

# Oberseminar

## VORTRAGSREIHE DES INSTITUTS FÜR ETHNOLOGIE

Leitung: Prof. Dr. Martin Sökefeld

30. 06. 2025

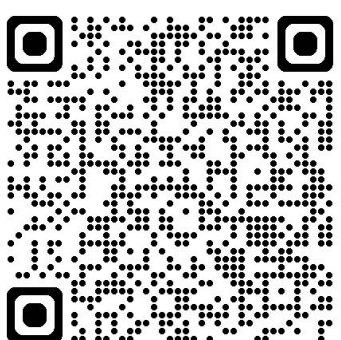
Prof. Dr. Biao Xiang (Max-Planck-Institut für Ethnologie, Halle)

***Recognition as approval and recognition as understanding: the changing social organization of appreciation, power and self-worth in China***

### Abstract

For some Chinese, especially the relatively young and educated, the pursuit of social recognition and the need to prove self-worth – a fundamental human need – has become an ever heavier burden in life. This article proposes an analytical framework that may help to think why this is the case and how people can deal with that. I distinguish two modes of recognition: *rende* (a Chinese term that I translate as recognition-as-understanding) and *renke* (recognition-as-approval). *Rende* means mutual understanding between equal subjects, whereas *renke* is the affirmation of individuals' value by authorities based on achievements. Over the last four decades *renke* gradually replaced *rende* as the foundation for self-validation. People's desire for interpersonal understanding paradoxically exacerbates their attachment to formal approval because the latter is seen as a basis of the former. Behind this are changes in the way of how appreciation, honour and power relation are socially organized. Individuals can act on the ways of how recognition is organized, which action may impact the more general social condition.

OBERSEMINAR



Institut für Ethnologie, LMU München  
montags,  
16-18 Uhr  
Raum L-155  
Oettingenstr. 67, 80538 München

[www.ethnologie.uni-muenchen.de](http://www.ethnologie.uni-muenchen.de)