

Dear Louise and all,

As I promised, here is an abstract of our work in progress on inter-generational conflicts in China from a constructionist perspective. Thanks for your interest and we appreciate any comments/feedback!

Identity, Memory and Stigmatization of Chinese Elders

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And

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This paper addresses the causes and policy implications of recent discrimination against elders in China. Over the past ten years, an astonishing widespread backlash against elders in public interaction has defied the thousand-year-old Chinese tradition of revering the elderly. Incited by frequent reports of elders suing people who helped them after accidents, playing loud, “unrefined” music in public squares when dancing, and asserting the right to take over bus seats, many Chinese people have begun to view the elder generation with antipathy. This backlash has intensified to the extent that people have fired rifles and hurled human waste to deter elders from making noise in public squares, disregarded dying elders on the street, and launched into fistfights with elders on buses. While there are voices critical of the younger generation’s indifference, no less prevalent is a discriminatory discourse blaming elders for their reported ill conducts. This popular discourse argues that the elderly generation is a corrupted and greedy one for having suffered material scarcity during the 1958-1961 Great Famine and spiritual scarcity under the Communist ideology, as well as for having violently participated in the 1966-1976 Cultural Revolution.

Our paper aims to explain the psychological and social causes of the backlash and the associated stigmatizing discourse. We examined over a thousand available journal articles, media reports, videos and blogs in order to reconstruct the development of and controversies surrounding the backlash against the elders. Next, we analyzed surveys, case studies, interviews, as well as theoretical papers to elucidate the multifaceted conditions and causes of the discrimination. Finally, drawing on the cognitive theory of memory, we interviewed younger Chinese subjects to investigate how they unwittingly construct false, ageist memories under the influence of mass media and within concrete conversation with people of similar identity.

Based on the above research, we conclude that the backlash against the elders’ generation had a psychological cause, rooted in specific social conditions. The aging Chinese population, a large influx of migrant workers, as well as slow infrastructure development have jointly resulted in shortage of urban public resources such as transportation and space, which condition the competition among generations. Since the Economic Reforms of 1978, the importation of Western culture has created significant value differences between the elder and younger Chinese generations. Rapid social transformations have led to many social problems, causing a great many of what McLuhan calls moral panics. We argue that the

younger generations rationalize their part in the intergenerational conflict by using the elder generation's unfortunate past as a discursive resource in a moralizing fashion. This mistaken rationalization has been coopted and overrepresented by mass media, often itself in the hands of the younger generations, which further perpetuates the stigmatizing anti-elder discourse. So far, public policy measures have been ineffective to alleviate the intergenerational conflict because they have failed to challenge the validity of the discriminatory discourse, which is constructed through intricate dynamics among the Cultural Revolution's legacy, China's changing social conditions, media misrepresentation and media users' age identities.

Two relevant pieces of media coverage (click to open):

China Daily: Need to protect our Good Samaritans
BBC news: Dancing Grannies raise a ruckus

Happy new year,
Zhipeng

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 [Comment by Zhipeng \(Simon\) Gao](#) by Louise S. [2015, Apr 05]

Hi Louise,

Kathy and I just finished writing the article on intergenerational conflict in China. We are pleased to share it with our task force and possibly hear any feedback.

All the best,
Zhipeng

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 [cross reading of two IP articles by Louise Sundararajan](#) by Louise S. [2015, May 18]

Dear All,

Attached please find the two papers I meant to comment for some time. In the first paper, by Gao and Bischooping, a disturbing scenario—the elders fighting for seats on the buses in China-- is explicitly treated. In the second paper, by Permanadeli and Tadié, a disturbing scenario was found in one footnote—the army’s involvement in the housing projects resulting in the use of military violence to exterminate the indigenous habitat of the poor and replacing it with modern housing complex for the well to do in Jakarta, Indonesia. The conclusion drawn by Permanadeli and Tadié about Jakarta is applicable to China and other Asian countries on the fast lane of modernization: “. . . those real estates seem so disconnected from the city they are in. It is in these disconnecting realities that Jakarta nurtures their inhabitants about the imaginaries of modern living” (2014, p. 33). The disjointed reality is also there in the paper by Gao and Bischooping.

The paper by Permanadeli and Tadié is about the masking of a disturbing, disjointed reality by the glorious imageries of modern housing projects. A similar theme is found in the paper by Gao and Bischooping, who used discourse analysis to expose the justification of those who refused to give seats to the elderly on the bus. I would like to take this theme further.

For the purpose of un-masking, hermeneutics has an edge of advantage. What Caputo (1987) refers to as “radical hermeneutics” is relevant here: “hermeneutics as an attempt to stick with the original difficult of life, and not to betray it with metaphysics” (p. 1), or science, if I may add. I believe this approach will serve IP well.

Thanks for the stimulating read,

Louise

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 [Imaginary project](#)

 [Comment by J. I. \(Hans`\) Bakker](#) by Louise S. [2015, May 18]

Dear Louise and other colleagues,

I read the Pemanadeli and Tadié paper quite some time ago. It was recommended to me by a friend and then also mentioned here at IP I think.

What needs to be included is what I am calling the "global rural-urban matrix." There is a rural imaginary just as there is an urban imaginary.

It is not just in Jakarta or Beijing or other cities in Asia.

It is global in the sense that the global modern capitalist financial system and trading system makes certain kinds of social change possible.

When I first went to Indonesia in 1975 the city of Jakarta was just beginning to change significantly. Whereas there had previously only been one luxury hotel in 1975 there were at least a dozen. Our Canadian team stayed at what was then considered a three star hotel. A decade before it had been thought of as at least a four star hotel. (I was perfectly happy there and when on other trips I was told I had to stay at a five star I was not particularly happy about that!. But the team had to all be in the same hotel, which made sense, and the better paid consultants were used to five star business facilities that speeded up the process of getting documents ready, etc.)

Anyone who only visited Jakarta in 1975 and now goes back in 2015, forty years (two decades) later, is in for a big shock. So much has changed. There really is a middle class in Indonesia now. They have cars (which are driven by drivers!) and they live in the kinds of housing complexes featured in the article.

The term "imaginary" is a bit loaded. It stems from Benedict Anderson's book about nationalism. But ALL cultural values and norms are "imaginary." Our images of what is rural are just as imaginary as our images of what is urban.

Perhaps there can be some discussion on this list serve of the Pemanadeli and Tadié paper, and what it implies.

I am attaching a 1995 paper about urban settlements and old traditions of "negara."

Sincerely,

Hans

J. I. Bakker



[Bakker 1995 Negara Urban Settlements and Environment sustain](#)