

Department of Sociology

Seminar

Professor Jack Barbalet

Research Professor, Sociology Department, HKBU

Tripartite *Guanxi*: Resolving Kin and Non-kin Discontinuities in Chinese Connections

Date: 28 May 2019 (Tuesday)

Time: 10:30 am – 12:00 noon

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

Abstract

A consensus holds that *guanxi*, understood as dyadic connections consolidated affectively and mobilized to achieve common purposes, exists in three forms (family *guanxi*, friendship *guanxi* and acquaintance *guanxi*) distinguished by the strength of felt obligation between participants. It is also held that through practices of ‘fictive kinship’ friendship *guanxi* may merge with family *guanxi*. This paper challenges these propositions and the assumptions underlying them. Obligations of kinship and *guanxi* obligations are fundamentally dissimilar and the notion of family *guanxi* is redundant. Pseudo-family ties do not provide access to kin relations and instead affirm the distinction between family- and friendship-ties. Finally, because *guanxi* is cultivated by its participants, so-called friendship *guanxi* and acquaintance *guanxi* are not distinct forms but rather different stages of *guanxi* formation. The paper goes on to consider the sources of these confusions; namely, common-language terms employed in sociological analysis, certain assumptions concerning Chinese culture, and finally methodological commitments which privilege latent structures of strong ties. The strength of *guanxi* ties, volitionally cultivated and indifferent to structural determination, fluctuates through agentic practices.

Biography

Jack Barbalet is Research Professor in Sociology at Hong Kong Baptist University. Author of a number of books, the most recent being *Confucianism and the Chinese Self: Re-examining Max Weber's China* (2017), Barbalet is a frequent contributor to academic journals, including *American Behavioral Scientist*, *British Journal of Sociology*, *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, *European Journal of Social Theory*, *Theory and Society* and *Sociology*, among others. His current research is focused on *guanxi* in mainland China.

***** ALL ARE WELCOME *****

Enquiries: 3411 7131 (phone) or soc@hkbu.edu.hk (e-mail)

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