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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another issue of the Newsletter! Last time I wrote, I would have been complaining bitterly about the cold. Cambridge now finds itself in the middle of a heatwave which, if nothing else, provides slightly more scenic views from the windows…

This is something of a bumper issue, which is a testament to the great variety of activities organised by the Faculty. In the past six months or so we have seen Spring Festival celebrations, conferences, and, of course, all manner of guest lectures. I never cease to be amazed by the wide range of disciplines and topics brought together under the Chinese Studies umbrella (or perhaps 'parasol', given the current weather?). This has always seemed to me one of the most appealing parts of being in FAMES. Equally impressive is the dedication of the staff and students who make all these activities happen – without them this Newsletter would have far less to record!

We now head into the summer, whether that means relaxing on holiday or finding time for work that had to wait during termtime. Although it seems far away right now, I look forward to sharing what the coming academic year brings and seeing old and new faces in the next issue.

Thanks, as always, to the staff, students, and alumni who took the time to contribute to this issue. I am especially grateful to John Everard for his delightful recollections of Chinese Studies in the '70s, Natcher for suggesting that we include regular MPhil updates (and then being so good as to write the first one!) and Yutong for her invaluable help with keeping records of the seminar series held in the Faculty. I hope everyone enjoys this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together.

Shannon Gilbert

If you have anything you would like included in the next issue, please email: skg42@cam.ac.uk



John Everard, who matriculated at Cambridge in 1976, went on to work as a diplomat, researcher, and media commentator. He has kindly agreed to share some of his recollections of his time studying Chinese at Cambridge.

JOHN EVERARD: MEMORIES OF CHINESE STUDIES AT CAMBRIDGE

Today, when Chinese is widely studied and so many people visit China, it is hard to remember how different China was half a century ago in 1976 when I started to learn Chinese. China then was not a world power but a closed, secretive society – in many ways closer to today's North Korea than to today's China. Only a few diplomats and journalists, and very occasionally businessmen, ever went there from the UK. Tourism in China was all but unheard of, and hardly any non-Chinese spoke the language. The Cultural Revolution had only recently finished and the Gang of Four were still firmly in charge. Deng Xiaoping, and his reforms and opening, were to come only some years later.

So when I started at what was then the Faculty of Oriental Studies in Cambridge Chinese was an off-beat subject studied by small numbers of off-beat people. There were about a dozen in our class, who had decided to learn Chinese with motivations that varied from simple curiosity to a shrewd assessment that this could be the language of the future. I think we were bound together by the strangeness of what we were doing. We all got on well both with each other, and with the others in the faculty pursuing (at that time) equally off-beat studies such as Mongolian (the Mongolian language course seemed to focus heavily on the ailments of yaks) and Egyptology. The Oriental faculty in those days felt like a kind of haven for free-thinkers and rebels.

Many of our teachers were equally off-beat. Much of our course rightly focussed on learning the spoken language, which was a new and strange idea – who was ever going to need actually to speak Chinese? – promoted largely by eccentrics. Indeed, at the time only a couple of UK universities offered modern Chinese courses. The guiding light in our course was the manic Wing Commander **Bob Sloss**, who had together with the (much less manic) **Richard Wang** (a refugee from the Cultural Revolution) created the modern Chinese course that we followed. The course materials had

all the hall marks of improvisation – hardly any commercial text books but lots of spiral-bound bundles of photocopied lessons with the characters carefully hand-written, supplemented by endless hours in the language laboratory listening to texts (on reels of tape) recorded by our teachers themselves, with Richard Wang supervising us to correct errors of pronunciation and to gently encourage us to pay some kind of attention to the four tones. (Bob Sloss told us that his own early attempts to learn spoken Chinese in the RAF had been complicated by a fault on a similar tape recorder. The playback had been set too fast so that he had learned Chinese as a high-speed stream of gibberish before realising the mistake.) We were also taught by **Dr Richard King**, who had studied in China during the Cultural Revolution and communicated to us his fascination with what he had seen. In 1976 it was still possible to regard the Cultural Revolution as an heroic example of top-led profound social and political change. It was only later that the horrors of what had happened became apparent. (Dr King later moved to the University of Victoria in Canada, where he became an expert in Cultural Revolution literature).

We were also taught the rudiments of classical Chinese and spent hours wrestling with sections of Mencius (taught by the eminently respectable **Dr Michael Loewe**) and Han Feizi (taught by the slightly wilder **Dr Tim Barrett**, who in between his studies of classical Chinese led his rock band "T-bone Barrett and the Yellow Peril"). In the 1970s, bizarrely, it was difficult to find reliable classical Chinese – English dictionaries and most of us used a scholarly tome by the Swedish scholar Karlgren, who had tracked the use of characters from seal characters upwards, accompanied by a separate look-up prepared by an Israeli student many years before. Looking up words was a slow process – electronic dictionaries had not even been thought of. After long hours in the faculty I think we all spent even more hours with stacks of vocabulary cards on our desks, sifting through them, shuffling them and trying to memorise the new words that we had learned. From the outset we had to learn both full and simplified characters. It was an uphill struggle!

Altogether to study Chinese in Cambridge in the 1970s was a unique experience. It was new, strange and challenging. When I used to tell fellow students in other faculties that I was studying Chinese many thought that I was joking. And it was a unique moment in time. Had I gone up to Cambridge ten years earlier to study Chinese I should have learned only the classical language. Had I gone up ten years later the study of modern Chinese would have been almost mainstream as the world woke up to the implications of Deng Xiaoping's reforms and to China's opening. But in the 1970s there was a sense that this was new, exciting and so very different from the Cambridge mainstream. Studying Chinese at Cambridge at that time was one of the best decisions of my life. And although it was very hard work, it was fun.

CHINA RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES UPDATES

The series for Lent term started with a presentation from **Prof. Sébastien Billioud (**Université Paris Cité) on Yiguandao, a syncretic millenarian Redemption Society whose roots go back to the Republican era. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Hong Kong, where Yiguandao occupies a legal grey area, the presentation focused on the factors driving the movement's rapid expansion. First among these is the confirmation of believers' faith by converting others and divine intervention, embodied by practices like spirit-writing 開沙. Second, group dynamics centred on charismatic leadership are incorporated into a worldview in which "the extraordinary becomes routine". Yiguandao leaders can even exercise *more* charisma after death through the perception that their leadership continues from the world beyond.

Prof. Billioud's interest in modern transformations of Confucianism linked to the third element he analysed: Yiguandao's use of Confucianism to defuse tension with authorities, particularly on the mainland. Promoting values such as education and filial piety allowed some activities (e.g. the publication of a commentary on the *Bai Xiao Jing* that had been attributed to an Yiguandao leader via spirit writing) to go on with less interference. Finally, the religion's sophisticated organisational structure contributes to its growth. The large scale and statistically-driven nature of the organisation – a "McKinsey in the Buddha hall" – also allowed for quasi-diplomatic efforts to navigate cross-strait politics. The lecture concluded with a discussion of the relationship between Yiguandao's practical, 'corporate-like' management and supernatural beliefs and the role of doubt in the lives of believers.

The series continued with a lecture from FAMES' own **Prof. Roel Sterckx** entitled "Disputers of the Plough: Reflections on Political Agrarianism in Early China". Prof. Sterckx introduced his recently-completed book on agriculture as a domain of knowledge with political salience in early China. "Agrosophic" language abounds in Early Chinese philosophy, from Mengzi's sprouts of goodness to the metaphors of levees in discussions of human desire. Indeed, agricultural cultivation was often cast as synonymous with civilisation itself: the good ruler is like a herdsman or shepherd; farming tools are weapons of conquest in cultivating wastelands; the quality of soil is analogous to the character of human subjects.

Discussion then turned to the titular plough, which archaeological evidence suggests was not widely used by agricultural workers even up to the Han dynasty, but which



Han mural, Sichuan

was nevertheless a powerful symbol of civilisation. Prof. Sterckx illuminated a key conundrum facing Confucian thinkers: despite the promotion of agricultural order, the *junzi* 君子 does not work the fields but strives for an official position; he must 'plough' with the heart-mind rather than by tilling the soil. Simultaneously, the language of *tuigeng* 退耕 (abandoning court and returning to the fields) and tales of people rejecting technological innovation in favour of simpler forms of agriculture could constitute a tacit critique of the agro-managerial state. Whatever the nature of the virtuous gentleman's ploughing, this discourse gives rise to a situation in which "the Sage was a farmer and the farmer was a Sage." A lively Q&A followed, touching on the gendered implications of these discourses, and comparing farmers and gardeners as state subjects, and mountains and fields as bounded geographical features.

The following week, we were joined by **Dr. Valentina Yang** (KU Leuven), speaking on Chinese Christian morality books of the 17th century. Her talk demonstrated how Christian *shanshu* morality books illuminate ritual rivalries and internal conflicts, and reflected how cultural contact between China and Europe can be understood in light of such sources. The extracts presented during the lecture depicted the greater efficacy of Christian religious objects and practices in exorcism (triumphing over the failed exorcistic attempts by other religious specialists), and the negotiations Chinese converts made with established ritual practices and belief systems, such as those concerning filial piety.

These texts reveal a dynamic "intercultural" space that can be observed in their content, format, and materiality. Christian *shanshu* drew on both Chinese and European accounts, anthologising them in the same volumes. The *shanshu* form was already widespread in 17th century Chinese society, and and Christian morality accounts conformed to established textual arrangements, most notably organisation into moral categories ('investigating principles', 'devotion to the Holy Cross', etc.). As intercultural objects circulating between China and Europe *shanshu* offer an opportunity to consider self/other encounters between, for instance, missionaries and converts, or Chinese converts and their wider community, and to interrogate the shifting boundaries between Chineseness and Christianity in the 17th century. Questions asked after the talk expanded on the conceptual hybridity inherent in the texts' invocations of technique and questioned whether the intercultural framing remains an example of an East-West model.

The next talk in the series took us to the early Ming dynasty as **Dr. Henning von Mirbach** from the History of Art Faculty discussed how visual sources reflected connoisseurship and ecological awareness in the field of tea culture. Tea drinking underwent a transformation between the Song and Ming dynasties that influenced how tea was drunk and served: increasingly in loose-leaf, rather than brick, form. Water quality, which had been ranked and compared since the Tang period, took on a renewed importance coinciding with artistic depictions

of springs that provided water for tea preparation. Dr. von Mirbach discussed artworks in which Mt. Hui, said to be the second-best source of water for brewing tea, provides a backdrop for elegant gatherings. While such paintings have been assessed in terms of how they depict literati values of connoisseurship, friendship, and tea culture, Dr. von Mirbach, drawing on Bruno Latour, adopted an eco-art history and environmental humanities approach, viewing the spring and its water as agents that compel exertion and bodily practice and condition physical and emotional responses.

Crucially, aesthetic cultivation negotiates with a consciousness, even anxiety, regarding limited resources and availability of prized spring water. Practices such as carrying away water from Mt. Hui to be given as gifts, and resulting concerns over authenticity and preservation of the water's special qualities, could be remedied only by travelling to Mt. Hui in person and obtaining water from the source. While the paintings' content focuses on the sociality and culture of tea, by reading against the surface of the paintings, we become conscious not only of how human beings act upon the spring but of its capacity to act on them - an approach that may also be applicable to other natural resources that exercised similar kinds of power. The audience discussion following the talk continued the focus on ecology, raising issues of the continuum between 'wilderness' and 'cultivation', and the resourcification of spring water. Literati sociality was not a neglected topic either, with the audience asking about the role of ritual in tea culture.



Detail from Huishan Chahui Tu

The gloom of Week Five was dispersed with a discussion on rainbows in premodern China from **Dr. Oliver Hargrave** of the Needham Research Institute. A theme dating back to the appearance of a rainbow-like graph in oracle bone texts is the rainbow as an ominous omen that, in the manner of other unusual heavenly phenomena, indicated something amiss in the natural and moral order. Explanations linking the appearance of rainbows to licentiousness appear especially prominent, inviting consideration of how they were understood in line with yin-yang principles. However, the meaning of rainbows did not remain static: other texts associated the baleful rainbow with warefare.

At the same time, 'scientific' explanations of rainbows' relation to light and water can be found as early as the Song dynasty. These

existed alongside and were not clearly distinguished from those describing rainbows as living creatures; indeed, in one account Zhu Xi concludes that rainbows must have a physical form as well as *qi* since they are known to drink water. The association of water with rainbows is expressed not only in the terms we understand today but also by accounts in which they descend to sip from wells, accept offerings of alcohol or, in one account, drink up a hapless man's morning congee. The importance of binomes in organising knowledge is evident in descriptions of rainbows as sexually dimorphic, in which the 虹 *hong* rainbow is male and the 霓 *ni* rainbow female. This resembles similar male-female pairs, such as *fenghuang* and *qilin*. The rainbow becomes a phenomenon in which the importance of premodern Chinese linguistic and cosmological assumptions are demonstrated. Audience questions took up the rainbow's animal qualities with questions about its similarity to another creature associated with rain, the dragon, and continued into discussions of the phenomena included in the categories *hong* and *ni* that are not covered by the translation 'rainbow,' such as the solar nimbus or other unusual lights.

The series continued with **Prof. Charles Sanft** (University of Tennessee, Knoxville) and his presentation "Land of Marvels: Twenty Poems About Dunhuang". This anonymous poetic sequence from the 9th century concerns the area surrounding Dunhuang, at the time considered a marginal and inhospitable place. Yet unlike his contemporaries, the poet describes the region in overwhelmingly positive terms. Prof. Sanft compared the attitude of the poet to W.H. Auden's topophilia, for their close and appreciative view of otherwise unloved places and the poems' interest in the history that suffuses them. Although Dunhuang itself is named only twice, the poems deal extensively with the surrounding region, particularly the Sanwei



Oracle bone script glyph possibly indicating a rainbow.

Mountains, and their geography, history, and associated legends. By translating and analysing the poems, the presentation argued that rather than a comprehensive picture of the region, the poems communicate the poet's interior state and feelings towards this "land of marvels". Central to this impression of the poet is the passage of time through the sequence of twenty poems, whose order has been consistent in across the copies of the twenty-poem cycle that have been found.

The twenty poems begin with the complaints of an unhappy arrival, in which rain-darkened gullies make "one's heart hurt". Yet by the last poem, the speaker declares that the magnificent views cause one to "forget fatigue". Along the way, he ruminates on local histories and landmarks, such as apparent accounts of human sacrifice and a well-known Zoroastrian temple. Invocations of historical figures resonate with the poet's inner life. References to Li

Hao become an opportunity for reflection in the vein of *sic transit gloria mundi*, while a possible reference to Qu Yuan recall another famous exile and, perhaps, the poet making peace with his displacement. The range of material in the poem provided ample scope for further discussions ranging from the possible domestication implicit in the apparent celebration of Dunhuang, questions about their audience, and reading the poems as a precedent for collections celebrating specific locations in gazettes later in Chinese history.

The next week saw another presentation from a scholar at the Needham Research Institute, **Dr. Xu Chun**, giving his lecture "Assembling a New Cadastral Regime in Song China 1015-1149". At the start of this period, the Song state was facing an "administrative paradox", having experienced rapid commercialisation, seen the emergence of an increasingly entrepreneurial court, and facing difficulties with land management. The land obligations (including taxation) required for governance relied on registers that recorded land indirectly and located it inexactly. The question of how the state rendered land legible took us through an explanation of title- and deed-based systems of land recording, to understand how the early Song gradually began to construct a title-based system. This transition required technical adjustments: unique geocoding, information retrieval, innovations in mapping, and the conduction of boundary surveys. Also essential were the social processes of developing professions that could undertake these projects and building sufficient trust in them.

The creation of the Southern Song 'fish-scale cadasters' were not the product of a single cadastral reform but resulted from the convergence of several techniques: the fiscal management of land reverting to the state in the absence of heirs, the square-field system that anchored land measurement in a marked grid, geocoding systems adapted from Buddhist scriptoria, and topographic mapping. This process reveals how administrative innovation was assembled and improvised, rather than designed, and how state-building took place through conversation, however contentious, more than direct command. Questions after the presentation drew wide-ranging comparisons from early Chinese records to the practices in the People's Republic, and touched on the processes by which cartographic literacy spread, as well as the state's response to changes in land formation.

The final talk in the series took us to Shanghai in the mid-1930s. Drawing on material from his forthcoming book, *Shanghai's Shadow Waltz*, **Dr. Paul Bevan** (SOAS) introduced the now-forgotten song 'Butterfly Wu,' produced to celebrate the marriage of the titular film star. Produced with both English and Chinese lyrics, the people engaged in its production reflect the cosmopolitan nature of the Shanghai entertainment scene. The song's muse, Butterfly Wu, was crowned China's 'Queen of Film' shortly before the composition of the song, and gained international recognition after an overseas tour. Charles 'Churck' Thode, credited as the writer of the English 'Butterfly Wu' and the popular song 'The Girl

of My Dreams', worked in the popular Paramount Ballroom alongside the Russian band leader Serge Ernoll. Involved in the Chinese version of the song were An E, today remembered primarily as a revolutionary but also a poet and writer of popular songs, and the singer Li Lilian.

Dr. Bevan posed two central questions which, he warned the audience, have no definitive answers as of yet: who wrote 'Butterfly Wu' and why did Thode consistently claim that he wrote 'The Girl of My Dreams'? Resemblance between the two is significant in light of the fact that the latter was in fact written by Sunny Clapp, though Thode would claim Clapp was a stage name of his. This was placed in the context of some of Thode's other outlandish statements (though surprisingly there may be a grain of truth to his claim to be distantly related to Wagner and Lizst!). Whatever the truth may be, Butterfly Wu' remains a fascinating artifact of this time, illustrating how performers and composers gathered in Shanghai from across the world, and showing the circulation of popular culture between film, music, and spaces like dance halls. After the presentation, Dr. Bevan took questions on music notation and the influence of radio in spreading popular music.

This ends the China Research Seminar series for the year, but next Michaelmas we look forward to hearing about topics ranging from the work of Qian Zhongshu to hot springs in imperial China to the colonial governor of 1920s Hong Kong. We warmly invite anyone who is interested to join us in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Details can be found on the Events page of the Faculty's website: https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/events



Dr. Bevan prepares to introduce Chuck Thode, writer of 'Butterfly Wu' and 'The Girl of My Dreams' (or is he?)



Prof. Daniela Campo begins her lecture on teaching and preaching in modern Buddhism

BOOK CULTURE IN BUDDHISM AND BEYOND UPDATES

We had to wait until the final week of Lent to resume the Book Culture lecture series, generously supported by the Glorisun Global Network. First, we were fortunate to hear from **Prof. Stephen "Buzzy" Teiser** (Princeton) about what we can learn about Buddhist ritual performance from the physical form of liturgical texts. His lecture on how liturgies related to healing were used and performed emphasised the sources' modular elements, which were standardised, differentiated, and most importantly substitutable. In a given ritual, certain stages would remain the same, whilst parts referring to the patient or purpose of the ritual could be adjusted. The creation of a template applicable across religious contexts that differed slightly indicates how these texts functioned partly as guides to performance.

Evidence was drawn from the texts' material qualities; certain formats would be easier or more difficult to use for performance. Naturally, texts which were small in size, or whose binding methods made them easy to access and store were the most suited to situations where guidance or improvisation might be required. Punctuation marks, performance notes indicating repetition, rubrication or indentation to separate different stages of a ritual, and notes stating the scope of use also had a role to play in conveying performance information. Ultimately, the liturgist emerges as a figure who needed a wide array of skills in addition to literary ability and understanding of Buddhism. The material evidence suggests that he also required spoken linguistic competence, performance skills, and sensitivity to the social and emotional contexts in which he was acting. After the presentation, the audience inquired further about the medical nature of the texts and the degree of medical awareness its performers might (or might not!) have possessed, and the purpose of decorative elements on some of the texts.

After the holidays, we resumed with **Prof. Daniela Campo** (INALCO)

sharing new research she is conducting in a lecture titled “Forms of Teaching and Preaching in Modern Chinese Buddhism: Research Questions and Directions”. The presentation laid out the project’s significance, as teaching and preaching remain underexplored in modern Buddhism studies, and offers a means of exploring evolutions in modern Chinese Buddhism through methods of transmission and social engagement. Drawing on a wide range of sources from 19th and 20th century China, ranging from speeches, lectures, ritual materials, dialogues, and words spoken at ordinations, Prof. Campo aims to identify and classify various forms of teaching and preaching, research their production and dissemination (especially given the technological transformations that occurred during this time), and analyse the evolution of the language in which these oral forms were delivered.

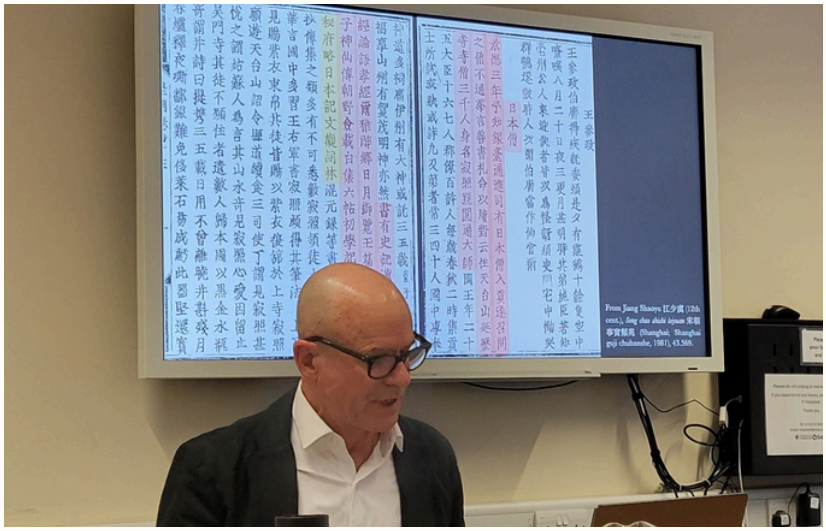
The lecture compared *fayu* dharma talks, which had a stronger ritual character and were delivered in more elevated classical language, with *kaishi* sermons on Buddhist practice, which were more varied in practice and delivered in vernacular language to an audience which from the 1920s included laypeople. Prof. Campo hypothesised that the rising popularity of *kaishi* may suggest that the Republican period saw less ritual and simpler forms of teaching and preaching due to a diversification of audiences and venues, connected to a rising engagement of laypeople, and speculated that this may indicate a shift in religious discourse and norms, the wider implications of which may provide topics for further study. She highlighted three significant changes in content over this period: the use of autobiographical information in Buddhist pedagogy, rituals linked to the nation-state (both Republican China and the occupying Japanese), and an emphasis on self-cultivation. We eagerly await the results of Prof. Campo’s further research, but in the meantime the audience discussed the pedagogical and salvific purposes of teaching and preaching, the relationship between linguistic simplification and changes to content and imagery, and how material recorded from oral performances compare with non-oral written materials.

The following week we heard from **Prof. James Robson**, James C. Kralik and Yunli Lou Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University and Director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute. The talk focused on a manuscript from Kōyasan, Japan, which includes two handwritten texts on the frontside and the backside. The front contains a 9th century manuscript of the *Wenguan cilin* 文館詞林 [Grove of Texts from the Literature Office], a compilation from the Han up through the early Tang period that later became obscure in China. The back contains a Buddhist text, Senkan’s 千観 (918–983) *Hokke-sanshū-sōtaishō* 法華三宗相対抄 [Extracts on the Comparison [of Interpretations] of the Lotus Sutra by the Three Schools], a valuable work for the study of Tiantai (Tendai) Buddhism, as well as Hossō and Sanron.

Prof. Robson began with an overview of the structure of texts in the *Wenguan cilin*, noting that this Japanese manuscript preserves texts absent from other

major collections in China. Using the example of amnesty 敕 texts, he demonstrated how such texts can help reconstruct the political and religious dimensions of amnesty practices. He further linked the *Wenguan cilin*'s popularity and preservation in Japanese monasteries to periods marked by an uptake of amnesties in Japan. He then turned to reverse side, the *Hokke-sanshū-sōtaishō* manuscript, which is distinctive in that it includes a rich body of quotations from Tiantai Buddhist texts which no longer survive in China, including the Tang dynasty *Fahua jing xuanzan yaoji* 法華經玄贊要集 by Qifu 栖復. The manuscript thus offers valuable material for studying Chinese Buddhist thinkers and traditions influential in Japan but which became obsolete in China. One of the central questions raised in the lecture concerns whether there is any relationship between the two texts preserved back-to-back in this manuscript. Although Prof. Robson acknowledged that no definitive answer can yet be given, the manuscript nevertheless sheds light on the flow of people and texts between China and Japan from the eighth to the tenth centuries, including texts that were subsequently lost in China.

Next, a lecture on the life of Gao Henian 高鶴年 (1872-1962) was brought by **Prof. Benjamin Brose**, Professor of Buddhist and Chinese Studies at the University of Michigan. Prof. Brose started by introducing Gao as a lay practitioner active at the center of the changing Buddhist world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was renowned for spending almost thirty years on pilgrimages to Buddhist and Daoist mountains across China, conversing with monks in hermitage, and documenting his experiences on the road, which were then compiled into *Mingshan youfang ji* 名山遊訪記 [A Record of Visits to Famous Mountains].



Textual analysis in Prof. Robson's lecture

The lecture focused particularly on Gao's travels to the Zhongnan Mountains near Xi'an, into which he made his first foray in 1903, and subsequently spent years in hermitage. Prof. Brose started with an overview of the mountain range's geography and history as a hub for Buddhist hermitage in medieval China. While fewer records exist of hermitic activities since the tenth century, monks began returning to the region from 1870s onward, many of whom later became leading figures in the Buddhist revival in Republican China.

Prof. Brose reconstructed the daily life of Gao and other hermits, and examined how they secured water, food, and other necessities. He explored the ways in which they lived in relative isolation while maintaining social ties, highlighting

highlighting how Gao participated in meditation retreats, organized vegetarian feasts, and dealt with illness with the help of other hermits. His narration then zoomed out in scale to describe the long-term changes of the mountains' ecosystem. He noted that the exhaustion of natural resources by the 19th century ironically made Zhongnan ideal for hermitage. The lecture also traced how Gao was invited to Zhongnan by renowned monk Faren Benxin 法忍本心, who had left the mountains before Gao's first arrival. After ending his travels in 1922, Gao devoted himself to humanitarian relief amid wars and natural disasters. Following the Communist Revolution, he spent his final years in a hermitage in Suzhou. After the lecture, the Q&A addressed topics including Gao's relationship to the *youji* travel-writing tradition, his publication networks and funding sources, self-fashioning in his writing, and the tension between isolation and sociability in hermit life.

As Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond comes to an end for another year, we look forward to next year's forthcoming talks. Two talks in the series are currently scheduled to be held next Michaelmas, with topics to be announced later. Further information will be available from the events page of the Faculty's website nearer the time: https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/events

We hope that anyone with an interest in the series will be able to join us in the new academic year!

Prof. Brose leands us on an expedition into the Zhongnan Mountains



THE CHUAN LYU ANNUAL LECTURE SERIES: TAIWAN'S LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES



Early Easter Term saw this year's instalment in the Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies, an annual lecture series that began over three decades ago and continues today thanks to the generous funding of the Chuan Lyu Foundation. This year we were honoured to hear from **Prof. Henning Klöter**, Professor of Modern Chinese Languages and Literatures at the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Prof. Klöter gave two lectureson topics related to Taiwan's languages and sociolinguistic environment. The talks were among some of the best-attended of the year; all levels of the Faculty from first-year undergraduates to professors were represented, alongside audience members from outside FAMES, which contributed to a lively atmosphere and gave a variety of angles of approach in the formal Q&A and the informal discussions that continued after the lectures concluded for refreshments.

In the first lecture, "The Making of a Language in Colonial Taiwan: Between Linguistics and Ideology", Prof. Klöter set the stage by asking a thorny question: is "Taiwanese" a language? This is a question that remains up for debate in part because of how Minnan (Southern Min) Sinitic varieties are widely geographically dispersed and demonstrate both considerable variation alongside a high level of mutual intelligibility across these varieties. However, the question of Minnan's linguistic status is made more challenging due to the historical and ideological issues at stake when making decisions about whether it is to be considered a language or a group of related dialects.

This issue is not one that can be settled on purely linguistic grounds. Even the name by which this language or group of dialects should be referred is a loaded issue without any straightforwardly satisfactory resolution. Names such as "Hokkien", "Hoklo", "Minnan", "Taiwanese (Taiyu)", or "Tai-oan-oe" all carry distinct implications relating to social, ethnic, and national identity. As

Prof. Klöter argues, these designations have more to do with ideas about linguistic identity than internal linguistic realities. The perception of a Taiwanese language relates to two diglossic situations, emerging with the colonial language policies during the period of occupation by Japan and continuing with the promotion of Mandarin Chinese after 1949.

The presentation focused particularly on the former, showing how Taiwanese intellectuals worked to articulate and promote the notion of a distinctly Taiwanese language. Rather than a Taiwanese language existing in a strictly linguistic sense, it was argued that its existence lies in others' perceptions. This applies not only to speakers who consider themselves to be speaking a Taiwanese language but also to colonial administrators who coined the term "Taiwanese" (*Taiwan-go* or *Taiwanhua*) and who trained functionaries and police in basic forms of the language for pragmatic purposes. Seeing how the notion of "Taiwanhua" gained currency among Taiwanese intellectuals from the late 1920s, Prof. Klöter's findings call attention to the central role of language ideology in the making of 'languages' and 'dialects'. The audience discussion explored these topics further with questions about interactions between the langauges used on Taiwan during the colonial period, from how *kanbun* instruction might have shaped students' understanding of 'Chinese' tradition to the linguistic effects of Japanese borrowing.

Two days later, the second Chuan Lyu lecture, "Linguistic Landscapes of Taiwan: Between Polyglossia and Playfulness" turned our attention to the rather more light-hearted topic of the visible and audible interactions between languages in Taiwan's diverse 'linguistic landscape'. After decades of promotion of Mandarin as the sole national language by the Nationalist government, the late 1980s saw new language policies that afforded more support to local languages and English, alongside continued support for Mandarin. These policies are not only evident in official and educational contexts, but can be heard on Taiwan's streets and airwaves, and seen on its billboards and adverts.



Taiwanese polyglossia in action

Drawing on existing scholarship on “linguistic landscapes” and “invisible languages”, Prof. Klöter considered how social, political, and ideological processes contribute to or detract from the relative visibility of different languages in Taiwan’s linguistic space. A difference between official and unofficial or semi-official linguistic landscapes emerged; street signs were used as an example of the former, with their regulation of names chosen and use of Latin letters to specify pronunciation. Although street signs are generally rendered as Mandarin transliterations of the characters used, occasional exceptions exist, for instance when a street named for a person uses the non-Mandarin name by which they are most commonly known.

By contrast, unofficial signage is more polyglossic, with other languages making an appearance, often in the form of wordplay. Visibly “Taiwanese” markers, such as the presence of linguistic features used only in Taiwan, transcription specifying that certain characters are to be pronounced in Minnan, or script interventions such as non-standard characters of Bopomofo make Taiwanese visible in the broader environment. Likewise, the island’s Aboriginal languages have found limited use in touristic settings where the presence of indigenous Taiwanese people is part of a region’s identity. However, both Taiwanese and Aboriginal languages possess a very limited visibility, confined primarily to domains such as food, rurality, and tourism – those areas where, perhaps, linguistic (or culinary) ‘local flavour’ is regarded as most relevant. A lively audience discussion on Taiwan’s polyglossia followed, ranging from educational and media contexts to more spontaneous manifestations like graffiti.

The lectures concluded with a convivial meal held in Clare College attended by Prof. Klöter and a number of the Faculty’s teaching and research staff, together with some postgraduate students. As host, **Prof. Roel Sterckx** gave a lively account of the college’s ties to Chinese studies, from its statue of Confucius to Nathaniel Vincent’s early translation of the Great Learning into English, as part of a (seemingly futile) attempt to set King Charles II on the path of temperance and chastity.

We extend our gratitude once again to Prof. Klöter for sharing his research and for giving us a greater understanding of the factors at play in Taiwan’s rich and varied linguistic landscapes, and to the Chuan Lyu Foundation for its continued support of these lectures.

ADDITIONAL LECTURES

As part of the activities of the Sino-Hellenic Network, the Faculty was pleased to welcome **Prof. Michael Puett**, Walter C. Klein Professor of Chinese History and Anthropology at Harvard University for a lecture on "Gods, Goddesses, and Humans in Ancient Greece and China." Prof. Puett started by reviewing the scholarly response to the question of the "absence" of mythology about gods and goddesses in early China, especially in comparison with Greek mythology. He observed that scholars have been trying to reconstruct Chinese mythology under the assumption that earlier Chinese mythology was lost due to the reconstitution of gods as sages by Warring States philosophers. He then argued that scholarly efforts of reconstructing Chinese mythology and research on early China's rituals and sacrifices hardly engage with each other; however, the study of ritual activity in early China could actually inform our understanding of the Chinese stories about gods and goddesses and, in turn, help us revisit the nature of Greek mythology.

From the paleographic texts available, spanning from Shang oracle bones from 12th century BCE until the 3rd and 4th centuries BCE, Professor Puett described a persistent pattern in the ritual system and cosmology in China. This cosmology assumed that among the world of the divine, the recently deceased were easier to reach, whereas more distant divine beings grew increasingly powerful, difficult to reach, and indifferent to human affairs. Through sacrifice and divination, people communicated with the immediate ancestors, and reaching through them, effectively moving up level by level, to access the more powerful and unresponsive spirits. Such a ritual system was aimed at calling on gods/spirits/*shen* 神to see themselves as part of the lineage of human beings – to think of themselves as ancestors/*zu* 祖.



Prof. Puett delivers a lecture for the Sino-Hellenic network during Easter term

Further, the ritual system was organized to center the ruler, as the ruling family aimed to build one lineage of the whole cosmos reaching heaven, posing the ruler as son of heaven: the *tianzi* who ritually became the father and mother to all other human lineages. In this sense, Prof. Puett argued that Chinese gods and goddesses should be understood in the context of a ritual system of sacrifice and divination that purposefully "humanized" the gods.

In this context, he revamped the question about the "absence" of Chinese mythology and nature of Chinese gods and goddesses, arguing that the fact that figures such as Huangdi are variably identified as a sage, ghost, or god in different stories was exactly the result of the humanizing ritual system in early China. Moreover, he pointed out how such observations could help us question the paradigm in the study of mythology in both the Chinese and Greek contexts, in which it is often thought that people in pre-philosophical times truly believed in deities, whereas later philosophers began to secularize and disenchant the world. Palaeographic materials in China helped us break down the paradigm by revealing early divination and sacrifice as the ritual processes of humanizing gods and goddesses and domesticating the world. Therefore, as Prof. Puett pointed out, instead of asking "who are the gods and goddesses in early China" in comparison to early Greece, we could reposition these questions about gods and goddesses in the debates about the (re)working of rituals and political power across Eurasia in this period.

After exams were over and Easter term concluded, we were fortunate to have a special lecture in early July from **Prof. Yuri Pines**, who holds positions at the Renmin University of China and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His presentation, entitled "The Rise and Fallof the Rules-Based Interstate Order: The Springs-and-Autumns-Lessons", drew on his new book *China's Aristocratic Age* and applied International Relations frameworks to interstate relations in early China. While for most of Chinese history, fragmentation was considered an aberration, the Spring and Autumn period was an exception in which the multistate system was viewed as a fait accompli to be perfected rather than dismantled. The lecture covered some two and a half centuries of history, showing how this situation emerged, stabilised, and eventually fell apart.

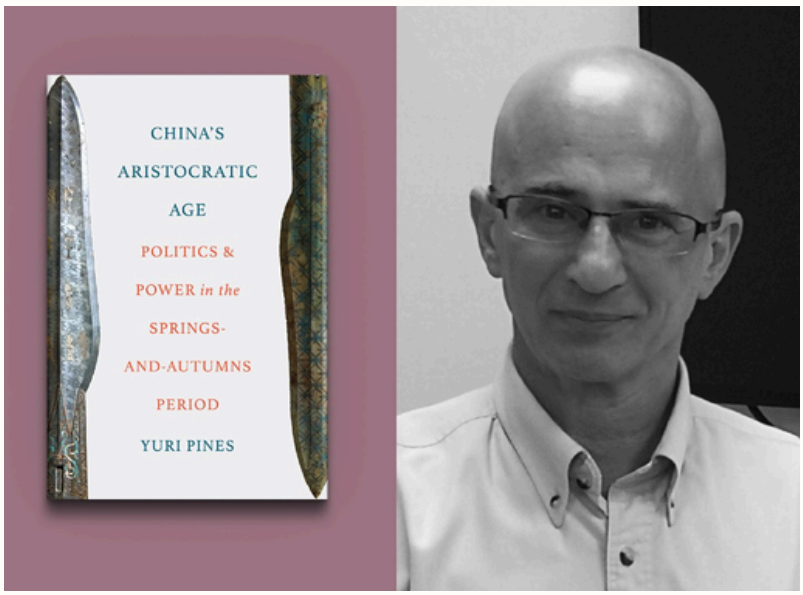
Prof. Pines compared the turmoil following the downfall of the Western Zhou to a state of anarchy (as the term is used in International Relations) that changed with the hegemony of the state of Jin. In the 7th century BCE, the Jiantu oath institutionalised the state's hegemony by committing Jin leaders to pursuing interstate leadership. The covenant system was not only governed by ritual norms and hierarchy but was also considered morally and legally binding. For these reasons, Prof. Pines argued that it can be understood as a kind of rules-based order operating between early Chinese states. However, this system was not without pitfalls: medium-sized states caught in the struggle between the two largest powers, Jin and Chu, were placed

in a situation in which observing their oaths became untenable. At the same time, the impunity of powerful states or individuals who departed from oaths or ritual norms resulted in a disillusionment with the rules-based order.

The disintegration of the old order culminated in the Warring States period, a period of renewed anarchy in which diplomacy seemed no longer credible. Under these conditions, most early Chinese thinkers and leaders concluded that interstate peace was unattainable and stability could be found only in the unification of the region. Prof. Pines concluded with the troubling suggestion that the conditions of Spring and Autumn China may not be altogether different from the international situation today. The lecture concluded with questions from the audience on the endurance of ritual rhetoric throughout the period, the role of non-Hua (or 'non-Han') people, and how the fields of early Chinese political history and international relations can inform each other.



Lord Huan of Qi, an innovator in hegemony



NEEDHAM RESEARCH INSTITUTE SEMINAR SERIES UPDATES

The last two terms at the Needham Research Institute Friday seminars have featured a lively range of subjects. **Tian Jianhui** of Shanghai University of Traditional Chinese Medicine opened the series in January with a discussion of his medical research team and the ways that they apply TCM theory in a contemporary context. **Wang Yao** (NRI/Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) then took us through a series of historical globes, and their relations to a globe he had been researching in the British Library, given as a gift to the Tianqi Emperor in 1623. The following week we heard **Zhang Jianwei** (NRI/Tianjin Normal University) discuss an early Geometry textbook from a Japanese scholar once based at St John's college in Cambridge, who would go on to have a great influence on the subject in Japan. **David Mozina** (University of Cambridge) finished off the first half of the term with a discussion of who Daoists could turn to in the Southern Song dynasty when faced with darker, desperate subjects, and also how these old practices in certain forms continue to the present day.

As the weather grew warmer, **Qian Chen** (NRI/Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine) took us through the early development of Meteorological networks across China and Tibet, and **Tang Zihua** treated us to the mystery of elephant bones across the Shang. Zihua proved fairly conclusively (though he would say, as a scientist, not yet conclusively enough), that the elephant bones found even in the North of China were of Asian elephants from Myanmar and Northern India, not, as has been suggested along the way, from mammoths or other since extinct northern elephant species. **Jimin Choi** (University of Cambridge) treated us the following week to an overview of the history of psychoanalysis in Korea, and **Haiming Wen** (Renmin University of China) rounded off the series with a philosophical discussion of the essence of Chinese philosophy, its links to the 'heavenly Dao', 'Zoetology' and the hexagrams, and the work that he and his colleagues have undertaken at the recently opened Roger Ames studio in Anshan Normal University.

The following term begun with a celebration of and talk about **Bill Mak**'s excellent, long anticipated new book – the latest in the Needham Research Institute Studies Series – Foreign Astral Sciences in China from the Six Dynasties to the Northern Song. The following week we learned from **Sung Soo Lee** (University of Toronto/NRI) about the history of hydropower in North Korea and its cultural significance. **Cai Yin** (University of Chicago/NRI) then took us through garments of feathers and fish skins in the Qing Dynasty, and **Arthur Erqi Cheng** (NRI/Syracuse University) took us into the Spring with an exposition of the various ways the human

body, particularly menstrual blood, could be consumed for medicinal purposes in Late Imperial China.

Domonic Steavu visited us all the way from the University of California Santa Barbara to make the case for the use of Magic Mushrooms in the history of Daoism, before **Calvin Jordan** (University of California San Diego/NRI) took us through China's part in the history of Botany in the 20th Century, seen particularly through the work of Dr. Shiu Ying Hu. The following week **Zhang Zhihui** spoke of Joseph Needham's 1952 report on Bacteriological Warfare, and argued for a transformation in his work at this point that would deeply affect his later sensibilities and scholarship. **Zhongrui (Florent) Ying** then visited us from the École Normale Supérieure in Paris and helped us stretch our understanding about the definition of mortality in the writings of Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343). As the weather grew warmer, **Daisuke Konagaya** (Ryukoku University) argued for the fundamental influence of Zhuangzi and Laozi on the Nobel Prize winning physicist Hideki Yukawa 湯川秀樹 1907–1981), and finally, as the weather forced us from the normal room and into a cooler room, **Fu Ge Yang** (University of Cambridge) treated us to her work on the chaotic work of Jingshen 精神 healing and the psychiatric trade in 1930s Beijing'.

More information about these talks, and about all upcoming seminars can be found on the Institute website (https://www.nri.cam.ac.uk/category/friday-seminars/). The Friday seminars will resume in October, and we look forward to seeing many of you there!



WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?





Sung Soo Lee is a historian of modern Korea and East Asia and recently received her PhD from the University of Toronto. Her research explores the ways energy, infrastructure, and environment function as intertwined forces in postcolonial socialist state-building during the cold war. Her work examines how hydropower and electrification—ranging from monumental dams to small-scale rural projects—mediated relations between technology, nature, and everyday life in North Korea. At the Needham Research Institute, she is developing her first book manuscript, Promise and Peril: Hydropower and the Making of Socialist North Korea, which reconsiders socialist development through the lens of uneven and contested energy transitions.

Tian Mengyuan 田夢源 completed her PhD in Chinese Studies at the University of Cambridge, where her thesis focused on the reconstruction of the Yellow Emperor Worship Ceremony in contemporary China. While at the NRI, she will be working on a second project exploring the scientisation, industrialisation, and commercialisation of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the People's Republic of China (PRC). She is particularly interested in the elderly care and wellbeing industries in contemporary China, including senior living real estate and the wellbeing sector.

WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



Arthur Erqi Cheng 程爾奇 received doctoral training in China and the United States and is currently a research affiliate in the East Asia Program at Syracuse University. He serves as Book Review Editor for Asian Medicine, coordinating reviews on scholarship in Chinese medicine. His research focuses on medical knowledge, visual culture, and intellectual history in late imperial and modern China in a global context. At the Needham Research Institute, he is completing his book manuscript, Uncommon Cures: Making Medicine from the Body in Early Modern China, which examines the history of Chinese pharmaceuticals and their technical and ethical dimensions.



Calvin Jordan is currently a PhD Candidate at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD). He completed his B.Soc.Sci at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and MA at Rhodes University in South Africa. His doctoral research focuses on global histories of botanical science and conservation during the Cold War era, with interests in ways transnational science and diplomacy inform political, environmental, and scientific developments. At the NRI, his project examines globalized botanical institutions with interest in materials that involve Kew Gardens, Chinese cities like Hong Kong, and Joseph Needham's research.

FIRST YEAR UPDATES

The pace at which first year has gone has not slowed down since Michaelmas, and if anything, Lent and Easter have been armed with more grammar points and vocabulary to learn and, unfortunately, even more meanings of 就. A notable change in Lent was the advent of our first attempt at learning Classical Chinese, a 2500-year-old language taught to us through ancient philosophies, military treatises and a strangely large number of stories involving talking turtles. Despite the many hours in the library Classical has forced me to spend, there is something incredibly rewarding when the passage you have spent half an afternoon trying to translate finally clicks.

An undoubtable highlight of the year would have to be my first ever Chinese New Year celebration. An amazing opportunity to come together with faculty staff and students across all years, try my hand at some calligraphy and experience the department in a less formal setting (but mostly eat delicious 饺子), I will surely remember the CNY celebration as a high point in my first year.

Of course, the advent of CNY meant another seasonal event was round the corner, dreaded end of year exams in mid-Easter term. Easter term meant day-long study sessions in the UL, the banning of speaking English with classmates in order to prepare for our oral exams and perhaps a few too many tears over EAS (our Asian history course). I am so grateful to all the support 汪 and 吴老师 provided us during this period – be it supplying us with endless past papers or marking essays we wrote in a panicked frenzy at midnight –getting through exams would not have been possible without them.



Some of the first-year class trying their hands at New Year arts and crafts

But exams, like all things, come to an end. And, at 12:00 on Friday the 12th of June, first year was finally done! After a gruelling, 3-hour long Asian history exam, we celebrated with a prosecco spray so typical of Cambridge and a lunch with all our classmates and teachers (at 1+1 Rougamo which I cannot recommend enough). Although perhaps the dinner felt somewhat like a final test of my Chinese as I attempted to read the characters on the menu in front of me and prayed I got the tones right under the watchful eye of 汪老师.

Despite the excitement of a long and free summer stretching before me, there was a bittersweet taste in my mouth – my first year, a year in which I had learned so much, made so many new friends, was over. But there are still three years left, and I can only hope that they will be half as good as my first.

SECOND YEAR UPDATES

It was only yesterday, sitting in the lobby of the Chinese Visa Application Service Centre, that the reality of the rapidly approaching year abroad finally began to sink in. Before this, the things we had studied throughout second year had felt unimaginably distant; names in a textbook rather than real places that could be visited and experienced. Professors had recommended trips to Mount Wutai, Kaifeng, Lu Xun's hometown, and various other locations that came up in lectures and readings; all of which had been dutifully noted down. As I sat in the visa centre, waiting for my assigned number to be called, I idly leafed through a travel guide, skimming its recommendations for tourists. In a matter of weeks, these places would no longer be merely symbols on a map or names in a list, impossibly far away; soon, they would be easily reachable by plane or high speed rail.

For us second years, Lent and Easter terms brought a curious mixture of sentiments: the inevitable stress accompanying coursework submission deadlines and looming end-of-year exams (which need not be dwelt on here!); growing anticipation and excitement at the prospect of a year in China; and, despite it all, the desire to enjoy the last of our time in Cambridge and the opportunities it provided. One of the best things about second year was that it offered us more choice in our courses than we had had in first year. Transitioning from the poetry and prose of 陶淵明 and 李白, to the history of China-Europe relations, to hip-hop culture in China within the space of a few hours could leave one's head in a bit of a whirl, but this diversity of topics and disciplines enabled us to simultaneously expand our understanding of China and start thinking about what we might like to write our dissertations about. I know that those of us who completed mini dissertations found it an invaluable practice run, with topics ranging from quantitative governance in China, to Nüshu, to the introduction of Western timekeeping technology in China.

Our Chinese New Year celebrations were a beacon during the long and dark days of Lent term, full of essays and deadlines. As well as the annual department-run celebration, thoroughly enjoyed by all, our class also arranged our own New Year's banquet. We feasted on dumplings, cucumber salad, spicy tofu and other dishes – shout out to Carissa for her excellent cooking! This was a lovely presentiment of the many meals to be shared in China, although perhaps without the stress. Formal dinners, Friday nights at John's bar and group study sessions abounded throughout both terms, encouraging us to keep going: it was truly the case that 人多力量大!

As our to-do lists now shift from revision to visa applications, VPN acquisition and the impossible task of packing our lives up, we are aware that the coming year will be very different from our first and second years at Cambridge. While the prospect of an entire year away from home is nerve-wracking, and while we will certainly miss the teachers, professors and friends we are leaving behind, it feels like we are finally gaining the opportunity to put everything we have learnt so far into practice. All that's left to say is: 再見!





Our own New Year's feast!



Formal at Robinson

YEAR ABROAD UPDATES





Felix surveys the land from the heights of Jade Mountain

It's a bittersweet feeling writing this submission for this edition of the newsletter. We are, of course, nearing the end of our time here in China, and with that comes pangs of sadness as we say goodbye to our life here and all the friends we have made. But it's also exciting to reunite with family and friends back home, as well as facing the daunting prospect of fourth year at Cambridge. This term was truly 丰富多彩,* and to be honest, 只能意会，不能言传,* but I will do my best to 言传 (express in words) as much as I can.

Spring Festival

Spring Festival, or 春节 (Chūnjié), is the most important holiday in the Chinese calendar, a time when hundreds of millions travel home for family reunions, and centuries-old traditions, from 拜年 (bàinián, New Year's greetings) to fireworks and red envelopes, are observed across the country. Getting to experience this period first-hand, rather than just reading about it, was genuinely special, and gave us a window into Chinese culture and family life that we couldn't have got any other way. Some used the holiday to go solo travelling, like 雅心 (Lauren), who hiked Huashan and made a lifelong friend along the way, before heading to spend Spring Festival with her in Leshan, Sichuan. Others used the time to further uncover what Beijing has to offer, or to spend the holiday with long-term friends made back in September. I personally did the latter, and was honoured to spend Spring Festival with my friend from Maoxian, Sichuan, and his extended family. I particularly enjoyed seeing all the cultural customs and traditions play out in real life, just as I had learnt them in textbooks and classes, truly 学以致用.* After two weeks there, I even found myself understanding more and more of the Sichuan dialect most of his family spoke. It was probably my favourite fortnight of the year abroad, and it really highlighted why we do this degree: to learn more about the world, get completely out of our comfort zone, and foster cross-cultural exchange that brings people from all kinds of backgrounds together. It was an unforgettable trip, and the food and daily feasts with the family were incredible!

**See the chengyu glossary at the end of this article!*



Gathering for a succulent Chinese meal during Spring Festival

Others, like 天鸣 (Hugo) and 友慧 (Katherine), went elsewhere with friends for Spring Festival, to Fujian and Inner Mongolia respectively, and I hear they had equally fulfilling experiences. 忠义 (Barnaby), and some of our Oxf*rd peers, went further afield to Xinjiang, matched with host families through his extensive contacts in China via the company he works with.

Class Trip to Jiangxi

In April we had our termly department-organised trip, this time to Jiangxi province, where we collaborated with JUFE (江西财经大学, Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics) on a number of activities with local students. This gave us valuable insight into the lives of our peers in China and what daily life is like for them. A particular highlight was a trip to an "asparagus village," where we watched local farmers livestream selling their produce and asparagus-themed snacks and products.

Drama Performance

We performed a ten-minute play about a family reunion set in the 胡同 (hútòng, traditional Beijing alleyways) of Old Beijing for the termly speaking competition, winning second place according to the judges (rigged) and first place according to the popular vote (the power comes from the people, not the bourgeois elite judges).



Members of the third year cohort giving a dramatic performance to rival the Peony Pavilion

Beyond the Classroom

Outside of our scheduled trips and events, everyone found their own ways to make the most of the term. 友慧 got stuck into all sorts: a week volunteering at a school for the blind in Guizhou, regular work with the China British Business Council, and a Track 2 Diplomacy internship, on top of giving a speech at Renmin University for their forum on China–Europe Cooperation and Global Development, and even coming third in the PKU Mountain Eagle hiking society's long run.

雅心, meanwhile, got involved with Intergen, a Beijing-based group connecting young people with elderly residents through events organised by Immie, one of its volunteers. In November she visited a care home and did KTV with traditional Chinese songs alongside the residents, and in March took part in a painting event at another care home. As she put it, "it was really lovely to be able to connect with the older generation of Beijingers, get an insight into caring for the elderly in China, and to practise speaking."

We all greatly improved our singing through countless hours of KTV, but 舒薇 (Veronique) took it a step further, joining a choir and singing in Chinese throughout the term, which culminated in a fabulous performance.

忠梅 (Hebe) headed up to Harbin, surviving the overnight sleeper train ("worst night of my life") before spending a day at the Ice and Snow World festival. With temperatures sitting around a comfortable -18°C by day and dropping to -28°C at night, serious layering was required, but the group still had a great time taking photos with the ice sculptures, and managed to leave with fingers and toes still attached. The second day was spent wandering around Harbin shopping for souvenirs, where 舒薇 even tried the city's famous ice cream.

天鸣 managed to explore more of China than most this term. Two highlights in particular stand out: getting to within a metre of the North Korean border by speedboat, and watching the tranquil sunrise over the Bohai Sea on the way to Dalian island. Not to be outdone, 至和 (Felix) cycled the entire coast of Taiwan and hiked many of the 百岳 (bǎiyuè, the "Hundred Peaks" of Taiwan), including 玉山 (Yùshān, Jade Mountain).



Spending this year together has not only brought us closer but also helped us understand the ups and downs and many facets of Chinese culture and people in a way we never could have otherwise. I personally can't wait to come back to China. We've made countless friends in China, and after all, 多个朋友多条路! However we are, of course, all very much looking forward to reuniting with friends, family, our "across-the-strait 同志" 至和, as well as the lovely staff at the Faculty of AMES.

There are endless stories each of us could tell from this year abroad, from hiking to hotpots, teahouses to temples, museums to marriage markets. We've genuinely experienced so much here in China, and it has left an unforgettable 烙印 (làoyìn, stamp/brand) on our minds forever. To any second years reading this: seize this upcoming opportunity with both hands!

- 志诚 Rocky Terruli

Guest Chengyu featured in this article:

- **丰富多彩** (fēngfù duōcǎi) — rich and colourful; varied and eventful
- **只能意会，不能言传** (zhǐ néng yìhuì, bù néng yán chuán) — can only be understood intuitively, not put into words
- **-学以致用** (xué yǐ zhìyòng) — to apply what one has learned
- **多个朋友多条路** (duō gè péngyou, duō tiáo lù) — the more friends you have, the more paths open to you



FOURTH YEAR UPDATES

For those ten in Part II hoping to graduate from Chinese Studies or Chinese Studies with Japanese this July, there is a great *hundun* of sadness and excitement as we look forward to our next steps, whilst also not quite internalising that this is the end. While most are ready to step beyond their undergraduate years, I am certain that both my classmates and I loathe the prospect of not encountering Wu Laoshi and Wang Laoshi regularly on a weekly basis.

The architecture of the listed AMES faculty building too inspires myriad emotions. There were certainly times during this fourth year where it felt like my brain was being academically dragged across its lovely pebble-dash exterior columns. But it is also home, and a place we all agree has seen us grow from anxious little first years to fourth years who are still anxious but better at coping with it like “adults”. People often say that university is the best time of your life, though neglect to mention that this best time often only emerges from a great deal of struggle and feeling as if you’re barrel-rolling into who you are. It is at university where one pushes themselves out their comfort zone, may change their entire world view, stumbles successfully or heart-wrenchingly through love, tries to shape the person they strive to be, perhaps gets unreasonably intoxicated one times too many and manages a degree on top of all of it. It is an uncertain time, but uncertainty is rather fundamental to the human condition. Having seen this fourth year in action, I have no doubts we’ve got the mettle to handle what the future has in store for us.

As for that future, for those continuing their academic adventures beyond these hallowed halls, the international foundation of AMES remains strong as some classmates jet off across the world again for graduate studies at Peking University in Beijing, or in Hong Kong. Others will remain closer to home, heading for LSE in London or LEI in Leiden. One classmate will take up a well-deserved position at Sotheby’s at their London office. Some classmates will take some time to travel before their forage into the job market, while some combine travel with further studies.




全国重点文物保护单位
万里长城—嘉峪关
中华人民共和国国务院
一九六一年三月四日公布

MPHIL UPDATES

Before I embarked on the long journey from my previous home of Shanghai to Cambridge's tourist-thronged sidewalks and air conditioning-free classrooms, my least favorite conversation was the conversation on whether or not I identify as a *zhongguotong*.

While deeply uncomfortable with the idea that I could claim any expertise on any matters Chinese, the question was not unpredictable. I was, after all, a conspicuously Caucasian foreigner. I did, after all, spend nine years living in and traveling around the Middle Kingdom. I could even mumble through some syllables in *putonghua* while sounding *bijiao biaozhun*. But for all those accomplishments, I never felt comfortable claiming the label of *zhongguotong*.

Given the squirming awkwardness that suffuses my limbs at the very idea of being recognized as a China hand, getting a master's in Chinese Studies from Cambridge was perhaps the worst plan I could have concocted.

Sitting down to write this newsletter update, I remain faced with indisputable proof of my non-expertise on China. I have a flash drive loaded with movies I need to watch for my dissertation, due later in the summer. My desktop is a mess of articles I need to read. I do not want to think about the tottering pile of library books on my desk that I need to peruse. The sheer mass of PDFs and physical volumes is daunting, damning proof of how much I have left to learn about even my narrow field of interest. Understanding the enormity of Chinese culture and society and politics will be a lifelong project.

As a nice bonus, my collection of unread books and PDFs serves as a fitting symbol of my Cambridge experience. The one constant since my arrival has been reading. Lots of reading.

Showing up with the rest of my MPhil cohort for orientation at the tail end of September, we quickly discovered just how intense an experience we had signed up for. We shared many classes with fourth-year undergraduates who had spent years gradually immersing themselves in the structures and nuances of China's history, grammar, and culture; the faculty assumed that we arrived with a respectable understanding of China. Instead of developing a feel for China, we had eleven brief months as postgraduates in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies to immerse ourselves in the particularities of Cambridge life, absorb enough theory and writing conventions to participate in academic conversations. And, if we had the spare seconds, try to embrace the cultural opportunities that come with being based in the United Kingdom.

I spent the first few months of the program grappling with the fundamentals: learning how to navigate the maze of construction walls that is the present-day Sidgwick Site, hearing the lore behind why the AMES basement is out-of-bounds, and discovering the difficulties of attending December classes in unheated classrooms. I learned how to navigate the



The MPhil cohort enjoying a brief moment of leisure

maze of construction walls that is the present-day Sidgwick Site, hearing the lore behind why the AMES basement is out-of-bounds, and discovering the difficulties of attending December classes in unheated classrooms. I learned how to navigate the wonders of meal deals, where to acquire caffeine, and gained a firsthand appreciation for how the British sun is naught but a mythological construct. I mastered the mystical arts of the faculty library, gaining the courage to power through the abundance of my printing credit, finding tables blessed with natural light, and embracing the joys of the postgraduate ability to spend evenings in a library emptied of undergraduates.

As a nice bonus, my collection of unread books and PDFs serves as a fitting symbol of my Cambridge experience. The one constant since my arrival has been reading. Lots of reading.

Most of all, through our coursework, I learned how to talk about China in an academically informed manner. Through the Michaelmas and Lent terms, all four students in the contemporary China MPhil cohort gathered for Asia in Theory and Modern Chinese Literature. We read poetry and prose from throughout the modern history of China and pondered the mysteries of how Xu Zhimo could possibly romanticize the fetid waters of the River Cam; we covered just enough of Edward Said's theory of Orientalism to sound informed when discussing the history of our faculty and contemplating the naming of the first floor Oriental Café.

Beyond consuming the thoughts of major names in academia and Chinese studies, we shared our research interests. Despite numbering in the mid-single digits, we hailed from a diversity of backgrounds— mainland China, Hong Kong, and American, albeit inflected by a near-decade in the Yangtze River Delta. The diversity of our backgrounds was matched by the diversity of our academic interests: the online culture of Chinese K-pop fandom, the poetics of artificial intelligence, the paratexts of poetics, Shanghai Disney Resort, and many more.

And, of course, there was the reading.

Heading into the program, I knew that Cambridge terms were short and the weekly workload commensurately intense. I was not entirely prepared for the learning curve that came with figuring out how to pace myself throughout the week so I could finish reading the assigned pages. Perhaps I made my life somewhat more difficult by deciding to audit an extra class or two, but I wasn't about to pass up the opportunity to learn about and discuss infrastructures and contemporary cinema. While flipping through— or, more often, scrolling down— hundreds of pages about modern China chewed through my time, I did build out a web of knowledge that allowed me to anchor my previous explorations in China in cited and peer-reviewed literature. Before long, I began to feel pleased with my overall understanding.

Thank goodness, then, for my regular lessons in ignorance. Every Thursday, I showed up for the faculty's weekly lecture in classrooms eight and nine to sip upon the provided instant coffee and pray that I would understand the talk. Often, I did not; my profound ignorance of Buddhism and classical Chinese literature rendered many expertly crafted lectures incoherent. I did, however, enjoy the caffeine, snacks, and opportunities to sample scholars' distinctive presentation demeanors.

Despite the demands of our coursework, my classmates and I found time to enjoy life in Cambridge. We swapped formals at each other's colleges, discussed the various Chinese restaurants in town, and rang in the Year of the Horse by sharing a dinner at Chinese Canteen. Now, we have gone our individual ways to focus on our dissertations. I've mostly found myself sitting in the library, taking thousands of words of notes as I binge-watch Chinese movies, tearing apart and reassembling outlines in a possibly futile attempt to craft a dissertation that might live up to Cambridge standards.

I was grateful to close my year by returning to the classrooms eight, nine, and ten to attend the East Asian Studies Postgraduate Conference. There was something wondrous and inspiring about spending two days alongside fellow aspiring area studies scholars, sharing lunchtime conversations about China and research methods. Far more surreal was taking to the same lecture podium as many terms of Thursday afternoon guest speakers to share my attempted insights into the *Battle at Lake Changjin* duology.

Cramming my postgraduate foray into a single year has been a definite challenge. I almost feel like I've only had the time to strategize how I might approach the Cambridge experience if given a second chance. Reflecting on the previous three terms (and the remaining weeks of desperate dissertation drafting) makes me feel somewhat dazed, although perhaps the dazedness can be attributed to the fact that I'm drafting these paragraphs in the middle of a heatwave.

Perhaps the dazedness is fitting. The Chinese Studies MPhil is intense. The deadlines are unmoving, the pace is relentless, and the faculty's standards are exacting. But as much as I have been stressed out by this degree— and there were moments of seriously strenuous stress— the

emotion that most clearly stands out is gratitude. Spending an academic year in this faculty has been a challenging, rewarding, life-changing experience. I remain amazed by how extensively I was able to discuss my particular interests of politicized blockbuster cinema and theme parks with genuine experts on Chinese society and culture. While I have no doubt that my resume will appreciate the eventual addition of a degree from the one and only University of Cambridge, the greatest gift of my MPhil year was how many people, from undergraduates to doctoral candidates to professors, were gracious enough to take the time to share their ideas and insights.

As the academic year comes to a close, my fellow master's students and I are preparing for the next steps in our journey. I'll fly to Beijing in August for my latest attempt at learning to speak Chinese.



Natcher presents at the East Asia Studies conference held in FAMES

At some point in the coming months, I suspect someone will once again face me and ask the dreaded question: am I a *zhongguotong*? Despite this faculty's best efforts, I remain rather stubborn in proclaiming my ignorance, so my answer will remain a horrified *juedui bushi*. At the same time, I recognize that, one day, I may just need to admit that my months of intellectual engagement with some of the finest and friendliest China scholars in the world have, in fact, taught me something. For that, I will remain endlessly grateful.

STAFF UPDATES

New MPhil pathway at the Faculty: East Asian Popular Culture Across Time

We are pleased to announce that next Michaelmas will see the first intake of students for the new Master's degree pathway being made available at the faculty.

This first-of-its-kind MPhil pioneers a new academic approach to popular culture by connecting the past, present and future. With us, you will develop skills in analysing key cultural products while considering how they are shaped by transmedial flows and other processes including translation, adaptation, top-down design, and grassroots creativity. The program explores popular culture in China, Japan, and Korea, from premodern to contemporary East Asia.

We look forward to welcoming these new MPhil students to the Faculty!

Staff Updates

Amidst marking and other university business this Easter Term, **Dr. Noga Ganany** has mainly been mostly working on her current monograph, *Origin Narratives: Hagiographic Writing and Cultic Reverence in Ming Book Culture*. As part of her work as a board member of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions (SSCR), Noga is also organizing a special session in the upcoming European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS) biannual meeting in Venice, Italy. The session, titled "New Voices in the Study of Chinese Religions," will take place on July 22nd and feature presentations by young scholars in the field, followed by a cocktail party.

Driven by their common interest and keen to combine their different strengths, **Dr. Ling Zhang** and **Dr. David Mozina** have launched an interdisciplinary, collaborative project, 'Ecology, Religion and Multispecies Healing'. For a part of that project, they focus on the complex relationship between climate change and religious practice. They will present a joint paper, 'Salvation from Apocalyptic Disasters during China's Early Medieval Climate Anomaly' at the international conference 'Ethical Norms, Agricultural Practices and Natural Spirits: China and Other Worlds Compared' in Geneva in July 2026. They are also co-authoring a paper entitled 'Building a Celestial Empire during China's Early Medieval Climate Anomaly', to be presented at the conference 'Empires & Ecologies of Afro-Eurasia at the End of Antiquity' in Cambridge in July 2026.

Since Prof. Adam Chau did not have an update in the last issue of the newsletter this one will be a longer one. In early 2025 Prof. Chau was interviewed by Dr SU Xiao (苏筱) of Renmin University of China for a special issue of the intellectual but playful weekly 信睿周報 (*The Thinker*) on global folklore studies, organised by Professor YUE Yongyi (岳永逸) (also at Renmin University). Prof. Chau gave his views on the development of folklore studies in the UK and how it might benefit from interacting with China's vibrant Folklore Studies (民俗學) scene. The interview was published as "英国民俗学的式微及其未来——专访剑桥大学教授周越" in 信睿周報 142 (March 2025). Three other scholars in the special issue spoke of trends in folklore studies in the US, Japan and Germany.

In early 2026 Prof. Chau's article "Superstition and the 'Religion Sphere'" appeared in *Uncanny Beliefs: Superstition in Modern Chinese History*, edited by Emily Baum and Albert Wu (Harvard University Asia Center).

Prof. Chau was on sabbatical leave for Michaelmas and Lent terms of the 2025-26 academic year. He continued working with Dr Jacqueline Lin (having recently been appointed Research Assistant Professor in the Academy of Chinese, History, Religion and Philosophy of Hong Kong Baptist University) and Joe Beadle (now a PhD student in social anthropology at Cambridge) on their co-authored book on the workings of 'spheres' (界) in contemporary China.

Prof. Chau spent close to three months (January to March 2026) as a visiting researcher at Nagoya University in central Japan. This was his first extended stay in Japan and he found the experience fascinating and rewarding. He had

With my Nagoya University hosts Professors HOSHINO Yukiyo, OKAMOTO Yuko and GAN Jingchao



many fruitful exchanges with local colleagues. In Nagoya Prof. Chau conducted research on two topics. The first topic is to trace the historical connections between the Japanese and Chinese usages of the suffix kai/jie (界), or 'spheres', in constituting and governing social groupings (e.g., 實業界, 宗教界, 芸能界, 相撲界, etc.) in their respective transition to the modern era. In the late 19th century and early 20th century this particular usage was brought from Meiji and Taisho Japan to China, and a multitude of spheres emerged in late-Qing and Republican China as various social groupings strove to be recognised by the broader society and to negotiate with the modern state. Examining the earlier history of the transfer of this suffix usage from Japan to China as well as the differences between the two national settings in subsequent deployments of 'spheres' is important to our overall understanding of spheres as a sociopolitical instrument. The second topic is about the goshuin (御朱印) as a cultural form. Prof. Chau is developing a theory on cultural logics and cultural forms and these talismans issued by temples and shrines as well as the booklets worshippers keep constitute a cultural form that's worthy of theorising anthropologically (e.g., Why do people accumulate goshuin? What do these goshuin do? Are they efficacious? How are they related to the different pilgrimage routes in Japan?). This research will also shed light on our understanding of religious practices surrounding talismans in Chinese contexts. Prof. Chau enjoyed exploring the many sites and neighbourhoods in Nagoya, especially on his mamachari (Japanese-style bicycle), and especially during the plum and cherry blossoms season. Winter in Nagoya was cold but sunny (far more pleasant than the wet winter in Cambridge!). It snowed beautifully a couple of times (once almost reaching mōfubuki猛吹雪 level).



Cherry blossoms at the Kōjaku-in (香積院) not far from Nagoya University.

Prof. Chau gave several conference papers and public lectures in the past year:

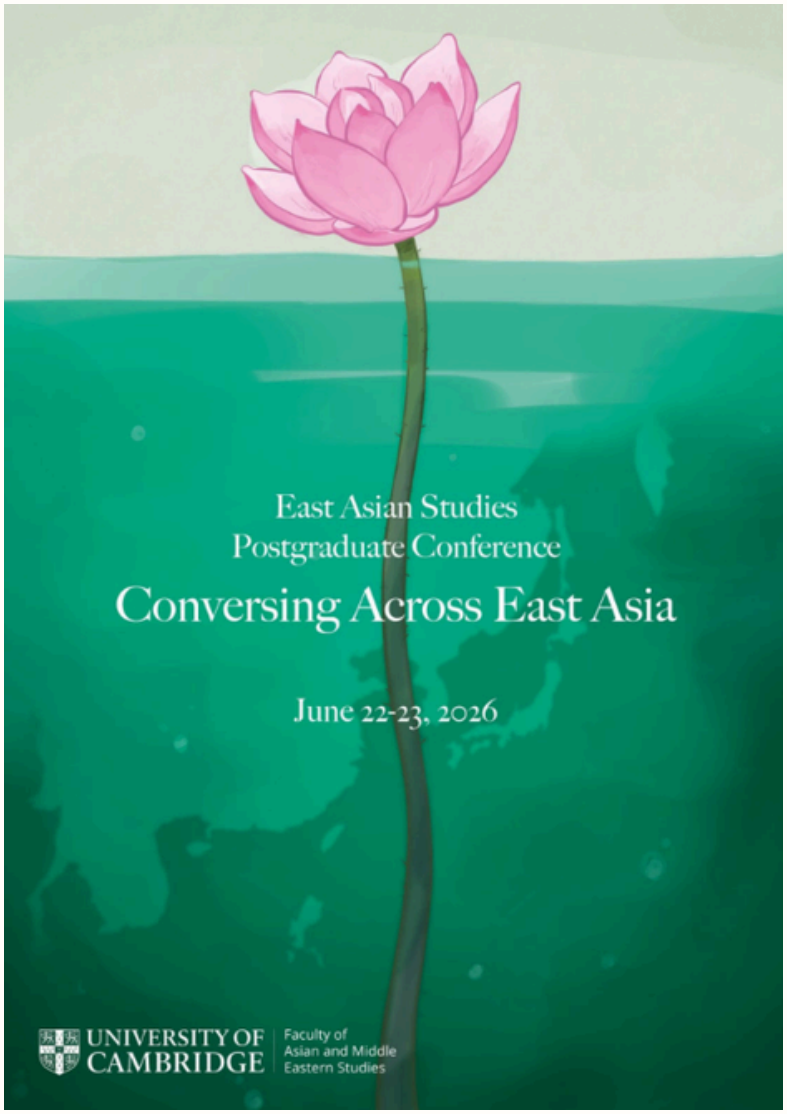
- '"Youthing" Religion'. 宗教与未来 – 第20届宗教社会科学年会 (Religions and the Future: The 20th Symposium on the Social Sciences of Religion) (23-24 July, 2025, The Friendship Hotel, Beijing);
- '山水与"壤境" (Shanshui (Landscape [Painting]) and 'Terroir"), 山水：行动中的世界观 (Shanshui: A Worldview in Action) (6–7 September, 2025; International Symposium, China Academy of Art, Hangzhou);
- 'Cultural Logics and Cultural Forms'. Conference 'Thinking Through Fieldwork' celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Ethnology (15-17 September, 2025. Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan);
- '現當代中國社會的'界化'(Spherization)：民族國家的建構與社會治理的機制 (The 'Spherization' of Modern Chinese Society: The Mechanisms of Constructing and Governing a Nation-State) (19 September, 2025. Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan);
- 'Cultural Forms: Hosting and "Doing the Series"' (7 November, 2025, Department of Anthropology Friday Seminar Series, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong);
- '"Women's Sphere" (女界，婦女界，婦人界) and "Spherization" (界化) of Society in Modern Japan and China' (9 March, 2026. The Center for Transregional Culture and Society and the Gender Research Library, Nagoya University, Nagoya, Japan)
- '"Spheres" (界) in Modern and Contemporary China' (2 June, 2026; Chinese Studies Programme, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway)
- 'Religion and Animals: Some Examples from Chinese Societies'. Workshop on 'Religious Animals: Interaction and Relatedness in Multispecies Studies and Religious Life' (4-5 June, 2026; University of Oslo)
- '"Get Out of My Father's House!": Fetishising Space in Abrahamic Religions and Contrasting Practices in China. Workshop on shared religious space in the Mediterranean and Asian Worlds (espaces religieux partagés dans les mondes méditerranéens et asiatiques) (8–9 June, 2026; L'Université d'Aix-Marseille, Aix-en-Provence, France);
- 'Building a "Proper" Daoist Temple Hall at the Black Dragon King Temple Complex in Shaanbei'. Workshop 'Daoist Temple (Re)construction in Contemporary China (Leiden University)

Prof. Chau wishes to congratulate LUO Fuyuan (now Dr LUO!) on having received her doctoral degree in January 2026 (thesis title: *Lamas and Followers: Doing Tibetan Buddhism in Contemporary Chengdu*). Two other of his PhD supervisees, LIU Di and TIAN Mengyuan, will soon receive their degrees. Di's thesis is entitled *The Politics of Connoisseurship: Knowledge, Taste, and the Marketplace of Chinese Hardwood Furniture in Republican Peking (1930s–1940s)*. She is now Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Faculty of History at the University of Oxford, working on the 'Chinese Furniture: A Global History' project, led by Professor Jennifer Altehenger and supported

by the John Fell Fund. Mengyuan's thesis is entitled Making Scenescape: Huangdi Worship Ceremony as State Ritual in Contemporary China. She is currently a Jing Brand Fellow at the Needham Institute working on the scientisation, industrialisation, and commercialisation of Traditional Chinese Medicine in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

EAST ASIAN STUDIES POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE: "CONVERSING ACROSS EAST ASIA"

The inaugural EAS Postgraduate Conference was held at the Faculty on 22nd and 23rd June 2026. The event was made possible by the funding generously provided by the Japanese, Chinese and Korean Studies departments and the assistance staff across the East Asian Studies side of the Faculty.



The conference aimed to bring young scholars across disciplinary and regional boundaries into closer contact and create a solid foundation for academic exchange. The initial call for papers received some 800 responses, from which thirty-two participants from institutions across four continents were selected. The panels placed research in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese studies side-by-side, with chairing kindly provided by researchers not only from FAMES but also the Archaeology and Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics (MMLL) Faculties. Most of all, several non-presenting audience members braved the summer heat to come to listen and ask thoughtful questions. By these measures, it is fair to say that the conference achieved some success in its goals!

The first day of the conference opened with a welcome from **Prof. Laura Moretti** as Head of Department and Faculty Co-Chair, followed by a keynote address by **Prof. Richard Bowring**, Emeritus Professor of Japanese Studies. Prof. Bowring's lecture set the tone by showcasing linguistic encounters across Japan and Chosŏn Korea, examining texts related to Chosŏn diplomats' attempts to learn the Japanese language. With the proceedings thus underway, the morning's panels could begin.

The first of these was *Ordering Modern East Asia*, which considered the role of classifications – between ethnicities, the able-bodied and disabled, state borders and competing citizenship claims – in constructing East Asia from the 19th century to the mid 20th century. Considering Meiji exhibitions, colonial Korean educational institutions for disabled students, and a humanitarian organisation in Maoist China, the panel drew comparisons across time and national borders.

Following this, the participants split off into two panels that ran in parallel. The first, *Adapting and Negotiating Religious Power in East Asia*, took us from medieval Japan to early modern China to the present day, rethinking how religious authority was dispersed among members of monastic assemblies, between centre and periphery in state sacrifices, and through texts and performances in contemporary Daoist worship. Meanwhile a few meters away, participants gathered for *Preserving the Body Politic in Premodern East Asia*, dealing with discourses of the (actual or metaphorical) health of rulers and polities. The presentations, bridging early Chinese cosmology's somatic metaphors, the development medieval Chinese medical concepts during wartime, and the use of early Chinese models in early modern Korean statecraft, were united by a shared interest in how stable governance was preserved and imbalances corrected.

After a leisurely lunch at Selwyn college, the conference resumed for two parallel panels in the afternoon. Framing East Asia: Cultural and Material Production Across Borders was the largest panel of the day, with four presenters tracing the circulation of artistic objects and productive practices around the region. While largely focused on early modernity, the presentations also considered influences stretching back further in time, placing painting, picture-mounting, fashionable fabric production, and the formation of subjective subjective testimony in their creative and historical context. Simultaneously, *East Asian Film and Literature at the Interstices* was framing questions about perception by searching for the tracks of real or imaginary animals in modern poetry, comparing the visibility of multiple scripts used in fiction, and using translingual and transmedial approaches to illuminate the experiences of East Asian subjects.

Coming to the end of a long day of academic exchange, everyone split into smaller groups to go to the pub, eat together at a restaurant, explore Cambridge, or just to sleep off their jet-lag ahead of the following day's activities!

The second day began bright and early another two panels running simultaneously. *Nationalism and the Making of Difference from the Cold War to Today* considered discussions of heritage and identity across the region, presenting research on the status of ethnic minorities broadly construed in Japan and the shifting relationship of an ethnic Korean minority group to nationalism in mainland China, as well as conflicts over how UNESCO heritage programmes in Northeast Asia are to be framed. Complimenting this,

the participants of *Movement, Place and Practice in Modern Chinese Encounters* showcased three different aspects of place-making in China through their presentations on the production of knowledge about the Miao ethnic group, the construction of Tibet's 'remoteness' in contemporary travel, and an art collective's interaction with Shenzhen's highly mobile floating population. In particular, questions of mobility, community, and atomisation proved resonant across the panel, allowing the panel discussion drawing unexpected comparisons across these differing contexts.

After a short coffee break, everyone reconvened for the next pair of panels. *Contemporary Challenges: Aesthetics, Affect, Action* examined how Chinese popular media navigates questions of happiness, dissatisfaction, and the ambivalent pleasure found in the discrepancy between the two. The panel explored online content as expressions of frustration with socio-economic stagnation through nostalgic 'Dreamcore' imagery, and with the expectations of heterosexual relationships through danmei fiction. By contrast, two recent blockbusters were read depictions of past pain being redeemed through a happy ending implicitly located in the present-day PRC.

Down the corridor, a lively exploration of health and medicine in Republican China was taking place in *Hygenic Modernity in an Age of Crises*. Panellists discussed the transmission of hygenic knowledge between Japanese writing and modernising Chinese medical practice, government campaigns and commercial advertising's promotion of hygienic consumption during the Nanjing Decade, and contestations over political authority in addressing the sanitary crisis in Shanghai following the January 28 Incident of 1932.



Yutong chairs a panel discussion between Yanke Wang (Manchester) and Miao Li (Monash)

The final panel, *Remaking Knowledge in 19th and 20th Century East Asia*, was presented to all attendees and, fittingly, focused on traditions or information being conveyed and adapted across borders in the region. Discussions of how Song Chinese precedents informed Queen Dowager regency in Chosŏn Korea, perceptions of modern learning by Korean students as colonial subjects of Japan studying in China at the height of the New Culture Movement, and translations of English-language texts relating to female same-sex love in Japan that circulated to colonial Korea and Republican China. A representative of the organising committee offered some final remarks thanking everyone who helped to make the last two days a success. As part of the conference, those who wished to were invited to attend a tour of the Fitzwilliam Museum lead by our own **Carmen Cao** (who is also the subject of this issue's PhD student interview on page 47).

Outside of the scholarly exchange taking place on the panels, attendees could be seen discussing their work during breaks throughout the conference. With the swapping of business cards and online contact information it is hoped that the conversation will go on long after the event itself. It was truly gratifying to see so many people willing to join us from near and far (in some cases as far away as Australia!) and to establish closer ties with colleagues in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Studies. It is much to be hoped that this will become an annual event in the Faculty.

The full programme, including participant abstracts, is available on the Faculty website:
https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/events/east-asian-studies-postgraduate-conference-conversing-across-east-asia



SPRING FESTIVAL EVENT

For many people around the world, New Year's is imagined as a single night; the clock strikes midnight on January 1st, fireworks light up the sky, champagne glasses are raised, and resolutions are made for the year ahead. Yet for hundreds of millions of people, the arrival of the new year is not confined to a single evening but unfolds over more than two weeks in the early spring and late winter.

Chinese New Year, also known as the Spring Festival, is a fifteen-day celebration centered on family, renewal of the coming year, and welcoming good fortune. In the days leading up to the festival, homes are thoroughly cleaned to sweep away bad luck; families gather for a reunion dinner, and red decorations and couplets are hung to invite prosperity.

Throughout the holiday, relatives and friends exchange red envelopes filled with money as wishes for health and success, visit one another's homes, share festive meals, watch vibrant lion and dragon dances, and set off firecrackers to ward off evil spirits and welcome a prosperous new year.

This year, as in years past, we had the privilege of celebrating the New Years together with the entire Chinese Studies community. Our teachers generously brought handmade jiaozi (dumplings) and baozi (steamed buns), both of which carry wishes for prosperity and abundance in the year ahead.



There was a particularly warm, homely atmosphere as we came together to share a meal, write *chūnlián* (Spring Festival couplets), and create traditional paper cuttings.

More than simply learning about Chinese New Year in the classroom, we were able to experience its emphasis on family, togetherness, and the passing on of tradition by celebrating with one and other.







FAMES POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM



On 3 June, postgraduate students from across the faculty gathered for the FAMES Postgraduate Research Symposium, an opportunity to present their work, exchange ideas across disciplinary boundaries and engage in discussion with their cohort. The event was organised by the symposium committee: FAMES MPhil student representatives **Cheung Yuk Yu Karma** and **Mariam Habib Matta**, PhD student representative **Lola Graziani** and committee member **Bai Haodong**, and brought together students working on a diverse range of topics spanning East Asia and the Middle East, religion, literature, environmental studies, history and linguistics. Through three panels, participants demonstrated the breadth of research currently being undertaken within the faculty while highlighting the value of interdisciplinary dialogue.

The symposium opened with remarks from **Dr Assef Ashraf**, Associate Professor in the Eastern Islamic Lands and Persian-Speaking World, who welcomed participants and reflected warmly on the value of sharing postgraduate research across disciplines.

The first panel, featuring speakers from Chinese Studies, featured presentations by **Shannon Gilbert** (PhD), **Fiona Bewley** (PhD), and **Cheung Yuk Yu Karma** (MPhil). Their papers explored subjects ranging from psychiatric criticism of experimental literature, with a focus on Can Xue, to the role of environmental scientists within boundary organisations, to contemporary Chinese poetry through the notion of “scar-like” emotion. Despite their differing methodologies and subject matter, the presentations shared a concern with how individuals and institutions shape knowledge, experience and cultural expression. The papers drew keen interest from the audience, sparking lively discussion that carried on into the coffee break.

Attendees then reconvened for the second panel, focusing on the Middle East. Presentations by **Theodora Moyse-Peck** (MPhil, Middle Eastern Studies), **Ankur Desval Fehrani** (PhD, Middle Eastern Studies), **Mariam Habib**

Matta (MPhil, Middle Eastern Studies), **Noam Perl Treves** (PhD, Middle Eastern Studies) and **Samuel Frith** (MPhil, Middle Eastern Studies) examined topics including interfaith relations in seventeenth-century Tangier, representations of religious warfare in Persian literature, Muslim participation in the "New Hebrew" calendar, questions of memory and transgression within Yemeni Jewish oral history and a second-century perspective on the Hebrew verb system. Together, the panel illuminated the richness of historical, linguistic and cultural approaches to understanding the Middle East across different periods and regions.

After a catered lunch, the symposium concluded with its final panel, also on the Middle East., featuring papers by **James Dylan Love** (MPhil, Middle Eastern Studies), **Paulius Bergaudas** (PhD, Middle Eastern Studies) and **Forrest laPrade** (MPhil, Middle Eastern Studies). Their research ranged from mobility and power in the early 'Abbāsid Caliphate, innovations in Muslim historical writing, to interpretations of homoerotic meaning in classical Arabic poetry. The panel showcased the diversity of contemporary scholarship in Middle Eastern studies, demonstrating how historical and literary analysis continue to uncover refreshing perspectives on familiar sources.

Throughout the day, lively discussions followed each panel, as presenters and audience members traced connections between projects and grappled with broader questions of methodology, interpretation and scholarly practice. The symposium offered postgraduate researchers a warm and supportive platform in which to share their work, fostering intellectual exchange across the faculty.

The FAMES Postgraduate Research Symposium once again demonstrated the strength and diversity of postgraduate research within the faculty, giving participants the opportunity to present developing projects, receive constructive feedback and connect with colleagues working across a wide range of disciplines and geographical contexts.



AN INTERVIEW WITH CARMEN CAO, A SECOND YEAR PHD STUDENT

Thank you very much for agreeing to be interviewed! Would you like to start with a quick self-introduction?

Yes, I'm Carmen Cao, and I'm a second-year PhD student in the Faculty of AMES, working under the supervision of Dr Ling Zhang. I'm doing research on medical and environmental history during the Jin-Yuan transition.

And what part of that are you working on at the moment?

The chapter I'm working on at the moment is about a medical practitioner called Li Gao, and the medical theories he developed during the siege of Daliang, in Henan province, in the years 1232-1233.

What was it about the siege and Li Gao's work at that time that's of interest to you?

Honestly, I didn't pay much attention to the siege when I first started this project. My central focus was reading medical texts and trying to find out how Li Gao's medical theories were shaped by environmental conditions. But that was too broad: environmental conditions can include climate, famine, hunger, fatigue, or even military attack. When I read Li Gao's medical texts more carefully, I realised they were valuable because you can read the siege through the perspective of a medical practitioner. I also found that his friends and contemporaries, such as the Jin-period poet and scholar Yuan Haowen, wrote a lot about the siege as well.

Yuan Haowen also raised the issue of a 'calamity of medicine', or what he called 壬辰藥禍 (*renchen yaohuo*). I prefer 'calamity' rather than 'disaster', because it shows that medical practice itself became part of the catastrophe: many practitioners misread patients' conditions and treated them in the wrong way, which contributed to the massive death toll. So Li Gao

offers his own explanation for that mass death: most of these people, he argues, did not simply die from external cold damage as many physicians claimed, but from internal damage caused by irregular drinking and eating, labour exhaustion, and disrupted rest, and the failure to regulate cold and warmth under siege conditions. When you go through the primary sources, you realise that the words and phrases repeated again and again are things like 'hunger', 'famine', and 'running out of grain'. Even texts written by educated elites and officials record people feeling real hunger during the siege. This is my starting point for approaching this topic.

Did your interest in this topic grow out of work you did before? What was your academic trajectory like up to this point?

It's not that straightforward! I studied English Literature and Art History at the University of Glasgow. At that time, I was really interested in medieval women and medieval monsters.I became interested in the body, including the monstrous body. I mean, I was intrigued by those kinds of descriptions, and by the kinds of social discourse that shaped these monstrous bodies. For example, in medieval Europe, writers might call people from the Islamic world Saracens, or refer to the Mongols as monsters. They depicted those groups as monstrous, or as having monstrous bodies.

I think that is kind of the same question I now bring to my current project: what kinds of social conditions and contexts shape our bodies, or shape medical theories about our bodies.

I can see how even though the specific topic is quite different there are aspects of how you approach things that stayed the same between your first degree and the work you do now! Did your Masters bridge the two areas?



Carmen during her time at the University of Glasgow

My Master's also focused on medieval history. So it was about medieval Europe, the Crusades, the field hospitals, and female medical practitioners. I really liked those kinds of medical recipies or formulas produced by late medieval women, which you can find in some letters or manuscripts. I could feel the parallels between Chinese medicine and medieval, or let's say ancient, Western medicine.

I'm curious about what caused you to move into premodern China after focusing on Europe, and about the kinds of comparisons this lets you draw.

The reason is a really long story, honestly. But to keep it short, I experienced severe school bullying in middle school. Personally, I needed distance from China, and I needed a different intellectual environment. That's why I chose English Literature and History of Art, studied those European topics.

But when I did my Master's, my supervisor at Glasgow encouraged me to do something related to Eurasia, and asked whether I could find anything similar produced by medieval Chinese women, or whether there were commercial or intellectual exchanges around aromatics, plants, and those kinds of things. I realised there might be many records about this, but mostly from the Ming and Qing dynasties, not from my period.

I still wanted to work on the medieval period, so my Master's dissertation did a comparative analysis of Trota of Salerno, a medieval Italian female practitioner, and an early Ming female doctor called Tan Yunxian. I compared their herbal treatments for irregular menstruation and how they understood menstruation in, let's say, "the global Middle Ages". Even though I dislike using words like "global" for these kinds of comparisons, you can still find many similarities in their situations as pioneering female medical practitioners at a time marked by the oppression of women. I don't know whether there are more primary sources about their lived experience, but I was intrigued by their medical education and knowledge of treating menstrual irregularities. I learned a lot from reading their medical texts, and I wanted to know how they could access that kind of medical knowledge at the time.

So what do you think has been the value of that comparison? By comparing the two, have you found anything that surprised you?

Yes, absolutely. I found one herb, or at least a plant from the same family or herbal genus, that they both used to treat irregular menstruation. That was really astonishing. I'm not a biochemistry, biomedicine, or bioarchaeology student, but I would love to find archaeological or archaeobotanical evidence that could help us investigate the use of this herb further. But I'd have a long way to go before doing a project like that!

Maybe a possible collaboration in the future?

Yes, maybe! It's strange that you can find those kinds of similarities, even the same herbs being used, or similar methods of treatment, across very different medical traditions. But then you still need to ask what modern biomedicine or modern TCM can actually say about treating irregular menstruation effectively. I think that is a problem for the current medical field to work through: how do we connect historical medical knowledge with evidence, safety, and real therapeutic effect?

Going back slightly, you said you don't like the idea of the 'Global Middle Ages'. Why is that?

The reason I dislike the word global is that you can never really do a global project. For example, if you frame your project as "the Global Middle Ages", you might

collect primary sources from Spain, England, Scotland, China, and India. But that is still not really global. Even if you focus on exchange, for example, let's say Indian Ocean exchange, you are still focusing on specific regions. You can say that is transnational or cross-cultural, but "global" is such a large scale that I don't think it is always appropriate for describing a historical period.

I can see what you mean, I suppose the name is rather ambitious! Outside of your immediate research, what else have you been doing during the PhD?

I've been playing squash! And sometimes I cycle over to Grantchester with my partner. To be honest, before this PhD I had many hobbies such as singing musicals or going to different art exhibitions, but now I don't feel I have as much time for other things. When I transferred to this Faculty from the History Faculty, the first time I met Professor Adam Yuet Chau, he said hello and told me he had heard I was a perfume maker. And I said I was, but I haven't really had any spare time to work on perfumery or branding!

That's a shame, it sounds like an interesting hobby! Of course, one of the things keeping you busy is that you've been helping organising a conference in the Faculty. How has that been? Have done anything similar before?

I've only organised a conference as



an assistant at Glasgow. That was about fantasy studies and fantasy literature. I really enjoyed that experience because you met all kinds of people, and some of them even dressed up.

Like a convention?

Yes, you could meet people who really liked C. S. Lewis and Tolkien. That kind of fantasy literature was inspired by medieval stories, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It was a good conference, and I really enjoyed it.

I've also enjoyed working on the EAS Conference, particularly reading through all the abstracts. When I opened the folder, I thought, wow, there are so many art historians, historians, and literary scholars, all working on different periods! These are the kinds of things that encourage me to stay in academia, even though it can be so hard. When I read about all those people and the work they are doing in their different fields, it is genuinely encouraging.



I agree, it's great to see what's out there. I know we're both looking forward to hearing some of them in more detail next week! Until then, thanks again for making time to talk about your work today, too!

The interview took place on 17th June, and has been edited slightly for structure and clarity.

THOMAS WADE SOCIETY UPDATES



Beijing-based thrid-years and TWS members meeting Chancellor Chris Smith

TWS at Global Cambridge Events in Shanghai and Beijing

In April, Chancellor **Chris Smith** and Vice-Chancellor **Deborah Prentice** led a large Cambridge delegation on a visit to Shanghai and Beijing. It was a great opportunity for some of our members to connect, and for us to represent Chinese Studies alongside other alumni societies in Greater China.

Careers Event

In January, TWS co-hosted a China Careers Event with the Cambridge China Forum on careers in the Civil Service, with **Sir William Ehrman**, former British Ambassador to China (2006-2010), and **Oliver Harris** of the Department for Business and Trade. Thank you to all who came!

Note: If you would like to join TWS, please see the information at the end of this newsletter.



Prisident Sarah Garton-Eisenacher (2015) being recognised as TWS's representative at the Shanghai event

TWS Book Club

Lately, our members have met to discuss the dystopian sci-fi novel *Waste Tide*, contemporary Chinese blockbusters, and classic wartime satire *Fortress Beseiged*.

Our next meeting will be on 2 August 11:30 AM UK / 18:30 CN. We will read *Self as Method* by Xiang Biao (项飙：《把自己作为方法》). Originally from Wenzhou, Xiang Biao is a social anthropologist trained at PKU and later, for his PhD, at Oxford. He now lives in Germany, where he is a Director at the Max Planck Institute. While his research interest primarily is in migration and mobility, he has become an influential public intellectual in China for his social commentary more broadly.

Self as Method consists of three interviews from the year 2018, conducted in Beijing, Oxford and Wenzhou respectively. In them, Xiang Biao discusses his own path, China's changing role in the world and what this means for the people living there. The English version is open access by Springer.

We are always keen to welcome new members. To join, please send an email to thewadesociety@gmail.com or message Sarah via the TWS WhatsApp or WeChat group. You don't have to be a TWS member yet. Just get in touch!



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
ALUMNI
THOMAS WADE SOCIETY

The **Thomas Wade Society** is the official alumni association of Chinese Studies at the University of Cambridge. We strengthen connections among our community of former students and staff, and facilitate contact between our members and current students. We run a newsletter for updates, as well as a WhatsApp and WeChat group.

Join TWS and stay in touch with your classmates and professors. **Membership is entirely free and open** to all current and former students and staff of Chinese Studies at AMES. By signing up to our mailing list, you will automatically be sent an invitation to our WhatsApp group.

Sign up here: https://shorturl.at/7tA3g

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 **ayc25@cam.ac.uk (Prof. Adam Chau)** to be added to the China Research Seminar series mailing list, and **ng462@cam.ac.uk (Dr Noga Ganany)** to join the Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond mailing list.

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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**FACULTY OF ASIAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES,
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For more information and updates, check out the Cambridge Chinese Studies twitter account: **https://twitter.com/ChinaCambridge**

Also, check out our library's twitter account for events and information: **https://twitter.com/ ames_library**

