



CCIS | Center for Comparative Immigration Studies

In Search of Exits: Emigration Freedom, Irregular Departures, and State-Building in China

Thursday, September 29, 2022 | 11:00AM - 12:30PM Pacific Time

In-person Event Only | ERC Conference Room 115



Jiaqi Liu

Jiaqi Liu is a PhD candidate in Sociology at the University of California, San Diego, studying the politics of international migration. Jiaqi's dissertation and book project, entitled "Symbolic Remittances: Diaspora-Homeland Relations in the Age of Rising China," studies China's policies toward emigrants as shaped by its growing state capacity and geopolitical ambitions yet complicated by grassroots officials' local improvisation and migrants' agency. Jiaqi has published four sole-authored articles at top migration journals and earned multiple distinctions from the American Sociological Association.

The right to leave one's home country is often assumed as natural rather than empirically examined. In this talk, I draw on archival materials and life history interviews with emigrants, smugglers, and bureaucrats to analyze China's exit policy since 1949. I argue that China's exit liberalization only became possible when incremental state capacity enabled more targeted, effective exit regulation upon a smaller subset of citizens while granting the population majority the right to leave. China's exit reforms constituted a fundamental compromise to unleash exit freedom in exchange for legal compliance from otherwise irregular emigrants. Bringing Mann's theories of infrastructural power and state-building into migration research, this study rethinks state-citizen interplay on migrants' way out and refines knowledge on irregular migration from sending countries' perspectives.

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