

Envy and Windfall Wealth in Contemporary China

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Useful information **Event website:** [zoom](#) [1]

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The sudden arrival of wealth in China in the past 30 years, especially the arrival of wealth for some people but not for others, offers anthropologists a very good opportunity to revisit and modify their theories of envy, as a key human emotion, and to understand how ordinary people feel when they see quickly widening economic inequality unfolding around them.

While most anthropological studies of envy have focused on relatively slow-changing ‘traditional’ societies, in the Chinese case we find dramatically growing inequality and, it seems, an equally striking increase in the prevalence of envy. Certainly, the arrival of windfall wealth due to mining activity in the three villages in North-east China where I conducted the fieldwork for this research back in 2006 to 2008, generated a wide and rich range of envy-related discourses and practices. This talk will mainly cover the basic analysis of the specific cultural forms of envy; the everyday contexts that shape envy and its social consequences; the morality governing those who are envied and how they try to ‘deflect’ it; and how emotion, in this research, is used as a way to understand the rapid social transformation in China.

Bio:

Hui Zhang is an Associate Professor at the Institute of Anthropology, Renmin University of China and currently a visiting scholar at our Institute, funded by the China Scholarship Council. She received her PhD from the Anthropology department at the London School of Economics in 2010 and the book based on her PhD research entitled “Envy and Windfall Wealth: an anthropological study” (in Chinese) has been published in 2016. From 2011-2015, she has been working on a EU-funded research “URBACHINA: sustainable urbanisation in China”, which developed into a joint publication “China’s Urban Century: Governance, Environment and Socio-Economic

Imperatives” edited by Francois Gipouloux. From 2015-2016, she was a visiting scholar at University of Rome (Sapienza), working with Prof. Santangelo on research into emotion and state of mind in Ming-Qing China. From 2018, she started to conduct field research and comparative work on China and Poland. Her current project is on the construction of motherhood and anxiety in childrearing in the two countries. Research interest: economic anthropology, urbanisation, anthropology of emotion, and cultural comparison. Contact: zhanghui01@ruc.edu.cn
[2]

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Links

[1] <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89125295180?pwd=VGJjVDh1b1dweDJSamdVWS9Gd0U3dz09>

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