

## Abstract Ph.D project: Zhang, Shimin

### **Reading Emotion and Morality: Structures of Feeling and Popular Magazines in Post-socialist China**

China's economic reform took a radical form since the 1990s and led to a significant social transformation. In the context of unprecedented urbanization, modernization, and globalization, the individuals, unshackled from the Maoist period's socialist norms, needed to reconceptualize their identity and sociality in emotive or moral terms to embrace and legitimize a new social order. Yan (2015: 9) notes that the relation between emotion in private life and social condition is "when collectivization broke up the previous system of social hierarchy based on kinship, it also created the antithesis of collectivity— namely, individuality." Thus, emotion and morality have become a fruitful avenue for reconceptualizing the "structures of feeling," the emerging formation of "values, meanings, and lived experience" within a particular generation (Williams, 1977: 132).

The booming cultural industry gave rise to new cultural spaces, in which people share stories, knowledge, values, and emotion till the internet sphere radically changed the media ecology in 2010 with the launch of the 3rd-generation (3G) mobile communication technology in China. Therefore, I ask how popular magazines, and print culture more generally, mirror the sentiments of people unshackled from withering norms and embracing new social orders and how they mediate social mentalities along with the formation of a new nation-ness.

The primary sources will be national top-seller magazines like *Stories* 故事会, *Bosom Friends* 知音, and *Readers* 读者 between 1980 and 2010. Focus will be invested on detecting the cultural politics of everyday-meaning making interwoven with the power of capital and mediating their conceptualization of emotion and morality. The proposed research will fill up the omission of grassroots cultural practices and mediation politics that sociological, anthropological and philosophical trajectories are prone to have (e.g., Yan, 2003 & 2009; Ong & Zhang, 2012; Lee, 2007 & 2014).

My contention is that the shared emotion and moral imagination in the public mediasphere form a transregional community that resists, adjusts, and negotiates with China's transformation in the reform era. Emotions conveyed on popular magazines are subject to the social conditions, public life and community. These three magazines (and their similar ones) represent the three cultural spaces in the formation of emotion: the society, family (private life) and individual (or self). Question awaits answering is how people conceive their gender roles, their roles in the family, and their social roles more broadly, as well as how they associate with others as the old values and meanings faded out from the stage.

Methodology includes "horizontal, integrated and situated" readings of these popular magazines (Judge, Mittler & Hockx, 2018: 10). Upon the close reading, a zoom-out analysis will historicize and contextualize emotions conveyed in these stories, themes and columns in the decollectivization in China's economic reform which causes a series of structural changes in family, schools, workplaces and communities. The expression of emotion and morality will be examined in association to public events like natural disasters, SOE workers laid-off, and peasant workers' problem, seeing the tension between individuality and nation-ness.