



The Department of Anthropology  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

# Therapeutic Reflections: Individuality as Capacity in Chinese Self-Help Psychology

Friday, 9 November 2018

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 12 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

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

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Young professionals in contemporary China are earnestly discussing how to become creative, humorous, and interesting. In order to develop these traits, many of them turn to self-help psychology books and training programs that aim to cultivate a key psychological capacity: reflexivity, or self-awareness. Critical scholarship has depicted reflexivity, both personal and institutional, as a tool for controlling self-presentation, optimizing self-management, and minimizing risk. Drawing from ethnographic data on personal growth groups and cultural activism in Beijing, as well as an analysis of popular self-help texts, I will analyze reflexivity as a therapeutic strategy for establishing a secure identity. Popular therapeutic techniques induce young adults to position themselves in relation to other people and in relation to social values. In personal growth groups, participants undergo intense, staged experiences of interpersonal and intrapersonal reflexivity. They learn to become conscious of their physical and moral identities, crafting a stage presence while performing moral scripts about self-cultivation, self-realization, and confidence. Taking a developmental view of the subject, I will suggest these games of reflexivity help young adults to clarify and articulate the rules that determine their identity in an era of rapid change. Through these exercises, young adults also develop specific psychosocial and cultural capacities that allow them to play the valued character of the creative and interesting individual. This talk will also demonstrate that the problem of reflexivity is motivating a range of cultural production, as Chinese psychologists, educators, social entrepreneurs, and cultural activists are all trying to teach their compatriots to become more self-aware.

Amir Hampel received his PhD from the University of Chicago's Department of Comparative Human Development in 2017. His research interests include personal identity, mental health, and social change, as well as epistemological issues in psychotherapy, medicine, and bodily practice. Amir's ethnographic research has focused on communications and social skills training groups that are popular among young professionals in urban China. He currently serves as co-editor for the Society for Psychological Anthropology's newsletter and online platforms. Amir is based in Shenzhen, China, where he is a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts, Southern University of Science and Technology.

**ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME**