

Department of Languages and Cultures
2018 Research Seminar Series

SIN WEN LAU

Lecturer in the Department of Languages and Cultures
University of Otago

“CHILDREN’S AGENCY AND THE NOTION OF ‘*GUAI*’ IN
CHINESE REALITY TV”

BY

Sin Wen Lau (University of Otago) & Shih-Wen Sue Chen (Deakin University)



In spite of a temporary government ban, *Where are we Going Dad?* is an extremely popular Chinese reality TV series that has been airing since 2013. On the programme, celebrity fathers bring their children on trips and are given challenges in each episode. Children in the series are praised for being *guai* when they listen to their fathers or accomplish a challenge.

Guai (乖) is the most important concept governing childhood in Chinese societies. This paper builds on our previous work on the cultural notion of *guai* as ambivalent (Chen et al. 2018). On one hand, *guai* emphasizes that children learn and enact accepted norms of behavior. On the other, the *guai* child should embody individualism and autonomy.

This paper analyses children agency through a focus on how children on the show negotiate the concept of *guai*. We approach *guai* as a social model of agency and pay attention to how children on the programme respond to adult authority, express their desires, and make themselves heard. In doing so, we argue that while Chinese notions of childhood emphasise conformity, there is a space open in which children can be active agents shaping their lives.

Tuesday: October 2, 2018 12:00pm A3N7 (3rd floor Arts Building)