low prices were further lowered by discounts that employees received for length of employment and for paying the full sum, Ikels 2004.
12. Yang and Jia 2010; Zhang 2015.
13. Necessary, for example, to accommodate elderly parents moving in.
14. During the last months of my research in Guangzhou, pork prices rose steeply, almost doubling from one day to another, seriously worrying some of the less well situated of my interlocutors.
15. In the year before the crash, small investors, apparently encouraged by the state-owned media, inflated the stock market and caused a bubble that exploded in August 2015. See Osnos 2015; Zarolli 2015.
16. Housing is one of the realms in which the uneven role of the state in current stratification processes is especially notable. During the Maoist era, people's housing situation reflected their political status: cadres, party members, and employees of centrally administered units received more living space. Housing reforms, which were based on the actual living situation of an employee, only perpetuated these inequalities. Thus, the sale of undervalued apartments at the beginning of the housing reforms already favored certain employees over others. The introduction of housing provident funds in the 1990s, in turn, especially benefitted employees with high-level economic stability and prestige in financially and economically sound enterprises. Collective and private enterprises largely did not participate in the scheme, thereby excluding most of the non–state sector urban employees, numbering about 45 million, Tomba 2004. More recently, government policies restricting the purchase of housing—supposedly to prevent a housing bubble—favor young, married, heterosexual couples. In some cities single women or homosexual couples are excluded from the property market, as Hong-Fincher (2016) explains.
17. Urban residents born in the mid-1950s and into the 1960s were affected by the political campaign's anti-intellectual fervor that led to the closing of schools. Students were sent into factories or to the countryside to learn from workers and peasants. Not a few ended up working in the countryside for up to ten years. See, for example, Whyte 2003.

18. See, for example, Jankowiak 1993; Ikels 1996.
19. Seeman 2008.
20. "Social Support and Kinship in China and Vietnam Research Group" 2015.
21. Schlecker 2013: 1–2.
22. Long and Moore 2013.
23. Ibid.: 4.
24. Strathern and Toren 1990.
25. Ibid.: 74.
26. Obendiek 2016; Oxfeld 2010; Yan 1996.
27. Kipnis 1997: 67.
28. Santos 2006; Brandtstädter 2009.
29. Jankowiak 2009: 68.
30. Ibid.
31. Wang 2002; Zhuo 2001.
32. Lambek 2010.
33. Ibid.: 61.
34. Ibid.: 2.
35. Zigon 2007.
36. Lambek 2010: 156.
37. Stafford 2013.
38. Ibid.: 15.
39. Ibid.: 17–18.
40. Strawson 2008.
41. Stafford 2013: 17–18.
42. Santos 2013.
43. Oxfeld 2010.
44. Ibid.: 48.
45. See Yan 2011.
46. Yan 2010b.
47. Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1991; Bauman 2001.
48. Mills 2007: 65.
49. Zhang and Ong 2008.
50. Yan 2010b: 14.
51. Sun (forthcoming: 8) points to an even longer trajectory of individualization in China. Whereas "authenticity" in Western societies is linked to modernization processes such as individualization and urbanization, in China the notion of an "authentic inner self" had already arisen in the late imperial era as a counterweight against Confucian ideas of propriety.
52. Yan 2010a: 495.
53. It is important to note, however, that Yan does not equate what is happening in China with Western individualization processes as described by Beck and others. On the contrary, Yan uses the comparison to highlight how Chinese individualization *differs* from the classical European case.
54. Kipnis 2012.
55. Ibid.: 5.
56. Ibid.: 7.
57. Ibid.: 8.
58. Ibid.: 10.
59. Ibid.: 7.
60. Henning 2007; Kipnis 2011.

61. Billioud and Thoraval 2015.
62. Durkheim 1951.
63. "Anomie" 2014.
64. Kleinman et al. 2011.
65. Zhiying Ma 2012: 224.
66. See Zhang and Ong (2008) on privatization; Yan (e.g., 2009b), Kipnis (2012) on individualization; Oxfeld (2010) on morality.