

CHINA CROSSROADS

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Study Gods: How the New Chinese Elite Prepare for Global Competition

Yi-Lin Chiang

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[Study Gods](#) (2022) offers a rare look at the ways privileged youth in China prepare themselves to join the ranks of the global elite. Yi-Lin Chiang shows how these competitive Chinese high schoolers first become “study gods” (*xueshen*), a term describing academically high-performing students. Constant studying, however, is not what explains their success, for these young people appear god-like in their effortless abilities to excel. Instead, Chiang explores how elite adolescents achieve by absorbing and implementing the rules surrounding status. Drawing from eight years of fieldwork and extensive interviews, Chiang reveals the important lessons that Chinese youth learn in their pursuit of elite status. They understand the hierarchy of the status system, recognizing and acquiring the characteristics that are prized, while avoiding those that are not. They maintain status by expecting differential treatment and performing status-based behaviors, which guide their daily interactions with peers, teachers, and parents. Lastly, with the help of resourceful parents, they rely on external assistance in the face of potential obstacles and failures. Chiang looks at how students hone these skills, applying them as they head to colleges and careers around the world, and in their relationships with colleagues and supervisors.

[Yi-Lin Chiang](#) is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at NYU Shanghai. Before joining NYU Shanghai, she was Assistant Professor of Sociology at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. Chiang’s research focuses on educational stratification and intergenerational status transmission in greater China. Her ethnographic work examines the processes and outcomes of elite status transmission. In other lines of research, she uses Taiwanese panel data to explore how schools and families contribute to educational inequality. Her book, [Study Gods](#) (2022), received the Pierre Bourdieu Award for the Best Book in Sociology of Education from the Sociology of Education section of the American Sociological Association.

[China Crossroads](#) hosts talks on all topics related to China, including business, foreign policy, and other areas as they relate to China, the idea being that China is both already a “crossroads” of the world and itself at a “crossroads” in terms of its future global influence. For more information, contact Frank Tsai at editor@shanghai-review.org.