

Chinese Modernity and the Individual Psyche

Edited by ANDREW KIPNIS

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This volume, edited by Andrew Kipnis, adds to a growing body of books and articles about the dynamic historical processes of modernity and individuation in China. The book explores relations between modernity and the individual psyche in China, with a certain emphasis on mechanisms of governing in diverse situations and institutions.

The introduction sets out to establish a new approach to the study of the individual in China, and is therefore quite critical in its assessment of recent works drawing on individualization theory and theories of second modernity for the analysis of contemporary Chinese social practices. Much of the existing literature is criticized for taking an outdated and linear approach to the study of Chinese modernity, and for treating individuation as a social fact under conditions of modernity. In light of the burgeoning interest in the topic of how the individual is constituted in China today, this debate is very relevant. I did find, however, that the critique sometimes builds on exaggerated representations of weaknesses in the existing literature – few would, for instance, disagree that pre-modern human beings were also individuals, or that religious and other social practices remain important resources for the cultivation of the individual psyche.

The introduction is followed by nine case studies, each of which is engaging in its own way. Creativity and senses of self are in focus in the first section, where three authors study the Chinese individual psyche from the perspective of artistic expressions and experiences. Ling-Yun Tang analyses the post-1970s generation of artists, showing how they, like many authors of fiction in the same period, emphasize questions of self and feelings of alienation in their works of art. Tang not only studies the works of these artists, but also their ways of negotiating the self through participation in the global commercial art market, emphasizing self-promotion, branding and career. This issue of individual career building is also evident in Emily E. Wilcox's study of professional dancers who draw a very clearly identifiable line between "pure" and "instrumental" forms of their art. The dancers feel, on a very personal level, the loss of spiritual commitment to commercial interests; and like many other groups and individuals in Chinese society they experience the "rise of the individual" first of all as a basic struggle for economic existence. The migrant workers who express themselves through poetry, as studied in the article by Wanning Sun, are undoubtedly struggling for their livelihoods. Sun shows how many young migrants experience feelings of hopelessness, and are even criticized for "putting the self before family" in the widespread Chinese discourse on presumed selfishness and egoism of the young generation.

Family relations and female gender are central in the second section of the volume. The first article, by Vanessa L. Fong et al., looks at the expectations mothers have for their toddler daughters' futures. They show how mothers express ambivalence towards their own ideals of independence and excellence for their daughters, and the study provides a very good example of how discourses promoting independence and self-reliance are inseparable from gender-role expectations which contain other and contradicting values. The mother-daughter relationship is also the topic of Harriet Evans's article which draws on a long-term study of educated and professional urban women. Evans shows how mothers in the post-Mao reform area are under a lot of pressure to respect, understand and raise their child as an

independent individual, while never disregarding their personal responsibility for cultivating and managing the success of the child (in addition to their other gendered obligations). In extreme cases pressure may lead to attempts of suicide, as discussed in Hyeon Jung Lee's chapter about the high number of female suicides in rural areas. Based on a study in four villages, Lee argues that most such suicides are committed by disadvantaged married women who lack resources and feel powerless, either in face of a husband's violence or as a result of deep economic insecurity.

The last section of the book has the most direct focus on Foucauldian perspectives of how individual psyches are governed in China, discussing Confucian technologies of shaming, private and state education, and psychiatric institutions. Technologies of governing the individual psyche by means of shaming are known from the many examples during the People's Republic of how, for instance, criminals or prostitutes have been paraded publicly, or exposed in media. Drawing on case studies from CCTVs Society and Law Channel and interpretations of Confucian classics on human nature, Delia Q. Lin argues that such practices of governing through shaming have a long Confucian legacy in Chinese culture. Shame plays a role also in contemporary Chinese education, where an individual child's failure to succeed may influence the social status of the whole family. This has created a rapidly growing market for private education, and Andrew Kipnis's article shows how private schools promote themselves not as alternatives to the standardized state school, but as sites for cultivating a child into being successful in the established educational, and thereby social, hierarchy. The final article in the book is based on one of few fieldwork studies from within a Chinese psychiatric institution. Zhiying Ma convincingly shows how some patients and their families draw on holistic traditional knowledge of the body to resist a rather rigid form of biomedical individualization.

In sum, these nine articles represent empirically rich studies of individual psyches in China, and the complex ways in which they are governed. I warmly recommend the volume for anyone interested in the topic of individual and self in China, in the ways Chinese individuals are governed through various institutions and in different cultural settings, and for those interested in theories of modernity and individuation in the context of China.

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Breaking out of the Poverty Trap: Case Studies from the Tibetan Plateau in Yunnan, Qinghai and Gansu

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This unique edited volume combines a wide range of contributions from a research team of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Being the translation of an original Chinese publication, it gives us unprecedented insights into the way modern Chinese academia deals with complex and sensitive socio-economic issues. This in itself makes the work an interesting read.

Comprising eleven chapters besides the introduction, the book can be loosely structured into three sections. The first four contributions focus on Tibetan farmer and herder market participation and income generation. The second set addresses a wide range of issues from ecological resettlement, health and education to a unique