

Presentation of M. Phil Thesis

Family and Sexuality in China: The case of functional marriage



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This talk discusses how family shapes the expression and practice of sexuality of adults in mainland China. In the west, many functions and roles of family have been substituted by the state, market and civil society. Studies mainly focus on how public sphere shapes people's sexuality. While unlike its western counterpart, Chinese family is still an important institution for production, welfare and education. Besides, family value is especially emphasized even in contemporary Chinese culture. Thus the patterns of family's power and influence on people's sexuality are also distinct from those of western family, yet the relations between the family and sexuality in mainland China is rarely discussed. This research intends to enrich the understanding on how family impact on adult children's sexuality by focusing on "functional marriage" popularly practiced by homosexuals in mainland China. It mainly tries to analyze the mechanism of familial influence on sexuality from five major channels, such as family network, resource allocation, care provision, blood ties and negotiating capacity. The main approach adopted in this research is to make comparisons among three types of family: 1) families with one child vs. families with more than one child; 2) urban families vs. rural families; 3) families with son(s) vs. families with daughter(s). I argue that the distinct structure, function and role of Chinese family determine that its influence on people's sexuality is more active and broad than that of western family. This research also has implications for those less developed countries or more family-centered societies in which family is different from the typical western nuclear family.

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