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ECONOMY AND POWER IN CHINA

HUANG Yuan (Sun Yat-Sen University)

State and Market: The Development of a Village in Lijiang, Yunnan Province

This research explores the development of rural China through the state power, market economy and daily-life practice of villagers at thirty years of the reform and opening-up. The central questions are: Why the rural development has faced with difficulties during thirty years of reform and opening-up; what is the impact of State power and market economy; and how the villagers response to the influence of state power and market economy? This research explores these questions through an ethnography of Xinrong village beside the Lashi lake of Lijiang of Yunnan province. The research found that during the 30 years of the reform and opening-up, strong state power does not bring substantial help to the rural development. On the contrary, it serves the goal of consolidating political power by depriving rural resources and reconstructing rural areas. Meanwhile, although growing market economy has brought some economic development opportunities to rural areas, the deeper motivation of it is to assist the political power to deprive and reconstruct rural areas. Therefore, in the practice of daily life, villagers being the subject in the development, always try to adjust their positions between the state power and the market economy in order to face the future.

YANG Yang (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

African Traders in Guangzhou, China: Routes, Profits, and Reasons

Guangdong Province in south China is the “world’s factory,” from which all kinds of products are made that subsequently circulate around Latin America, Africa, and Asia, products that serve as the material basis for economic globalization from below. In this paper, I examine the global passage of these products through the foreign traders who come to Guangdong to buy these products. Most immediately apparent in Guangdong Province’s capital, Guangzhou, is the massive presence of African traders, but traders also come from Latin America as well. These traders purchase China-made counterfeit Nike shoes, Adidas T-shirts, Sony audio sets, and mobile phones in bulk, and ship by container or carry in their luggage these products to their home countries. The trade between China and Africa/Latin America is largely informal, and often involves violation of copyrights and government policy; this trade forms a worldwide economic network conducted through individuals in their global linkages, circulations, and connections. In this paper, based on a year’s fieldwork in Guangdong Province, I look at the economic activities of these traders and the goods they buy: I discuss who these traders are, the global circulation of the goods they deal in, and the influence these traders and goods have locally--in China and in their home countries--and globally.

DONG Lixia (Fudan University)

Contemplating Vegetable Safety: An Ethnography on Agricultural Commodification, Scientific Farming Practices and Morality in Shouguang, Shandong Province

As an integral part of the farm-to-table food safety continuum, vegetable safety has attracted a wide range of attention from all walks of social life in China. Based on participatory field research conducted in Shangdong's Shouguang region which has the largest vegetable production base in the country, my paper attempts to offer an ethnographic perspective on vegetable safety in the context of the ongoing agricultural commodification, scientific farming practices, and the transformation of moral landscape in rural China. During my investigation, I conducted in-depth interviews with vegetable growers, cadres, villagers and town residents, peddlers and merchants and visited vegetable fields, green houses, markets, stores, restaurants, and farming households. The intimate perspectives gained from my informants and consultants have enabled me to develop a complete picture of what actually happened on the ground. The purpose of my paper is to bring multiple voices to bear on the issue of vegetable safety thereby revealing how different local actors perceived food safety and reacted in different ways. My field research represents the first solid step toward providing ethnographic evidence underpinning food safety policy making and deepening our understanding of the multifaceted process of vegetable plantation, production and consumption.

LIANG Yaqian (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

Making Gold: Commodification and Consumption of the Medicinal Fungus Chongcao in China

Since the 1990s, a Tibetan medicinal fungus (*Cordyceps sinensis*) that grows out of a moth caterpillar (*Thitarodes* sp.), known as chongcao (蟲草, short for 冬蟲夏草) in Chinese, has become an expensive commodity and a fad among the Han Chinese. Despite its debatable medical efficacy, it has been called "soft gold" and regarded as a symbol of wealth since its price sometimes even exceeds that of gold. By examining the trade and consumption of chongcao, this research aims to explain how a once unfamiliar fungus has become a popular and valuable commodity. This study asks the key question of economic anthropology: how is value created? In particular, how do the large sociopolitical and historical forces shape value in the more marketized China of the post-reform era?

The study suggests that chongcao passes through different value realms along its whole social trajectory. Market exchange is just one step in this trajectory. It reveals that economic exchanges other than market exchange, such as corruption, gift giving and banquets, still prevail, despite of three decades of free-market reform. This research rejects reducing these "Chinese characteristics" of economy to Chinese traditional value, nor to a consequence of under-development of free market. This research shows that what are sometimes described as "Chinese characteristics" of the economy are neither the result of static traditional values nor the consequence of an underdeveloped free market, but the result of China's specific history.