ABSTRACTS

Gao Yang, “Me before you: Chinese youths’ contemplation of American television’s portrayal of personal relationships”
This article examines the ways well-educated urban Chinese youths use American television fiction to contemplate personal relationships. Based on 29 in-depth interviews with university students in Beijing who regularly watch US TV, I find these youths are attracted to US programming partly because they identify with its promulgation of the “pure relationship,” a kind of intimacy practiced primarily through mutual self-disclosure and verbal expression. Specifically, respondents’ TV talk about friendships and parent-child relationship reveals a common yearning for personal relationships that value emotional transparency, autonomy, and personal space. But their media-fuelled imagination of the “pure relationship” is also laced with uncertainties and ambiguities about practicing this kind of intimacy in a Chinese context. Such ambivalence stems from, and in turn reflects, the socio-historical specificities of these youths. In particular, as China’s first generation of only children under the one-child policy, they are raised in a largely collectivist culture but are coming of age as the country’s neoliberal transition catapults individualism to a secular holiness. Analyzing their negotiated readings of US TV, this article foregrounds the delicate position they are caught in, between the entrenched prioritization of “face,” interpersonal harmony, and filial piety, on the one hand, and the increasing emphasis on choice, self-reliance, and self-advocacy on the other. By showing the ways these youths strategically draw on foreign symbolic materials to reconcile identity ambiguities, the article clarifies how transnational media consumption informs lived experiences for a historically unique and important Chinese cohort. It thus sheds light on the crucial and yet still understudied implications of global media flows on China’s massive social change.

Ho Wai-Yip, He Jiajun Martin and Ng Wing-Fung Matthew, “When Secular and Qur’anic Worldviews Encounter: Educational Experiences in Conventional Schools and Madrasahs in Hong Kong”
This paper explores teaching and learning experiences concerning young Pakistani Muslims in Hong Kong, who are found simultaneously immersed in two divergent systems of education - first, the conventional daytime schools where students are educated formally with general knowledge, and second, the madrasahs (Islamic learning institutes) where student recite Qur’an and receive religious teachings every day after school. Based on the ongoing ethnographic fieldwork (with methods including participant observation and interviews) in both local conventional schools
and madrasahs in Hong Kong, this paper reveals that the three parties involved, namely the Chinese-speaking educators from conventional schools, the Qur’anic teachers from madrasahs (along with the students’ parents, who are often supporters of madrasah education), and the ethnic Muslim students, might have different understanding and expectations on education. This paper further argues that such difference could be a result of contrary worldviews and meanings of life to the two groups of educators, as well as limited communication between the two sides of educational institutes.

Man Kit, “Rule of Law with Chinese Characteristics: Etymology, Philosophy, and History”

As a result of the distinct cultural and historical contexts that it arose, it would be problematic to equate the Chinese concept of law with the Western jurisprudence, a body of knowledge, skills and theories concerning law. In lieu of the Western binary law and justice, law has long been used as a coercive means to exert and reinforce state control over society throughout history, from ancient, imperial, to modern China. To unravel how the Chinese understanding of the rule of law varies from the West, this paper will investigate its emergence and evolvement in China, in terms of its etymological roots, philosophical debates, and historical changes as a social institution.

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It is well-known that two philosophies of punishment; namely, retribution and rehabilitation are widely being adopted in our societies. The basic justification of retributive punishment is the principle of revenge, that is, “an eye for an eye” and backward-looking; while rehabilitation is based on medical models, that is, to let the offenders get back to the right track by education as well as medical treatment and forward-looking. However, these two philosophies of punishment have long been under dispute, just like a pendulum swinging in the western societies since last century. The mission of Hong Kong Correctional Services (a.k.a. Correctional Services Department, CSD) says that “We protect the public and reduce crime, by providing a secure, safe, humane, decent and healthy environment for people in custody, opportunities for rehabilitation of offenders, and working in collaboration
with the community and other agencies.” (italic mine) The mission clearly confirms the philosophy of rehabilitation in CSD. In September 2008, the CSD launched a community education programme “The Reflective Path” that lets some selected secondary school students to experience a real penal life by performing a person in custody (PIC) in order to gain a better understanding of correctional services and the meaning of rehabilitative punishment. Nevertheless, amidst the postmodern era and its condition, postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard, 1979), people always cast doubt on the thing of punishment and the related concepts such as criminality and crime. In this paper, I would like to make a critical reflection on what is the nature of punishment. In that regard, Berger’s debunking motif, Mills’ sociological imagination, Foucault’s governmentality and Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming will serve as the points of departure.