

China Studies Webinar Series 2021-22 Term 2

The Absolute Host

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Date: 27 Jan 2022 (Thursday)

**Time: 17:00 - 18:30 (HKT)/
9:00 - 10:30 (UK)**



**Conducted in English
Online via Zoom**



In this presentation I will show the importance of hosting as a key framing device in Chinese ritual life. More specifically, I will present the ways in which the Chinese emperor, because of his status as Son of Heaven, assumed the position of the Absolute Host, commanding the chief host position in all situations of hosting in which he participated. I will present three ‘scenarios’ from the Manchu Qing dynasty: 1) the Grand Sacrifice (大祀), in which the emperor was the chief officiant; 2) the alternating audience system (年班), with which the emperor hosted the lords and other dignitaries of the Qing Inner Asian domains in the first month of the lunar New Year; and 3) an imperially-sponsored commemoration ritual where the Kangxi Emperor bestowed favour upon his favourite minister Xiong Cilü (熊賜履). I will establish the key conceptual difference (and indeed radical contrast) between what I call ‘hosting’ and what is treated as ‘hospitality’ in the anthropological literature. It is hoped that this study will contribute to broader discussions in anthropology and Chinese Studies on key framed relationship and interactions between different categories of actors (human, spirits and things) as well as on expressions of power and sovereignty.

Speaker Bio:



Adam Yuet Chau is Professor of the Anthropology of China teaching in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China* (Stanford University Press 2006) and *Religion in China: Ties That Bind* (Polity 2019), and editor of *Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation* (Routledge 2011) and co-editor of a 2019 special issue of *L’Homme* (Cumulus: Hoarding, Hosting and Hospitality). He is currently completing a group project *Chinese Religious Culture in 100 Objects*, which will have 100 entries written by one hundred plus contributors. He is interested in developing better ways of conceptualising Chinese religious culture. Book projects in progress include the idiom of hosting (做主); forms of powerful writing (‘text acts’) in Chinese political and religious culture; the rise of the ‘religion sphere’ (宗教界) in modern China; modalities of doing religion; subjectification; and ‘cherishing lettered paper’ (惜字紙).

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!

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