



The Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

presents a seminar

by

Gordon MATHEWS

Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

on

Life After Death/Life Before Death in the United States, Japan, and China

Friday, 17 January 2020

1:00 – 2:30 pm

Room 115 Humanities Building

New Asia College, CUHK

A light lunch will be served at 12:30 pm. First come first served.

What happens to us after we die? Up until recently, most people in the world more or less knew what would happen to them after death. Today, however, senses of life after death have become profoundly individualized as well as secularized. This talk, based on a recently completed book manuscript, explores senses of life after death or its absence in the United States, Japan, and China, through ethnographic interviews with 140 people in each society. While in the United States, the Christian God and heaven serve as a moral guide and shadow for Christians and atheists alike, in Japan, a society full of pressure to live in certain ways, senses of life after death serve as matters of personal hope and moral escape. In China, senses of life after death have reemerged as materialist ideology has lost credibility for some as a guide by which to live. I argue that senses of life after death can serve as a fascinating window into life before death in these societies. Underlying this is the global historical movement away from senses of larger meaning. Can human beings still be happy and fulfilled if we believe that ultimately our lives and deaths have no larger significance at all?

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME