

Friday Seminar

Spring
2023

Valuable Anxieties: From the Education of Love to the Exploitation of Anxiety



Feb 17

10AM ▶ 11:30AM

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/98810574863>

Meeting ID:

988 1057 4863

Passcode:

986566

This presentation examines the state-civil partnership on the education of love through an ethnographic study of the "Youth Development Workshops" in Beijing. The state-invested workshops are an attempt to redress the massive failures of youth marriage-making in the city, and the related social ethos of anxiety among urban families. As the name suggests, the state agents see an acute need to "re-socialize" the youth into marriageable and sociable subjects through managing their desires, beliefs, and interpersonal relations. However, as I shall show, the state proxies dispute over the proper path of youth socialization and, therefore, the proper pedagogies of love. At the center of the debate are the Marxist virtues and values of reciprocity and contribution versus the neoliberal aspirations of self-fulfillment, and the techniques of emotional manipulation and competition. This is caused by conflicted interests among the state proxies for careerist advancement in the public sector and for market profitability. Rather than assuaging the anxieties, the contradictory and volatile pedagogies intensify youths' anxiety and self-doubt. The presentation ends by showing that, when market-based interests triumph, the educational initiative on youthful love is rendered to be an exploitative mechanism of youthful anxiety.

Shanni Zhao is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology and student associate at Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies at Harvard University. Her dissertation, "Affective State and Civic Intimacy: Youth Marriage, Public Mediation, and State-Making in Urban China," studies the relation of affect and sovereign power in contemporary China. Part of this research, titled, "Transgenerational Transmission of Suffering: Violence, Memory, and Aspiration for Alternative Intimate Lives in Contemporary China," has been published in *Ethos: the Journal of the Society of Psychological Anthropology*.



ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!



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