



The Department of Anthropology  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

**Teresa KUAN**

Department of Anthropology  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

on

# Family Runs in the Vessels, Vines Run Through the Family: An Anthropologist Engages with Systemic Therapy

Friday, 17 Nov 2017

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 11 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

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

\*\*\*\*\*

## Abstract:

In his recent book *What Kinship Is-And Is Not* (2013), Marshall Sahlins describes kinship, which may include the non-human, as a “mutuality of being” - i.e. a conjoining of existence realized in and through mutual participation. Sahlins’s romantic construal has been criticized for neglecting the dark, coercive side of kinship, in discussions that show reinvigorated interest in a classic anthropological topic. Drawing on recent fieldwork at a research institute for family therapy in Shanghai, this presentation explores one possible way for understanding the ambiguity of mutuality. Family therapists are no strangers to the negative in family life. “Wenness” could be a suffocating embrace and potentially the nourishing condition for even the most severe of psychiatric diagnoses. While practitioners of family therapy understand the purpose of treatment in terms “individuation” (*fenhua*), I argue for seeing family therapy as a ritual technology for working on relational tangles that have caused someone to take responsibility for something she or he cannot control. Family therapy offers a small window for looking at the current psycho-boom in China, or what some scholars call “therapeutic governmentality.” It also provides an occasion for reflecting on vexing, existential questions such as “where do I end and others begin?”

## Bio:

Teresa Kuan is Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at Chinese University. She is the author of *Love’s Uncertainty: The Politics and Ethics of Child Rearing in Contemporary China* (University of California Press, 2015). Her current research interests include the development of family therapy in mainland China, and the interdisciplinary study of morality and ethics in everyday life.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME