

A Sweet Counterforce to Individualization: The Return of Parental Power among Urban Youth in China



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Abstract:

A new development in Chinese urban society today is that parents increasingly exert influence and power in the life of youth at the critical moments of life course, such as education, job search, mate choice, marriage, post-marital residence and divorce. To live a life of one's own, still a shining ideal in the minds of Chinese youth, seems to be silently drifting away from them in real life as they cannot thrive without parental support in the extremely competitive society. Focusing on the new phenomenon of parents-driven divorce among the post-1980 youth and new patterns of intergenerational dependence, I argue that the lack of re-embedding mechanisms in an increasingly risky society, the dominance of materialism and consumerism in social life, and the crisis of social trust and the remaining centrality of personal trust are the major factors contributing to the return of parental power and also create the extra challenge of living a life of one's own. The Chinese case therefore also raises a number of questions for a better understanding of the global trend of individualization and its local variations.

Yunxiang Yan, professor of anthropology and director of the Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, Los Angeles. He earned his B.A. in Chinese Literature from Peking University in 1982 and Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Harvard University in 1993. He is the author of *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village* (Stanford University Press, 1996), *Private Life under Socialism: Love, Intimacy, and Family Change in a Chinese Village, 1949-1999* (Stanford University Press, 2003), and *The Individualization of Chinese Society* (Berg publishers, 2009). His research interests include family and kinship, social change, the individual and individualization, and the impact of cultural globalization. Among other projects, he is currently writing a book on individualization and moral changes in post-Mao China.

2013年 11月13日(水) 16:30～18:30

京都大学吉田キャンパス 文学部校舎 B1 地下大会議室

(参加無料・当日参加歓迎)