

Friday Seminar

Fall
2021

Mediating the Mundane, the Magical, and the Miraculous

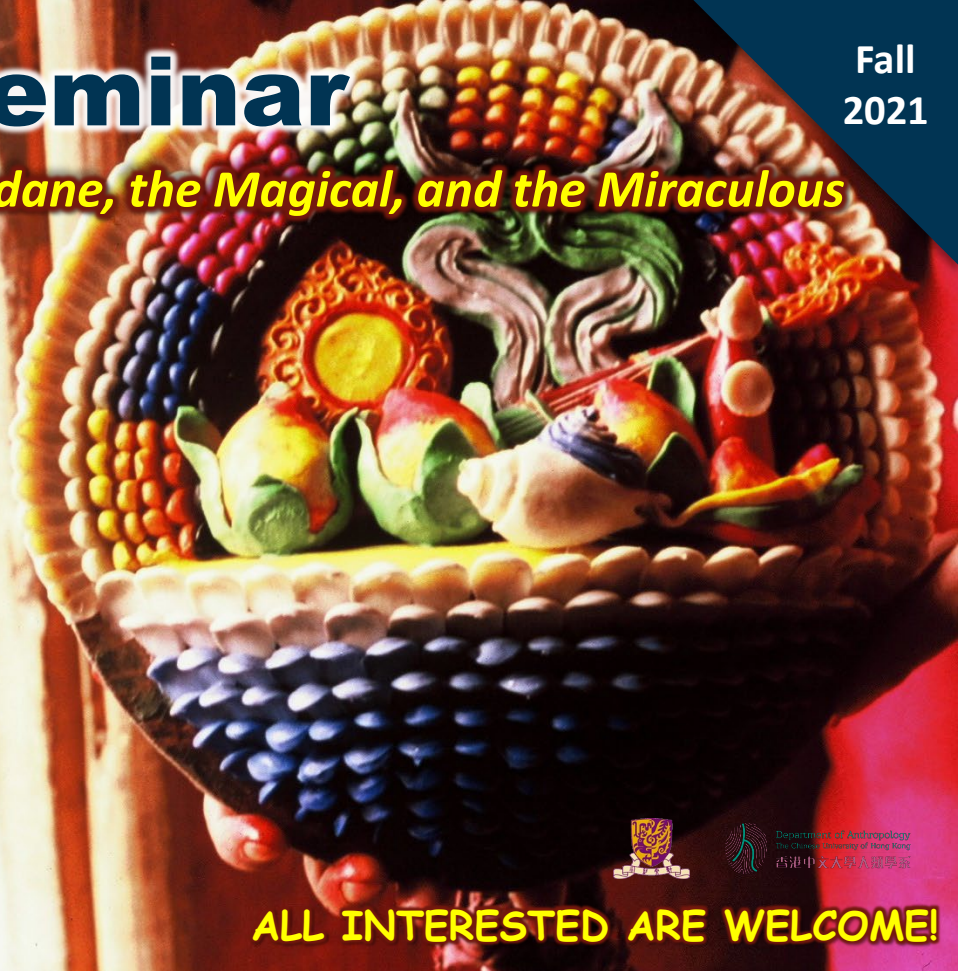
Date : 17 Sep 2021
Time : 1:00 - 2:30 pm
Venue : NAH114



zoom

Meeting ID:
956 0200 2569

Passcode:
193497



Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
香港中文大學人類學系

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!

How do we untangle art, ritual, festival, and religion when they all blend together? Or, better, what can we learn from their entangling? The terms might change (or the elements, in Mauss's phrasing), but these are questions which go to the heart of classical anthropology's holistic method. Do they still apply, and does our discipline have any ready answers?

One way this set of questions has arisen in my work is the making of the *Ocean of Sacred Food* (T. *zhal zas rgya mtsho*), an ornate offering annually constructed for public display in monasteries during Tibetan New Year. I have been tinkering with how to present this set of problems for more years than I care to remember, but it is only recently that I have realised these are the questions I am addressing. They are, of course, constructed from the discipline's analytical categories. Knowing so, however, is of little help in what Marilyn Strathern would call "the explication"; which is to say, how do we find the language to talk about, theorise, and share this rich, tangled territory? Any of our rich, tangled territories?

In his foreword to the late Richard Kohn's *Lord of the Dance*, a monumental study of Nepal's polythetic Mani Rimdu festival, Matthew Kapstein describes Buddhist tantric ritual as the "one great art form" to which the others are subservient (2001, xvii). Not all of us have the means, opportunity, or desire to produce encyclopaedic work, in the Tibetan case a steep Sisyphean hill indeed. Perhaps we need a tantric solution after all... shuttling between concrete and abstract considerations I will consider a way through via what I call "the generativity of the bad example." Along the way there should be some lessons from Pierre Lemonnier's *Mundane Objects: Materiality and Non-Verbal Communication* (2012), Ron Grimes's *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (2014), and Laurel Kendall's *Mediums and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings, and Masks in Asian Places* (2021). I will no doubt be revising my speculations some more, so questions and discussion will be very welcome.

Speaker: Mark Stevenson, Department of Anthropology, CUHK

Dr. Stevenson is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Department of Anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His interests range between the revival of Tibetan art in Northeastern Tibet to research methodologies and the changing visual environment.

