Dear Louise,

My colleague Katherine Bischoping and I just published an article on how a popular Chinese discourse commits a “fundamental attribution error” in understanding Chinese elders’ deviant behavior, which include fighting for bus seats, noise making, and blackmailing.

Can you please share this news with our task force members? Following is an abstract and a link to the full text.

The Emergence of an Elder-Blaming Discourse in Twenty-First Century China

ZHIPENG GAO & KATHERINE BISCHOPING

Abstract

To people familiar with Confucian teachings about revering elders, it may be surprising that, over the last decade and a half, a discourse has emerged and spread widely in China in which elders are denigrated as out-of-date and corrupt. Using newspaper articles, commentaries and videos, this paper first traces the emergence of intergenerational conflicts over bus seats, along with related phenomena that have become flashpoints in the new elder-blaming discourse. Second, this paper delineates and challenges popular and academic notions that intergenerational differences in values and dispositions entirely account for intergenerational conflict. Specifically, it criticizes a notion, popular in China, that the older generations became corrupted through a series of historical misfortunes from the 1958-1961 famine onward. Aided by the tools of cross-cultural comparison, historicization, and media studies, it offers alternative explanations for intergenerational conflict, including underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of public resources, occupational pressures on the younger generations, and a decline in social trust. Third, this paper discusses why an elder-blaming discourse has been so possible to propagate. Owing to their greater illiteracy and lack of internet access, China’s older generations can rarely make their voices heard amidst sensationalist reporting that over-represents their offenses. Further, that the Chinese population is concerned with starkly increasing and profound social problems, yet is given few opportunities to comment on these problems’ structural roots, contributes to elder scapegoating.

Full text: https://rdcu.be/NCbO
Thanks!
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