Seeing Like a Third Eye: The Academic Ecology in China
By Dr Tenzin Jinba

Date : 12 Apr 2016
Time : 16:00 - 17:30
Venue : Asia Research Institute Seminar Room
Tower Block Level 10, 469A Bukit Timah Road
National University of Singapore @ BTC

CHAIRPERSON
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ABSTRACT

Belief is inedible, hence insignificant. Democracy is inedible, hence insignificant. Freedom is inedible, hence insignificant. Principle is inedible, hence insignificant. For the Chinese, nothing is significant unless it is edible. We believe in the life principle of pigs, thus we are faced with the same destiny as them – we will be eaten by others sooner or later. – Wang Shuo (Chinese writer)

China has only one university, namely the University of the Ministry of Education. – An anonymous scholar

Plagiarism, corruption, nepotism and other negative practices are reportedly becoming rampant in Chinese academia. Many point their fingers at fundamental flaws of the tizhi or highly structured Chinese sociopolitical system. I argue that despite the predicament of the “deep water” in which Chinese scholars and institutes become mired, in so doing one may lose sights of individual aspirations and various institutes’ initiatives in it. Therefore, I propose reexamining Chinese academia and its practices by applying and expanding the notion of field by Pierre Bourdieu. The four fields I outline–ideological, quasi-official, fame-profit and guanxi fields–spotlight academic practices with “Chinese characteristics”. I elaborate on my own experience and reflections as both an insider and outsider to these practices, which I refer to as perspective of a third eye. I conclude by briefly discussing its implication to the international academia.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Tenzin Jinba is an assistant professor at Sociology, National University of Singapore. Trained as an anthropologist, he has cultivated broad interests in resistance, history, memory, heritage, tourism, media, modernity, environment and development. At present he conducts research on borders, ethnicity, gender, state-society relations, cross-cultural encounters, and intellectual practices. He did his PhD in Boston University, and finished his postdoctoral research at Agrarian Studies program, Yale University. Before joining NUS, he held a faculty position at Lanzhou University, China.

REGISTRATION

Admission is free. We would greatly appreciate if you RSVP to Ms Tay Minghua via email: minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg.