



Public Lecture

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Thursday, 21 January 2021

Logistification from Below: Mobility, Trade and Power in Yiwu, China

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Prof. Biao Xiang, University of Oxford

Discussant: Ka-Kin Cheuk, Rice University

18:15 – 19:45 h

The Public Lecture will be streamed online on the nccr – on the move YouTube channel

Abstract

Logistification means “the subordination of production to the conditions of circulation” in the economy (Jasper Bernes 2013), which process is crucial for the rise of the supply chain capitalism. Initiated by large corporations in the U.S. partially based on military know-how in the 1970s, logistification has largely been a top-down process. Logistification from below, as I observe in Yiwu in southeast China, is related to this global trend yet is different. Goods and people in low-end economic sectors circulate frequently, thanks to localized industrial clusters and multi-level logistical industries that are centered around physical marketplaces. If logistification from above brings about hierarchically organized “chains”, logistification from below creates rhizome-like “channels”, through which small-scale producers and traders participate in the global market. Actively encouraged by the local state, logistification from below generates “logistical power”: the additional governing capacity that the government gains by coordinating private actors’ mobilities and connections. An analysis of logistification from below may help us to envision how the global economy may change in the coming years, and how developing countries can benefit from the changes.

Curriculum Vitae

Biao Xiang 项飙 is a Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Oxford, and Director of Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany. Xiang’s research addresses various types of migration – internal and international, unskilled and highly skilled, emigration and return migration, and the places and people left behind – in China, India and other parts of Asia. Xiang is the winner of the 2008 Anthony Leeds Prize for his book *Global Bodyshopping* and the 2012 William L. Holland Prize for his article ‘Predatory Princes’. His 2000 Chinese book 跨越边界的社 (published in English as *Transcending Boundaries*, 2005) was reprinted in 2018 as a contemporary classic. His work has been translated into Japanese, French, Korean, Spanish, German and Italian.

Selected Publications

- Xiang, Biao (2016). Theory as vision. *Anthropological Theory* 16(2–3), 213–220.
- Xiang, Biao (2016). Beyond methodological nationalism and epistemological behaviouralism: drawing illustrations from migrations within and from China. *Population, Space and Place* 22, 7, 669–680.
- Xiang, Biao (2014). The would-be migrant: post-socialist primitive accumulation, potential transnational mobility, and the displacement of the present in northeast China. *TRaNS: Trans-Regional and -National Studies of Southeast Asia* 2(2), 183–199.
- Xiang, Biao (2013). Multi-scalar ethnography: An approach for critical engagement with migration and social change. *Ethnography*, 14(3), 282–299.
- Xiang, Biao (2013). *Return: Nationalizing Transnational Mobility in Asia*. Edited with Brenda Yeoh and Mika Toyota. Duke University Press.