

Visiting Speaker Series 2016-17 Term 2

“The Market Is a Wandering Witch Spirit”:

Transgenic Crops and Ecological-economic morality in the Era of the Global Climate Change

Wenyi ZHANG

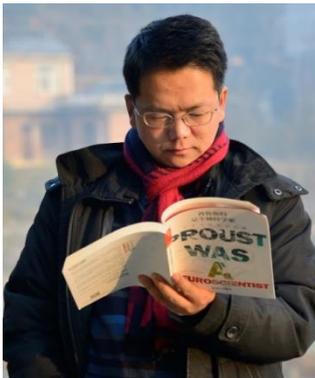
Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology,
Sun Yat-sen University

30 Mar 2017 (Thursday)

4:00 – 5:30pm

Room 1118, 11/F,

Yasumoto International Academic Park



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Wenyi ZHANG is an assistant professor of anthropology at Sun Yat-Sen University. He received his doctorate in anthropology from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2013 and completed a year of advanced training in the neurosciences in 2007. He works at the intersections of medical and psychological anthropology and cognitive sciences, developing ethnographic accounts of how Chinese individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds deal with health and environmental challenges associated with current socio-economic transformations in China.

ABOUT THE TALK

This talk examines the moral paradox initiated by the introduction of transgenic crops to the ethnic Kachin communities by various government-sponsored economic development projects in Southwest China since the late 1990s. These crops are un-classifiable in the local mythological system, and foreign to the local ecology. On the local level, transgenic crops become bare things, both socio-culturally and ecologically. Realizing the potential danger, the Kachin do not eat transgenic crops and feed the crops to pigs instead as the market of crops lasts no more than one year. Yet they eat the pigs later. The Kachin understand the expansion of the market and climate change based on their view of the nature. Things always flow: hot weather in the valley climbs up the hills following climate change, and transgenic crops climb up hills following the expansion of the market. The market has been conceptualized as a wandering witch spirit, stirring up endless desires while depriving the Kachin of all possibilities of realizing these desires. On the regional and national levels, transgenic crop scares the scientific and governmental discourse of economic development. The rupture between the local and regional/national levels brings forth conflicting evidences regarding the crops. This talk details how the conflict is negotiated among the Kachin, and explores how the rupture can be considered as a genesis moment of the socio-ecological entanglement involved in the transgenic crops.

Free Admission

The seminar is conducted in English

Enquiry: Centre for China Studies | ccs@cuhk.edu.hk | www.cuhk.edu.hk/ccs