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FALL 2010 RESEARCH SEMINARS ON CHINA

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Wednesday, October 20, 12:00 noon
Tokiokia Room (Moore Hall 319)

“Conceptions of Health and Disease: Philosophical Reflections on the Crisis of Chinese Medicine in the PRC”

Yin Gao, Ph.D.

*Lecturer in Philosophy, School of Humanities and Social Science
Faculty of Education and Arts, The University of Newcastle, Australia*

There are two medical systems in the national health service system in the People's Republic of China (PRC): biomedicine and Chinese medicine (CM). CM has suffered a significant decline since the 1950s when it was first established as part of the national health service. Recently, this decline has reached a crisis point, indicated by the public's decreasing faith in the effectiveness of CM. Perhaps the most illuminating sign of CM's crisis in the PRC is the 2006 debate in which a philosopher of science suggested excluding CM from the national health service due to CM's lack of scientific merit. He was soon joined by others, including one leading scientist and many members of the general public. This call to ban CM triggered a national debate on not only the scientific merit of CM, but also many other aspects of CM theory and practice in PRC. The debate became so intense and politicized that the Ministry of Health had to intervene, stating that CM has the full support from the government and it will be further developed to serve the health of people in China and around the world.

This talk focuses on one of the themes of the debate: the philosophical aspect of CM. It first examines the arguments presented by three leading critics of CM. Then it proceeds to analyze the philosophical roots of their critique using the conceptions of health and disease in CM and biomedicine as an example to demonstrate the philosophical root of CM's crisis.

Since 1995, Dr. Yin Gao has pursued research interests in history and philosophy of science, Chinese philosophy, and, in particular, the foundations of medical research. She has published on Chinese philosophy, complexity and Chinese medicine, complexity and urban/architectural design, and the philosophy of ecology. Recently she has been doing theoretical work on the research methodologies of both biomedicine and Chinese medicine. Her teaching subjects include applied philosophy, Chinese philosophy, and ethics.