



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

Cognitive Horizon and Moral Empathy: China as a Test Case

Friday, 19 May 2017

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 401 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

A light lunch will be served at 12:30 pm. First come first served.

Adam Smith first suggested there is a strong link between the development of a nationalistic-oriented government, the rise of a capitalistic economy, and the expansion of an empathic gaze toward another's plight. The historian Thomas Haskell drew upon Smith's discussion to advance the thesis that there is a causal relationship between the appearance of a global trading system and the expansion of an individual's sense of moral inclusiveness and thus obligation to others. The Smith-Haskell hypothesis suggests that the rise of a world-wide market system would result in the formation of a new cognitive framework in which individuals perceive themselves in relation to society. In contrast to life in a small scale society, where individuals' empathic response is restricted to their immediate community of residence, faith, or kin, participating in a fully developed market economy requires individuals to become knowledgeable about and involved with other cultures' customs and practices. A consequence of this mental engagement is to expand individuals' involvement with people with whom they have no prior relationship. China presents an opportune moment to revisit this discussion. My talk will examine the transformation of the Chinese moral universe as it is reflected in the changing behavioral patterns associated with market system and manifested in the evaluation of specific occupational types. I will also explore Chinese changing attitudes toward charity donation in order to illustrate the shift in urban China's moral universe from one linked from a particularistic orientation based in locality toward a more expansive or generalizable orientation that includes giving to strangers.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME