

SEASONAL RETIREMENT IN SANYA: PROMISES AND FRICTIONS OF SOCIAL LIFE



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When anthropologist Xiang Biao proposed the idea of the displacement of *fujin* ("the nearby"), a term that entered China's mass media around 2020, he drew attention to the ways immediate surroundings hollow out as sites of tangible relations and actionable social life. Sanya's downtown neighbourhood, where "snowbird" retirees concentrate, looks different. Many are seasonal arrivals from northern China, drawn by the mild winter. In this setting, retirees can turn chance encounters with fellow snowbirds into varied forms of mutuality. At first glance, they do not simply have "the nearby"; they lean on it.

Rather than arguing against Xiang by offering a counter-case, I ask, in this neighborhood, what and who constitutes "the nearby," what relationships it makes possible, and what those relationships can (and cannot) do. I argue that retirees' prior experience of collectivist living in socialist China does not, by itself, explain the social life I describe here. Resting on a different social base and taking different forms, "snowbirds" recalibrate spatial and social relations as they live their later years at a distance from adult children and long-standing networks. This then raises a broader question about what relationships we want and need as human beings.



Mengge Zuo is a PhD candidate in Anthropology at The Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her dissertation examines Chinese "snowbird" retirees' lives in Sanya, asking what kinds of lives people pursue through seasonal mobility with and among fellow retirees, while negotiating contested and ambivalent norms, expectations, and imaginaries of retirement and old age.