



Department of Psychology
The University of Hong Kong
香港大學心理學系

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14
2026

Departmental Seminar

The Inhuman Origins of Culture: The Role of Ecological Relatedness and Density



Prof. Oliver Sng

Assistant Professor of Psychology
University of California, Irvine

11:00a.m. – 12:00n.n.

Room 715, 7/F

The Jockey Club Tower

Centennial Campus

The University of Hong Kong

Abstract

What do ground squirrels, killifish, and humans have in common? The answer is that all have evolved to adopt certain traits and behaviors, in response to variation in environmental and ecological conditions. This is known as adaptive plasticity. I outline how thinking about adaptive plasticity, and animal behavioral ecology more broadly, can provide novel insights to our understanding of the nature and origins of human cultural variation. Specifically, I focus on two lines of work: (1) the psychological effects of living in environments where individuals are surrounded by many family relatives—referred to as ecological relatedness, and (2) the psychological effects of living in environments with many unrelated individuals (i.e., high population densities in general). I highlight how this perspective can generate novel predictions about cultural variation and also integrate existing cultural psychological explanations.

About the Speaker

Oliver Sng is currently Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Irvine. He received his PhD in Social Psychology from Arizona State University and was previously also a research fellow at the University of Michigan. His work applies an evolutionary lens to thinking about human social behavior, with a focus on understanding the origins of cultural psychological variation and social stereotypes. His research has been published in outlets such as Psychological Review, PNAS, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, and Evolution and Human Behavior. He leads the Evolution, Culture, and Stereotyping Lab at UC Irvine. He is the 2019 recipient of the Wegner Theoretical Innovation Award, named a 2022 Rising Star by the Association for Psychological Science, and was elected fellow of the Society of Experimental Social Psychology in 2025.

Zoom Meeting (For participants who couldn't attend the Seminar in person)

<https://hku.zoom.us/j/93606475930?pwd=RDgxhBkfdLLGaah60Db3fDYmkb0mbK.1>

Meeting ID: 936 0647 5930 | Password: 698015

~ All are Welcome ~

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