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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
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Rethinking Chinese Urbanism from the Periphery

Dr. Xuefei Ren, Professor of Sociology
Michigan State University

1:30 – 3:00 p.m. EDT, Tuesday, February 3, 2026

3140 Sangren Hall



Dr. Xuefei Ren obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and is a comparative urbanist whose work explores urban governance and the built environment from a global perspective. She is the author of three award-winning books: *Governing the Urban in China and India: Land Grabs, Slum Clearance, and the War on Air Pollution* (Princeton University Press, 2020), *Urban China* (Polity, 2013), and *Building Globalization: Transnational Architecture Production in Urban China* (University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Ren is a fellow in the Humanity's Urban Future program at the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) and previously served as a Public Intellectual Fellow of the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations. She has held editorial roles as an associate editor for the *Journal of Urban Affairs* and *City and Community*, and as an editorial board member of the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*. Her current projects examine climate boomtowns (comparing US and Switzerland), the data infrastructure boom (comparing U.S. and China), and China's rustbelt northeast.

Abstract: Global urban studies have seen a “peripheral turn,” as researchers shifted their gaze from the central city to the peri-urban areas. This shift in perspective is crucial for studying cities in the Global South, as most urban growth in the Global South has taken place on the urban fringes. This lecture examines the evolving scholarship on urban China and considers how China as a case may illuminate the peripheral turn in global urban studies. It argues that urban China research needs to move beyond the largest cities in the country and study a wider range of peripheral regions and urban experiences. Northeast China (Dongbei) is used as an example to illustrate how the narrative on Chinese urbanism can be enriched by taking a peripheral view. It then proposes some comparative questions to rethink Southern urbanism from the periphery.