

Dr Giulio Ongaro

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

giulio.ongaro@ust.hk

Academic Research Interests

Social Anthropology; Medical Anthropology; Ethnopsychiatry; Shamanism

Philosophy of Psychiatry; Philosophy of Mind; Social Ontology

Human History; Philosophy of History

Higher Education

2014-2020	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Social Anthropology, London School of Economics, University of London Thesis title: <i>The 'placebo effect' in highland Laos: insights from Akha medicine and shamanism into the problem of ritual efficacy</i> Supervised by Prof. Rita Astuti and Prof. Catherine Allerton Examined by Prof. Tanya Luhrmann and Dr. Joe Calabrese
2013-2014	Master of Research (MRes) Social Anthropology, London School of Economics, University of London <i>Distinction</i>
2012-2013	Master of Science (MSc) Philosophy of Mind, Language and Embodied Cognition, University of Edinburgh <i>Distinction</i>
2009-2012	Bachelor of Arts (BA) Social Anthropology, Goldsmiths College, University of London <i>Distinction</i>

Academic appointments

Jul 2024 - present	Assistant Professor. Division of Humanities. School of Humanities and Social Sciences. Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)
Oct 2022 – Jul 2024	Junior Fellow at the Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts, Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech), Shenzhen
Jan 2022 – Oct 2022	Wenner-Gren Hunt Postdoctoral Fellow. Department of Anthropology, LSE
Oct 2020 - Dec 2021	ESRC Postdoctoral Fellow. Department of Anthropology, LSE

Further affiliations

2025 – 2027	Assistant Director. South China Research Center, HKUST
2025 – present	Officer. The Asian Philosophy of Science Association (APSA).
2025 – present	Team Member. Center for Philosophy of Science, HKUST
2024 – present	Team Member. Situated Cognition Research Group. Bournemouth University
2022 – 2025	Visiting Fellow at the Department of Anthropology, London School of Economics
2021 – present	Team Member. Program of Placebo Studies & the Therapeutic Encounter. Harvard Medical School
2018 – present	Member. Society for Interdisciplinary Placebo Studies (SIPS)

Teaching experience

Fall 2025	A New History of Humanity (PG course). HKUST
Spring 2025	Global History: New Anthropological Perspectives (UG course). HKUST
Fall 2024	Culture, Psychiatry, and Mental Illness (PG course). HKUST
Fall 2023	Global History: new anthropological perspectives (UG course). SUSTech
Spring 2023	Medical Anthropology (UG course). SUSTech
Jan 2020	Guest lecturer on the postgraduate course 'Placebo: what, why, and how'. Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford.
Fall 2018	GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) on module 'The Anthropology of Kinship, Sex, and Gender.' LSE
Spring 2018	GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistant) on module 'Religion in Different Social and Geopolitical Contexts.' King's College London

Funding

2025	Digital Humanities Seed Funding. HKUST
2021 – 2022	Wenner-Gren Hunt Postdoctoral Fellowship
2020 – 2021	ESRC Postdoctoral Research Fellowship
Jan 2021	Research Infrastructure and Investment Funding (£9944) from the LSE Anthropology Department for co-organizing a seminar series 'The case for comparison' at LSE, Summer 2021.
Nov 2018	Research Infrastructure and Investment Funding (£5000) from the LSE Anthropology Department for organizing 'The philosophy of placebo workshop' at Senate House, 27-28 November 2018.
2013 – 2018	Economic and Social Research Council 1+3 Scholarship (4 years), ESRC Difficult Language Training grant (1 year).

Events organisation

12 Mar 2025	IAS Distinguished Lecture by Prof. Marcia Inhorn (Yale) 'Motherhood on Ice'. HKUST, Institute For Advanced Study
02 Nov 2023	4on4 Salon seminar on 'The early Neolithic city of Taosi' by Prof. He Nu. School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Southern University of Science and Technology.
27 Apr 2023	4on4 Salon seminar on 'Akha twinship and caring practices' by Prof. Wang Ruijing. School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Southern University of Science and Technology.
Sep – Dec 2021	Research seminar series on the anthropology of David Graeber. LSE. Co-organised with Prof. Alpa Shah and Dr. Megan Laws.
27-28 Nov 2018	'The philosophy of placebo workshop'. Senate House, London. Main organiser.
16-18 Aug, 2017	'The creation of efficacy in Southeast Asian healing practices'. Panel co-convened (with Elizabeth Elliot, UCL) for the European Association for Southeast Asia Studies (EUROSEAS) conference at the University of Oxford.

Awards and prizes

2019	Class teacher award – Highly Commended. LSE
2014	Alfred Gell Prize for Best Research Proposal. LSE
2013	Highly Commended Dissertation Award. University of Edinburgh

Academic articles

Ongaro, G. (2024). Social Psychiatry Inside-OUT. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 31(3), 341-346

Ongaro, G. (2024). Outline for an Externalist Psychiatry (3): Social Etiology and the Tension Between Constraints and the Possibilities of Construction. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 31(3), 301-314.

Ongaro, G. (2024). Outline for an Externalist Psychiatry (2): An Anthropological Detour. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 31(3), 285-300.

Ongaro, G. (2024). Outline for an externalist psychiatry (1): Or, how to fully realize the biopsychosocial model. *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, 31(3), 269-284.

Ongaro, G., Hardman, D., & Deschenaux, I. (2024). Why the extended mind is nothing special but is central. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 23(4), 841-863.

Ongaro, G., Ballou, S., Kube, T., Haas, J. & Kaptchuk, T. (2023). 'Doctors speak: a qualitative study of physicians' prescribing of antidepressants for functional bowel disorders' *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry*.

Ongaro, G. & Kaptchuk, T. (2022). 'Reply to Arandia and Di Paolo', *PAIN* 163(4) e605-e606.

Haas, J.*, Ongaro, G.*, Jacobson, E., Conboy, L., Nee, J., Iturrino, J., Rangan, V., Lembo, A., Kaptchuk T. & Ballou, S. (2022). 'Patients' experiences treated with open-label placebo versus

double-blind placebo: a mixed methods qualitative study'. *BMC Psychology*, 10(1), 20. *Equal contribution of work

Hardman, D., Hutchinson, P., & Ongaro, G. (2021). 'Questioning the consensus on placebo and nocebo effects'. *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*. 1-2.

Hardman, D. & Ongaro, G. (2020). 'Subjunctive medicine: a manifesto.' *Social Science & Medicine*. 113039.

Ongaro, G. & Kaptchuk, T. (2019). 'Symptom perception, placebo effects, and the Bayesian brain.' *PAIN* 160(1), 1-4.

Ongaro, G. and Ward, D. (2017). 'An enactive account of placebo effects.' *Biology & Philosophy*. 32(4), 507-533.

Book chapters

Ongaro, G. (forthcoming, 2026). 'Whose tribalism?' in Gutierrez, A. & Musallam, F. (eds.) *New Questions of Anthropology*. London School of Economics Social Anthropology Monographs. LSE Press.

Ongaro, G. (2025). 'When new shamans enter the stage: ecstatic healing and the neutralization of messianism among Akha in northwestern Laos'. In Stolz R. & Lutz P. D. (eds.) *Being Present: Emerging Ethnographic Perspectives and the Study of Laos*. NUS Press

Ongaro, G. (2024). 'The cultural identity of techniques: rigidity and flexibility among the Akha of highland Laos'. In Charbonneau, M. (ed.) *The Evolution of Techniques: Rigidity and Flexibility in Use, Transmission, and Innovation* (Vienna Series in Theoretical Biology). MIT Press.

Reports, reviews, blog posts

Ongaro, G. (2025). 'The social world is something we collectively create'. Guest blog post on Substack *Psychiatry at the Margins*.

Ongaro, G. & Laws, M. (2022). 'Towards a progressive theory of myth: Turner and Graeber on social creativity'. *Focaal Blog*.

Ongaro, G. (2021). 'Review of *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*' appeared in *Tribune* and *Jacobin Mag*, subsequently translated into Spanish, Italian, German, French and Portuguese.

Howick, J. & Ongaro, G. (2020). 'Could reading about the pandemic cause harm?' *The Conversation*. 20 April.

Ongaro, G. (2017). 'Akha study'. Contribution to 'Immunisation final report: issues, barriers and facilitators that influence access to immunisation programmes for people living in the Mekong border regions of Lao PDR'. Funded by the World Health Organization.

Ongaro, G. (2016). 'Wild pigs cannot enter.' *Mekong Review: Quarterly Literary Journal*. Vol 2(5).

Selected presentations

Oct 26, 2025	'Life, consciousness, and voodoo death.' Shanghai-Hong Kong Philosophy of Science Workshop. HKUST
--------------	---

Feb 21, 2025	'The placebo effect paradox: a conceptual labyrinth and an etiological way out'. Seminar Series in Philosophy of Science. HKUST.
--------------	--

Dec 5, 2023	‘Shamanism and the “placebo effect”: a new anthropological approach to the global history of psychiatry’. Division of Humanities. HKUST.
Dec 1, 2023	‘Towards a cognitive science of collective intentions’. Institute of Philosophy at the Chinese Academy of Science, Beijing, China
Feb 2, 2023	‘The Akha medical system: its epistemic and therapeutic value’ 云南民族大学 Yunnan Minzu University, Kunming, China.
Jul 15, 2022	‘Outline of an externalist psychiatry: anthropological insights into the problem of social causation’. Mind, Value and Mental Health: Philosophy and Psychiatry Summer School. St. Hilda’s College, University of Oxford, UK
Nov 26, 2021	‘Towards a progressive theory of myth: Terence Turner and David Graeber on dynamic structuralism’. Department of Anthropology, LSE, UK (with Dr. Megan Laws).
Jul 2, 2019	‘Ritual efficacy in an externalizing medical system.’ Anthropology Department, University of Heidelberg, Germany.
Nov 27, 2018	‘Placebos and the limits of medicine: from the modern clinic to shamanic healing’. Philosophy of Placebo Workshop. Senate House, London, UK.
Mar 16, 2018	‘The effectiveness of symbols revisited: insights from Akha indigenous medicine and placebo science.’ Department of Anthropology, LSE, UK.
Aug 17, 2017	‘Efficacy of spiritual and non-spiritual therapies among the Akha of northern Laos’. EUROSEAS Conference, University of Oxford, UK.
May 27, 2017	‘Akha medicinal plants: knowledge and effectiveness’. Plant Worlds: A Cross-Disciplinary Forum on Human-Plant Relationships. University of Kent, UK.
Apr 3, 2017	‘Diagnosis as treatment: anthropological insights from Akha indigenous medicine.’ First official Society of Interdisciplinary Placebo Studies conference. Leiden, Netherlands.
May 13, 2016	‘Akha identity in Laos’. Paper delivered at the LSE Southeast Asia Forum ‘Inclusion and exclusion in Southeast Asia’. The Lincoln Centre, London.

Languages

Italian	Native speaker
English	Full proficiency
Akha	Advanced
Mandarin Chinese	Intermediate (HSK 4)
Lao	Elementary