



The Department of Anthropology
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presents a seminar

by

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on

The Happiness Impasse: Exploring the Pursuit of Marital Happiness as Moral Experience in Urban Japan and China

Friday, 13 April 2018

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 115 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

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

As part of my research on how married young adults in two East Asian metropolises navigate the space between the prevalent discourse of marital happiness and their actual lived marital experience, this talk focuses on one of the elements that is essential in today's public discourse on marital happiness, namely, the attainment of conjugal equality. At first glance, the majority of my informants and many others of their generation seem to take the causality between an egalitarian relationship and marital happiness for granted. When asked directly, almost everyone I interviewed, regardless of their gender, agreed immediately that the attainment of equality between husband and wife is crucial to their sense of marital happiness. However, the deeper I probed into their marital life, the more ambiguous the relationship between their ideal of pursuing an egalitarian marriage and their actual feelings of happiness became. In this talk I will first discuss what my informants in Tokyo and Shanghai actually mean when they talk about conjugal equality. What are the similarities and differences in the two places? What "gender strategies" (Hochschild 1998: 24, 34) do people in the two places adopt in order to obtain their own versions of conjugal equality? Then I will look into how the ideal of pursuing conjugal equality ambiguously affects people's actual sense of happiness in marriage. When an egalitarian relationship is believed to be essential to one's marital happiness, what are the practical consequences if this is not actually attained?

Lynn Sun is a PhD candidate in anthropology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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