RESEARCH SEMINAR
DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG

Agricultural Modernization and Diabolic Landscapes of Dispossession in Rural China

15 March 2024 (Fri)
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In response to the Chinese state's 2006 call to expand industrial grain farming, government officials in the township of Ruilin pressured and coerced small-scale farmers to lease their land to new large-scale farmers on five-year contracts. Though coerced villagers initially vowed to retake their land, they ultimately renewed their leases four years later, despite their apparent ability to resume farming. Explaining their change of mind, many villagers referenced the remade landscape as evidence that they no longer belonged on the land. Based on a multi-year ethnography, I show that in forcibly sidelining villagers and remaking the landscape for mechanized agriculture, officials made villagers spectators of a modernized scene that, over time, helped to naturalize the modernist ideology that shaped it. Drawing on landscape studies literature, this paper contributes to recent work on relational and situated dispossession by foregrounding the link between sensory experiences of the land and subjectivity formation.

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Ross Doll researches agrarian change in Asia drawing on political ecology, cultural geography, and resilience ecology. Based on long-term ethnography, his current research considers the influence of contemporary state-led agricultural modernization in the Yangzi Delta region of China, focusing on the material and cultural (re)production of landscapes and relational dynamics of embodiment and affect. Dr. Doll teaches courses on the geographies of natural resources and global and Asian development. He holds a PhD in Geography and a MA in China Studies from the University of Washington, as well as a BA in English from UC-Berkeley.

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