



Lecture Series in Social Anthropology

Spring
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Tuesday, 31 March 2026 | 4.15 p.m. | Room AND-4-06

What is Real: Self-discipline Among Chinese Students

Prof. Dr. Biao Xiang (Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology)

When a college teacher in China told her students to spend more time for leisure and friendship, the students responded that relaxation is not something they could afford. The only real thing in their life now, they said, is exam score. Researchers may similarly say that “only publication is real”, and company employees may assert “only performance record is real”. This reductionist, only-one-thing-is-real view can be energising, but is self-destructive, too. Why does the result of supposedly transparent, rational and fair procedures acquire such magical, and often frightening, power in determining people’s fate? In this paper, I demonstrate how life in Chinese high schools and colleges make such a view appear natural, and what people could do when they are cornered in such a position.

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Entrance free of charge.

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