



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

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on

Between Nationalist Pride and Self-Development: The Marathon Running Craze in the People's Republic of China

Friday, 4 October 2019

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 114 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

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

During the Suzhou 2018 Marathon, a Chinese runner was forced to slow her pace as staff members twice tried to hand her the Chinese flag in a show of nationalist pride. She dropped the flag, drawing online criticism, and lost the race by a mere five seconds. Events like what happened in Suzhou have led some to assume that nationalism is driving the extreme growth of participation in Chinese marathons, which grew from only 22 domestic races in 2011 to 1,102 in 2018. However, my ethnographic study of long-distance Chinese runners shows that a desire for self-development is the most important driver increasing interest in marathon running. Most Chinese runners participate in marathons to improve their bodily health, raise their social capital, or visit a new location, all of which they term self-development (or *fazhan ziji*). While nationalism does play a role for Chinese marathon runners, it is primarily encouraged by domestic marathon organizers to prevent a crackdown on an emerging money-making industry. In the end, Chinese runners engage with the nationalist discourse but only if they feel it will benefit their own self-development.

Edwin Schmitt is an Environmental Anthropologist, but he also dabbles in the field of Energy History. His research has focused on energy development in Sichuan, Yunnan, Hebei and Qinghai; commodification and cultural heritage in Han, Nuosu and Ersu villages of Western Sichuan; and environmental consciousness among urban residents of Chengdu.

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME