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Discussion Note 4 - Risk Society and Tobacco Control in Urban China

For this week's reading, we started to get in touch with a few opinions given by anthropologists with a foreign background, in regard to the social issues in a modernized, privatized China. In Matthew Kohrman's article, he insightfully analyzes the addiction and quitting of tobacco in kunming city, in order to find out how the theory of "risk society" was embedded in the regulatory regime of tobacco control in China, and what role did media play in this nationwide moral regulation, and to be honest, many of his statements (those often associated with certain terms) make his research and analysis not easy to read or make people feel relevant if they never had any background in current situation of tobacco control in China.

The concept of "risk society" is quite interesting, according to Kohrman, this stands for the certain self-awareness, self-regulation, and a sense of vulnerability about the rising risks among the society (pg136-138). He found out that in the post-Mao era, Chinese society and media seems to strengthen the promotion of risk society theory in various regulations regarding to public health, moral values, etc, and this phenomenon was thought to be the result of both the aftershock of globalization and modernization, and the privatizing process of Chinese citizens. Government hopes to use all kinds of media, like advertisement in TV, billboards in the street, and stickers with "no smoking" to inform citizens to "regulate themselves" and stay healthy. The reason behind all of these tobacco control also includes a sense of "urbanization" government has towards its city and citizens --- if you smoke a lot or publicly, this would be a sign of "un-urban".

However, most of the citizens, including government officials themselves, would find this tobacco control rather contradictive and hard to implement: simply because they could not quit it themselves. Most of the interviewees would think that if they could not quit the smoking, it only indicates they did not processes strong self-regulatory ability (自控力). This is why I still think despite all kinds of efforts government would take into this tobacco control, it will still be a long road for a total regulatory, "clean", "tobacco free" society. Mainly because of the fact that smoking has become a part of Chinese culture for a really long time, and its association with masculinity.

Comparison

Since this article was recorded and written in early 2000s, situations should be improved by now --- ten years after. Well, I remember seeing all kinds of stickers in all kinds of places back in my hometown, especially in restaurants, schools, and other public services like metros and airports. It is true that this sense of "culture quality" (文化素质) has been well strengthened among citizens. We would often consider those who boldly smokes in public area "impolite" and "rude", and now it is really rare to see someone walking while smoking in the street. However, the consume of tobacco is still a huge social issues: people still consume a great amount of cigarettes, small grocery storeowners would often sell cigarettes to minors regardless of the regulation, I guess it might be an universal thing that's shown in Western society.

Questions

1. What kind of similarities you find in this contradiction between self-regulatory and the difficulties quitting smoking in American society? How did the government implement certain campaigns? What was the result?

2. Can you think of any examples of "risk society" in the way American government promote certain

information? How did these differ from the situation we had in China?