

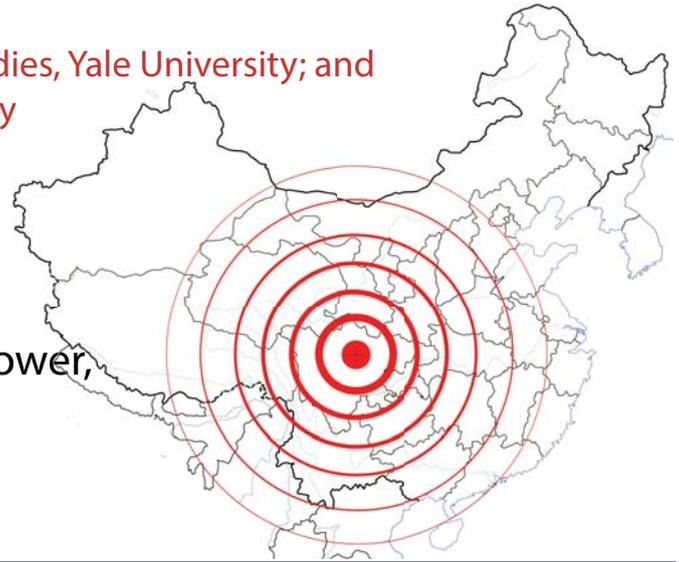
Seminar on

Politics of Moral Sentiments: Civil Society and the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake in China

Bin XuPostdoctoral Associate, Council on East Asian Studies, Yale University; and
Assistant Professor, Florida International University

Date: 11 May 2015 (Monday)

Time: 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue: Room 929, 9/F, The Jockey Club Tower,
The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

The Sichuan earthquake was not only a massive natural disaster but also a political drama, in which the Chinese civil society transcended their particular group interests and took actions to address their fellow citizens' suffering and was engaged in intensive and emotional interactions with the authoritarian state. The most memorable episodes of the drama included a large wave of volunteering, the public sphere's advocacy for an unprecedented national mourning ritual for the earthquake victims, activists and public intellectuals challenge to the state's moral authority on the school collapse issue, and civic associations' complex relations with the local governments in the recovery period. Drawing on interviews, ethnography, textual and visual data, Bin Xu's book project on the Sichuan earthquake argues that a massive disaster like the Sichuan earthquake provides civil society under authoritarianism with rare political opportunities and symbolic-moral resources to participate in large-scale public activities. This participation is enabled and constrained by the interplay between the disaster's dual feature—being both a management crisis and a moral event—and the structural state-civil society relations. Its long-term political outcomes are mixed. To contribute to the scholarship on civil society under authoritarianism, this book project stresses two important but often neglected aspects: situational variation in the state-civil society relations; the moral-cultural dimension of civil society. The project's inquiry of the two aspects casts doubt on a linear thinking of the potentiality of civil society development for democratization.

About the speaker

Bin Xu is Postdoctoral Associate in the Council on East Asian Studies (CEAS) at Yale University (2014-2015) and Assistant Professor at Florida International University (2011-present). His research interests include cultural sociology, political sociology, and social theory with a regional focus on East Asia, particularly China. His empirical foci are on civil society, collective memory, and politics of disaster. His articles have appeared in sociology and China studies journals, including *Theory & Society*, *Sociological Theory*, *Social Problems*, *The China Journal*, *China Quarterly*, etc. He has finished his first book manuscript on the 2008 Sichuan earthquake and is currently working on his second book project on China's *zhiquing* (the "educated youth") generation's social history and collective memory.

All are welcome, no registration required. Seats are limited; first-come, first-served.