

Department of Sociology

Seminar

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The Prevalence and the Increasing Significance of *Guanxi*

Date : 6 February 2018 (Tuesday)
Time : 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
Venue: Room 1045, Academic and Administration Bldg.,
15 Baptist University Road, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon
Language: English

Abstract

This forthcoming paper in *The China Quarterly* provides an analytical review of the social science literature on *guanxi*. The focus of this review is on the prevalence and the increasing significance of *guanxi* during China's post-1978 reforms implemented to move to a market economy. Since then, researchers have engaged in debates on what *guanxi* actually means to Chinese people in the past and at present, how it has been adaptive to ongoing institutional transformations, and why its influence in economic, social, and political spheres can be stabilizing, increasing, or decreasing along with market reforms and economic growth. The author provides a synthesis of these debates before offering a theoretical framework within which to understand the dynamics of *guanxi* from the changing degrees of institutional uncertainty and market competition. Survey findings on the increases of *guanxi* usage in labor markets from 1978 to 2009 are presented to illustrate the usefulness of this framework. In the conclusion, the author argues that *guanxi* is a five-level variable, and that the nature and forms of *guanxi* influence are contingent upon whether *guanxi* is a tie of connectivity, a sentimental tie, a sentiment-derived instrumental tie, an instrumental-particular tie, or an obligational tie that facilitates power-money exchanges. This five-level conceptualization is aimed at advancing future *guanxi* scholarship in the fast-changing Chinese society.

Biographical note

Yanjie Bian is Professor of Sociology at University of Minnesota, USA. Concurrently, he is Director of the Institute for Empirical Social Science Research at Xi'an Jiaotong University, China. Dr. Bian is a co-founder (with Professor Li Lulu) of the Chinese General Social Survey, which is a public data archive available to domestic and international scholars. Author of 13 books and more than 130 research articles on topics of China's social stratification, social networks, and institutional change, Dr. Bian's current projects include the development of the sociology of *guanxi*, a panel study about networks and jobs in Chinese cities, and East Asian social networks. He was recognized as one of the 2014, 2015, and 2016 Elsevier most-cited Chinese researchers in social science.

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