

China Research Colloquium 2018-19 Term 1

Participatory Control: Drama Workshop and Performance Making in a Chinese Prison

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30 Nov 2018 (Friday)

4:30 – 6:00pm

Room 1118, 11/F,

Yasumoto International Academic Park



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Xiaoye ZHANG is a final year PhD candidate of Social and Behavioral Sciences (Criminology) at City University of Hong Kong. Holding an BA degree in English from China and MA degree in Applied Theatre from England, Zhang is an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural researcher/practitioner with a focus on prison studies. Her research interests are situated at the cross-road of prison sociology, participatory arts, criminology and China studies.

ABOUT THE TALK

Performing arts in prison is mostly approached by scholars as intervention evaluation within the grounds of offender rehabilitation. This thesis reconceptualizes performance making in prison as an organizational process of social control. As an ethnographic case study of civic-prison collaborative drama project in a Chinese male adult prison, this study has found that performance making in Chinese prisons can be conceptualized as a continuous spiralling process. The process involves the construction of a social drama by the leadership group with fixated roles and conflicts, which in turn serves as the meta-narrative of a variety of cultural performances inside. Performance making thus becomes a task that is administratively mobilized to be executed and is highly contingent upon individual leadership's decisions and wider political trends. Frontline officers and prisoners collaborate closely in the making of the shows, where various forms of compliances and resistance can be found. Incentives, competition and strains run across all levels in the prison system as a constant driving force of instrumental participation. Civic professional's intervention—without full awareness due to lack of access to information and resources—becomes deeply embedded in this existing mechanism and therefore very limited in its ability to inflict change. However, by collaborating with the prison authority and sustaining its long-term existence inside, a form of precarious community can be observed.

Free Admission

The colloquium is conducted in English

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