



Sinofon

CHINESE AGRICULTURE ABROAD

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

OLOMOUC 2019



Palacký University
Olomouc

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7. – 8. 6. 2019

Palacký University in Olomouc

Sinophone Borderlands – Interaction at the Edges

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Excellent research

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sinofon@upol.cz

Chinese Agriculture Abroad

China's presence in neighboring countries is growing at a fast pace. One of the recent manifestations of this is Chinese "land rush" and investments in agricultural infrastructure. Mass media constantly report that Russian, Tajikistan or Kazakhstan government would lease huge areas of farmland to China; that Chinese companies would invest in chemical (pesticides) production, agricultural storage or processing companies or that Chinese small farmers occupy new niche markets (like greenhouses) in bordering with China regions.

Not only journalists but also scholars inform that both small- and large-scale Chinese agricultural enterprises operating in neighboring countries have a strong commercial orientation. Even more, it is argued, that Chinese agri-businesses strongly differ from the most of host – local (national) – companies which are still in the trap of post-soviet legacy. Furthermore, it has been claimed that Chinese agri-businesses abroad differ sharply from national agrarian companies, which are prevented from being competitive by institutional or structural restrictions.

Thus, although the main priority of the workshop is Chinese agricultural businesses abroad (in particular in the Russian Far East), we also aim to discuss agriculture adjusting to institutional arrangements inside China. To be more specific agenda includes the following topics:

- ✓ recent changes in Chinese agriculture; more specifically, "capitalist" dynamics, land dispossession, capital accumulation;
- ✓ the diversity of Chinese actors (such as agrarian 'capitalists', peasants, smallholder farmers, farmworkers, etc.) involved in the agrarian sector of neighboring countries/border areas;
- ✓ discourses on Chinese "land grab," "land rush" as well as practices of land property abroad;
- ✓ shifting agricultural policies and domestic/ international production regimes between China and neighboring countries (seeds production, circulation, etc.);
- ✓ infrastructure as a "socio-material assemblage," including the role of the state and other institutions in revitalization/ redevelopment of rural areas adjoining the Chinese border;
- ✓ the use of infrastructure to normalize land acquisitions in bordering with China regions in juxtaposition to Chinese presence and/ or investment in land and infrastructure.

PROGRAM

7 June 2019

- 09:30 – 10:00 REGISTRATION, TEA & COFFEE
- 10:00 – 10:30 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS
- 10:30 – 12:00 SESSION 1: CHANGES IN CHINESE AGRICULTURE
- JIAYI ZHOU: The Agricultural Belt and Road: New Political Economy and Policy Landscapes
- RENÉ TRAPPEL: Guiding peasants into the future? Vision and practice of agricultural modernization in China
- SAYANA NAMSARAEVA: Live-Streaming Craze of Chinese Famers: Hi-tech Apps for building trust in food safety and organic farming
- 12:00 – 13:30 LUNCH
- 13:30 – 15:00 SESSION 2: LAND AND PROPERTY PUZZLE
- STEPHANIE ZIEHAUS: Is Chinese settler colonialism a thing? "Yellow peril" and land rush in the colonial age in the Amur borderlands
- HYUN-GWI PARK: To remain a khoziain [owner] or not: Koreans' agricultural enterprise in the Russian Far East
- YULIA KORESHKOVA: Invisible hand of a Chinese entrepreneur
- 15:00 – 15:30 TEA & COFFEE
- 15:30 – 17:00 SESSION 3: THE DIVERSITY OF CHINESE ACTORS IN RUSSIAN AGRICULTURE
- SERGEI IVANOV: The rise and fall of Chinese development strategy in agriculture of the Russian Far East
- KONSTANTIN GRIGORICHEV: Chinese agricultural entrepreneurship in the Irkutsk suburbs: between "invaders" and "benefactors"
- NATALIA RYZHOVA: Social topology of agricultural infrastructure in the Russian Far East

8 June 2019

- 10:00 – 10:30 TEA & COFFEE
- 10:30 – 12:00 ROUNDTABLE
In conceptualizing the puzzle of Chinese agricultural "capitalism" abroad
- 12:00 – 13:30 LUNCH
- 13:30 – 15:00 OLOMOUC EXCURSION

SESSION 1: CHANGES IN CHINESE AGRICULTURE

The Agricultural Belt and Road: New Political Economy and Policy Landscapes

Jiayi Zhou

Stockholm international peace research institute, Sweden

China's overseas investment in farming and agriculture (including forestry and fishing), has been of significant attention over the past decades, with media and scholarly attention particularly focused on the specter of China's putative state-sponsored "land-grabbing" abroad. While many of these studies have been empirically de-bunked, concern over the scope and impact of China's food and agricultural resource needs in world markets, persist. The topic, however, has heretofore received very little attention in analyses of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Indeed, in May 2017, China published a 'Vision and Action Plan' specific to international agricultural cooperation that brings to the fore China's role in global, regional, and local agricultural resource markets. But whether this document represents a critical juncture in China's overseas (agricultural) activity remains to be seen. This paper examines and situates China's overseas investment in agriculture in a policy landscape marked by the BRI, examining the scale, scope, and modalities of this investment since the 2000s. It further examines what sorts of political economic and policy landscapes this investment is linked to, both domestically and in destination regions. In regard to the latter, two preliminary case studies of Chinese agricultural investment and trade, in Kazakhstan and Ukraine, will be presented.

Guiding peasants into the future? Vision and practice of agricultural modernization in China

**René Trappel
University of Freiburg, Germany**

The paper suggests that Beijing's recent efforts to establish "new-type professional farmers" aim to reinforce agricultural governance centered on the notion of entrepreneurial self-optimization in China. It explores how this new imperative is perceived and dealt with by local administrations and the rural population. The main hypothesis presented here is that in rural practice this does little to incentivize existing agrarian producers but instead re-emphasizes the importance of personal and professional links to local governments for them. The paper is primarily based on document analysis and fieldwork conducted in Gansu Province between 2016 and 2019.

Live-Streaming Craze of Chinese Farmers: Hi-tech Apps for building trust in food safety and organic farming

**Sayana Namsaraeva
Palacký University in Olomouc, Czechia**

Some academic scholarship argue that China is a society with a low level of trust in state institutions due to the fact that it was ruled most of its history through the personalised power of the emperor, and the low trust environment forces entrepreneurs to create informal guanxi-based institutions (Bodde & Morris 1973, Kiong and Young 1998, Li Lianjiang 2004 on post reform China). My presentation reflects on how Chinese farmers use social-media platforms such as WeCHAT, QQ, Sina Weibo and Kuishow (to name but a few) to live-stream all stages of their agricultural production to build trust into their agricultural products and its food safety. While streaming is still perceived as a niche gaming subculture in other parts of the world, Chinese farmers (as well as other industries ranging from education to news to boutique organic grocery shopping) have embraced it as a business tool to take advantage of open digital society to build trustworthy relations with retailers and individual customers.

SESSION 2: LAND AND PROPERTY PUZZLE

Is Chinese settler colonialism a thing? “Yellow peril” and land rush in the colonial age in the Amur borderlands

**Stephanie Ziehaus
Palacký University in Olomouc, Czechia**

The focus of this presentation is on the organization of Chinese settlement and agriculture in Manchuria and beyond the Amur in the Russian Far East through the perspective of settler colonial theory. I am going to establish how Chinese agriculture and settlement was organized and explore if it can be defined as a form of settler colonialism. I am also going to include the interconnected settlement of Han and Manchu Chinese in Northern Manchuria, on the Qing side of the Amur and Ussuri. Amongst others, I want to examine the role Chinese settlers played in the dispossession of indigenous communities in the Amur region, opium cultivation and how the phenomenon of “Yellow peril” angst was frequently evoked by Russian officials and intelligentsia in regard to the growing number of Chinese farmers and tenants. By looking at the settler colonization of the Amur region as a whole - not only the Russian but also the Qing territory – I can offer a comprehensive overview Han and Manchu Chinese presence in the Russian Far East.

To remain a khoziain [owner] or not: Koreans' agricultural enterprise in the Russian Far East

**Hyun-Gwi Park
Chung Ang University, Korea**

This paper explores the economic conditions and personal qualities for becoming a khoziain [owner] among Koreans who cultivate watermelons in the Russian Far East. Research on which this paper is based was conducted in a village near Khanka Lake of Primorskii Krai where ethnic Koreans have been cultivating watermelons and vegetables using greenhouses since the 1990s when these Koreans moved to this village from Central Asia. In the last two decades, these Koreans' domestic economic activities in agriculture became more market-oriented. Yet, this change was made with diversion among the farmers between those who chose to remain owners of agricultural enterprises and those who gave up agriculture to trade agricultural products which were purchased from the Chinese Koreans. I am going to explore social and economic conditions for such shift and also the notion of 'khoziain', drawing on anthropological works on the notion of 'khoziain' in Russia.

Invisible hand of a Chinese entrepreneur

**Yulia Koreshkova
Palacký University in Olomouc, Czechia**

The paper explores the practices of Chinese agricultural entrepreneurs, specializing in “greenhouses” and working in the Irkutsk region. It aims to reveal and explain a way of doing business in a context of impossibility to register ownership, to fulfill all obligations. The paper uses a series of interviews, as well as participant observations in fields of production and city markets. The study presents cases of good adaptation of Chinese entrepreneurs and reveals the reasons behind the success.

SESSION 3: THE DIVERSITY OF CHINESE ACTORS IN RUSSIAN AGRICULTURE

The rise and fall of Chinese development strategy in agriculture of the Russian Far East

Sergei Ivanov

Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography FEB RAS, Russia

The paper explores the changing dynamics of Chinese activity in agribusiness of the Russian Far East. The research is mainly based on semi-structured interviews with officials, businesses, and experts conducted in 2014-2016 and early 2019. It argues that the expansion of Chinese farming companies reaching its high point by the mid-2010s and since declining was due to two factors – transborder fly-in/fly-out work practice and an abundance of floating capital. State-owned farms, private cross-border trade companies and farmers from China exploited these advantages where there were uncompetitive local agribusiness and weak local protectionism. Recently, these advantages are fading away because of reducing capacity to exploit Chinese labor, the more protectionist economic policy of the regional authorities in Russia and increasing competition from large federal Russian businesses. Nowadays, Chinese investors face the challenge of transforming their activity but have a little window of opportunities. The most recent attempts are to invite big investors from China or to invest in logistics of agricultural products. Both strategies seem hard to be realized as there is a lack of free cropland that is vital to expand business or to secure feedstock.

Chinese agricultural entrepreneurship in the Irkutsk suburbs: between "invaders" and "benefactors"

Konstantin Grigoriev
Irkutsk State University, Russia

The paper explores a variety of discourses about Chinese businessmen activities in the Irkutsk's suburbs. The study reveals that, in spite of a widespread of this phenomenon, the power discourse seems to ignore the existence of Chinese farms. The legislative ban of such businesses causes the officials to avoid any discussion of the topic, resulting in an incomplete state's description of the territory. In contrast to this, regional and federal mass media actively discuss the "problems" and represent Chinese entrepreneurs as invaders, who violate laws and leave the "dead land" behind. Media also willingly perform the confrontation between locals and Chinese farmers. However, locals usually perceive the Chinese as permissible partners and benefactors. That is because the Chinese offer jobs for the poorest segment of the population, provide opportunities for informal firms, and alleviate the pressure of large owners on small peasant farms. Representatives of local administrations also participate in the production of positive discourse. The main reason is that Chinese farmers are encouraged to make regular voluntary donations for local needs.

Social topology of agricultural infrastructure in the Russian Far East

Natalia Ryzhova
Palacký University in Olomouc, Czechia

This paper aims to conceptually and methodologically answer the following question. "How can one find a tool to make sense of a messy agricultural landscape of the Russian regions bordering to China?" A tool is needed to merge elusive "Chinese agrarian capitalism" with persistent "Russian socialism," to include a phantom of a "land rush" into the realm of "abandoned lands," to place ruined rural barns among incompatible, imagined, existing only in the PR-world, soybean processing plants. Thus, the designation "messy" refers to a situation in which the researcher may find herself in a trap of countless discourses with no chance to find a way to study them together, to place them in relations to one another. It even may appear that the way to study the agricultural "landscape" is to recognize that there is no one object. In contrast to this pessimistic contemplation, a framework of "social topology," developed within ANT, allows one to capture all the various facets of the object at once (Law 2000; Law & Singleton, 2005). Using this approach, I focus on agricultural production infrastructures and reveal a multiplicity but connectedness of the Russian Far East agrarian worlds.

CONFERENCE VENUE

**Faculty of Arts
Palacký University Olomouc
Conference Room 2.25
Křížkovského 10
779 00 Olomouc
Czech Republic**

CONFERENCE COORDINATORS

**Natalia Ryzhova
Tereza Motalova**

**natalia.ryzhova@upol.cz
tereza.motalova@upol.cz**



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