**DESIRE, COSMOPOLITANISM, AND NEOLIBERALISM: WOMEN COLLEGE STUDENTS AS SEX WORKERS IN POST-SOCIALIST CHINA**

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# ABSTRACT

With the neoliberal reform initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the landscape of Chinese people’s social life has experienced profound changes (Harvey 2005). The previous collective values that emphasize selflessness, absolute conformity to the state, and commitment to communism are replaced by neoliberal values that prioritize personal advancement and personal choices. China’s historical contingencies engendered among Chinese youth a strong neoliberal desire for cosmopolitanism that is most notably embodied by the consumption of foreign goods. Among these youth are some college women who engage in sex work while at college in their pursuit of cosmopolitanism. How should we make sense of these young college women’s choice of sex work through the lenses of desire, cosmopolitanism, and neoliberalism in the context of contemporary China? This paper examines the intersection of desire, higher education, and sex work, and suggests that neoliberalism as an analytical framework is helpful in exploring the connections between these young college women’s desire and their choice of engaging in sex work.