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香港樹仁大學  
HONG KONG SHUE YAN UNIVERSITY

# Biography and Family in Global Sociological Perspective

**Hong Kong Shue Yan University**  
**22-25 May 2024**

Wednesday, 22 May, 2024

9.30 – 12.00 | Welcome & Tandem 1

13.00-14.30 | Keynote 1: Andrew Kipnis

15:00-17:00 | Tandem 2

17.00-18.00 | Keynote 2: Laurence Roulleau-Berger

Thursday, 23 May, 2024

10.00 | Guided tour on a tram

15.00 | Guided tour at City Gallery

Friday, 24 May, 2024

9.30 – 11.00 | Keynote 3: Yunxiang Yan

11.00 – 14.00 | Tandem 3

14.30 – 17.00 | Theme 1: The social construction of  
biographies and biographical becoming

Saturday, 25 May, 2024

9.30 – 12.00 | Theme 2: Anthropocene and  
multi-species entanglements

13.00-14.30 | Keynote 4: Susanne Yuk Ping Choi

15.00-17.00 | Tandem 4

17.00-18.00 | Discussion



## Wednesday, 22 May, 2024

- 09.30-09.50 Selina Ching Chan (Academic Vice President, HKSYU)
- 09.50-10.00 Network business
- 10.00-12.00 Tandem 1:  
– “Doing transnational biographies in the PRC - educational upward mobility, social stratification and family” (Yvonne Berger)  
– “Individualization and subjectivization in the Global South: A contribution of the biographical approach” (Gérard Amougou)  
Chair: Sylvia Esther Gyan  
Venue: RLG102
- 12.00-13.00 Lunch
- 13.00-14.30 Keynote 1: Andrew Kipnis  
“Ghosts, urbanization and strangers in China and Hong Kong”  
Chair: Yew-Foong Hui  
Venue: RLB502
- 14.30-15.00 Coffee Break  
Venue: RLG101
- 15.00-17.00 Tandem 2:  
– “Migrants and their plants. Thinking human and plant biographies together to understand migrant emplacement/home-making” (Hilal Alkan, online)  
– “The social construction of biographical (dis-) continuity in migration courses” (Arne Worm)  
Chair: Martin di Marco  
Venue: RLG102
- 17.00-18.00 Keynote 2: Laurence Roulleau-Berger  
“The fabric of post-Western sociology: Dialogical theory and autonomous knowledge”  
Chairs: Marian Burchardt, Johannes Becker



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## Thursday, 23 May, 2024

- |             |                             |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| 10.00       | Guided tour on a tram       |
| 12.00-13.00 | Lunch                       |
| 15.00       | Guided tour at City Gallery |



## Friday, 24 May, 2024

- 09.30-11.00      Keynote 3: Yunxiang Yan  
“Neo-familism as the Chinese response to individualization  
and risk society”  
Chair: Weishan Huang  
Venue: RLB502
- 11.00-12.00      Tandem 3 (part 1):  
– “The import of space, place and time for biography”  
    (Michael Okyerefo)  
– “The Cambodian Power Elite – Sociocultures,  
    ontologies and biography in the formation of fields of  
    power” (Daniel Bultmann)  
Chair: Joschka Phillips  
Venue: RLG102
- 12.00-13.00      Lunch
- 13.00-14.00      Tandem 3 (part 2)
- 14.00-14.30      Coffee Break  
Venue: RLG101
- 14.30-17.00      Theme 1: The social construction of biographies and  
biographical becoming  
Venue: RLG102



## Saturday, 25 May, 2024

- 09.30-12.00 Theme 2: Anthropocene and Multi-Species  
Entanglements Venue: RLG102
- 12.00-13.00 Lunch
- 13.00-14.30 Keynote 4: Susanne Yuk Ping Choi  
“Theorizing LGBTQ family lives through intersectionality  
and life stories”  
Chair: Flora Pui-Yan Lau  
Venue: RLB502
- 14.30-15.00 Coffee Break  
Venue: RLG101
- 15.00-17.00 Tandem 4:  
– “Memories of enslavement in Ghana and Brazil -  
entanglements, figurations, relationalities” (Eva Bahl)  
– “The other side of the water: Fort Allen in two acts”  
(Fabio Santos)  
Chair: Soledad Balerdi  
Venue: RLG102
- 17.00-18.00 Discussion  
Venue: RLG102



## **Keynote 1 | Andrew Kipnis Ghosts, Urbanization and Strangers in China and Hong Kong**

Belief in ghosts is often thought of as a relic of the past—an outmoded belief linked to the traditional cultures of rural China. But ghost stories are commonplace in Hong Kong and other large Chinese cities and evidence of the fear of ghosts can be found in the ways that modern urban people treat death, funeral homes, and cemeteries. This talk analyzes belief in ghosts as a facet of modern, urban living. I suggest that traditional Chinese beliefs about ghosts have transformed rather than diminished as China has urbanized, and that modern urbanites may harbor more fear of ghosts than anyone did in the past.

## **Keynote 2 | Laurence Roulleau-Berger The Fabric of Post-Western Sociology: Dialogical Theory and Autonomous Knowledge**

In the Post-Western Sociology we have opened dialogues between European and Asian sociologies in different fields and spaces to produce a polyphonic economy of knowledge. We have proposed a Post-Western sociology on “equal footings” – on theories rooted in European and Asian academy. We described an ecology of knowledge and co-existence of the Western Wests, the non Western Wests, the Western Easts, the Reeasternized Easts, the Eastern Easts, the Souths and the Easts-Souths on an epistemological continuum. By combining empirical results of Chinese, French, Japanese and Korean research programs we will explore further the notion of dialogical and non-hegemonic sociology, identifying dissonances and what makes autonomous knowledge in the fabric of Post- Western Sociology.



### **Keynote 3 | Yunxiang Yan**

#### **Neo-familism as the Chinese Response to Individualization and Risk Society**

Since the 1980s, China has undergone an accelerating process of individualization, and consequently, Chinese individuals found themselves facing an increasingly precarious environment of work and life. The trends of social change resemble the conditions of second modernity and resonate with Ulrich Beck's theorems of individualization and risk society. Yet, the Chinese response to these challenges is to invoke the organizational power and social functions of the family in the private sphere, instead of cultivating individual autonomy and reenforcing institutional support at the societal level. The rise of neo-familism under an authoritarian state raises new questions on the Chinese path to modernity and the global implications of the second modernity theory.

### **Keynote 4 | Susanne Yuk Ping Choi**

#### **Theorizing LGBTQ Family Lives through Intersectionality and Life Stories**

This talk presents a new analytical approach – the intersectionality through focused life stories framework – to examine how the intersection of multiple identities shape the family lives of LGBTQ populations in post-socialist China. While research on the global LGBTQ community has focused on the political, cultural, and discursive landscapes undergirding changing definitions of homosexuality and legislation regarding its rights, this talk brings materiality back into focus and identifies the mechanisms by which class and gender inequalities shape the doing of sexuality in the sphere of family. A focus on intersecting inequalities sexual minorities in the global South experience cautions against the universalization of urban, middle-class, and white gay men and lesbians' experience and help to decolonize the production of knowledge on sexuality. A turn to materiality underscores the intensified class inequality and persistent gender disparities created by global capitalism.



## **Thematic session 1: The Social Construction of Biographies and Biographical Becoming**

Coordinators: Gérard Amougou (University of Yaoundé II), Yvonne Berger (TH Rosenheim), Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo (University of Ghana), Arne Worm (University of Göttingen)

In our session we will discuss the potentials, challenges, and limitations of using biographical research in global sociology. Biographical research offers a processual and relational perspective on social phenomena, allowing us to reconstruct the complex relationships between collectivity and subjectivity, power and positionality, history and the present, connectivities and boundaries that constitute "biographical becoming" (Burchardt/Becker 2023). But how do we deal with the complex interplay of processes and forces within and between (trans-)local, (trans-)regional, and (trans-)national spaces, which shape and are shaped by process of "biographical becoming"? Should we, and is it feasible to, view concepts that underpin the biographical approach (like acting, knowing, belonging, becoming, or telling (life-)stories) as inherently flexible, relational, and depending on context? In this session, we will consider the concept of "biographical becoming" and discuss how it can be examined through biographical approaches in different contexts and from various theoretical perspectives.

### ***Readings:***

- Bogner, A., & Rosenthal, G. (2023). Social-constructivist and figurational biographical research. *Current Sociology* 71(4), 567-586.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921221132511>
- Chilisa, B. (2011): *Indigenous research methodologies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. (Chapt. 1)
- Haraway, D. (2016): *Staying with the trouble. Making kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham: Duke Univ. Press. [Introduction; parts of Chapt. 1; Chapt. 4]





## Thematic session 2 Anthropocene and Multi-Species Entanglements

Coordinators: Hilal Alkan (Leipniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin), Eva Bahl (University of Göttingen), Daniel Bultmann (Humboldt University of Berlin), Fabio Santos (Free University of Berlin)

Guiding questions while reading the texts:

- To what extent do you think these perspectives are enriching for our global sociology debates?
- What understanding of “globality” are they based on?
- Have you already considered ideas and approaches from the Anthropocene and Multispecies scholarship in your work and/or can you imagine doing so in the future?

### **Readings:**

- Khayyat, M. (2022). Resistant ecologies. *American Ethnologist* 50(2), 181-195.
- McKittrick, K. (2013). Plantation Futures. *Small Axe* 17(3), 1-15.
- Paulson, S. (2019). Making Kin: An Interview with Donna Haraway'. *Los Angeles Review of Books* (December 6, 2019).  
<https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/making-kin-an-interview-with-donnaharaway/>



## Tandem 1

### **Doing Transnational Biographies in the PRC – Educational Upward Mobility, Social Stratification and Family (Yvonne Berger)**

In the 1990s, China implemented educational reforms to expand access to education. However, the focus on neoliberal ideologies and educational success has led to significant social implications in the context of social strata. As a result, students now face pressure to perform in the educational system to achieve success and therefore social upward mobility. Families encourage their children to pursue education as a means of social advancement, and this has become a defining feature of Chinese society to have or not have social quality (suzhi). In this presentation, I will discuss how this focus on education impacts the social upward mobility and biographical orientations of elite students in China. I will discuss social mobility and stratification through the lens of habitus theory. According to P. Bourdieu, this theoretical perspective suggests that achievement in the context of social mobility is not solely dependent on economic capital but also on cultural capital. Biographically, this is highly interesting, as families represent the essential point of reference for educational decisions and impact making. Families play a crucial role in shaping educational decisions and aspirations; if individuals lack the necessary economic, social and cultural capital, they may seek opportunities in transnational contexts as a form of outsourcing and even biographical illusion.

### **Individualization and Subjectivization in the Global South: A Contribution of the Biographical Approach (Gérard Amougou)**

My presentation argues for an approach to individualization in Black Africa that gives analytical centrality to the Subject. The aim is to reframe the problematization of this phenomenon – which remains more of a project - by exploring the processes of subjectivation and de-subjectivation, the bearers of a historical dynamic of structural change. The contribution is an invitation to articulate biographical material from the research field with theoretical ingredients drawn from research on the modern subject; without undermining “objective” Africanist contributions, which should nevertheless be titillated.



## Tandem 2

### **Migrants and Their Plants: Thinking Human and Plant Biographies Together (Hilal Alkan)**

This presentation builds on my ongoing research on intimate human-plant connections in the context of migration. I work with Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Germany and the plants they look after. My research shows that especially when plants and humans have a shared trajectory of migration they also share the struggles of settlement and finding their place in the new land. During this challenging period, plants and people develop unique companionships. The intimate and attentive character of this relation lead migrants to anthropomorphize the plants and plantify themselves. These phytomorphic and anthropomorphic reciprocal metaphors turn parallel migrant and plant biographies into potent resources for understanding the migrant condition.

### **The Social Construction of Biographical (Dis-)Continuity in Migration Courses (Arne Worm)**

In my presentation, I explore the complexities involved in combining global sociology, migration research, and biographical research. Drawing on my empirical research on migration in the context of collective violence, I argue that reconstructing biographical (dis-)continuities from a relational and processual perspective is helpful in avoiding common pitfalls in (forced) migration research, such as “methodological nationalism” and “groupism”. However, the concept of biographical (dis-)continuity also points towards theoretical and methodological challenges, especially concerning the situating or contextualizing of life histories and life stories: How do we relate biography, positionalities, and context(s) when assuming a complex interplay of global, (trans-)local, (trans-)regional, and (trans-)national relations and forces? Furthermore, which actors, relations, and forces should be considered when analyzing the making and unmaking of (dis-) continuity in transnational biographies?



## Tandem 3

### **Global Sociology from an African Perspective (Michael Okyerefo)**

The social construction of biographies and biographical becoming can be viewed from the fact that sociological ideas were already steeped in human society and well articulated by thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun before August Comte would be celebrated as the founder of the discipline, credited with coining the term 'sociology'. Following Comte, the discipline has been dominated by northern perspectives since the 19th century, marked by globalizing local theories that hardly leave any space for equally local perspectives emanating from other societies. This discussion explores sociological thought within the context of African scholarship. It seeks to unearth the thought processes that are fundamental to African social interactions and structures. The growing import of the biographical method in Sociology today also serves as a critical conduit in conceptualizing and situating the discipline in any social space, place and time, making sociology an enduring pursuit across societies, including those in Africa.

### **The Cambodian Power Elite – Sociocultures, Ontologies and Biography in the Formation of Fields of Power (Daniel Bultmann)**

The presentation discusses the importance of provincializing the concept of a social field. It argues that not only does the situatedness of a field within a particular context matter, but also a strong diachronic and transnational perspective. Using the example of the Cambodian power elite, the presentation delves into two biographies (of a princess and of a newly rich oligarch) to demonstrate what a provincialized theory of fields might add. In doing so, fields are portrayed as consisting of different social groups as sociocultural sediments of the past that tend to struggle with each other over the ontology of the social. However, these sediments of the past need to be understood beyond the nation-state as a container enmeshed with transnational and global (oftentimes violent) processes.



## Tandem 4

### **Memories of Enslavement in Ghana and Brazil – Entanglements, Figurations, Relationalities (Eva Bahl)**

My current research project focuses on collective memories regarding processes of enslavement in specific regions in Ghana and Brazil: Who knows and tells the (hi)story and who wants to hear it? Which voices are marginalized or tabooed? And what knowledge is accessible at all after centuries of making certain forms of knowledge invisible? In this project, I am confronted with various levels of entanglements, figurations, and relationalities. This raises methodological questions as what role I play as a white researcher in relation to a field characterized by a very violent past in which white Europeans played a central role. But it also raises questions concerning my research field: which figurations, dynamic power constellations, regarding historical knowledge and its transmission, can be observed within the respective societies. And finally, the transatlantic entanglements between Ghana and Brazil, the Afro-diaspora and Europe, are a constant companion to my research in this field. What can even be ‘compared’ or where do the interconnections between different actors, regions and perspectives become graspable?

### **The Other Side of the Water: Fort Allen in Two Acts (Fabio Santos)**

Theorizing from the Kreyòl proverbial phrase *lòt bò dlo*, I examine how colonial histories shape unequal mobilities. I do so by zooming in on Haitian maritime mobilities to Florida and their aerial detours to Puerto Rico. At the height of what the Carter (Act I) and Reagan (Act II) administrations perceived as a “migration crisis,” Haitian “boat people” were flown from Florida to Fort Allen, a U.S. military base in Puerto Rico where they were held captive for more than a year. In my historical reconstruction, I uncover the geopoliticized, racialized, and classed politics of deportation and detention of successive U.S. administrations. Special emphasis will be placed on how Haitian refugees and their allies articulated critiques and spurred effective change in this two-act drama at Fort Allen, a short-lived instance of the coloniality of migration. I tentatively argue that though short-lived, Fort Allen offered a blueprint for what has become an intricate system of maritime interception and massive immigrant detention in the United States and its colonies.



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