



# What Moves Where? On the Flexible Ordering of Chinese Modals and the Nature of Head Movement

**Professor Jackie Yan-Ki Lai (City University of Hong Kong)**

This presentation focuses on the analytical questions that arise with the flexible ordering of many Chinese modals with respect to the surface subject. The overwhelming consensus holds that the modal remains in its base position in both the pre-subject and post-subject modal variants, and it is movement of the subject that gives rise to the latter variant. I demonstrate that a hitherto neglected set of data involving multiple *pre-subject* modals hold the *key* to understanding the alternation involved, such that, once also taken into consideration, the current consensus cannot be maintained. Accordingly, I develop a general Head-to-Spec theory whereby the derivation of pre-subject modal sentences involves Internal Merge of modals to specifiers of some functional projection in the left periphery. Overall, the proposed account supports the bifurcation of 'head movement' phenomena as recently argued in Harizanov & Gribanova (2019): 'genuine' head movement displaces X<sup>0</sup>'s to specifier, not head, positions. This is joint work with Haoming Li (MIT), my former Sapir Scholar at Chicago.

Date: March 15, 2023 (Wednesday)

Time: 2:30pm - 4:00pm

Venue: 2/F, Conference Room, Art Museum East Wing, Institute of Chinese Studies,  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Jackie Yan-Ki Lai received his PhD in linguistics from The University of Chicago. Prior to his doctoral studies, he received his BA degree from The University of Hong Kong and his MPhil degree from The Chinese University of Hong Kong. He is primarily interested in syntax, morphology, and the syntax- semantics interface, with specific focus on Chinese languages like Mandarin and Cantonese. Jackie works on dislocation, ellipsis, phrase structure, compounding, among other topics. Currently, he is Assistant Professor in the Department of Linguistics and Translation at City University of Hong Kong. Together with faculty members at CUHK, he has been examining of late the syntax and semantics of inner aspect in Chinese.



**All are welcome**

