

China Research Seminar Series, University of Cambridge

The Changing Moral Economy of Diasporic Relations in a Former Emigrant Village (Shenzhen, China)

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Nov 21 (Wed) 5pm (tea served at 4:45pm)
Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES



Abstract

The creation of Shenzhen, one of the first Chinese Special Economic Zones, and the ‘reopening’ of China have facilitated the reconnections between the ‘localities of origin’ (*qiaoxiang* 侨乡) and the diaspora. My research examines the effects of local transformations on the relations with the diaspora through the case of the former village of Pine Mansion, which has become a district in Shenzhen.

I retrace how there has been a revalorisation of local belonging, and how the meaning of migration as well as the moral economy of diasporic relations have changed. Pine Mansioners recognise the past importance of the contributions of their overseas kin, and their crucial role in restoring ancestor rituals and saving the village’s most important sites from destruction by state-led urbanisation plans. However, they also proudly emphasise the end of the relationship of dependence. I further analyse how they voice sociodicies, explanatory schemes that retrospectively justify the “choice” made by those who did not emigrate, by placing the emphasis on the present moral rewards of having stayed.

Divergent experiences of (im)mobility account for situationally shifting spheres of belonging: one which the villagers share with their diaspora and against the state; and another which they share as citizens with the Chinese state, against their overseas kin and their supposed traditionalism but also their estrangement. And yet, there is also a sense in which the local community defines itself as different from both the state and the diaspora.

Speaker

Dr Anne-Christine Trémon, senior lecturer in anthropology at the Université de Lausanne, is currently a visiting researcher at the Institute of Advanced Studies, University College London. She obtained her PhD at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris in 2005 and since then she has been a postdoctoral fellow at the Institute of ethnology, Academia Sinica in Taiwan, a lecturer at the Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) and the Ecole normale supérieure (ENS) in Paris, and a EURIAS fellow at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in 2012-13. Her research examines Chinese globalisation and the Chinese diaspora in a global anthropological and historical perspective. She has published journal articles among others in *l'Homme*, *Anthropological Theory*, and *the J.R.A.I.*. Her first monograph, *Chinese in French Polynesia, Migration, métissage, diaspora* was published in French by the Société d'ethnologie (2010). Her second, the outcome of research carried out in Shenzhen since 2011, will be published under the title *For the Ancestor's Cause: diasporic relations and transformations of a globalized village, Shenzhen, China* (2019).

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