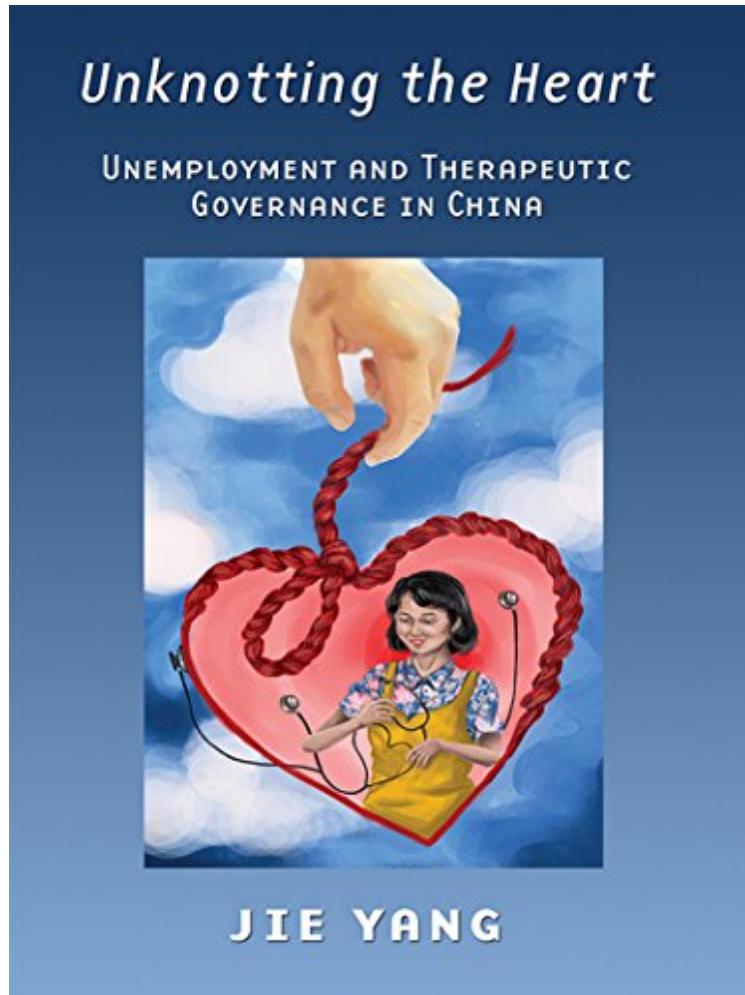


Unknotting the Heart: Unemployment and Therapeutic Governance in China

Jie Yang

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Jie Yang : Unknotting the Heart: Unemployment and Therapeutic Governance in China before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unknotting the Heart: Unemployment and Therapeutic Governance in China:

Since the mid-1990s, as China has downsized and privatized its state-owned enterprises, severe unemployment has created a new class of urban poor and widespread social and psychological disorders. In *Unknotting the Heart*, Jie Yang examines this understudied group of workers and their experiences of being laid off, "counseled," and then reoriented to the market economy. Using fieldwork from reemployment programs, community psychosocial work, and psychotherapy training sessions in Beijing between 2002 and 2013, Yang highlights the role of psychology in state-led

interventions to alleviate the effects of mass unemployment. She pays particular attention to those programs that train laid-off workers in basic psychology and then reemploy them as informal "counselors" in their capacity as housemaids and taxi drivers. These laid-off workers are filling a niche market created by both economic restructuring and the shortage of professional counselors in China, helping the government to defuse intensified class tension and present itself as a nurturing and kindly power. In reality, Yang argues, this process creates both new political complicity and new conflicts, often along gender lines. Women are forced to use the moral virtues and work ethics valued under the former socialist system, as well as their experiences of overcoming depression and suffering, as resources for their new psychological care work. Yang focuses on how the emotions, potentials, and "hearts" of these women have become sites of regulation, market expansion, and political imagination.

"With this book, Yang makes an important contribution by exploring the subjectivities of unemployed workers in China and by making visible the often hidden ideological struggle between the state and the unemployed workers over the interpretation of dislocation and unemployment." Ofer Sharone, ILR (March 2016) "In *Unknotting the Heart*, Jie Yang provides a fascinating look at a process of transformation that few general readers would be aware is going on in urban China, and that even specialists know relatively little about. Yet the 'psychologization' of China's political economy is an extremely significant topic that casts light on China's rapid rise and transformation. Yang draws on social theory in thoughtful ways to interpret affective dynamics. Her originality lies in how she takes the emotional consequences of reform very seriously indeed." Alan Smart, University of Calgary, author of *The Shek Kip Mei Myth: Squatters, Fires, and Colonial Rule in Hong Kong, 1950–1963* "In *Unknotting the Heart*, Jie Yang rigorously and insightfully analyzes what she calls state-led therapeutic intervention and the psychologization of governance in contemporary China. Based on detailed fieldwork with laid-off workers, this elegant ethnography not only forces us to rethink recent analyses of 'the self,' entrepreneurialism, and marketization but also raises important questions about the sociopolitical implications of these modes of governing. It is a must-read for anyone interested in governance in China today." Lisa M. Hoffman, University of Washington Tacoma, author of *Patriotic Professionalism in Urban China: Fostering Talent* About the Author Jie Yang is Associate Professor of Anthropology at Simon Fraser University. She is the editor of *The Political Economy of Affect and Emotion in East Asia*.