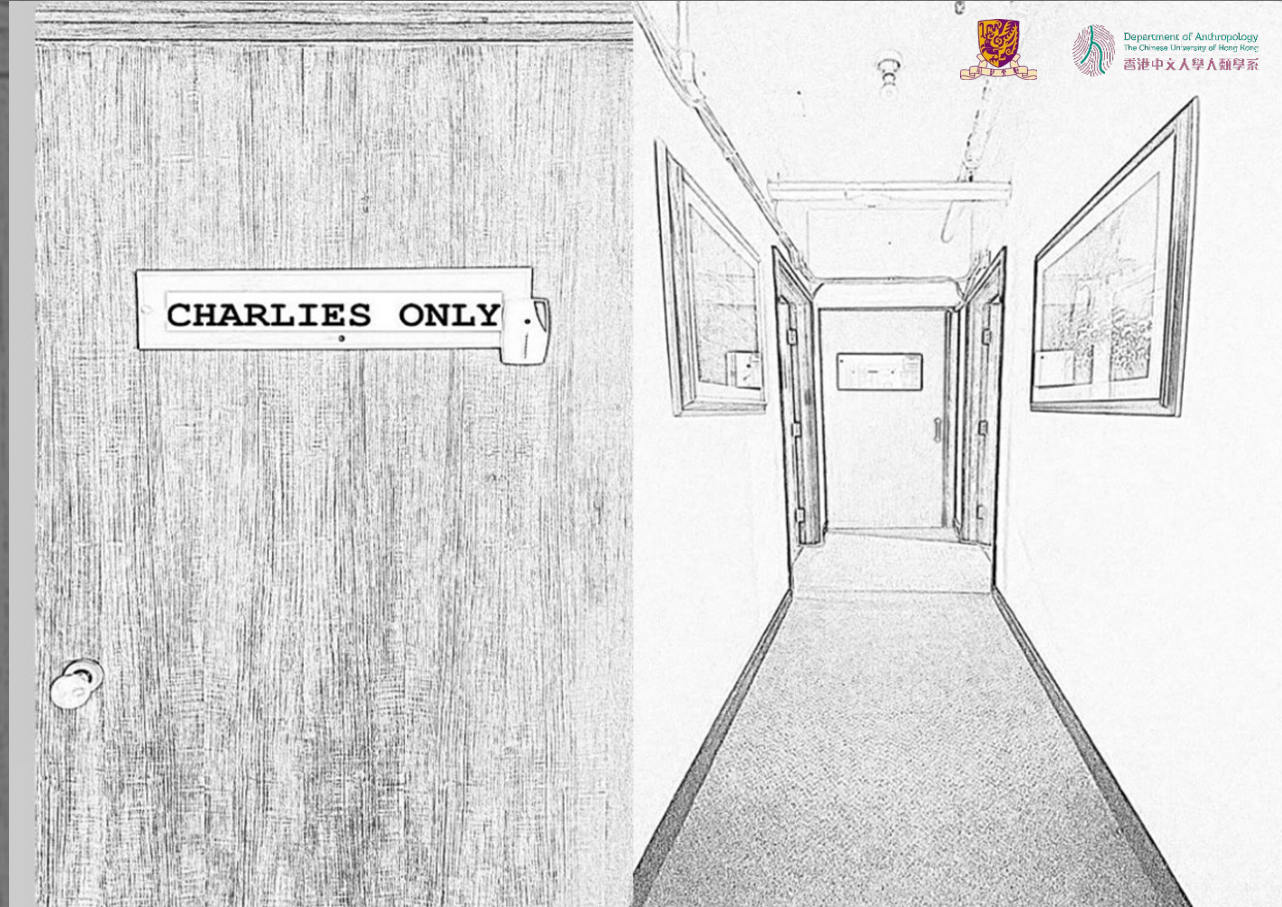


# Friday Seminar

Mar 21 1:00 - 2:30PM  
NAH 213



"It's a hotline!":  
attachment and  
detachment in a  
suicide prevention  
organization in  
Hong Kong

Drawing on 15 months of fieldwork in the Charlies, a suicide prevention organization in Hong Kong, this talk reflects on the nature of the work performed by the organization's 24/7 hotline for distressed callers. It argues that connection and detachment are two sides of the same coin. I describe the ways in which the Charlies presents a narrative of constant availability and seemingly tireless connection to callers. This narrative foregrounds the indisputable good of connection, an imperative that reinforces the organization's authority to prescribe what constitutes meaningful support. Yet, I contrast this portrayal with the indispensable distance the organization maintains from callers. This distance is necessary to ensure that it is callers themselves who will make life-and-death decisions to safeguard their authority over their own lives. It also ensures an equitable distribution of scarce organizational resources. Meanwhile, the ways in which callers adversely respond to the limits imposed on their interaction with the organization become acts of protests that attempt to negotiate whose terms of care should prevail. In conditions of what I call "organizational ambivalence", care surfaces as the ways in which the authority over someone's (be it others' or their own) well-being becomes negotiated and contested.

**Gabriel Liu** is a candidate on the PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. He works at the intersection between anthropology and law. His research interests include themes of care, organizations and ambivalence.

