



CAMBRIDGE CHINESE STUDIES NEWSLETTER

**劍橋中國
研究簡報**

**FACULTY OF ASIAN AND
MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE**

**JULY 2025
VOLUME 6
ISSUE 2**

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another issue of the Newsletter!

I am very happy to announce that this is a jointly-edited edition, and I will be delighted to bow out following this edition knowing that the newsletter will be in Shannon's very safe hands.

It has been very gratifying to have been editing the newsletter over the last few years. During this time period I have had the opportunity to witness the flow of student life: the cycles of first years becoming second years, flying off to Beijing, banding together for the exams, postgraduates becoming alumni, and everyone working their way through this quite challenging and creative endeavour together. Community is a curious thing in academia - relationships often being created only through reading others' work, or in bumping into one another at conferences far and wide. From this perspective I like to see the newsletter as a sort of community, a place where everyone in the faculty can get together.

I will still be around the faculty (provided that I pass my viva) since I will be taking up a fellowship just a few minutes' walk away at the Needham Research Institute. Perhaps I'll get to contribute the odd piece, but that will be up to the next editor!

As always, we are very grateful to our willing contributors, and I am grateful to my design whiz Mrs Aayushi Gupta for making the newsletter attractive.

We hope that you enjoy reading it as much as we have done in organising it.

Shannon Gilbert & John Donegan-Cross

INTERVIEW WITH DR NOGA GANANY

Dr. Ganany, thank you very much for joining us, and for agreeing to be interviewed. Could you first tell us about your academic pathway before we met you?

My academic journey began in Paris at the Sorbonne, where I spent a very memorable year studying French philosophy and literature. It was something of an intermediate stage between two moments in my life. I already had a rather firm idea that I wanted to do Chinese studies for my BA, but I have always been drawn to French culture and was fairly proficient at the time, and so decided to spend this year in Paris before committing to Chinese Studies. It was an amazing time which I look back on fondly (though with some regret that I lost much of my spoken French since then, due to lack of practice).

After that, I embarked on my undergraduate studies at Tel Aviv University with a dual major in East Asian Studies and Philosophy. At Tel Aviv, I was extremely fortunate to take classes with Professor Meir Shahar, who eventually became my mentor and MA advisor. It was in his classes that I first read some of the great Chinese masterpieces, and his instruction in Chinese religions was transformative for my later path as a scholar. It was also Meir who encouraged me to pursue a PhD in the field and who supported my applications for graduate studies in the US. In fact, until Meir suggested I apply for graduate studies, I never seriously considered a career in academia. So, I owe him a great debt.

After my BA at Tel Aviv, I spent a tremendously enjoyable year in China studying Chinese at Xiamen University. Xiamen is doubtlessly one of the loveliest places I have lived in anywhere in the world, and at

the time in was not on the radar of foreign tourists and students, so it was a great place to be really immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment. It is also a fantastic place to live and travel, with arguably the best food in China!

Beyond language training, it was also a very important year for my research; it jumpstarted the project that would eventually become my MA thesis and my first research article on Baogong 包公 (Judge Bao) and his role as the lord of the netherworld King Yama (Yanluo wang 閻羅王) in religious practice and popular culture.

It was completely by chance that I stumbled upon this topic. I was already familiar with the Baogong lore through the plays and stories I read that portray him as the ideal judge and official, but it was only after a random visit to a temple-cum-tourist attraction devoted to him in Kaifeng that my interest in his reverence was piqued.

My husband and I were wandering aimlessly in Kaifeng while the museum we wanted to visit was closed for an afternoon break (the quintessential Chinese post-lunch nap), when we stumbled upon this complex by the lake celebrating his historic and literary figure. Following this coincidental visit, I continued reading about Baogong and suddenly noticed his figure was everywhere in Chinese culture – in literature and the performance arts, cultic worship, and even in politics and everyday life (including TV commercials).

Upon my return to Tel Aviv to begin my MA, under Meir Shahar's supervision, I continued researching the Baogong lore in library collections and through

field work. The foundational research for the project I actually conducted in the Starr East Asian library at UC Berkeley while my husband was doing a collaborative project there. Midway through this project, I took time to do fieldwork in Baogong temples in Taiwan and mainland China. This was an extraordinary experience; not only did I encounter real rural China for the first time, but I also met various interesting people, including the thirty-fifth generation of Baogong descendants, a lovely fellow who looks after the Bao ancestral hall with his wife.

Figure 1: a descendent of Baogong



And this also relates to your second book? Could you tell us what is it about?

My second book will explore Chinese conceptions of death and the afterlife, including depictions of the netherworld, from a multidisciplinary perspective. The main focus of the book is King Yama and the ways in which his figure was used in popular culture and religious practice to discuss justice and morality during late imperial China (between the 15th to the 19th centuries). At the centre of the book is the development of King Yama in various media and religious practice, especially through the view of the netherworld as an alternative justice system that negotiates social and cultural tensions.

So what happened about the PhD?

After considering several offers, I chose to go to Columbia, which turned out to be one of the best decisions I ever made. Moving to New York was a major watershed, as it became the first place I truly called home. At Columbia I was very lucky to have been supervised by Professor Shang Wei, who is a remarkable scholar of Chinese literature, a true literatus, and one of the kindest people I have ever met. Not only is he a great teacher and supportive advisor, but one who is profoundly invested in the happiness of his students. I often miss our conversations and sitting in his seminars.

The department at Columbia, EALAC (East Asian Languages and Cultures), is an amazing hub of scholarship. We were a huge cohort, we had over a hundred graduate students when I was there, and so we had a very vibrant community. Except meeting people in classes and the various events in the department and across the university, we also ran dissertation-writing groups and a weekly “happy hour” (fondly remembered for its drinks, conversations, and Ping-Pong!). In retrospect, these

were not only great opportunities to socialize but also to exchange ideas, and importantly to complain about the many stressful aspects of doing a PhD. I learned a lot from my classmates and forged many lifelong friendships during that time. When we meet each other these days at conferences etcetera we often reminisce about the countless hours we spent in Columbia’s CV Starr library chatting and procrastinating (fig 2).

When my husband took a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard, we moved to Cambridge MA, and so I spent the last two years of my PhD at Harvard. Much of my dissertation was written in the Harvard-Yenching Institute, arguably the best library to do research in our field outside China in terms of its collections (though far less comfortable in terms of its cramped and airless working spaces!). They also had a great cohort of doctoral students at the time, who very kindly invited me to their writing group and social events. I still keep in touch with some of them. It was also a fantastic opportunity to learn from other scholars; I feel particularly grateful to Li Waiyee and James Robson, who generously met with me several times to give me feedback on my dissertation research even though I wasn’t even part of their program.



Figure 2: Dr. Ganany at Columbia's CV Starr library

After graduation, I taught for one year as a Visiting Assistant Professor at Boston University, on the other side of the Charles River. It was in a very friendly department, but as a whole it was a challenging and exhausting year for me. Teaching was not new to me; I taught for two years at Tel Aviv and three years at Columbia, but at BU I taught four original new syllabi to large classes where I was completely on my own, with no guidance and no TAs. This busy teaching schedule coincided with applying for permanent positions and raising baby twins.

How do the kids like it here?

The girls were born in Boston three months before I defended my dissertation. They don't remember living in the US, of course, as we moved to the UK when they were only eighteen months old, so they are locals here. Cambridge is a wonderful place to raise children.

Mengzi's mother would be very impressed too, I'm sure! So tell us about your first book.

The book, which I am trying hard to wrap up this year, builds on my doctoral dissertation but expands its scope and looks more broadly at practices of hagiographic writing and cultic reverence in Ming book culture. At the centre of the book is a subgenre I call 'origin narratives' – illustrated books depicting the lives of major cultic figures drawing from a broad reservoir of pre-existing sources. My main argument in the book is that, like many publications of the time, origin narratives were multifunctional books which acted

as source books for the lore of these protagonists.

Although they repackage earlier materials that have already been in circulation, they offer a new hagiographic vision of the main protagonist in a very accessible and engaging form, targeting a wide audience (figs 3-4).

They are also much more than mere life stories. They weave into the lives of these icons various materials that relate to the protagonists and their cultic worship, such as religious teaching and manuals for Daoist self-cultivation.

Some of these books chart the protagonists' 'sacred geographies' – they describe the places that became essential to their myth-making and worship. They also provide practical tools for their reverence, such as worship timetables and lists of offerings. And in a more general sense, this subgenre recounts the lives of extraordinary individuals through a cosmological framework that gives their life stories universal significance. So they try to do much more than just retell famous hagiographies.



Figures 3 and 4: illustrated origin narratives

My book examines this subgenre, which has been woefully understudied, as part of what I regard as a broader transition during the Ming dynasty in Chinese writing and publishing. The Ming was a very exciting time for both writing and worship; it saw the rise of new modes of writing and what scholars often refer to as a "print revolution," as well as great exuberance in lay religious practice and what I see as a major shift in hagiographic imagination in China. My own sense is that there was some kind of seismic movement in Chinese perceptions of

extraordinary lives during the 15th and 16th centuries. Much of what we see in the sub-genre that I call origin narratives in late Ming is rooted in transformations that occurred during these centuries in the depiction of Daoist and Buddhist divinities (fig 5).

In a nutshell, in the hagiographic vision of origin narratives an extraordinary individual is a miracle-making protector who is spiritually enlightened. The protagonists of these books are depicted as people (men and women) who have chosen a path of spiritual cultivation, and after many years of self-cultivation achieve some kind of elevated spiritual state that also grants them supernatural abilities. They put these miraculous skills to practice through various charitable acts: they vanquish demons, cure epidemics, save humanity from natural disasters, and convert laypeople, among other things. Thanks

to the protagonists' spiritual cultivation and the assistance they offer mankind, the narratives end with their divine canonization – they are invited to ascend to the divine realm and are given celestial titles. These books are, of course, didactic in varying degrees, but also very entertaining, and they shed light on cultic worship of these icons at the time.

Beyond the subgenre of origin narratives, my book explores hagiographic depiction in writing and visual culture, Ming book culture and publishing, as well as increasing tendencies to reimagine geographical space – the Chinese landscape – through the lens of hagiography.

Figure 5: Ming hagiographic album



And how's it going, the book?

Always a tricky question. I am striving to finish the book this summer or early next year; it is now in its last stages of drafting. So I am very cautiously optimistic that the project is nearing its end. But as always with projects of this size, there is the enduring temptation to continue expanding. Every day I come across a new primary source that sparks my interest and I feel could open another fascinating discussion on something that relates to one of my chapters. One of the problems I am facing at this late stage in the project is that because the book is multidisciplinary and touches upon different cultural phenomena, many points that come up in the book could be developed further. It is really the trouble of knowing where to stop.

Do you enjoy the process of writing and editing?

Yes and no. I enjoy working on my materials. I sometimes still wake up in the morning wonderfully surprised that our civilisation (at least for now and hopefully in the future!) accommodates

independent research as we are fortunate to have in academia here. The fact that we as a society managed to carve a place for scholarship is a tremendous achievement that we should never take for granted, and always cherish and protect, especially now that various forces around the world are increasingly threatening and stifling academic research. So I feel very fortunate to have the privilege to study these subjects.

However, the process of writing itself is infinitely frustrating for me. I am a very slow writer who has very little time on her hands, and surrounded by innumerable distractions of both professional and personal nature. So the combination of having no time and my own perfectionism definitely slows me down. I still enjoy working on these illustrated

Dr. Ganany presenting at the Glorisun forum in Paris



hagiographies for my first book, but a big part of me wants to see it done so that I can move on to the next project.

The research is the really fun bit!

Indeed, the early stages in every project are the most fun! Then again, the writing process itself is also revelatory; I find that many new ideas and connections emerge while writing. And certain things only fall into place after you have been engrossed in your materials for a long period of time. You have more perspective after a few years into a project – you have these eureka moments, when suddenly all these dots connect in your head, and this only happens after you have spent enough time on a project and have been exposed to a wide array of sources, including many sources that you did not initially think would be related to your topic. So perspective is the big plus of working on something for a long time.

Thank you very much for your time!



Professor Ron Po

CHINA RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES

The China Research Seminar Series at the University of Cambridge returned during Lent Term 2025 in the form of three very interdisciplinary lectures that combined early modern Chinese flavours of cuisine, Silk Road material culture, and religious transformations in late imperialism. The series attracted a diverse group of students and researchers and offered new insights into Chinese social history, consumption, materiality, and religion.

The series began with **Professor Ron Po** of the London School of Economics on 30 January. His contribution, 'From Sea to Splendour: Shark Fin and the Rise of Marine Luxuries in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century China', addressed the surprising

ascent of shark fin— from a tasteless gelatinous matter to a luxury imperial dish—within Qing food and medical imagination. Far from being just an elite foodstuff, shark fin represented Qing ideals of elegance, wellness, and ocean-derived ambition. With endorsements by court doctors and performances at lavish banquets, it became ensnared in networks of meaning and prestige. Po insisted that the emergence of shark fin had to be placed in large-scale currents of world consumption, equating Chinese

demand for sea treasures with European cravings for sugar, tea, and spices. In the process, he relocated Qing China from a passive importer of luxury exotica to an assertive participant in early modern global food culture. His interpretation of 'sea-freshness' (海鲜) and 'four sea delicacies' (鲍参翅肚) gave a lively account of the imperial taste as a cosmopolitan and culture- pursuing place.

The second seminar, held on 6 February, featured a joint lecture by **Dr. Kelsey Granger** and **Dr. Hajni Elias**, the co-authors of the recently published book *Saved from Desert Sands: Rediscovering Objects on the Silk Roads*. It brings together a variety of perspectives from historians, archaeologists, codicologists and curators to examine the material evidence of Silk Road exchange. Dr. Granger discussed Tang dynasty ceramics depicting seated women, which she believes represent ideals of femininity, elite leisure and cultural aspiration in eighth-century China. These figurines, so easily dismissed as mere cosmetic tomb wares, were revealed to be rich in symbolic meaning and artistic innovation. Dr. Hajni Elias then turned to the world of the sea, presenting a sensational silver dish associated with the Belitung Shipwreck. The dish's affluent iconography and ocean-crossing provenance attest to the intermingling of religious, commercial, and aesthetic currents in the Indian Ocean world. Together, their presentation covered both land and sea, and demonstrated the value of reading artefacts as texts — objects that index the histories of material desire, memory and migration.

On 13 February, the final seminar was delivered by **Dr. Junqing Wu** of the University of Liverpool. In her talk, 'The Changing Landscape of Late Imperial Buddhism and Its Clergy', Dr. Wu challenged established accounts of the decline of Buddhism in the late Ming period. She argued that negative portrayals of monks and nuns in popular and official

texts, in which clerics are depicted as cheats, sexual perverts and sorcerers, should not be viewed merely as evidence of degeneration, but rather as signs of a newly transformed religious landscape. She explained that, by the sixteenth century, the Buddhist clergy had lost their religious monopoly. With the rise of educated lay Buddhists, Confucian ritualists and spirit mediums operating independently, the boundaries of dharma transmission had shifted. She suggested that Buddhism was being 'de-monopolised' and brought into broader social circuits, causing unease among leading commentators who tried to maintain narrative control. Drawing on historiographical narratives and court discourse, Wu illuminated the tension between reality and perception in shaping the religious politics of the time. Her talk emphasised the importance of tracing the development of discourse as a history-making process, particularly during periods of doctrinal fluidity and social change.

Together, the Lent 2025 China Research Seminar Series showcased the wealth and variety of research into Chinese history to date. Whether examining a bowl of shark fin, a figurine from a Tang tomb or a polemic against a

wandering monk, each lecture invited the audience to reconsider their assumptions about luxury, legitimacy and the lives of people and objects in premodern and early modern China. The series reaffirmed the enduring value of close textual and material analysis in the study of China's cultural past.

By Mengyuan Tian



Dr. Junqing Wu



Dr. Isabelle Ang

BOOK CULTURE IN BUDDHISM AND BEYOND

The 2025 'Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond' lecture series offered a stimulating exploration of textuality, ritual practice, and religious imagination in Buddhist and broader Asian traditions. Convened at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES), and organised by Dr. Noga Ganany at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and sponsored by the Glorisun Network for Buddhist Studies, the series brought together top international scholars from the UK, US, China and France, whose lectures covered the presence of religious texts in forms other than books, such as stone inscriptions, photographic media, hagiographies, ghost images and digital media. During Lent and Easter terms, this interdisciplinary conversation created new perspectives on how 'books' are performed, embodied, debated, and commemorated.

On 23 January, **Professor Bernard Faure** of Columbia University presented a challenging reconsideration of the Buddha's historicity.

In a lecture that challenged conventional historiography, Faure claimed that attempts to recover a 'historical Buddha' tend to obscure the diverse accretions of myth, ritual and local imagination that have shaped Buddhist traditions over time and across space. Drawing on evidence from cultures ranging from India to East Asia, he proposed that the Buddha should be viewed less as an individual and more as a 'semantic operator', a conceptual symbol through which communities navigate their religious and social landscapes.

On 27 February, Prince Chong'er of Jin was presented with a new perspective on epic literature by **Professor Mick Hunter** of Yale University. Drawing on his wider interest in cross-cultural comparisons between world epic traditions and Chinese ones, Hunter explored how the motif of refusal — a hero declining to reclaim what is rightfully his — alters tropes of fate, legitimacy, and moral authority in early Chinese philosophy. His lecture explored the potential of interpreting Chinese historiographic texts alongside epics ranging from Homer to



Professor Bernard Faure and other colleagues from FAMES during the dinner after his talk.

Gilgamesh, offering fresh approaches to comparative literary analysis.

On 6 March, the series continued with **Dr. Yang Shen** of Zhejiang University, who re-theorised Chinese Buddhist wish-vows (愿文) as 'commitment templates' rather than fixed ritual forms. Drawing on her recent ethnographic fieldwork and close reading of texts, she argued that these vows were intended to serve as instruments for modelling spiritual aims, social ideals and emotional attachments. Her lecture spanned Buddhist studies and the anthropology of religion, highlighting the capacity of vows to not only forge individual moral formation, but also collective ethical imagination.

On 13 March, **Dr. Isabelle Ang** from the Collège de France introduced us to Xu Xun (許遜), a lesser-known but locally significant Daoist figure from Jiangxi Province. Drawing on decades of textual study and field observation, she explored the intersection of hagiographical narratives, ritual practice and territorial claims in Xu Xun's cult.

She demonstrated how texts and temples work together to create sacred geographies, thereby transforming physical space and

collective memory. In her talk, she made visible the complex character of vernacular religious authority, which is conditioned by fluid dialectics among myth, space, and social practice.

On 20 March, **Professor Max Deeg** of Cardiff University gave a richly illustrated survey of Chinese Buddhist inscriptions from Bodhgaya in India. Reflecting on newly discovered Tang-period stone records, Deeg conceived of the inscriptions as 'manu-inscripts' — literally handwritten into the material world. He argued that these material texts were multifunctional, serving as devotional gifts, pilgrim books for trans-frontier cultic circulation, and instruments of soft diplomacy between China and the Buddhist heartland. His presentation emphasised the significance of materiality in the history of Buddhist transmission and cross-cultural memory.

On 8 May, **Professor Lucille Chia** of the University of California, Riverside, spoke about the cult of privately compiled versions of the Chinese Buddhist canon during the Song and Yuan dynasties. These imprints, which are usually overlooked in traditional bibliographic studies, revealed the various reasons behind the publication of holy books, including devotional, commercial and intellectual motivations. Chia's talk illuminated the intersection of religious authority, print technology, and textual mobility, offering a refined understanding of the social life of the canon beyond state-sponsored projects.

The final lecture in the series, delivered on 22 May by **Dr. Nataly Shahaf** of Princeton University, shifted the focus to the twentieth century with an unexpected subject: Republican-era Chinese ghost photography. Using Buddhist metaphysics, Daoist cosmology and modern scientific rhetoric, Shahaf explored how ghost photographs were used as tools of self-cultivation and as a means of expressing

rationalised religious belief. She argued that these pictures offered a new form of visual religiosity in which intangible spirits were made accessible through new technologies. Not only did the lecture challenge disciplinary boundaries, it also illustrated how religious epistemologies adapt with the emergence of new media.

Together, 'Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond' lectures series fostered rich interdisciplinary discussion and attracted a diverse audience from Cambridge and beyond, affirming the importance of 'book culture' in the study of religion and society.

By Mengyuan Tian

DISTINGUISHED YIN-CHENG LECTURE SERIES: JOHN KIESCHNICK ON 'CHINESE BUDDHIST VEGETARIANISM IN FIVE WORDS' 五字觀中國佛教素食史

I was sitting at the top of the gourd shaped tables, at the opposite end from the other vegetarian – our speaker **Professor John Kieschnick**. This probably isn't the most sensible place to sit to monopolise the vegetarian dishes, I thought, but **Professor Chau** reminded me that the top of the gourd was akin to living in the highest form of Buddhist heaven – the formless realm.

How apt to have such a dinner and such a conversation... to follow Professor Kieschnick's excellent talk on the subject of the history of vegetarianism in China in five key words: 欲 (desire), 業 (karma), 慈 (compassion), 清 (purity) and 味 (flavour).

Professor Kieschnick's talk actually answered lots of questions I had been in a muddle about myself. Why can some Buddhists eat meat and why can't others? If for some they are allowed to on the basis that they don't personally kill the animals – does that mean that they can morally also hire hitmen or send soldiers to perpetrate massacres, as long as they don't get their hands dirty?

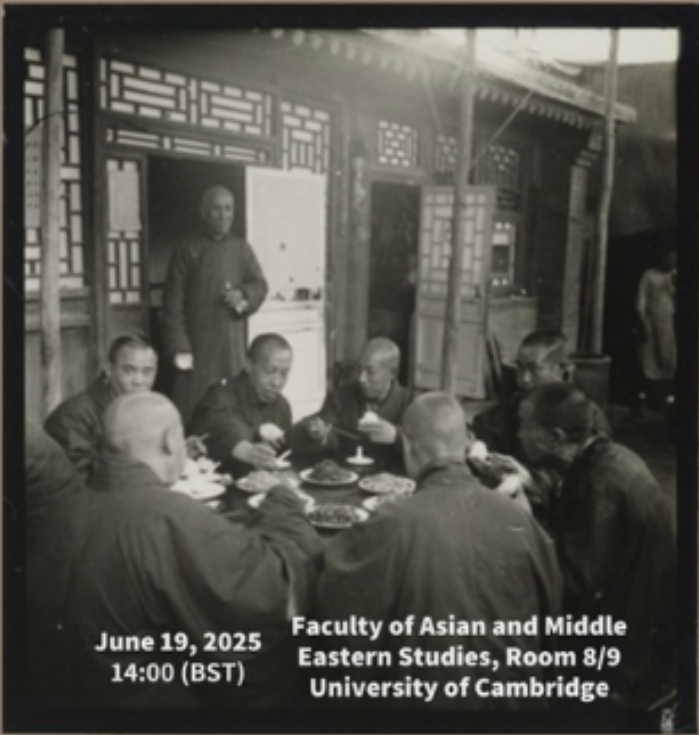
It also added many more details I had never thought of, how killing some animals whose existence is miserable can be a mercy to them (chickens for example), are





Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism in Five Words

SPEAKER Prof. JOHN KIESCHNICK Stanford University 	DISCUSSANT Prof. ROEL STERCKX University of Cambridge 	HOST Dr NOGA GANANY University of Cambridge 
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June 19, 2025
14:00 (BST)

Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Room 8/9
University of Cambridge

Buddhists supposed to enjoy eating dinner? How can you eat food without enjoying it?

Professor Kieschnick is an excellent, engaging speaker. He makes all sorts of complicated and rich content comprehensible, and we are lucky that someone who writes and speaks so well as taken on this surprisingly unexplored – as **Professor Sterckx** noted – subject.

His interest in this topic was started by a conference two decades ago to the day on food in Chinese history, held in our own faculty, and hosted by Professor Roel Sterckx. It was very special, therefore, that Professor Sterckx could be engaged as the discussant to Professor Kieschnick's talk and to see how a project can grow and develop over decades of thought and discussion.

Afterwards, we migrated to Seven Days and chatted about garlic and the spirit world, the definition of 'animals', stories involving gourds, and memories. We are very grateful to Professor Kieschnick for visiting and for sharing his research with us, and to the Yin-cheng Foundation for their support in this wonderful series.

By John Donegan-Cross

Launched in September, 2021, the Yin-Cheng Distinguished Lecture Series (印證佛學傑出學術系列講座) is a collaborative, multi-university partnership between Peking University, Columbia University, Princeton University, Harvard University, University of British Columbia, University of Oxford and University of Cambridge.

*The Lecture Series is established in honour of **Venerable Cheng-yen** 證嚴, founder of Tzu Chi, and her mentor **Yinshun** 印順 (1906–2005), with the goal of promoting topics in Buddhist studies. The series is organised at Cambridge by **Dr. Noga Ganany** with the generous support of the Tzi Chi Foundation.*



NEEDHAM INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES REPORT

The Easter Term 2025 seminar series at the Needham Research Institute featured a particularly full and stimulating programme, reflecting the strong presence of visiting fellows in residence this term. With a diverse range of speakers and topics spanning science, medicine, environment, and religion in East Asia, the series drew a steady and engaged audience from within and beyond Cambridge to the 'Engine Room' at 8 Sylvester Road, Cambridge.

Yizhuo Li (City University of Hong Kong) opened the series with a study of the Qing play *Sizhou City*, analysing how flood disasters were reinterpreted through drama and religious myth, with the demonisation of the river goddess Shuimu serving broader narratives of local reordering.

Yizhuo Li (City University of Hong Kong) opened the series with a study of the Qing play *Sizhou City*, analysing how flood disasters were reinterpreted through drama and religious myth, with the demonisation of the river goddess Shuimu serving broader narratives of local reordering.

Bin Xu (Palace Museum, Beijing/NRI) examined the scientific instruments gifted to Qianlong during the Macartney Embassy of 1793. Using archival and artefactual evidence, she explored their diplomatic significance, display in the Yuanming Yuan, and role in Sino-British cultural exchange.

Shanshan Gao (City University of Hong Kong/NRI) mapped the CCP's use of opiates, psychotropics, and acupuncture anaesthesia from wartime to the

1990s. Her talk linked battlefield innovation to rural medical practices and later drug policy challenges.

Yafang Yin (Chinese Academy of Forestry/NRI) discussed how wooden relics, including waterworks, buildings, and shipwrecks, can reveal historical and ecological information. He addressed the technical challenges of wood species identification in archaeological conservation.

Xue Zhang (Reed College/NRI) explored Qing court memorials and maps documenting the ritual integration of Xinjiang's sacred landscapes. She argued that these practices reflected both imperial ideology and ecological concern, especially regarding water resources.

Wenxue Li (Southwest University/NRI) reinterpreted the *Bencao Gangmu* as a landmark in Chinese wine ('jiu') history. His seminar traced the text's role in codifying the medicinal uses of wine and navigating the dual character of wine as both cure and poison.

Guangchao Wang (University of Chinese Academy of Sciences / NRI) offered a close analysis of a star chart described in the *New Book of Tang*, reportedly based on the observational practices of Yixing.

He argued that Tang astronomy did not rigidly follow either the Gai Tian or Hun Tian (Spherical-Heaven) models, but instead reflected a pragmatic synthesis in which both cosmological frameworks coexisted and complemented one another.

Lu Zhang (Sichuan University/NRI) introduced the internal alchemy system of Lu Xixing, a Ming alchemist who claimed spirit-writing transmission from Lü Dongbin. Her talk traced his influence on Qing self-cultivation traditions and Daoist metaphysics.

Yuqi Li (Nankai University/NRI) concluded the series with archaeological findings from Xinjiang showing early irrigation and crop diversification. He challenged the traditional view that advanced irrigation came only from eastern China, emphasising local innovation and regional connections across Central Asia.

We are grateful to all speakers and participants for making this a rich and intellectually stimulating term.

East Asia HPSTM seminars

In addition to the Friday research seminars, the NRI also saw a continuation of the East Asia History of Science, Technology, and Medicine (HPSTM) seminar series, convened by **Zhiyu Chen, Fu Ge Yang, Zhilin Chu**, and **Arthur Harris**. Four stimulating sessions were held fortnightly at the Board Room in the NRI. The programme explored diverse intersections of medicine, belief, and modernity in East Asia, beginning with a critical examination of the category of 'magic' in early Chinese medicine, followed by a session on Buddhist vegetarianism and animal protection in modern China.

Subsequent discussions addressed the themes of commerce and medical authority, and physiognomy, phrenology, and the human sciences in East Asia.

Jingyi Jenny Zhao
ISF Senior Research Fellow Needham
Research Institute

WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



Ji Chen received her Ph.D. in History of Science and Technology from University of Science and Technology of China (2022). She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Science and Technology of China, and conducted research at the Paris Observatory in France from November 2023 to October 2024. Her research focuses on the history of astronomy in the Ming and Qing dynasties and the history of scientific and technological exchanges between China and the West.



Li Wenxue holds a PhD in Ethnology and is a Professor at Southwest University in China. His main research areas are the history of ethnic groups in the Middle Ages, and cross-cultural material exchanges. His two recent monographs are 'Study on the History of Tuyuhun' and 'Study on the History of Chinese Wine Culture (Volume 1)'. While at the NRI he will research the development of ancient Chinese medicinal wine culture, exploring the topic from two angles: the historical development of Chinese medicinal wine itself and the history of knowledge exchange between Chinese medicinal wine culture and the surrounding world.

WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



Yuqi Li is an associate professor in archaeology at the Faculty of History, Nankai University, Tianjin, China. He earned his PhD in 2018 from the Department of Anthropology at Washington University in St. Louis, USA. His research focuses on the herding and farming strategies of ancient residents of Xinjiang, with particular emphasis on their water management techniques from the Bronze Age to the early historical era. Currently, he is working on a project investigating stone-built floodwater irrigation systems in the southern Tianshan foothills.



Shanshan Gao received her PhD in History from City University of Hong Kong in 2024 with a dissertation titled 'Forging a Basic Theory of Chinese Medicine in the Early People's Republic of China: An Examination of Wuxing'. She earned her MA in Clinical Medicine (2015) and BA in Chinese Medicine (2012) from Beijing University of Chinese Medicine. Her research interests include the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and the exchange of ideas between East Asia and the Euro- American world. She is a recipient of the D. Kim Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship (2025–2026), currently a visiting scholar at the Needham Research Institute. While at the NRI, her research focuses on the project 'Opiates, Psychotropics, and Acupuncture Anaesthesia: The Chinese Communist Party's Battlefield Medicine and its Impacts (1927–1999)'.

WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



Weilin Pan is an Associate Professor at the Institute of China Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. She also teaches at the China Studies Postgraduate Program of Shanghai International Studies University. Her academic interests include material culture of modern China, China in modern English literature as well as overseas Chinese Studies. She is the author of *Un/Making the Hell Money: A Material Cultural History of Tinfoil in Southeast China* (Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences Press, 2018) and the editor of *Material Culture in Modern China* (Shanghai Rare Book Press, 2015). Her new book project is about recycling in modern China.



Dr. Yafang Yin is a professor at the Research Institute of Wood Industry (CRIWI), the Chinese Academy of Forestry (CAF), Beijing, China, and curator of the xylarium and archaeological wood collection of the Chinese Academy of Forestry. He has served as Executive Secretary of IAWA (International Association of Wood Anatomists) since 2017, a member of the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) Scientific Committee of China since 2020, and Coordinator of the Wood Archaeology Joint Laboratory between CRIWI of CAF and the National Center for Archaeology of China since 2023. His research interests include wood formation, wood properties, wood archaeology, and wood anatomy. His focus at the Needham Research Institute (NRI) centers on the role of early modern wood science in China.

WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



Lewis Bremner is a historian of science, technology, and medicine with a primary focus on Japan. He received his DPhil in History from the University of Oxford, followed by a year as Reischauer Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in Japanese Studies at Harvard University. He has taught at the University of Oxford and held lectureships at the University of California, Berkeley and, most recently, at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge. He is currently the Soon-Young Kim Fellow in the History of East Asian Science and Technology at the Needham Research Institute. He recently co-edited a volume with Sho Konishi and Manimporok Dotulong, *Reopening the Opening of Japan: Transnational Approaches to Japan and the Wider World* (Brill, 2024), and his first book is a history of the magic lantern in Japan. He is now working on several projects ranging from the development of irrigation technology to the translation of Newtonian ideas in Japan.



THE CHUAN LYU ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES: WHY STUDY TAIWAN?

The Chuan Lyu Annual Lecture Series has been funded for more than thirty years by the Chuan Lyu Foundation and its benefactor, **Dr. Lee Hwa-lin**. It continues to attract distinguished scholars to Cambridge to address pressing issues in Taiwan Studies. In April and May of this year, we had the privilege of hosting **Prof. Yu Shuenn-der** (余舜德), Research Fellow at the Institute of Ethnology at Academia Sinica in Taiwan, as the visiting speaker for the 2025 Chuan Lyu Lectures, sponsored by the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES) at the University of Cambridge.

Prof. Yu gave two lectures entitled 'Why Study Taiwan?', drawing on decades of ethnographic and theoretical studies to discuss Taiwan's central yet frequently contradictory position in modern cultural production and global material flows. These two sessions were well-attended by faculty members, researchers, and students from a variety of disciplines, sparking lively academic discussions.

The first lecture, 'Taiwan and the Globalisation of Puer Tea: The Role of the Taste of Ageing', took place on 29 April in Rooms 8 & 9 of FAMES. In this lecture, Prof. Yu traced the global spread of Puer tea from its ancient production in Yunnan to its contemporary commodification, which was triggered by the cultural and economic upheaval of 1990s Taiwan. He outlined in compelling terms that Taiwanese tea enthusiasts, who were previously unfamiliar with Puer, had played a significant role in developing a new sensory and economic rationale for aged tea. He emphasised that this transformation was facilitated not only by circumstantial political events such as the 1997 handover of Hong Kong, but also by Taiwan's highly refined tea connoisseurship, which created the concept of a 'taste of ageing'. Prof. Yu's case study sheds light on the material culture of tea and enriches theories

of globalisation through the analytical application of 'sensescapes'. His ethnographic fieldwork sparked considerable interest among the audience, who asked questions ranging from the commodification of taste to the circulation of sensory value.

The second lecture, 'When a Local Tradition Becomes a Heritage Culture for All of China: The Paradox of Taiwan's Tea Art', was delivered on 1 May at FAMES. In his lecture, Pro. Yu explained how Taiwan's *chayi* (tea art), a local tea-brewing custom originating from Chaozhou, evolved into a performance-based cultural form enjoyed by tea communities across mainland China. He discussed the socio-political contexts that facilitated the reinvention of this tea-making ritual, such as the

KMT's cultural revival movement and post-war anxieties regarding Japanese heritage. He argued that Taiwanese tea art is both a claim to a distinctive cultural identity and a cultural export, marketed as part of the wider Chinese heritage. Prof. Yu suggests that this contradiction demonstrates the ambivalent cultural negotiations surrounding Chinese identity in the Taiwan Strait. The lecture was supplemented with a wealth of visual and historical materials, generating discussions about the politics of heritage, authenticity, and transnational identity in East Asia.

Prof. Yu's lecture



Outside of the seminar room, Pro. Yu and his wife Valerie Wen had a stimulating and memorable time in Cambridge. Following the first lecture, they enjoyed a friendly dinner with Cambridge researchers, as well as a variety of cultural and social activities. These ranged from punting on the River Cam to visiting King's College Chapel and attending a formal dinner with department members at St John's College.

We are deeply grateful to Prof. Yu for his inspiring lectures, which showcase the richness of Taiwan Studies and the importance of sensory and material approaches to contemporary anthropology. His visit to Cambridge was greatly appreciated by all those who had the opportunity to engage with him and his scholarship, both intellectually and personally. As reflected in his own words, Prof. Yu and his wife Valerie Wen thoroughly enjoyed their stay in Cambridge, making the 2025 Chuan Lyu Lectures a successful and memorable event.

By Mengyuan Tian and Di Liu



On 1 May a special dinner was held in the Wordsworth Room of St John's College in honour of this year's Chuan Lyu speaker Professor YU Shuenn-Der.

Back row (from left): Prof. Bill Hurst, Dr. Xin FAN, Dr. Avital Rom, Dr. Lucy Zhao, Mr John Moffett, Prof. Jianjun MEI, Mr John Donegan-Cross, Prof. Ying JIN, Ms Hsiao-ching WANG, Dr. Yan HE, Dr. Heather Inwood, Dr. Ling ZHANG

Front row (from left): Dr. Irene Lok, Prof. Hans van de Ven, Mrs. Valerie YU (WEN Ping-Ying), Prof. YU Shuenn-Der, Prof. David McMullen, Prof. Adam Chau, Dr. Noga Ganany

Also present: Miss Amy YU (not shown in photo)



FACULTY RESEARCH DAY 2025

On the 4th of June, postgraduate students from across the faculty's departments and subject areas participated in the Faculty Research Day, which provided an opportunity for them to introduce their research and take questions. The event, was organised by the student representatives for FAMES' MPhil students (Kate Bucek and Isabelle Saba) and PhD students (Dana Al Shabari and Mariah Zhong), with the intention of promoting inter-departmental dialogue and providing a window into the research being conducted outside participants' own subject areas. It was a pleasure to note that postgraduate students from Chinese Studies were represented in all three of the panels that ran over the course of the day!

The event began with a few brief opening remarks from **Prof. Laura Moretti**, Department Head and Professor of Early Modern Japanese Literature and Culture. Prof. Moretti began by thanking the student representatives for their hard work in organising the research day, and emphasised the value of interdisciplinary understanding. She expressed her hopes that presenters and audience members alike would be able to draw interesting and useful comparisons across the different topics being introduced.

The first panel, 'Architectures of Resistance: Bodies, Institutions, and Memory', combined presentations by **Yutong Li** (Chinese Studies, PhD), **Annabel Langdon** (Korean Studies, PhD), and **Kim Mi Jin** (Korean Studies, PhD). The presentation topics covered the emergence of 'natural-style' animal enclosures and the provision of edifying public

information in Beijing Zoo in the 1950s, narratives of resistance among the haenyō divers of Cheju Island after the 4.3 Cheju Uprising – in particular the preservation of historical memory through dramatic performance, and how the methods employed by colonial Korea's juvenile correctional schools met with students' resistance to being 'reformed' by these institutions. Despite their widely-varying topics, all three presentations demonstrated a concern with the transformative goals of education and its limits as a means of realising this transformation, attempts to shape public perception through the circulation of information about events and institutions, and the potential for resistance or indifference to official narratives.

After a quick coffee break, everyone reconvened for the second panel, 'Empire Legitimacy and Historical memory'. The research presented concerned the life and political influence of the prominent 16th and 17th century Japanese general Hosokawa Fujitaka (also known by his Buddhist name Yūsai),

an episode in a fictionalised life of Alexander the Great that featured his encounter with the Emperor of China, and a search for sources on the oral traditions of Chinese maritime religion that took place all across Taiwan, featuring presentations by, respectively: Andrew Fischer (Japanese Studies, PhD), Ankur Desval Fehrani (PhD, Persian Studies), and Ilay Golan (PhD, Chinese Studies). Audience questions for this panel were especially lively and displayed a particular interest in sources, including the recovery of lesser-known materials, the traces of orality in textual documents, and the role of literary sources in understanding history. With this, the session broke up for lunch. The success of the organisers' stated goal of encouraging discussion across departments and disciplines was evident in the conversations taking place between participants from across the faculty.

Afterwards, everyone gathered for the final panel of the day, 'Reframing Religion, Myth, and Modernity'. Samuel Martin (Arabic Studies, PhD) analysed Abdo Khal's 2009 novel *Throwing Sparks* through the lens of 'tashwīh' (deformity/distortion) with regard to the 'deformed' Saudi Arabian modernity that emerged in the shadow of the oil industry. Kate Bucek (MPhil, Korean Studies) introduced the post-colonial boom in Buddhism in South Korea, a trend often neglected by English-language scholarship's focus on the prevalence of Christianity in the nation. Finally, Shannon Gilbert (PhD, Chinese Studies) examined two Chinese novels as analogous to cabinets of curiosity, charting how their attempt to taxonomise textual curiosities gives way to a monstrous form of the written word. The questions that followed focused on the parallels between different forms of literary distortion appearing in the first and last presentations, and treatment of survey data in acquiring information about South Korean religious affiliation.

FAMES Research Day 2025 concluded with the organisers' closing remarks, in which they thanked the audience and presenters for their participation and expressed their hopes that future years would see similar events. Their efforts were much appreciated and was key to the success of this event. As postgraduate study can be a rather solitary affair, it was gratifying to see the enthusiasm that was generated when everyone was given the chance to learn about the exciting work being done outside their language specialisms and disciplinary areas of expertise. Hopefully the foundation formed by this event will allow for fruitful communication and collaboration within different areas of the faculty going forward.

By Shannon Gilbert

WOMEN'S WRITING AND WRITING GENDER IN CHINA TODAY

Feminist writing has become an increasingly prominent topic in Chinese literature over the past few years, as women writers gain acclaim for their incisive portrayal of gendered experiences that resonate with the broader population and, at times, give rise to fervent debates. In response to this emerging attention to feminism and gender across the literary and other creative arts, Women's Writing and Writing Gender in China Today, organised by former and current PhD students at AMES, took place at Murray Edwards College in late May. The event brought **Dr. Heather Inwood**, Associate Professor in Modern Chinese Literature and Culture, into conversation with Chinese author **Wen Zhen** (文珍) on the occasion of the publication of the English edition of the latter's short story collection *Nothing but the Now*.

A recipient of the Lao She Literary Award, Wen Zhen is recognised for her works that delve into the intimate thoughts, emotional tensions, and romantic and familial relationships of women living in present-day China. During her dialogue with Dr. Inwood, conducted in Chinese in interview format, Wen Zhen shared her reflections on topics ranging from gendered narratives and literary styles to artificial intelligence. In particular, she commented on the obstacles facing contemporary women writers, many of whom find themselves falling prey to the habit of imitating literary conventions created by and, overwhelmingly, for men. Meanwhile, the gendered 'advantage' that some female writers may enjoy at a younger age often turn into restrictive labels as their careers progress.

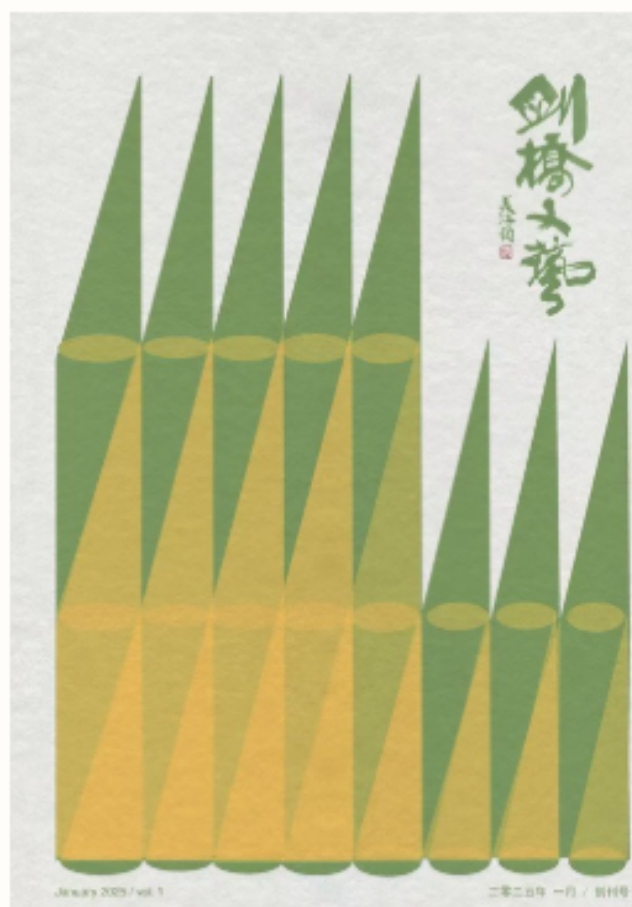
Recalling her own struggles against such both internally and externally imposed gendered norms, Wen Zhen delineated her hopes and efforts toward redrawing stereotypical images and offering more nuanced representations of gendered experiences through literature.

Following on from the passionate exchange between Wen Zhen and Dr. Inwood, scholars and PhD students in the audience engaged in a roundtable discussion which continued to probe the complexities, challenges, and possibilities of feminist and gendered writing at the current moment in China. Dr. Qian Liu from the University of Warwick and Dr. Bingbing Shi, who recently received her PhD from AMES and has since been working as a Lecturer at the University of St. Andrews for the past year, also joined in the wide-ranging discussion, exploring intriguing questions such as the frequent undermining of romantic or other private themes in so-called mainstream literature and the translation of Chinese feminist writing into other languages.

The final part of the event ceded the floor to the Cambridge Review of Literature and Arts (剑桥文艺), a Chinese-language journal based in Cambridge. Initially conceptualised and founded by Bingbing and AMES PhD student Qingyang Bai, the publication aims to showcase the latest literary, visual, and other creative productions from artists working in Chinese across the world. Qingyang introduced the journal's inaugural issue – which features a collection of short stories, poetry, non-fiction writing, translated work, and photography – with special thanks to its numerous contributors, the relentless support of Dr. Inwood, and the editorial team.

The Cambridge Review of Literature and Arts is currently putting forward a call for submissions for any form of Chinese writing, translation, and visual art for publication in its upcoming issues. Those who are interested are welcome to submit their works to: cambridgechinese@vip.sina.com

By Ruo Fan (Claire) Ping



FIRST YEAR UPDATES (PATHWAY 1)

The first time I introduced myself as 燕美 was, in truth, rather unremarkable. I was talking to a student from China who was visiting my college, and so I thought I should probably attempt my first foray into speaking Chinese in the wild. Despite the interaction being filled with more than a few long pauses, in that moment, the alter ego who had been fumbling through Wang Laoshi's classes finally took her first breath out in the world. For the first time, I glimpsed what it might feel like to live in and through the Chinese language.

Especially as an ab initio learner, my favourite moments this year (as thrilling as the comprehensive exercises were) were the ones where Chinese became real. The Lunar New Year and Spring Festival celebrations, where the language flowed so casually, were particularly enjoyable for me, transforming something that once felt like pure struggle into something worth struggling for. Of course, my exams were far from perfect, but I remember reading over my C1 essay and being struck by how much I'd written, and how, not so long ago, I had arrived in Cambridge knowing little more than 你好.

Throughout first year, I've been supported and encouraged not only by my teachers and comrades, but I've also been offered tiny, gleaming windows into the kind of life this language might make possible. And so, the trepidation I feel before heading to Taiwan has been replaced by something else: the excitement of knowing that the anki decks late at night in the Pembroke library might finally come to life.

By Martha Burdon (Pathway 1)

FIRST YEAR UPDATES (PATHWAY 2)

It feels surreal to be writing this, sitting in the air-conditioned haven of National Cheng Kung University library, as first year draws to a close. With even the most intimidating of this year's tasks – learning traditional characters for the first time, reading Classical Chinese texts, a spoken viva exam – in the rear view (for now), a summer in Taiwan seems the perfect way to put everything we've learned this year into practice, and prepare for next year.

While exam term certainly had its low points, it also brought a sense of achievement, because what felt impossible nine months ago had finally come to fruition. The classes for those of us taking pathway 2 this year have included C4 (translation and writing), C5 (translation), CO (oral and listening), East Asian Studies, and Classical Chinese. One highlight was getting to read and translate Lu Xun's short story 故鄉; deciphering Classical Chinese philosophical texts also became enjoyable, once it began to feel less like an entirely different language!

It would be impossible to sum up everything we have learnt from this wide array of classes, but I do have some brief advice for anyone taking pathway 2 next year. First, bring lunch with you on Fridays (trust me). Second (and perhaps most importantly), enjoy your Wednesday nights out during Michaelmas term, before the horror of a Thursday 9am is added to your timetable in Lent. Third, don't panic! If you feel as out of your depth as I did at the start of Michaelmas term, know that there will be so many fantastic classmates, supervisors and teachers to help you through. From the poetry recital, to our Chinese New Year celebration, to the many class dinners, it has been a fun-filled year all round.

Looking forward to another year at Cambridge is bittersweet as our pathway 2 class will be reduced to just 3 with the second years departing for Beijing. We wish them all the best and hope to see them again at some point in the not too distant future!

By Maya Kermisch



Photo from annual department dinner

SECOND YEAR UPDATES

As Lent term began, we returned to a Cambridge wrapped in winter chill, our bellies full from holiday feasts but minds sharpened for the term ahead. Known for its harsh weather and relentless workload, Lent term often feels like an academic marathon. Yet for Chinese Studies students, it's also a time of vibrant cultural warmth.

The department's Chinese New Year celebrations transformed Room 10 into a hub of activity. With brushes and ink, we carefully wrote 春联, some with graceful calligraphy strokes, others with... enthusiastic improvisation. Scissors flashed as we folded and cut red paper into intricate lanterns and flowers, the room buzzing with everyone 大吃大喝 as debates over the ideal 餃子 fillings raged on. Later in the term, the department dinner at Seven Days became another highlight, with tables crowded with dishes: crispy duck, mapo tofu, and steaming noodles, all passed around in a flurry of chopsticks and laughter.

Academically, the term stretched our skills in every direction. Classical Chinese classes had us untangling Li Bai's drunken moonlit escapades ('醒时同交欢，醉后各分散'— a sentiment that also applied to our study group's post-library pub trips). Modern texts spanned Lu Xun's 故鄉 to Taiwanese news articles, while writing classes drilled 書面語, though even the best essays sometimes slipped into 口語, like a stubborn colloquial ghost haunting our formal prose. And looming over it all was the C8 Mini-Dissertation, which by term's end had us all 埋頭苦幹, whether on the perception of 氣 in China or 1930s romanisation politics.

Yet small joys kept us going: weekly

AMES Library tea (lifesaver biscuits courtesy of our librarians), impromptu class outings to Golden House for black bean noodles or The Grain and Hop for post-essay pints, and the camaraderie of shared character- memorisation despair. By term's end, we were exhausted but exhilarated, ready to trade frost for spring blossoms in Easter term.

By Rocky Terruli

After a content-heavy Michaelmas and Lent term, we found ourselves on the final stretch full of both exam nerves and excitement for the year abroad. First on the cards for most of us was submitting our short(er) dissertations which covered topics ranging from Christian Names in Modern Korea and Catholic Hymns in China to Language diversity in Taiwan and an Imagined History of a Romanised Chinese Language. We had already given presentations about our respective topics and completed the long research phase, so collating all the insights findings gained along the way was both satisfying and rewarding.

Once the dissertations were sent off, we moved into the exam preparation stage. Korean speaking, Tang poetry, modern Chinese essay writing or training our ears - we were confronted by the question: 'where on earth do I begin?'. So, after a few too many days of procrastinating revision plans and priority lists, we laid roots in the library and put pen to paper, accepting that there will always be more that could be done.

Slowly but surely, exams made their way round the corner, and it was time to give them all a good shoot. A few of us turned up in suits for our speaking exams to channel logical and professional-sounding answers, hoping that we'd give the examiners

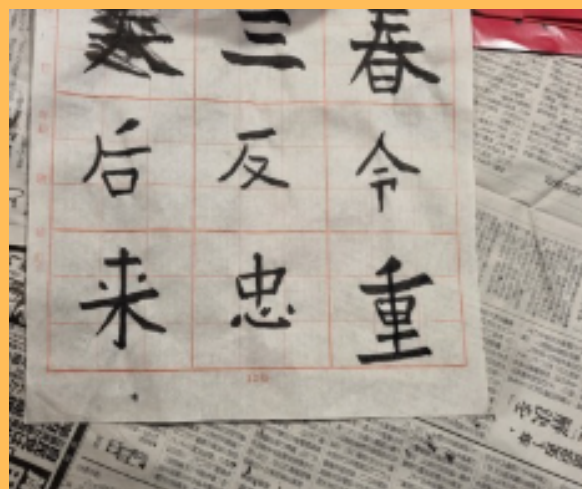


Photo booth at the pub after an intense study session

a good impression to finesse a few extra marks. To break up exam stress, we embraced global warming at the Jesus Green lido and fuelled up our brains at 回味軒, the latter proving to be a great find for good value southern Chinese cuisine.

As exam season made its way to a close, we set our eyes on May Balls and other celebrations such as the FAMES Garden Party where we caught up with ex-supervisors, professors as well now finally relaxed and out of the library friends and classmates.

By Hugo Deval



Above: calligraphy from the Chinese New Year Department Party

Below: Class photo at the end of the oral exam





Above: The annual department dinner

Below: the two authours at the Chinese New Year formal



UPDATES FROM BEIJING





The Third years are nearly at the end of the Year Abroad and time has flown by. With roughly ten months away from Cambridge, so much has happened. Besides studying very 努力 (diligently), the third years have embraced every opportunity. 安菊 (Ines) has seen a fair bit of China – in fact, almost all of it - visiting twenty-three out of twenty-three provinces. Other classmates (or 同志 comrades) have made similar trips with different stories to tell. In total, nine students flew out to Asia, with eight based in Beijing and one in Taipei. For the Beijing group, the second term followed a similar pattern to the first, with the bonus of an inter-class performance. The Cambridge class placed third, impressing the other students with their Chinese language version of Take Me Out, a popular dating TV-show, not to mention 柳文 (Elodie)'s six pack (please see photo – 柳文 will come to regret this). In April, the students in

Beijing went on a class trip to Gansu province, located in central China and famous for its Mogao caves, deserts and Lanzhou beef noodles. Nearly everyone was on the bus by 4 am, ready to go. It was only 如曦 (Lucy) who was yet to wake up or even pack. Thankfully, the trip supervisor located her room and managed to break in, and with the essentials thrown into a bag – a passport and a handful of 大白兔 (famous Chinese milk sweets) – they were on their way.

In Gansu, the class enjoyed camel riding, dune sliding, and a tour of the Mogao caves. These caves, also known as the Thousand Buddha,



an oasis town on the ancient Silk Road. First excavated in 366 CE, they were used as places of Buddhist meditation and worship. A tour guide is required to enter, though truthfully, the third years already had one - 安冬 (Millie) and her trusty C7 History of Dynastic China Quizlet set from the second year.

The trip also included a visit to the city of Jiayuguan, the western-most point of the Great Wall, built during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The fortress served as a key military stronghold, guarding the far northwest China at the narrowest point of the Hexi corridor, a vital defensive frontier since the Han dynasty (BC 202-220).

Beyond Gansu, the students took their own individual trips to places like Yunan, Tibet, Sichuan, Japan and Korea - just to name a few. Despite the travel, the students also found time to participate in societies on campus and to make new friends. 茉莉 (Molly) has spread her knowledge and love of 麻将

(Mahjong) throughout the class and is looking 'forward to the inter-faculty championships' back in Cambridge. 寶惠 (Lidiana) tapped into her musical side, joining the piano society and picking up the accordion. Meanwhile, 修露 (Sarah) continued to be part of a choir singing in both Chinese and Japanese! 惠珊 (Sam) has been playing her guitar, and the group has made a good number of class KTV trips. In short, the class is preparing diligently for their performance at the faculty poetry recital next term.

Speaking of performance, 安菊 (Ines) was whisked away to Luoyang to be part of a short film produced by Peking University, highlighting the sights of this ancient capital of 13 Chinese dynasties. The short film was a great success. It gained over 3,000 likes on WeChat and over 210,000 on Instagram. The class was understandably very proud to have a celebrity in the midst.

It has been great to spend a year together in Beijing but everyone is very much looking forward to being reunited with their much-missed final 同志 (comrade), 寧恪 (Nikos). Unlike the rest of the class he spent a year in Taiwan studying in Taipei. The class kept in touch throughout the year, noting that 寧恪 (Nikos') Taiwanese accent was becoming more and more pronounced. When asked for a highlight, he shared a story of



bouldering along a river in Wulai with an oxf*rd studies student – a near-death experience which nearly ended in being '被冲走' (swept away) or in 寧恪 (Nikos') exact words '被冲走' (please note the traditional character).

To mark the end of exams and a brilliant year abroad, the third years gathered for a final class dinner at a Xinjiang restaurant, before a couple of students getting on a long-haul train the next day to go to Xinjiang themselves. Whether in Beijing or Taipei, it's clear that everyone has learned a great deal, including each other's Chinese names. While many are already planning their return to China, they are also looking forward to their final year in Cambridge, reuniting with their teachers and not having use metro-line 10 again.

The third years send their best wishes (and maybe a little envy) to the second years about to begin their own Year Abroad. Have an amazing time, make the most of it and remember to pack more than a passport and 大白兔.

By Elodie Sparrow



FOURTH YEAR UPDATES

Hello again! This newsletter update feels rather bittersweet, as it not only marks the end of the year, but also the end of our undergraduate studies at Cambridge. Exams have finished, dissertations have been submitted, and we are busying ourselves with May Week events before the graduation ceremony. Although the last four years seem to have flown by, much has changed for our class. Four years ago, we entered the faculty for the first time, and for some of us, we had our first encounter with Mandarin; consisting of learning to count to ten, picking our Chinese names and trying to wrap our heads around past tense markers and measure words. This year has seen vast changes: we have consulted primary sources in Mandarin for coursework, written Chinese essays on topics ranging from technology to globalisation, and even discussed our dissertations in Chinese in our oral exams. Looking back, it is a remarkable progression to have achieved in a four-year period, and I am incredibly proud of all my classmates.

However, some things never change: the tireless support of our amazing language teachers and supervisors, the hard work and camaraderie amongst classmates, and the fact that I am still not entirely sure how to verbalise when one should use '了' in a sentence.

This year posed an academic challenge, with dissertations and content papers on top of language classes. No challenge was too great, however, as we rose to the occasion with the help of language teachers and professors. Small class sizes and individual meetings with supervisors ensured we received personalised support throughout the coursework and dissertation-writing process. It was

a pleasure to hear about the wide range of topics my classmates had chosen to write their dissertations on, highlighting the flexibility for students to pursue their own interests in the fourth year. The feeling of satisfaction when submitting our bound dissertations was unmatched, and it was incredibly rewarding to see our Chinese fluency progress in the classroom.

Of course, it wasn't all just about work. Events arranged by the faculty, such as the Spring Festival celebration, allowed us to let off some steam whilst eating copious amounts of dumplings. As a small faculty, we have the privilege of getting to know students and professors on a personal level, as demonstrated by Professor Chau who generously arranged for students to have a meal at a Chinese restaurant. Wang Laoshi was also kind enough to take our class out for dim sum after our final lesson together. We were not the only newcomers into the faculty four years ago; it was at this time that Wang Laoshi also became a language teacher, and it has been an honour to go along this journey with her. Wang Laoshi, Wu Laoshi and Zhao Laoshi's hard work, support, and enthusiasm will not be forgotten, and they have instilled in us a lifelong passion for Mandarin, as well as many fond memories from the classroom. The annual faculty garden party was a wonderful way to end the year, where we celebrated the hard work of teachers and students alike.

As the year comes to an end, many of us are thinking about our next steps, whether they be further study, work, or travel. Some of us are going on to do master's degrees in Oxford, the USA and Korea, one classmate is going to China this summer, and some of us will be job-hunting. It is worth highlighting here that the AMES faculty attracts students with a really diverse range of interests and skills.

Our cohort has engaged in a variety of extracurriculars this year, whether that be in the Cambridge University China Forum, the Centre for Geopolitics, or in sport and theatre. Whatever our cohort's next steps may be, our Cambridge experience in and out of the classroom has shaped a group of individuals with a lot to offer, thanks to our unique degree and diverse interests. I am excited to hear about all the amazing things my classmates will get up to next – and we will be sure to come back and visit to reminisce our time here. Please keep in touch!

再見！

By Lara Shakhshir



STAFF UPDATES

During Lent Term, **Dr. Hajni Elias** continued teaching C15 The Chinese Tradition: Chinese Art and Visual Culture, with a focus on the arts of the High Qing, modern and contemporary China. A highlight of the term was their visit to the British Museum in London, where students engaged with the China Galleries and took part in a handling session (see photos on the previous page). Amongst the artefacts handled were examples of Shang dynasty archaic bronze vessels, a Neolithic ritual jade bi disc, a Hongwu period copper-red decorated porcelain cup stand, a Northern Wei gilt-bronze votive figure of Padmapani, a Song dynasty Jun ware bowl, and a Yongzheng famille-rose imperial bowl.

Between March 7–8, 2025, Dr. Elias travelled to New York where she presented her work on the visibility of children in Han art and material culture at a two-day conference organised by Dr. Avital Rom and Prof. Andrew Meyer from Brooklyn College. The conference, held at Columbia University and titled *A Very Lively Death: Death Culture and the Culture of the Living in Early China*, was generously sponsored by the Tang Center for Early China. It brought together scholars from a range of disciplines to explore new perspectives on the close interrelationship between the living and the dead in Warring States, Qin, and Han China (see bottom photo on the right).

On April 28, her book *Remembrance in Clay and Stone: Early Memorial and Funerary Art of Southwest China* was officially launched in the UK at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. The evening event drew over 120 attendees with all copies sold out at the venue (see photos to the right). She wrote: 'For me, this was the culmination of a long journey started 13 years ago when I knocked on Prof. Roel Sterckx's door

enquiring about studying for a PhD under his supervision and mentorship. My deep thanks goes to Prof. Sterckx and everyone who supported and guided me through an amazing decade, and those who were able to join me in this special celebration'.

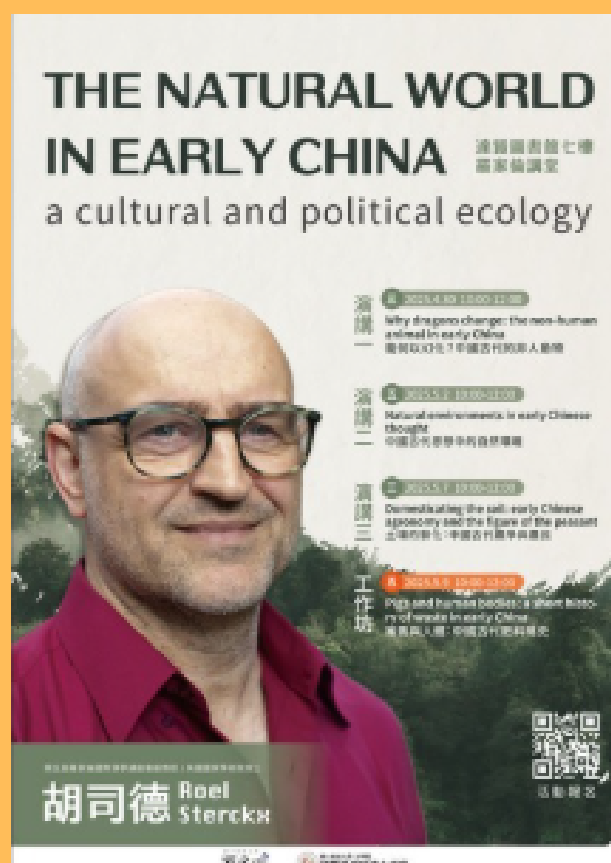


Looking ahead, she is giving a lecture based on her research on cultural and artistic transmission along the Southwest Silk Road to students attending a summer programme titled Central Eurasia: A Region of Connectivity organised by the Central Asia Forum, University of Cambridge and The School of History and Culture, Lanzhou University at Cambridge. Although the topic may initially seem distant or unrelated to the programme's focus on Central Eurasia, she aims to demonstrate how the regions of south and southwest China, often neglected in current scholarship, also played a vital role in the economic, artistic, cultural, and technological exchanges that occurred across regions and continents from early times.

In spring 2025, **Dr. Noga Ganany** gave three lectures on hagiographic writing and visibility in Ming book culture at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Manchester, and Princeton University. Her recent project on illustrated hagiographies of the Buddha, titled 'The 'Origins of Buddhism' (Shishi yuanliu) and Illustrated Hagiographic Narratives in Ming China,' is queued to be published in the next edition of Journal of Chinese Religions. In Lent and Easter Terms this year, Noga has continued organising the China Research Seminar and the Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond lecture series, sponsored by the Glorison Foundation. This June, she is also organising the annual Yin- Cheng Distinguished Lecture Series on Buddhism, sponsored by the Tzu Chi Charitable Foundation, hosting Professor John Kieschnick (Stanford University) as our distinguished lecturer of the year and Professor Roel Sterckx as our discussant.

Prof. Roel Sterckx was appointed to the Lo Chia-Luen International Sinology Chair 羅家倫 國際漢學講座教授; at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan; and delivered the 2025 Lo Chia-luen lectures on the theme of 'The Natural World in Early China: a cultural and political ecology.' (Poster below)

He lectured at National Taiwan University (above a photo with Dr. Yang FU, former PhD student and now Associate Professor in the department of history at NTU).





He delivered the 15th.Joseph Needham Memorial Public Lecture in Hong Kong, hosted by the Policy Research Centre for Innovation and Technology, Hong Kong Polytechnic University', title 'Those who are learned do not farm and farmers do not learn.'

It is bittersweet to share that **Dr. Xin Fan** will be leaving Cambridge after the summer to take up a professorship at the Institute of Humanities, ShanghaiTech University. Over the past three years, he has greatly enjoyed his time at Cambridge, especially the opportunities for teaching and research. In his words, the students and colleagues at AMES are truly exceptional—almost definitely the best in the world. With deep appreciation for his Cambridge experience, Dr. Fan looks forward to advancing international exchange and global education at this dynamic, emerging university in China.

He will continue publishing in English, collaborating with scholars around the world, and returning to Cambridge regularly.

He also hopes to welcome visits from Cambridge students and colleagues to Shanghai in the near future.

Professor Adam Chau presented a paper entitled 'Culinary Exophony: "Translating" Exotic Sounds Across Culino-linguistic Boundaries' at a workshop at the intersection of translation studies and food/drinks studies on 15-16 May, 2025, at the Université Bourgogne Europe in Dijon: Vin & Gastronomie: Pratiques traductives et terminologies. The workshop



featured an ‘obligatory’ wine dégustation where, beside tasting a variety of local wine, participants learned about climats and terroirs. Making use of the terroir concept, Professor Chau wrote an article a few years ago entitled ‘Ritual Terroir: The Generation of Site-Specific Vitality’. He has been trying to popularise his Chinese translation of terroir into 壤境, a Chinese neologism that he thinks is better than existing translations such as 風土 (‘ritual terroir’ is then 儀式壤境).

On 31 May–1 June, 2025, Professor Chau presented on ‘hosting and offering’ in the ‘Workshop on Food in Chinese Religion’ at the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies, Stanford University, organised by Professor John Kieschnick. The workshop was organised around clusters of keywords. Other clusters

‘pollution and disgust’, ‘purity and pleasure’, ‘health and medicine’, ‘identity and heritage’, ‘family and commensality’, ‘cooking and craft’ and ‘ethics and etiquette’.

This was the first time in many years that Professor Chau visited his postgraduate alma mater (where he received his PhD in anthropology in 2001) and he enjoyed a few moments of ‘walking down memory lane’ (a lot has changed on the Stanford campus and in downtown Palo Alto but not so much as beyond recognition). It just happened that Coldplay was

giving two nights of concert in the Stanford Stadium as part of their world tour; how would one translate viva la vida? 過把癮?! 活個夠?!

Dr. Zhang Ling conducted fieldwork in east China in February and March; she gave two lectures at the University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Polytechnic University in late March; and she gave three lectures at SOAS, Oxford and Durham University in May. She is working hard trying to wrap up her book, but at this moment she is most enthusiastically writing a chapter entitled 'Stony Lungs and the Rocky Stairway to Heaven.' As the title suggests, the chapter revolves around stone.

She has also proposed a new paper for our Part II and MPhil students, C14 Environmental History of China, which will start from the next academic year.

Finally... Just a note that **Dr. Kelsey Granger**, IASH-HCA Postdoctoral Fellow in Chinese History at the University of Edinburgh, and former alumnus of FAMES and editor of this very newsletter has appeared on the radio alongside Melvin Bragg discussing dragons!

Kelsey appeared alongside Daniel Ogden, Professor of Ancient History at the University of Exeter, and Juliette Wood, Associate Lecturer in the School of Welsh at the University of Wales for the BBC Radio 4 Programme In Our Time, which can be listened to on BBC iPlayer.

Below is a photo of Dr. Granger outside the BBC building.





THOMAS WADE SOCIETY UPDATES

We were delighted to welcome such a strong attendance at our London Social in May, reflecting a true breadth of professional backgrounds - from academia to education, the civil service to finance, and consultancy to public transport.

The evening began at Hong Kong Restaurant in Angel - an inspired recommendation from Rowena, a good friend of the Thomas Wade Society. As the name

suggests, Cantonese delicacies - such as dim sum, old-style pork and steamed fish - made up the bulk of our feast, balanced out by a smattering of fiery Sichuanese food - favourites included mapo tofu, gongbao chicken and stir-fried green beans - and washed down with icy Tsingtaos.

Following our meal, we somewhat begrudgingly set off on a short walk along Upper Street to our regular haunt, the Old China Hand. And while we may have lost a few members to the sweltering Islington heat en route, we were delighted to meet even more familiar faces at the pub, where we filled the cozy back room with spirited chatter and the occasional flurry of faculty gossip.

It was such a pleasure to catch up with everybody. Keep a look out for our next social event!

By Sarah Garton-Eisenacher



Photo of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy in Seda, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (August 2023)

FROM TEA ROOMS TO MONASTERIES: WRITING TIBETAN BUDDHISM IN URBAN CHINA

My name is Fuyuan Luo, and I am a PhD candidate in Chinese Studies. My research broadly explores how religious practices are transformed amidst rapid urban change, mobility, and cultural translation, with a special focus on how Han Chinese do Tibetan Buddhism in Chengdu, a major city in southwest China.

Chengdu, where I was born and raised, is not just famous for its pandas and hotpot. It has long served as a critical gateway to Tibetan regions through trade links, administrative governance,

and religious exchange since the Tang dynasty (618– 907). Today, Chengdu is home to many retired Tibetan officials and traveling lamas, and serves as a key connector to the Ganzi and Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures within Sichuan, and further onward

to the Tibetan Autonomous Region. It remains a crucial hub for Sino-Tibetan interactions.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork took place across Chengdu and Ganzi and Aba Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures within Sichuan between 2019 and 2023. I spent time in monasteries, lay communal gatherings, Buddhist academies, and, crucially, in the homes of Han Chinese practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism. Much of my fieldwork involved following the everyday rhythms of Han Chinese followers and their Tibetan Buddhist masters: sitting through long tea-drinking sessions where stories of miraculous dreams were exchanged; traveling with lamas to monasteries still under construction; reading sutras in Tibetan-style cafés tucked inside residential blocks in Chengdu; and attending Dharma gatherings where offerings are made and initiations are granted.

I was very fortunate to be invited by one of the Han Chinese followers to a tea ceremony with the Panchen Lama's mother, where miraculous stories of the Panchen Lama circulated alongside his mother's charity work. I came to form a long-lasting friendship with graduates of a Buddhist Academy in Dege, Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. One such graduate not only welcomed me as a researcher, but also as a friend who could help introduce him to majorly Han Chinese populated cities as he reached out to take Mandarin classes in Chengdu.

I also became like a daughter of many Han Chinese practitioners, mostly middle-aged women from well-to-do families, who warmly welcomed me to their homes, served me tea, shared meals, and opened their hearts to me.

Writing Up

As often happens, my original chapter plan didn't survive the field. Some questions I had hoped to explore proved inaccessible; others emerged organically from unexpected encounters. Writing up was therefore not simply a matter of transcription or synthesis, but of working through these emergent patterns and moments of surprise. Many times, the emergent patterns were full of contradictions. For example, how do Han Chinese disciples reconcile a language of equality with religious practices of hierarchy between masters and disciples, and the broader social dynamics between Han Chinese and Tibetans? How do Han Chinese followers navigate the tension between spiritual authenticity and material affluence? How does Tibetan Buddhism, often regarded as exotic and esoteric, travel to urban homes, as it is steeped in expensive tea, shared at dinner tables, and brought up in conversations about real estate plans for monastery construction?

After two years of writing up, I've now submitted my thesis and am waiting for the viva. Strangely, I feel both relief and an even greater sense of urgency. Relieved that I've produced a work that captures four years of learning. Urgent as

there's so much that didn't make it into the thesis—fieldnotes I still return to, stories I feel compelled to tell.

What Comes Next?

For now, I'm taking a breather and spending some time playing tennis in Belgrade, Serbia, home of the famous tennis player Novak Djokovic. But I'm also starting to sketch out future projects from the rich encounters, unresolved questions, and conversations that didn't make it into the thesis.

One thread I'm exploring is the intersection of renewable energy and religious imaginaries in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, where hydro, wind, and solar energy projects are expanding rapidly. In my thesis, I've explored the indigenous Tibetan concept of bla (soul/spirit), which Han Chinese practitioners often describe as a lama's 'energy' (nengliang) or 'magnetic field' (cichang) to capture the religious master's vitality and charisma. In the future, I hope to see how ideas of 'renewable energy' are entangled with class, kinship, infrastructure, political power, and most importantly, religion. What intrigues me is how these two registers of energy—the metaphysical and the infrastructural—might intersect. This line of inquiry continues my interest in how religious personnel, ideas, and practices travel across social, linguistic, and infrastructural terrains.

As I look back, I'm reminded that research often begins with questions, but ends with people—those who hosted me, taught me, and made space for me in their lives. I remain deeply grateful to them, and to the broader Chinese Studies community here in Cambridge, for providing the intellectual and personal support to carry this journey through.

By Fuyuan Luo



THE MOTORCYCLE DIARIES - ON PENGHU ISLANDS

The blue light flickered once again. Surely not – didn't we just install a new battery? Yes we did, certainly! Only twenty minutes or so again – and the battery shows full power! But the wheels started to slow, the blue light grew dimmer, there was no escaping the fact, our battery had run out again – right in the middle of the 'Great bridge' (ha!) connecting the outer islands of Penghu.



Perhaps Aayushi and I were overloading the bike, after all, we had been eating as if we had spent months in the desert (the British culinary scene) and finally arrived at paradise (the Taiwanese culinary scene).

Luckily, Ilay was riding right behind us – much lighter from all of his jogging and abstemious living, and could nip to pick us up another battery.

We had both been very grateful beneficiaries of departmental Chuan Lyu funding, which allowed us to take this trip to Taiwan in the gorgeous Spring weather for some field libraries. The Chuan Lyu funding is that most special form of funding, with very few strings

attached, allowing you to freely explore and study with only a rough itinerary and justification required. Free research in this form, in my experience, always produces the most fruitful results.

I was supposed to bury myself in the many well-stocked libraries, and Ilay was gathering data in the field. But when he said he would take a trip to the Penghu Islands – how could I resist joining him?





Ilay was busy on Penghu, charming the mayor, drinking fish-infused alcohol (curiosity overcame me and I took a sip, breaking my vegetarian fast – disgusting!), and dotting about between temples asking to see their archives with great success.

When we returned to the mainland we made our way to the great Mazu Pilgrimage, where Aayushi developed an obsession with all things Mazu. She wanted to get a tattoo of Mazu, but we asked her icon in the temple and she laughed at the suggestion (it was unclear whether this was in support or against – better not to take risks).

I shouldn't brag too much about our holidays because it will sound as if I was there for holiday rather than research... but let's just say that in amongst the long hours in the library we did find a little time to make our way up to the mountains and a couple of long weekends to loop the island with my brother who visited us from Malaysia and with my friend Oliver who was also visiting for concentrated and diligent research.

It was hot and breezy and liminal, we returned to Cambridge having had a complete reset, and ready to write once again. As a photographer, Aayushi was delighted by the riot of colour and sound, and I am now being pestered to find other grants I can apply to that will take us on similar trips! Any recommendations?

Ilay and I can't express enough how grateful we are for the support of the Chuan Lyu foundation and for our department's help in allowing us to take this trip, we would exhort any of our colleagues to take the opportunity to visit if they want some peace and quiet to get down to writing, or to peruse the copious libraries, museums and teahouses.

By John Donegan-Cross



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

ALUMNI

THOMAS WADE SOCIETY

The **Thomas Wade Society** was founded in 2009 as the University of Cambridge Chinese Studies Alumni Society. Until 2016 the society was dormant, when the Class of 2016 decided to rebuild the society into something new that could bring faculty members, alumni and friends of the faculty together.

If you would **like to join** the TWS network, please join the society's social media groups on **Facebook**. If you have any questions, would like to find out more or even help out, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the committee at **thewadesociety@gmail.com**



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY

CHINA FORUM

劍橋大學中國論壇



Founded by former second-year students, the Cambridge University China Forum (CUCF) hosts a range of **exciting events** relating to China. **To find out more, please** join their Facebook page **@camchina**, or visit their website **www.camchina.org** to join their mailing list.

Looking to join our seminar series mailing lists? Please email **ng462@cam.ac.uk** (Dr. Noga Ganany) to be added to the China Research Seminar series mailing list.



maa
museum of
and archaeology
digital
laboratory anthropo

The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology have recently launched a new project, the MAA Digital Lab which is now live at <https://maadigitallab.org/>

Over the coming years the Digital Lab platform will be a space that gathers stories, research and reflection from across the Museum and beyond, and produces and commissions new content from diverse voices that take objects in the collections as a starting point for asking new questions and brings new insights.

In our first few posts, we're unravelling stories of the tea trade and tea consumption in [Russia](#) and [China](#), the [archaeology of maize alcohol in South America](#), and [a Chinese deity's 180 year and 9000 kilometre journey](#) through wars, museums, and mistaken identities.

We are looking for people interested in contributing research based on collections of East Asian archaeological and anthropological objects at MAA. If you are interested, or know someone who might be interested, then please contact **Aayushi Gupta** at ag2151@cam.ac.uk to discuss your ideas.



Daniel Crouch Rare Books (4 Bury Street, St James's, London SW1Y 6AB) is a specialist dealer in antique atlases, maps, plans, sea charts and voyages dating from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Please scan the QR code to access our WeChat account where we post articles on our pieces in Chinese, or contact **Miss Qi Sun** at qi@crouchrarebooks.com

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