

## CFPR SEMINAR SERIES



OCTOBER 10, 2025  
12:00 – 1:30PM



Chairperson:  
Senhu Wang  
Assistant Professor  
CFPR Steering Committee Member  
Sociology & Anthropology



NUS AS7  
The Shaw Foundation Building  
Level 6 Seminar Room, 5 Arts Link  
Singapore 117570



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### Diaspora by Another Name: The Making of Refugees in Cold War China

By examining China's refugee policies from 1949 to 1982, this article demonstrates how the Chinese state redefined "return" and "refugee" to serve shifting political objectives. While China is often perceived as a source, rather than a host, of asylum seekers, it hosted over 320,000 displaced migrants—primarily ethnic Chinese from Southeast Asia—during the Cold War. Through a systematic discourse analysis of 382 People's Daily articles, we identify four state narratives—diaspora, diplomatic tool, ideological sanctuary, and legal duty—that structured how China labeled displaced migrants, interpreted their sentiments, and determined their settlement. These models evolved dynamically: from the 1950s to the late 1970s, China framed displaced migrants as both diasporic returnees and victims of foreign persecution to bolster its legitimacy. During the Cultural Revolution, they were recast as Maoist returnees seeking ideological redemption. By 1978, the state invoked international legal norms by portraying them as "refugees" to secure global assistance amid the Indochinese refugee crisis. We argue that China's refugee discourse functioned as a flexible political instrument that unsettled rigid distinctions between voluntary and forced migration. Our findings advance a constructivist understanding of migration categories and offer a historically grounded critique of refugee politics beyond Western-centric Cold War narratives.

#### Speaker

Dr. Jiaqi Liu  
Singapore Management University

Jiaqi Liu is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Singapore Management University. His research lies at the intersection of political sociology, international migration, digital technology, and Global China. His work has been recognized with five Best Article Awards and two Honorable Mentions from the American Sociological Association.

