



# Friday Seminar

## Beyond Freshness: The Aesthetics of Flowers

Mar 17

1:00 – 2:30 PM  
NAH213

Zoom: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/92586757244>  
ID: 925 8675 7244 Passcode: 812361



What makes a floral bouquet a beautiful gift? How is beauty qualified in the context of floral arrangements? This talk situates China's "cut flower economy" within its consumption sphere. The consumption of fresh-cut flowers in China largely exists in ceremonial occasions. Valentine's Day is saturated with red roses. Carnations are for Mother's Day or Women's Day. Chrysanthemums appear to commemorate the dead. Time is ever present in the cut flower industry, as entrepreneurs are constantly striving to obtain the freshest flowers during their respective selling seasons. Freshness determines the economic value of flowers, affects the temporalities of the cut flower economy, and is a significant marker of both quality and beauty. But what, beyond their freshness, makes flowers aesthetically valuable? Based on fieldwork in the Chinese cut flower industry, I present how the aesthetics of flowers are constructed through navigating the qualia of a "good grip" during the bouquet-making process, as well as discursively through storytelling on the symbolic meanings of flowers. Drawing on the Chinese aesthetic concept of *Yi Jing* (意境), I further my discussion on the semiosis of the appreciation of flowers.



**SUN Rui** is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Anthropology in The Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is currently revising her dissertation on the values and temporalities of fresh-cut flower industry in Yunnan Province, Southwest China. The first publication coming from her doctoral research is titled "Yunnan Flowers: Storying Cross-Species Love Beyond Metaphors." She was 2021/22 Visiting Fellow at Harvard-Yenching Institute where she got the training on linguistic and semiotic Anthropology and has since been working on applying "qualia" to analyze the aesthetics of flowers.

