



Department of Anthropology  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong  
香港中文大學人類學系

# Friday Seminar

Spring  
2026

## Horticulture Boom in a Hot Valley: Gendered Labor, Migration, and Development in China's Southwest Frontier

Feb 6

1:00 - 2:30PM  
NAH 213

In recent years, thousands of migrants from inland and coastal provinces have moved to rural Yunnan, a province in China's southwest frontier, to lease land and grow high value horticulture crops. Facilitated by the state's financial and institutional support for an agenda of agriculture modernization, their arrival has triggered a widespread land rush that is reshaping local agrarian livelihoods and landscapes. My research explores the challenges rural-to-rural migrants, including farmers and farmworkers, face as they take part in reproducing capital, labor, and life. In this talk, I offer a feminist analysis of the gendered processes of class differentiation and rural transformation by focusing on the increasing involvement of mid-aged and elderly rural women—the so-called 'left-behind' population—in seasonal farm work. Ethnographic work conducted in these women's homes and at seasonal sites of labor show that their transition to agricultural wage work in the region is not making life better but rather reflects the structural violence in both productive and social reproductive spheres, which forces them to take on informal wage work to meet family consumption needs. I thus emphasize that rural women are stuck in a liminal space between accumulation and survival no matter how exhaustingly they work.



Miaomiao (Mira) Qi

is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the department of Global Development at Cornell University. Her research focuses on the intersecting gender and class dynamics of agrarian change in southwestern China. Mira's research has received funding from multiple sources including the Wenner-Gren Foundation and a Luce/ACLS travel grant in China Studies. She previously completed a master's degree in community development at the University of California, Davis, where she conducted research on the localization of alternative food networks (AFNs) in China. She published a part of this work in the journal *Agriculture and Human Values*.