

The 'divided self'

Family and Self in 21st Century China

Literature on the 'family'

- ▶ Knapp, Ronald G.; Lo, Kai-Yin (eds.). *House, Home, Family: Living and Being Chinese*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005.
- ▶ Giskin, Howard; Bettye S. Walsh (eds.). *An Introduction to Chinese Culture Through the Family*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- ▶ Theiss, Janet M. *Disgraceful Matters: The Politics of Chastity in Eighteenth-Century China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.



Research on the 'self' in 21st century China

- ▶ Arthur Kleinman et al. *Deep China: The Moral Life of the Person*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- ▶ Anthropological and psychiatric approaches to the 'self' and 'personhood' in China
- ▶ Analyse the Chinese self in its moral context



‘In 1949, only socialism can save China; in 1979, only capitalism can save China; in 1989, only China can save socialism; in 2009, only China can save capitalism.’

(Kleinman et al. *Deep China*, p. 2)

→ Need to understand China on its own terms by identifying the things that really matter to Chinese

→ Look at the ‘remaking of the person in China’s changing emotional and moral context since the 1980s’



Chinese self-identity in the past

- ▶ ‘In the past, the self-identity of the Chinese individual was defined by preordained social relations that revolved around the centrality of the family and descent line in the form of a close-knit kin group. Hence, one was an oldest son, a younger daughter, a concubine’s son, the first wife of a first son who is the family head, a peasant, a landlord,, a scholar bureaucrat.’
- ▶ Kleinman et al. 2011: 3.



‘Divided self’

- ▶ Divided between
- ▶ ‘Past and present’
- ▶ ‘Public versus private’
- ▶ ‘Moral versus immoral’
- ▶ → self is torn between self-interest and collective good, responsibility and desire, and contradictory emotions



Ideal of the wolf

- ▶ *Wolf Totem*
- ▶ Describes an idealized relationship between individual and group
- ▶ ‘Each member is independent, wild and free at the same time as loyal to its pack and willing to be sacrificed if needed for the survival of the group. It is a strictly hierarchical formation with a strong and wise leader, whose authority is unquestioned.’
- ▶ (Wedell-Wedellsborg 2010: 179)



Influencing factors

- ▶ Expansion of private sector → development of labour market (unknown before 1978)
- ▶ urbanisation
- ▶ 2005: 126 Mio. Workers in urban private sector
- ▶ 1980: 2 Mio. migrants
- ▶ 2006: 132 Mio. Migrants
- ▶ 2004: 88 Mio. Elderly people or children alone at home
- ▶ Privatization of housing
- ▶ Marketization of education and healthcare



Influencing factors II

- ▶ Individualization adapted by party state
- ▶ People are expected to
 - ▶ Accept more responsibilities
 - ▶ Experience greater uncertainty
 - ▶ Work harder
- ▶ Enterprising and desiring self
- ▶ Development of a middle-class society
- ▶ 200 Mio. in 2008; 520 Mio. in 2025



Shift from responsibilities to rights

- ▶ ‘Why is life’s road becoming narrower and narrower?’ (*China Youth*, May 1980)
- ▶ ‘Having seen through life, I acquired a dual personality. On the one hand, I denounced this vulgar reality. On the other hand, I rode with the waves. Hegel once said: “Whatever is realistic is rational, whatever is rational is realistic.” This has almost become a motto with which I comfort myself and soothe my wounds. I am human. I am not a noble person, but I am a rational one, just like all other rational beings. I fight about wages; I calculate bonuses. I learn to flatter, to lie. ... Doing such things, I feel terrible inside. Then I remember Hegel’s words and I become calm.’



Pursuit of happiness

- ▶ 2008, 25 year old woman in Shanghai
- ▶ Gives her mother her monthly salary of 3,500 Yuan
- ▶ ‘Whenever I want something, I just go to my mother. I did a rough calculation a few months ago and found out that I need at least five thousand yuan per month for basic expenditures. But I also need to change my cell phone every year and my parents pay for it; I often travel with friends to other parts of the country and my parents pay for it. And I need to drink Starbucks coffee every day and my parents pay for that too. I guess now you would think I am not that filial anymore, right? ... You are wrong... I am quite filial. Why? Do you know what my parents’ biggest hope is? My happiness! If I live a happy life, they will be happy. That is exactly what I am doing, and they are indeed very happy.’



Self-awareness and self-fashioning

- ▶ 17 year old factory worker
- ▶ ‘In a factory with on thousand or ten thousand people, to have the boss discover you is very hard. You must discover yourself. You must develop yourself. To jump out of the factory, you must study. You are here [at the meeting, TJ] because you don’t want to be an ordinary worker with a dull life. If you are waiting for your company to lift you up, you will grow old waiting.’
- ▶ (Chang 2008: 174)
- ▶ Use of identity cards to become someone one longs to be – different from individualism.



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- ▶ “Every time I read the biographies of [the recluses] Shang Ziping 尚子平 and Tai Xiaowei 臺孝威,” Ji Kang admits, “I yearn for them, sighing with emotion, and remember what kind of men they were.”
 - ▶ model himself on the examples set by past recluses, rather than elevating his own decisions and preferences to the status of exclusive moral guideline
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