



# Department of Sociology

## Seminar

### Face, Emotional Bonding and Corruption: How Middlemen Facilitate Corrupt Exchanges in China

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**Date:** 20 October 2017 (Friday)

**Time:** 12:30 pm – 2:00 pm

**Venue:** Rm 1045, 10/F., Academic and Administration Bldg.,  
15 Baptist University Road, Kowloon Tong, Kowloon

**Language:** English

#### Abstract

How do middlemen facilitate corrupt exchanges? The economic literature looks primarily at the role of middlemen in reducing transaction costs, which neglects the richness of human behaviour that is embedded in cultural traditions and specific social contexts. This paper adopts a sociological approach to understanding corruption in a Chinese context by incorporating local culture and indigenous concepts into analysis. Drawing on rich empirical data about military corruption in China, it establishes that *ganqing* (emotional bonds) is a prerequisite for corrupt exchanges, yet middlemen are able to facilitate transactions between bribers and power-holders who have no emotional bonding. Benefiting from Hwang's study of face and Barbalet's account of *mianzi* (the Chinese concept of face), this paper argues that the transferability of *mianzi* enables power-holders' close associates to share power and earn corrupt benefits by functioning as intermediaries. It also investigates how the mechanism of *mianzi* regulates middlemen-enabled corrupt exchanges in the Chinese military. This research advances the understanding of corruption and the Chinese concept of face, delivering empirical and theoretically based contributions.

**Keywords:** Corruption, face, *ganqing*, *guanxi* practice, *mianzi*, middlemen

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