



Friday Seminar

Guanyin's Limbo: Personhood, Magic and Deity Statues in Hong Kong

Date : 22 Jan 2021

Time : 1:00 - 2:30 pm

Speaker : Martin M. H. Tse & David A. Palmer

Zoom Meeting Link: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/99867655424>

Meeting ID: 998 6765 5424 Passcode: 641442



How do objects and humans relationally constitute one another? In this talk, we will examine statues of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion, in Hong Kong to illuminate the forms of personhood and agency that arise through human-icon relations in a modern metropolis. We follow the life-course of Guanyin statues, investigating their production, circulation, animation, and disposal—teasing out worshippers' contradictory discourses on whether the deity is present in the statue or in the mind of the worshipper. These ethnographic observations lead us to consider how anthropological debates about the nature of cultural objects as *representations* or as *agents*, parallel Guanyin practices and discourses in Hong Kong. We will consider what insights this case can bring to the application of anthropological theories of personhood and magic to icons.

Biography:

Martin M.H. Tse is a PhD candidate recently admitted by the Hong Kong Institute of the Humanities and Social Sciences at HKU. He has been a Research Assistant and Assistant Lecturer in the Institute for the past several years, during which he been working on co-authoring a book manuscript on the dual Civil and Martial structure of a Chinese ritual tradition. For his doctoral research, he is investigating the Daoist ritual manuscripts among the Lanten Yao people in northwestern Laos. He is a co-author with Chip Colwell and David A. Palmer of the article "Guanyin's Limbo: Icons as Demi-Persons and Dividuating Objects," *American Anthropologist* 121:4 (2019).



David A. Palmer (Ph.D, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris) is a Professor of anthropology jointly appointed by the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the Department of Sociology of the University of Hong Kong. His award-winning books include *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Religion in China* (Columbia University Press), *The Religious Question in Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, co-authored with V. Goossaert) and *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (University of Chicago Press, co-authored with E. Siegler). His articles have been published in *Current Anthropology*, *American Anthropologist* and the *Journal of Asian Studies*, among others. His current research projects focus on Yao Daoist ritual on the China-Laos-Vietnam borderlands, and on the religious entanglements of the Belt and Road Initiative.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!