

Sex Hacker: Configuring Chinese Women in the Age of Digital Penetration

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The article seeks to grasp the potential of Chinese women as “sex hackers” able to breach the protected walls of the modern nation-state, rewrite the algorithm of international relations, and shift the hypermasculine framing of capitalist society. Rather than take the term hacking as given, I argue that the term “hack” is shot through with sexual and gendered significations that might not be immediately apparent to the casual observer of digital culture. My purpose here is two-fold: first, I demonstrate how hacking refracts (and disturbs) the exclusionary gendered logics of 21st century global capitalism; secondly, I illustrate how the sex hacker interrupts the political and aesthetic structure of the social order. Sex hacking, as I define it, denotes a micro-strategy of power, a queer hypersexual positionality that speaks to the hypothetical and literal moments when binaries are confused or cracked.

Similar to Donna Haraway’s feminist reconception of the cyborg figure, the sex hacker is figure of the imagination, one evoking new political possibilities that disrupt and push against the technological over-determination of the planet and its inhabitants. She signals the postmodern transgression of the “coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world” (Haraway 1991, 152). My intervention here is largely critical, fleshing out the manifold ways Chinese women as potential sex hackers short-circuit and undercut their sexual objectification within digital and hacking culture. The sex hacker displays capricious skills and capacious power to thwart the same high-tech infrastructures and apparatuses that seek to capture or contain her. Without denying the class privilege accorded to those able to access the computer, I believe the metaphoricity of the Chinese woman and other East Asian women as “sex hackers” engenders a kind of feminist “split, partial knowledge” without rigid binaries (Haraway 1991) ^[1]. This article weighs in on the agency of women and how they take power from a male dominated arena, utilizing their perceived inferiority to their advantage and changing the stakes and nature of what we know as hacking.

My conceptual reappropriation of hacking intervenes in the broader discourse about hacking with the aims of reinventing how we talk about gender, sexuality and power in the age of “digital penetration,” a milieu characterized by the saturation of new media technology over material life. Digital penetration encapsulates multivariate social trends and behaviors, making visible new diffuse kinds of engagements and arrangements in human experience. Rather than assume that digital technology always penetrates human life (reiterating the phallic logic of forced unwanted insertion), one might ask how people penetrate the digital domain as well as the social aspects (race,

gender etc.) associated with it. Sex hacking, as I view it, sheds light on the subversive activities of women of color in a networked planet and its “massified” multitudes (Hardt and Negri 2000). The sexualized spaces, gendered forms of communication, and reproductive labor typically imputed to Asian women—while crucial to the global “digital village”—have not been considered as formative or central to it. The sex hacker figure revamps the ways Chinese and other Asian women have been historically insinuated within Western archetypes of hypersexuality, either passive subordinates (Lotus Blossom) or slinky seductresses (Geisha/Dragon Lady) (Espiritu 2008). As a creative sign and cipher that reimagines asymmetrical power relations, the sex hacker takes root in the shadows of the positive feedback loop of modern communications, offering not simply counter-hegemonic resistance “from the margins,” but inducing the need for viable social roles that grant women “double agency” according to Tina Chen (2005) and the “space to maneuver and the ability to resist singular interpretation” (xxii). In the following sections, I layout examples and several instances where the sex hacker emerges, embodying a quasi-feminist archetype gaining access to and intruding upon the male-dominated arenas of computing, gaming, and espionage. In line with feminist studies scholars who have approached hypersexualization not from the usual perspective of pure abjection or denigration, I believe a different conversation can emerge when we think about how hypersexed feminine subjects effect alternative forms of knowledge in the digital era. From this dialogue, I hope to direct attention to the gender politics of hacking and the sexualization of women of color within information economies and political economies of desire. Despite being in conversation with scholars like Celine’s Shimizu’s (2007), my analysis of sex hacking differs from her discussion of Asian women’s reclamations of hypersexualized spaces like pornography as an empowering “third space” to the poles of feminist self-representation (autonomy) or feminized otherness (objectification). Sex hacking provides merely a conceptual point of departure for investigating the “unintelligibility” and “unknowability” of the Asian woman within online and representational discourse. Sex hacking cannot be pinned down to renegade individuals who intentionally appropriate and overtly challenge their sexual objectification. Rather, it draws attention to how hypersexualized subjects occupy a strange place within digital hyperspace, where anonymity enables all types of clandestine deeds, and where performances of gender, sexuality, and race are put in a state of flux.

Breaking the Hacker Sex Code

Before discussing the sex hacker, it is necessary first to understand what is meant by hacking and how it plays on gender and sexual meanings. At a basic level, hacking is a shibboleth or neutral word used to differentiate ingroups and outgroups based on value variants. The term can be confusing, since it generally refers to excellence in

programming systems, those who playfully circumvent or tamper with programming systems as a matter of intellectual exploration to show off their skills. The public understanding of hacker can better specified with the word “cracker” or those who break into computer security systems. With racial subtext, good crackers are “white hat hackers” fixing security holes, distinguishable from the bad “black” ones (typically from Orientalized countries in Eastern Europe and Asia) sending malicious software to pierce the firewalls that protect the sensitive electronic information. Offering an alternative form of expression, hacking as the art of (re)writing computer code is a major capital-driven industry that attracts tech-savvy geniuses who either cause damage to information systems or contribute to scientific breakthroughs through their esoteric skills-based work. According to “hactivist” Ricardo Dominguez, the ethical question of what is legal or illegal in the context of computer hacking is not stable as hacking creates different affective responses within an unruly “performative matrix” (Dominguez 2008). Beyond its pure technological meaning, “hacking” offers an eccentric mode of expression, a means to rupture the symbolic currencies and tendencies of online culture, which can be then decoded or scrambled by the “sex hacker” to demonstrate that digital power/knowledge can function in non-linear, non-instrumentalist ways.

The hacker is everyday citizen-subject and potential criminal able to not only break code but also “code switch,” activating alternative uses of human and computer language within the same online discourse in which the interplay of dominant digital cultures and subcultures creates an improvised, mind-splitting experience. Performance scholar Jade Sotomayor (2012) defines code as “secrecy, intrigue, privacy, communication via illegitimate means, strategic circumventing of power, something closed to be cracked, and hacked open in order to yield a more democratic society” (23).

In popular parlance, hacking mostly refers to computer coding processes, but the term can elicit broader cultural readings of society. Insofar as “code” denotes both accepted social rules of engagement *and* computer writing, a decryption of code demands a form of hacking that is not just technical. Computing language can be violent as well as erotic with suggestive terminology like “packet,” “sniffer,” “cookie,” and “master.” Hacking evokes pornographic connotations of someone (sitting in a dark room) attempting to penetrate dark private spaces, taking advantage of “gaps” and “holes” in systems, “probing” and “gaining access” to databanks through the “backdoor,” “worming” and “fingering” toward a target, infecting it with deadly “Trojans” or messing around for “good times” (a hoax virus). Masculine authority is insinuated through a figurative language alluding to rape or sexual harassment with unsuspecting “victims” and “abuses of privilege.” Male hackers rely on certain “sex codes” to demarcate their specialized subculture, one overrun with antisocial teenage boys who see the world as

their frontier for sexual conquest. Majid Yar (2005) points out that the delinquent “locker room” lifestyle of hacking stems from larger social demands made upon boys and men to demonstrate their manliness. At the same time, a reading of cyberspace as women’s space allows for “the possibility of bending or dissembling gender,” where the “mental magic of cyber-intimacy” allows for the projection of positive female-oriented traits, gender-neutral/bending disguises, and “guerrilla girl” tactics not possible in “real-life,” since real-life poses many physical threats to women which are not reproducible in cyberspace (McCormick and Leonard, 1996, 109-114).

What one can make out about female hackers often follows conjecture due to the shrouded character and secrecy of their craft, but the public meanings of gender and sexuality ascribed to hacking can be further deliberated and expounded. In the most pornographic sense, hacking conjures the fantasy of (masculine) tools penetrating something (feminine) tucked or hidden away in the dark. Conversely, it is just as necessary to posit hacking as a “soft” interference and incursion into “hard” technological and binary systems that harshly separate insiders from outsiders. Hacking is not unlike sex insofar as sex-based characteristics (male/female) and the sex act itself are not reducible to simplistic binary meanings. Sex hacking alludes to the digital play and performance of Asian women in their most malleable, flexible, and dynamic sense rather than the simple act of undermining male domination.

Not every woman has the capacity to smash systems of oppression, but the designation of “Asian women” with all its symbolic gendered trappings can be read otherwise in terms of what queer theorist Eve Sedgwick (1994) calls a nonce taxonomy, a reservoir of unrationalized energies and unrealized potentials for subversion (24). Nonce is Anglophone slang for sex offender but alternatively means a way to prevent replay attacks in communications (cryptographic nonce). Indicating at once (digital/sexual) penetration and protection, the nonce of the Asian woman qua sex hacker offers more than a fixed space of identity to be entered, violated, and pilfered by others but indexes an irreducible form of queer sexualized being in the world that is difficult to trace and track down, one endowed with potential to disrupt certain normative needs and impulses. Sex hackers figures an idiom to describe someone who is sexually offensive and someone able to prevent communicative attacks against them. It would be a mistake to assume that the main subjects of hacking culture are heterosexual males, since the sexual metaphor and gender performativity of “hacking” can be equally applied to women, who can thwart sexual advances or promote their own sexual advances through virtuoso digital performances upon which I elaborate further in the next section.

Decrypting the Gender Performativity of Hacking

In our technologically “enhanced” times, when the global “sex machine” (e.g., how globalization processes rework our bounded ideas of sex and gender) recasts Asian women as hyperfeminine but also hypermasculine through the gender realignments of capitalist modernity (Ling 1999), digital penetration these days is characterized by the embedding of Asian women’s soft and “hardened” laboring bodies within high-tech scientific industries controlled by wealthy governments, multinational corporations, and savvy business gurus. Despite this muddling of private and public space, the masculine and the feminine, the local and the global—the social engineering of gender still follows the traditional binary logic of women as mere “servers” responding to others’ desires and requests by a global roster of “clients.” Thinking of women as major players and actors “creating affective and visceral responses as theater between the codes of the utilitarian-effective” spaces of late capitalism works to raise “questions of poetry, ethics and justice” (Nadir 2012). Hacking as a kind of social performance offers a performative anti-model of capitalist commodification and a queer model of sexual/gender disidentification (Munoz 1999), inspiring small-scale forms of action that defy the globally “scattered hegemonies” (Grewal and Kaplan 1994) of racism, sexism, and capitalism.

Sexist assumptions about women’s networking abilities can prove deadly. In actor network theory, the nonhuman object participates in the network, and given the ways Asian women have been rendered as objects of Western fantasy and the playthings of men, one can imagine how they have not only been objectified by technoculture but turned that objectification into an advantage. Xiao Tian is the new general of China’s “hacker babes” smashing patriarchal systems of control and wanted by many security agencies for her online defacements (Figure 1). Posing in coy doll-like positions on her online blog, the teenager’s flirty self-portraits or “selfies” are disarming in their dual connotations of Oriental submissiveness and feminine treachery.



(<https://ad anewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/6-1.jpg>)



(<https://ad anewmedia.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/6-2.jpg>)

(Figure 1: Online “selfies” of Xiao Tian) Source: <http://pixgood.com/xiao-tian.html>

(<http://pixgood.com/xiao-tian.html>) (Accessed 11/14/2014)

With a salacious moniker translated from Chinese into English as “a little bit of heaven,” the always fashionable Tian leads a legion of female hackers called the Cn Girl Security Team, a group with over 2,000 member in a country where hackers are accorded rock star status as the sometimes “proxy army” for the communist party (Vembu 2008). The team replaced the Six Golden Flowers group, China’s first female hacker group, an ensemble blamed for several telecommunication attacks. Despite their cutesy innocent demeanor, these hackers are always “on the prowl” for any opportunity for personal financial gain. Yet, their buying and selling of computer secrets exposes more than the selfishness of individuals but indicates the decentralized power and crowdsourcing of the present-day “hivemind,” the collective consciousness engendered by dispersed individuals working together in cyberspace (ibid). The women’s desire to sell to the highest bidder and still label themselves as (s)heroes of the information age suggests not an exclusive investment in individualism or nationalism or even communitarianism, but something more amorphous because no one knows what ultimate authority, if any, these hackers serve. This example of Chinese “hacker babes” recognizes that sex and hacking are not mutually exclusive, but mutually constitutive. To hack as a Chinese woman is to be deeply wired into issues of race/gender/sex as well as politics, nation, economics, and technology. This wiring then gives rise to a range of possibilities for infiltration and betrayal linked to female seduction and racial difference. Through the coupling of the female sex and hacking,

Chinese hacker babe is able to interrupt the homosocial bonding of men and how men see women (Bow 2001).

Sex hackers are material girls living in an (im)material world, the classification of their sexed racialized bodies still “matter” in a post-millennial “posthuman” culture that appears to “banish biology and corporeal substance” (Kirby 1998, 98). Sex hackers are not above exploiting their sexualized corporal imagery by online publics (web searches for “Asian women” mostly call up pornography sites). They recode and puncture globally trafficked sex codes, mobilizing new technologies and digital discourses toward a non-positivist “girl power” movement that undermines the “old boys’ club” as well as the dogma of Western feminism focused on male-female relations (without attention to race). A specific instance in which male hackers record and replicate “brogrammer” sex codes can be found in online chat rooms where women and girls are attacked simply for trying to enter. Such spaces trade in ideas of “hackers and hookers” that enables sexual harassment of all kinds because male hackers see women as “hacker groupies” or “cyberwhores” (Segan 2000). If a woman wants to find a place in elite hacker circles, she is often compelled to take on these inferior sex roles. The other binarism established through the hacker sex code is the perception that “the female hacker’s nemesis is the ‘scene whore’” [women who hang around and onto male hackers], and the perceived irreconcilable conflict between “feminism” and “fun” (Helga 2013). The problem is compounded by the fact that it is hard for female hackers to network with one another due to the lack of institutional support and mentorship. At international hacker conferences, women often dress more masculine to get respect. As one female hacker writes on an online forum, “If you can match men’s skill level and ‘better it,’ they’ll give you every ounce of respect....it’s when a female comes in and tries to play on her being feminine, that doesn’t get you anything” (Segan 2000). Playing ‘feminine’ in traditional fashion does not get respect from men in real-life; however, the online hacker skills of women does not strictly follow embodied standards of femininity (or even masculinity), even though the computing field seems to approximate gender structures that equate weakness with women and strength with men.

According to technology scholar Caroline Clarke Hayes (2010), there are more and more women attaining degrees in computer science, but due to gender/sex codes that promote a masculine image of the field, there is ironically what she calls a “shrinking women” crisis or the sense that women are being crowded out from a field that simultaneously demands their increasing participation, especially as most women are not employed as high-level systems analysts and technicians but found in low-level jobs like data entry and word processing (266). Their lowly status prevents them from assuming the public stature of computer prodigies but also the celebrated anti-hero status of the “hacker.” While not all hackers are sexist, Jordan and Taylor (2004)

recognize the basic misogynistic nature of the hacking community with an organizing mentality that excludes women (of color), but one that gives rise to a culture of anti-conformist rebellion that allows for a potential reordering of gender (117). In the infantilizing eyes of some white male hackers, Chinese girl hackers are “average script kiddies,” more prone to wage a “cyberwar of the sexes” rather than sparking “legitimate” hacktivist movements with higher political motivations or aspirations (Danchez 2008). Such comments are repudiated by online commentators who find such comments as entrenching bigotry and divorcing women from the lucrative nature of hacking taken simply as “men’s work.”

Given the lack of female public role models, Ying Cracker has assigned to herself the status of “professor” or “educator” for the masses, finding notoriety as one of the top five women hackers in the world. The Shanghai resident considers hacking a skill easily learned by anyone and has released publications about cracking software, offering free courses for youth on how to change IP addresses or wipe passwords [*efytimesnews* 2014]. Amassing a huge fan base on online message boards initially for her stunning looks, Ying Cracker has set out to convince the world that an Asian female hacker can dominate her field without sacrificing the pleasure of being a physically attractive female. Ying Cracker has multiple Facebook accounts with the same user name and ingénue-like modeling photos, all of which reveal nothing about her life other than her preference for promoting humanitarian causes and cute pictures. Ying Cracker’s fondness for spreading “freedom” writ large accords with Alison Adam’s (2003) assessment that as we need to “hack into hacking” to grasp the special “hacker ethics” of women and expose fault lines in the chauvinism and racism of hacker subculture—which facilely celebrates open frontiers, freedom of information, and egalitarianism—but fails to directly address social politics and material inequities, especially with regard to women of color. To reiterate, the idea that anyone can be a hacker reinforces and obfuscates the implicit sex codes that disregard the exceptional status of women within male-driven digital economies. Unlike the “black hat” hacker Xiao Tian, Ying Cracker legally sells her expertise and computer secrets to companies, retaining independence as a free-lance agent, one that stirs the passions of everyday individuals to swarm around information capital in ways that “play” or toy with the market strategies of capitalists without ever buying completely into the patriarchal corporate business model. Ying Cracker is everywhere and nowhere. Not much is really known about this enigmatic celebrity. A feminist perhaps, a bot potentially, but the possibilities are open when discussing such a mysterious person as a sex hacker, whose technical manipulations and shadow work trouble the global human-machine interface, one bound up to gender gaps and sexual divisions in society.

Sex hacking is important to reposition our thoughts about the ways hacking is already sexualized. For instance, Black female bodies are historically deemed as hypersexual and sexually available for illicit public consumption since the days of slavery, but Mireille Miller-Young's (2010) work on Black women and pornography speaks to how women of color can face multiple axes of harm and discrimination in the digital domain but can enjoy the mobility that comes with the territory. While one cannot make the total leap of analogizing sex hackers to sex workers, the fact that pornography is a primary arena for Asian female digital visibility points to the similarities as well as differences with other women of color. Hacking the Black/White binary thus entails further hacking of the male/female binary and the normative/hypersexual binary. The online adult entertainment industry leads the way in marketing to niche audiences. For identity groups with online websites, they are disproportionately targeted by the most-sophisticated purveyors of smut. Asian Americans and women's organization are often the "victims" of this *legal* form of identity theft, which diverts traffic from their legitimate websites that contain the words "Asian" or "women" channeling them to X-rated copycat domains or websites that promote "Yellow Fever" stereotypes about Asian prostitutes and mail order brides; thus, turning the products of niche ethnic media markets into "hotly desired, packageable ethnic fetish products" (Ikeda 2012). Using tools like Overture, the batches of information related to searches for "AsianWeek" are hijacked, poached, and rerouted (e.g., ARP spoofing) to Asianphile adult sites like "Mrchewsasianbeaver.com," which offers the best in "hottest" Far East women you can find (ibid). Such websites reinforce the archetype of Asian women as passive hypersexualized subjects of the Net, rather than game-changers of the World Wide Web.

In thinking about sex hacking the binary, I want to place my discussion in the larger feminist scholarship on hypersexualization, focusing on the ways binaries are differentially deployed for specific groups. To explicate my utilization of hacking through a gendered and sexualized lens, I draw on Linh Nguyen Tu's (2003) work on the hypersexualization Asian women in cyberspace as an important site for engaging a politics of representation and difference not catering to dualities of top/bottom, inside/outside, and self/other. Like Juana Juana María Rodríguez's work on Latina discursive spaces and cyberspaces, Tu's research recognizes that cyberspace does not simply reference the Internet but the wider imaginary spaces of fantasy role-playing and cultural production. She says artists armed with "hacker knowledge" can recycle and reflect on the social position of ethnic women, so often couched in pornographic terms. If hackers are messing up the online presence of ethnic and women's organizations, driving unsuspecting people into the domain of online sex, people like Kristina Wong are satirizing these hackers with her "Yellow Fever" mock porno and dating websites, which provide feminist commentary riddled with fake "come-ons" and

savvy advertisements about how “everyone wants to date Asian babes.” Chinese American sex hackers like Wong are rewriting the sex code, redirecting the online pornographic male gaze back to her sex-positive critically conscious websites. Cultural myths about Asian sexual prowess and the capitalist demand for “Oriental flesh” are being globally reorganized not in terms of homogenization but differentiation in new global markets that demands increased digital saturation but also sexual stimulation (Tu *ibid*, 268). Tu further notes, “While it is difficult to assert that Asian women in these industries have ever had much access to spaces of creative expression, digital or otherwise, it is possible to imagine that these technologies they make offer new tools for speaking back to the representational regimes that sustains their social position... enabling of a whole range of creative and political possibilities” (268-269).

Sex hacking forces the observer to ask how people (and their gendered avatars) fit or do not fit within digitized social roles. It forces us to comprehend how computer work is always already circumscribed within the domain of “sex” with its gendered ideas of public/private. Such is the effect of sex hacking on “invaginated” lines of miscommunication (Derrida 1980), splicing through our hierarchal world-system with its computerized protocols of domination and serialized dyadic vocabulary of powerful/powerlessness. As Mimi Nguyen writes, postmodern liberal subjects often wish for a “post-body future” bound to a secret wish to “become other” and difference, and so Asian women often adopt secret identities and digital prosthetics that help them “pass” within the reconfiguration of sex codes that “reference a body politic and frameworks of cultural intelligibility that...spectacularize already hypervisible bodies” (2007, 375). By hacking the sexually differentiated and pluralized binaries of the digital world, sex hacking gestures toward a kind of “cybernetic drag,” as Nguyen might put it, rearticulating the abstractions and incoherence of the current technocultural zeitgeist.

Starting with the premise is that sexism is rampant and that Asian women and girls are presumed to not “hack it” in a Man’s world, then we might also consider addressing those “girl gamers” who bypass sexist attitudes by presenting themselves as a gender-neutral or as men. Women gamers are sexually degraded the most in first person shooter games, where players attacks or hunts from a singular (usually male) point of view, rather than multiplayer games where there are more female characters or roles to choose from. In response, many women regularly trick their fellow players by “going stealth,” adapting to the assumed male role or subverting gender roles in simulated environs of faceless interaction (Schleiner, 2001). Offline, it is harder to upend the gaming world. In gaming tournaments all throughout Asia, from Singapore to China to the Philippines, women are too often found in the role of “ambassadors,” managing an esports brand or team and making “things look nice” (*gamesinasia*, 2014). Though

more and more women are getting into gaming, most games cater to the male audience, which is where female sex hackers come in.

Sex hacking does not apply exclusively to Chinese women but other Asian women. Japan boasts the highest percentage of women gamers in the world (over two-thirds of Japan's gamers are female), but this Westernized Asian nation with its firm gender roles was flummoxed when transwomen like Kayo Satoh, a *Tekken* and *Street Fighter* champ, revealed to the public that she was born "male," inciting much controversy (*gaygamer.net*, 2014). Playing video games that riff off ethnic stereotypes and sport a pantheon of sexualized female characters, Kayo managed to hack into the pre-determined sex codes about the role of women (and men) in gaming, later finding fame as a model who released a nude photo-book. Kayo beats men at their own game, initiating a critical discussion of hacking as sexual metaphor that recalls the queer/feminine threat of Asia to the West (which now includes newly industrialized Asian nations and men), a threat epitomized by the "I love you" e-mail virus discussed by Martin Manalansan in his study on Filipino queer men, where the semblance of online intimacy carries the potential for danger to upset gender norms and sociality (2003, 183). Women will play with others through gaming, allowing their competitors to find digital intimacy with them. Such digital penetration masquerading as digital intimacy makes men underestimate the shrewdness and competitiveness of their female counterparts. The sex hacking work of Kayo and other Asian women gamers affords a differing take on hacking as more than a conquest and successful display of technical skill, one that takes into account the public misrecognition of female abilities and exclusion based on assumed incompetence. Insofar as the term hacking both refers to aptitude but also failure (i.e. she is a total "hack"), the sex hacker is an example of the failure of gender expectations, which manages to cut new paths in unequal playing fields. If the hacking is pathway, then sex is the source code that determines the value modeling for the female body and its integration and application in the age of digital penetration, a time when no man-made technology is truly safe or secure from reappropriation. This lack of (male) security is something which I further explore in the next section on espionage.

Hacking Racial and International Binaries through Sex

Sex hacking gestures toward various forms of hacking in activities that involve hidden identities, role-playing, cryptic secrets, and occult dealings. The notion of hacking as a kind of sex act complicates simple cultural readings of espionage. Increasing competition between the U.S. and China has raised fears of Asians hackers perforating the country's national mainframe. Such anxieties echo classic "Yellow Peril" discourses of Chinese workers invading the country, scrambling the bureaucratic codes and

technologies of modern border enforcement regimes. Despite the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), thousands of “paper sons” used fake immigration documents and falsified identities to evade sensors, prompting numerous counter-intelligence probes against these foreign “aliens.” Chinese women were almost entirely excluded before their male counterparts, many of whom were cheap imported laborers, under the Page Act (1875). Demonized as hypersexual beings carrying undetectable bugs as prostitutes or expanding polygamous networks, Chinese women were thought to be more dangerous than men in their ability to penetrate the inner “core” of Anglo-American domesticity, thus warranting their total exclusion from the United States (Ngai 2014, Peffer 1986).

Throughout modern history, Asians were considered sexually deviant, perverse, and alien to the gender normalcy of White European men and women. As such, they did not inhabit a simple sexual binary, but occupied a liminal inscrutable position as a “third sex,” needing to be hacked and penetrated by outsiders and put under colonial “spheres of influence” that transformed them into modern liberal subjects (Lee 1999). This third sex classification is further splintered by the power differential between Asian American men and women, a binary complicated by the fact that East Asian men are simultaneously viewed as emasculated/asexual as well as hypersexualized (Espiritu 2008). These days Asian men appear empowered, vested with a re-masculinizing economic position in high-tech culture epitomized by the Asian nerd boy and computer engineer geek (i.e., Yahoo’s Jerry Yang). Meanwhile, Asian women appear less savvy and visible in technological culture, perhaps in due part from their historical objectification by the West as hypersexual entities defined primarily by their eroticized bodies.

In conversation with other texts and theories on Asian hypersexualization (Shimizu 2007, Tu 2003, Hoang 2014), my critical work reads Asian women’s third sex/hypersexual position as a primary site for reinterpreting binary gender relations within international relations. Hacking is usually approached as the negative excess of the American democratic system, emphasizing individualism over conformity, something not seen as relatable to women or other countries around the world (Lal 2003, 99). In her reading of the ultimate hacker novel *Neuromancer*, Lisa Nakamura (2003) echoes Lal to observe that the free-floating hacker figure reproduces the Western imperial gaze of “seeing without being seen,” recovering American masculine cowboy frontier ideals that also “draws on and disseminates pornographic Orientalist fantasies of opening Asian beauties” (14). The sex code then extends beyond women but Asian countries like China represented historically in a feminized manner as a secret society to be hacked by Westerners. For me, however, Chinese sex hacker and “rising China” appear as a gender queer formations that are simultaneously feminine and masculine, penetrated but also penetrating.

Through their sex hacking work, Chinese women shatter the techno-Orientalist imaginary of the East as porous, fluid, and “open” virgin territory for sexual conquest and digital penetration. The rich symbolism of the Chinese sex hacker as linked to the sinister gendered iconography of “rising China” provides a polysemous association that rescripts our globalizing binary sensibilities to force recognize of the multiplicity, hybridity, and amorphousness of global affairs. The sex hacker points to the persistence of the gender binary in capitalist technoculture, but also direct attention to how our binaristic ideas of sex and other things are changing, so much so they require a more critical form of “hacking.” The sex code that demarcates women from men can be analogized to the Chinese-American binary insofar as China is considered now to be a dangerous masculinized-though-feminized ‘Other’ trying to hack into American national security systems, a foreign threat that in turn needs to be matched and interpenetrated by American technology. The Chinese woman’s hacking work resonates with the looming threat of communist China hacking into the U.S. and the “Free World.” A dialogue about Chinese-U.S. international relations is necessary in conversations about Chinese women hackers, because hacking is a prism through which the U.S. primarily considers its fraught relationship with China and Chinese people in the information era.

As industrial systems are becoming increasingly digitized, U.S. government officials are most afraid of the virtual art of war employed by the Chinese. According to the Cox congressional report on Chinese espionage, China practices a “thousand grains of sand” approach to spying, procuring and acquiring information from the thousands of Chinese foreign tourists, international students, and workers in the states (U.S. Department of Defense 1999). The PRC’s adeptness in tapping into the vast network of overseas Chinese to assemble bits of information to crack American national security turns all Chinese subjects into potential hackers of sorts. The imaginary divide between the normative acceptable self (citizen, civilian) and non-normative “Other” (foreigner, criminal) is jumbled to the point that it is safe to say that hacking is less a skill or subculture of the few than a global matrix of power involving many. My point here is that hacking can indicate more than cyberattacks or programming, but signify a moment of moral crisis when binary relations and epistemologies are put into disarray.

An abiding fear of Chinese hacking extends to anxieties surrounding sex hacking. In past decades, several U.S. officers have been duped by sexy Chinese women, who “prey” upon these men’s “Yellow Fever” to enact high-level of acts of espionage or “sexpionage.” These women befriend unsuspecting state diplomats and agents, hacking their phones and electronic files, hoodwinking men who are too spellbound by their exotic charms. One of the latest cases involves a 60-year old former U.S. military contractor, given a seven year prison sentence for passing on national defense security

secrets to his girlfriend, a Chinese national in her late 20's and student of security studies in the states. Prosecutors and FBI have yet to determine if the woman was working for the Beijing government (McAvoy 2014). Like the infamous "Parlor Maid" case (1999-2004), where government officials could not determine if the Chinese woman named Katrina Leung who became involved with two of America's top secret agents was a "triple agent," working for the U.S., China, or herself—the sex hacker/spy appears as an independent agent. No one knows if individuals like Leung worked for any political authority, but the damage of her work to national security is undeniable. In this high-profile case, one reporter writes, the FBI thought "they had a brilliant penetration operation running; but while their top agents were certainly penetrating Katrina Leung, *she* was penetrating the FBI" (Monk, 2014).

Beyond computing, hacking alludes to the ways human affairs are opaque, encrypted, and virtual. At a time when the language of computing infects and redefines so many aspects of life, hacking references more than the theft of computer codes but also serious breaches in our social exchanges, tied to international relations between countries but also gendered exchanges between men and women as well as interracial encounters between Whites and Asians. The China/U.S. divide further complicates domestic racial binaries based on Black/White relations because it introduces other "foreign" racial elements that require further parsing. In a geopolitical sense, sex hacking slices open modern binary relations, which are gender coded as well as racially scripted. It exploits the American's vulnerabilities in his sexual fetishization of Asian women and demonization of China, exposing weaknesses in those Western imperial agents who believed they can penetrate the feminine "Other," the latter assumed in a virtual position of fixed distance/intimacy rather than one of assertive digital penetration with all its potent dangers.

The sex hacker thus can be both a seductive Lotus Blossom and cunning Dragon Lady, the latter defined as femme fatales who use their calculating and seductive abilities to deceive, trick, and bring down men and governments. While bearing affinities to the girly playful Lotus Blossom figure, a sex hacker is also not unlike a Dragon Lady, a high-achieving and intelligent sexual being who revels in her Orientalist mystique and feminine mastery of the art of deception. However, the sex hacker embodies not so much the one-dimensional trope of ethnic villainy or female betrayal, but expresses the problems of representing the "Other" at a time the Other is not to be found in a foreign "elsewhere" but everywhere. If computer hackers are able to look behind the screen of new media to understand the organizing binary logic behind technology, sex hackers do more than "lift the veil" of Oriental feminine mystique to peer into the sexual technologies of what Foucault (1980) termed the coupling of power/knowledge...they shatter and beguile the codes ascribed to digital bodies themselves.

Conclusion

Sex hacking gesticulates the breakdown of boundaries and binary oppositions in a digital world becoming ever more fluid, porous, and “deterritorialized.” This article did not simply touch upon how women fit or do not fit into hacker subculture. Rather, I spot the “sex hacker” as a speculative form of role-playing and subjectivity that distillates a larger plane of (im)material agency and digital sovereignty for women. Sex hacking dislodges the traditional notion of Chinese women’s sexual objectification in the public and cyberspace to offer a critical intervention in feminist thought, confronting the proliferation of sexism in electronic spaces. Cyberspace offers a space to hide (and hack) sexual identification, so while women might not be able to escape their interpellation as hypersexualized beings, hacking affords an opportunity to seize whatever power lies within their “sex.”

Speaking to the scholars working in the fields of ethnic studies, feminist studies, sexuality studies, and communications—this article contributes to interdisciplinary conversations around female presence in digital culture. Given the absence of critical dialogue about the role of women of color in this culture, sex hacking wields a “critical machete” to knife through the thick encrusted intersecting layers of biased thinking. Sex hacking disrupts the high-tech capitalist phallic order, exposing its penetrable borders insofar it rewires the utility network of our digital currents, acting as a circuit-breaker to the globalizing flows of nationalism, sexism, and racism. In the Western imagination, our planet is divided in terms of East and West, communism and democracy, female and male, 1’s and 0’s. But another script exists beyond the hegemonic Unicode, one able to dismantle the technological tools of the Master. In the age of digital penetration, decrypting the sex code is serious business, and with the sex hacker as our guide, we learn not to live in a world of strict binaries, but rather find ways to penetrate it.

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Notes

[1] Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” was a seminal text that set the critical grounds for cyberfeminist studies and how to think about gender in technoculture, but it problematically attributes too much privilege to Southeast Asian women factor workers as “real-life” cyborgs.

[2] For example, the electronics manufacturing industry in developing countries is the largest employer of Asian women on the planet. Women's invisible but central role in Silicon Valley, that beacon of "high-tech industry" is as much propped up as much by the "nimble fingers" and mechanized appendages of Asian female low-wage laborers putting together microchip parts for multinational electronics companies as much as the "invisible hand" of capital accumulation and wealth provided by Chinese nouveau rich, Korean businessmen, and Indian bourgeois elites. See Pellow and Park (2002).

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