



# **CAMBRIDGE CHINESE STUDIES NEWSLETTER**

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

Welcome to another issue of the Newsletter!  
We've some long articles this time to help you while away those cold and dark winter hours!

I'm very grateful to those who have been generous with their time and their words and have made this issue such good fun to edit and to bring together. As Dr Fang noted in her interview, it is striking the variety of talks that one can join in our faculty alone. This is certainly true in this issue, we have seminar series in Global History, in Buddhist Book Culture, in the History of Science and Civilisation. We have a Research Seminar Series that strides across literature, history, politics, and the social sciences. I always say to friends from other disciplines with tighter boundaries that if my colleagues and I were not in FAMES, then we would be spread all over the University in different faculties and would never come to meet each other.

It has been very nice to have Kelsey back as a contributor, and to hear how well she is doing as Dr Granger, and to see that she hasn't lost the gift for Newsletter writing! I am still very grateful for her detailed plans, which still form the backbone of these issues. I am also grateful for my tech whizz, Aayushi Gupta, who is responsible for the aesthetics of the Newsletter, and I am, of course, grateful for the many contributors who are responsible for its quality!

I hope that you enjoy reading as much as I have organising.

John Donegan-Cross



*Professor Sterckx during his early days at Cambridge with, from left to right, Michael Loewe, Jane Portal, Michael Nylan, himself, and David McMullen*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR ROEL STERCKX FBA

**Thank you very much for joining us today. I wonder if first you could give us an overview of your studies until you arrived in Cambridge?**

I went first to the University of Leuven, Belgium, in the 1980s. Its Chinese studies programme was set up in the late 70s. It was fairly recent. Back then the place to go for Chinese studies in the Low Countries was Leiden.

### **Was the course full of Jesuit studies?**

Well, it was the Catholic University of Leuven, but that didn't mean it was ideologically tainted. My professor at the time was Ulrich Libbrecht, a mathematician who had done a PhD in Leiden with Erik Zürcher on a 13th century Chinese mathematical treatise. Of course, back then Zürcher had an interest not only in Buddhism but also in the story of the Jesuits, and Libbrecht was a scientist and a mathematician and hence he had an interest in the contributions of the Jesuits and the import of western science into China. Also, as it happens one of the most famous Jesuits involved with China was Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–1688), who was Flemish. Of course, if you put together 'flemish', 'Jesuit', and 'China' then it had to happen at the Catholic University at Leuven. There was a Verbiest unit so we learned quite a lot about him as a part of our story of contact between East and West. This was also the time when for the first time one heard these rumours that it might be quite an astute choice to study Chinese since China was 'opening up'. Consequently, our programme was full of modern Chinese,

twelve or fourteen hours a week or so. And, naturally, everybody had to do classical, both students of Chinese and Japanese. Each required two years of classical Chinese. In the third and the fourth year one could choose between a 'modern China stream': economics, human geography, etc. or a 'classical China stream', for people like me. I did a paper on the history of science because my professor knew Needham, and was very interested in his work (he was proud to have shared a Japanese bath with Needham in Kyoto). And from then on I really became interested in philosophy and in Chinese thought.

**And would you say the course was well taught by the standards of today?**

We definitely had a very good very good modern Chinese class. We had a native speaker – a linguist from Beijing, and we had a lady from Taiwan as well. So we were taught Chinese by one teacher who used Chinese and English and another one who used Chinese and French.

*In the Forbidden City in 1998 while a Junior Research Fellow at Wolfson College, Oxford*



### Did it all come naturally to you?

I quite liked it. I mean, I had always liked to study languages. I knew that I would do languages at university, but I didn't know that I would decide at the last moment that it would be Chinese. For many people who get into studying China, there's always a story. Something like: 'my father was a diplomat', or 'I went to visit my friend's house, and I saw this fantastic Chinese vase'. This was never the case for me. I grew up in a small rural village. And so for me to learn a non-European language, in the back of my mind, was my way of getting out of the village, to see a part of the world or to get to places where I would normally never get. If I had taken French or classics I might have become a high school teacher in the next town or something.

My grandfather was living with us. And of course, he had traditional opinions about what to study: law or medicine, say. Nobody in my family ever went to university. And so when I decided to do Chinese, they were wondering whether I was sure about it! But my parents were open minded. So I wasn't encouraged just to follow, I was encouraged to follow my nose, so to speak. And then came Taiwan.

### And what was your first experience of life in China?

It was in Taiwan. That was interesting, because the first Taiwanese representative office (i.e. its unofficial embassy) in Europe was in Brussels, since Brussels the headquarters of the EU, and of many more international organisations, and so it was the place to be based. Because of this, we had generous scholarships offered to us from the Taiwanese government. I was offered a scholarship, and I ended up in Taida 臺大, National Taiwan University. I decided to enroll in the MA program at the faculty of philosophy.

That was my immersion experience, because we didn't have a year abroad as part of the undergraduate degree. And that's when I really started to get interested in trying to read texts properly and being a bit more attuned to the way in which Chinese scholars read their own texts. I mean, to be honest I hadn't particularly enjoyed my first few years of my undergraduate degree. It was just hard work learning all this Chinese while friends were discussing the great and the good in classics, philosophy or literature. They were discussing adult subjects while we were spending most of the day learning basic Chinese conversation and learning how to write and read, like a toddler again.

### That strikes me as quite a traditional education, how did you end up writing about such left-field subjects as animals and food?

For my undergraduate degree, being in a Catholic University, I wrote on the concept of the *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄 souls and the notions of *gui* 鬼 and *shen* 神.

### All four of them in one dissertation!?

It was quite a bulky dissertation, unlike our own 12,000-word dissertations in the Tripos.



[Professor Sterckx picks up a hefty tome of A4 and reveals it to be his undergraduate dissertation]. All Chinese characters had to be handwritten into the main text since it was before the days of computers. [I have a look inside and can't help but notice very elegant Chinese handwriting!]. So I started with these conceptual questions, and then I got interested in other things touching on the place of human beings in the universe. After my time in Taiwan, I came to Cambridge, and I did an MPhil first, which dealt with the polemic on demons during the Han period, because I was still interested not in the philosophical definition of these concepts, but how people started to prove or formulate arguments about how these concepts worked. How does one handle the world out there? Do spirits exist, how do you demonstrate their existence factually? How did the ancient Chinese handle this problem? I kept getting drawn back to this general observation that the Chinese are 'human centred', or how Confucius, 'put human beings at the centre of the universe' and how everything is supposed to come back to these earthly human ethics. So, then I became interested in the question, well, what about all the other creatures? What about the non-humans or the not-quite-humans? And so that's how I got into animals for my PhD, not necessarily because I was interested in the animals per se, but rather in animals as a category that could help me interrogate human beings. The animal world is often a mirror through which human beings ask questions about themselves. Also, my supervisor here was Mark Lewis, who was American and trained at the University of Chicago. He had just written *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, and had anthropological interests in theories of violence, sacrifice, and in its links with animality. I was interested in that whole area. Next I discovered that Needham never wrote or finished his volume on zoology in *Science and Civilisation in China*.

I wondered why that was the case, and so I went into the archives and read through all the papers that he had gathered together. It was clear to me that Needham was never going to write that volume. Why? Because it did not fit into his classification of the sciences. And then of course it became also apparent to me that there was not a huge amount of early Chinese literature on zoological matters. So I played with these thoughts. I suppose I was partly inspired in my dissertation by that question of why Needham did not write his volume on zoology.

**So following this first stint as a graduate student at Cambridge, where did you go to next?**

I was at Oxford for a while, at Wolfson College as a as a Junior Research Fellow. My first tenure-track job was at the University of Arizona, in Tucson. I returned to Cambridge when my supervisor Mark Lewis left for Stanford. My job at the time was the teaching of Classical Chinese. I was also to cover the first part of the pre modern China offerings here. David McMullen taught medieval China, and Joe McDermott covered late Imperial China. I basically slotted into what was on the books. Back then we had a comparative history paper where students had to compare the Han and the Tang empires.

This gradually became a more thematic history paper. I had never been an undergraduate here. I was at Cambridge as a graduate student, but as you know, that is an entirely different experience. Back then it was a fairly small department, there hadn't been a big increase in positions dedicated to China since the 1960s. At the time the Tripos seemed very much set in stone. There was a lot of focus on dynastic (institutional) history. Professor Hans van de Ven was already here. He had really put the study of modern Chinese history on the map. Dr Susan Daruvala taught modern literature, but at that time, of course, the 'modern' very much meant late 19th century, and the first fifty years of the twentieth century. So while we weren't quite as classical as Oxford was, we still pretty much reflected the time and place. When Adam Chau, an anthropologist with an interest in lived religion joined us, that opened up our curriculum. When I joined the faculty most of our energy was focused on the undergraduate curriculum. The big change over the last twenty years has been the expansion of graduate studies. And of course, when graduate students arrive, they not only come with new ideas but also with new curiosities. It was great for us to be able to attract people from different educational and institutional backgrounds to Cambridge. Few of us had been undergraduates at Oxbridge and, like many of my colleagues in the Faculty, I was a foreigner, so to speak. But this mixture of people who were trained in different universities made it a great place to work. In many European institutions it is hard to find academics who hold a PhD from another university or country. At Cambridge we work both with people from the local system, and people trained in universities across the world.

### **And were these changes gradual?**

In Cambridge, things rarely change overnight. So it happened gradually.

Students at one point were asking for new offerings. For undergraduates there wasn't much choice in terms of papers students could choose from when I arrived here. We went through a process of reforming the faculty, not only changing its name, but also we set up departments. Then in 2007 we reformed the Tripos. We made it more modular, so that people could have a choice of papers and so that students of Chinese and Japanese had the opportunity to spend time together. A similar reform took place for students of Middle Eastern studies. As in the real world, Faculties like ours sometimes tend to be a bit balkanized in language areas (Chinese versus Japanese, Arabic versus Hebrew, etc.) When we set out to reform the *AMES* Tripos, I learned very quickly that this would be immensely bureaucratic and difficult. as if one is touching a sacred cow or the holy grail. And if you have not been an undergraduate in Cambridge, like I have, it is not always easy to accept why it should be so difficult to tweak things. But our offerings today are much flexible than they were when I arrived.

### **Have you anything to say to younger students thinking about becoming academics?**

I never had a conscious plan or ambition to become an academic.



For me, it was more that I did an undergraduate degree that excited me, got a scholarship, had the opportunity to go abroad, thought, 'oh! that's great!'. Then I walked into an MPhil and I thought, 'well! this is quite interesting'. And then I thought, well, maybe if I can find a scholarship, I'll continue. Also I didn't want to go to work and quite liked the independence that comes with reading and writing. I wanted to postpone having to do a normal job as long as possible. So the MPhil became the PhD and then I thought 'well, okay, I can do this postdoc thing!'

But then there comes a point all young scholars eventually get to: you finish your PhD and it gets very competitive. You learn to live with rejection: you apply for fifty jobs and you get forty-nine rejections and one interview. That's just how it is. One has to be open minded. On the one hand, you should pursue your studies with a passion, and I do believe that everybody who wants to pursue an academic career and puts the time in will get there eventually, but on the other hand, you also have to be realistic, right? I mean, it is a particular career that is extremely rewarding, but there are many other ways in which you can engage with China that are equally rewarding. Many of our former students now lead very exciting careers they would not have envisaged when they started studying Chinese.

Chinese studies in the UK is a history of waves. There is little or no continuity, and there has never been a consistent government policy, let alone a joined-up institutional strategy to expand the discipline. Governments only respond to the latest waves. So when 'China', and 'the rise of China' hits the news they think 'Oh, we all need to go and study Chinese'. As a result you see some investment in Chinese studies programmes, but it's not sustained.

Many universities set up China centres, with shiny websites, only for these centers to sink again because they are not backed up by library collections, adequate staff, etc. And still today, in most universities, we are stuck in Faculties for Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, rebaptised from Oriental Studies, thus excusing other humanities departments from appointing experts on China. At Cambridge we have far more capacity and China expertise now than two decades ago. To many of my colleagues who work elsewhere, Cambridge must at times seem like an island of sinological luxuries, with a selective cohort of students, a diverse inflow of graduate students, great library collections and a truly international gathering of scholars. What Cambridge does well is setting programs that are there to stay, regardless of the political climate. There is a China that we want to teach about, in a curriculum which we believe offers a good introduction into thinking about China, no matter the political circumstances in Westminster, China, or beyond.

**Thank you very much for your time!**

You're welcome!

## WORKING ON AI WEIWEI'S JADE COLLECTION, BY DR HAJNI ELIAS

Early this summer I was invited by the artist and activist, Ai Weiwei 艾未未, to examine his jade collection housed at his primary residence in Montemor, Portugal. Over the past years he had mentioned to me his fondness for his jades, but what I saw at Montemar was beyond what I had imagined. Ai's appreciation and knowledge of Chinese art, evident in many of his contemporary pieces, is well known. However, what may not be common knowledge is his profound passion for Chinese archaic jades. Over the past four decades, he has assembled one of the most impressive early jade collections in the world.

The collection contains over 1000 pieces, meticulously assembled with each object's rarity, aesthetic appeal, workmanship and cultural and historical importance in mind. Ai recalls how in his youth he would watch his father polish an ancient jade seal on a daily basis while the family was in exile in Xinjiang. He said,

'In our subterranean abode on the fringe of the Gurbantünggüt Desert, this jade seal appeared almost extraterrestrial, its texture and inscription seemingly belonging to an alternate realm. The seal characters, despite signs of wear, endured. In the present day, long after my father's departure, this jade seal graces my desk, its innate beauty intact – a timeless testament to the ideas etched upon its surface.'

Ai's collection stands out for its impressive size – no museum or any other private collection known to me contains so many archaic jade pieces – and for its time span that covers examples from the Neolithic Hongshan 紅山 Culture (fl. c. 3500–2500 BCE) to the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). The idea of compiling and cataloguing this vast collection came from Ai, who knew that I have worked with jade previously at Sotheby's. He wished his collection to be researched and catalogued, in particular documenting their significance and provenance. On his part, this project is very much about preserving it for the future.

During my visit, we spent days on end examining the pieces, handling and inspecting them under the microscope, only breaking off briefly for lunch or dinner. Ai's passion for his objects was evident from the many stories he told me about how he acquired them and what their significance may have been. He would bring them out from his store-room one by one, carefully taking the piece out of its beautiful box, and placing it in front of me as if it was a rare treasure.

This became our daily ritual, perhaps not dissimilar as to how the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736–1795), an avid collector of jades in his time, would have treated his Imperial Collection. We discussed how to prepare the catalogue and Ai Weiwei came up with the idea of producing an extensive lavish publication as well as an ‘artefact’ which would be a box designed by him containing an independent leaf for each jade object. Of course, he’s the master of curation and his collection warrants such an artistic presentation.

While there is much I could say about the collection, here I would like to briefly introduce some of the more memorable pieces - such as the striking animal form jade labelled by archaeologists as the ‘pig-dragon’ (*zhulong* 豬龍). The name *zhulong* is a contemporary invention, derived from the facial features of this C-shaped sculptural object that resembles a wild boar or pig with its distinct broad snout attached to a body reminiscent of a sinuous dragon. It is typically depicted with large bulging eyes, a snout, sealed lips and protruding ears with a prominent ridge on the top of the head. *Zhulong* are amongst the earliest representations of zoomorphic objects in Chinese art and Ai Weiwei’s collection has examples fashioned from different coloured jades (Figs. 1–2). Whilst clearly representing some form of animal, whether real or imaginary, exactly what they meant for people at the time remains a mystery. Nevertheless, their connection to the animal world is unmistakable and they may be considered as representations of some form of mythical hybrid beast of cultural and ritual significance. Related to the *zhulong* is another zoomorphic animal, labelled by modern scholarship simply as the ‘dragon’ (*long* 龍). Jade dragons are typically of a C-shape with a serpentine body that extends to a rounded tip at the tail, its head detailed with a set of bulging eyes, a surging prominent snout above a mouth and an undulating crest on the back (Fig. 3).

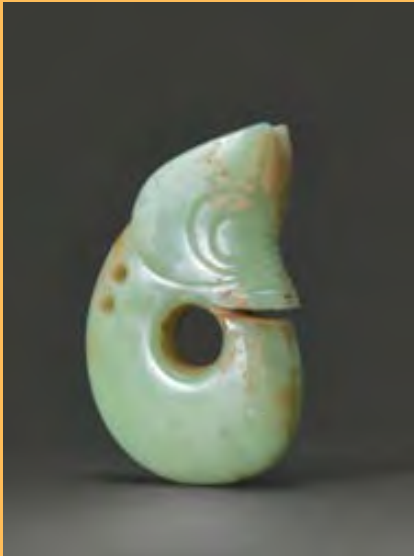
The purpose and significance of both the *zhulong* and long jades can to some degree be ascertained through the locations where they have been found which include the ‘Mother Goddess Temple’ at Niuheiliang 牛河梁, south of Zhushan 豬山 in Chaoyang 朝陽, Liaoning province. Sacrificial altars at Niuheiliang were used in worshipping an earth mother who was treated as a fertility goddess, perhaps the one known from textual sources as Houtu 后土 or the Sovereign Mother Earth. Dragons served as Houtu’s helpers and as such likely functioned as fertility symbols. Another category of jade carving we find in Ai Weiwei’s collection are silkworms and cicadas that were associated with notions of fertility and rebirth. An especially early example is a *huang* pendant in the form of a silkworm, attributable to the late stages of the Yangshao 仰韶 culture (5000–3000 BCE) (Fig. 4). This delicate carving is fashioned with grooved sections to the body and suspension holes on each end. While jade examples are rare, a closely related silkworm-form ornament, also from the Yangshao culture, but made from a boar’s fang, was unearthed at the site of Shuanghuaishu 雙槐樹 in the outskirts of Gonyi city 鞏義市, Henan Province.

Cicadas, also associated with notions of rebirth and fecundity, feature prominently in Chinese art throughout history. Represented by a number of examples in the collection, these artefacts convey the arrival of summer as well as being a symbol of transformation and rebirth due to the insect's unusually long life cycle. Carved with a wide head, large bulging eyes, gently upward curving plump body with the back detailed with lines dividing the insect into three segments and articulated wings, their naturalistic depiction is worth noting (Fig. 5). By the Western Zhou (1050–771 BCE) and Han periods, jade cicadas were placed on the entombed deceased's tongue as part of a set of plugs that covered various bodily orifices with the aim to prevent vital energy or *qi* 氣 from escaping. The ultimate intention was not only to retain the *qi*, considered the life force of all beings and the cosmos, but also to confer the virtues and properties of jade listed in the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記).

Birds, tigers, elephants, water buffalos and turtles carved in jade are further representations of zoomorphic sculptures from the artist's collection (Figs. 6-10). These were all objects found in mortuary settings. However, apart from their ritual or ceremonial function, animals were part of the human world and their placement in tombs and religious sites perhaps reflect man's desire for a harmonious existence with the 'other' i.e. the animal world. It is evident that in the early Chinese world view humans were in an inseparable relationship with nature and jade came to represent the perfect material to create emblems of this powerful connection. To produce zoomorphic objects out of jade, an especially labour intensive and specialised material to work, required artistic imagination, dedication, patience, technical know-how and a belief in the power of the stone.

Thus, when we look at a jade sculpture what we see is much more than a simple artefact. In the words of Ai Weiwei, 'jade served as a vessel of boundless creativity and technical artistry, from meticulous selection to widespread dissemination, forging a shared perception that seemingly embodied truth. It stood as a testament to humanity's imagination of and reverence for the broader cosmos, all the while human humility being the hallmark of civilization'.

*To read the full article on Ai Weiwei's jade collection see Hajni Elias, 'Spiritual Naturalism and Cosmic Harmony: Early Zoomorphic Jades from the Collection of Ai Weiwei', Arts of Asia, Spring 2024 (in print).*

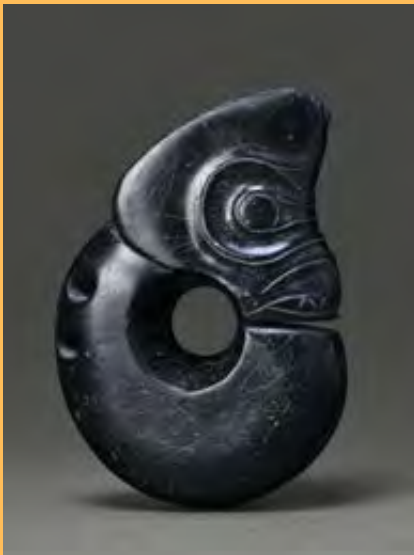


**Fig. 1**

Green jade 'pig dragon'  
(*zhulong* 豬龍)

Neolithic period,  
Hongshan culture (c.  
4500–3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the Ai  
Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 2**

Black jade 'pig dragon'  
(*zhulong* 豬龍)

Neolithic period,  
Hongshan culture (c.  
4500–3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the Ai  
Weiwei Studio)

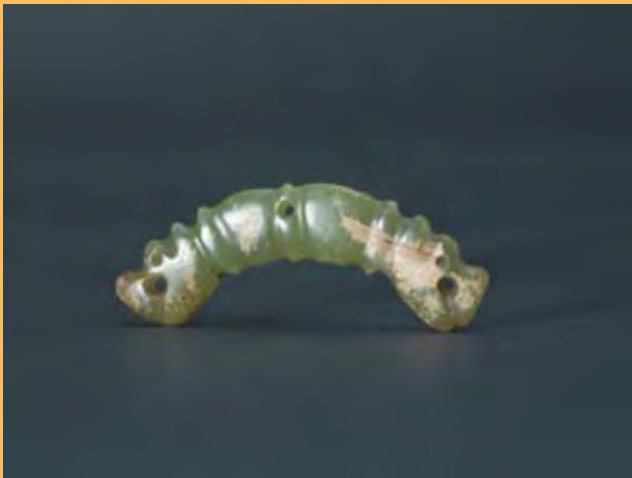


**Fig. 3**

Creamy white jade  
'dragon' (*long* 龍)  
ornament

Neolithic period,  
Hongshan culture (c.  
4500–3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the Ai  
Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 4**

Green jade silk worm  
from *huang* pendant

Neolithic period,  
Yangshao culture (5000–  
3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the Ai  
Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 5**

Green jade cicada from  
pendant

Neolithic period,  
Hongshan culture (c.  
4500–3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the  
Ai Weiwei Studio)



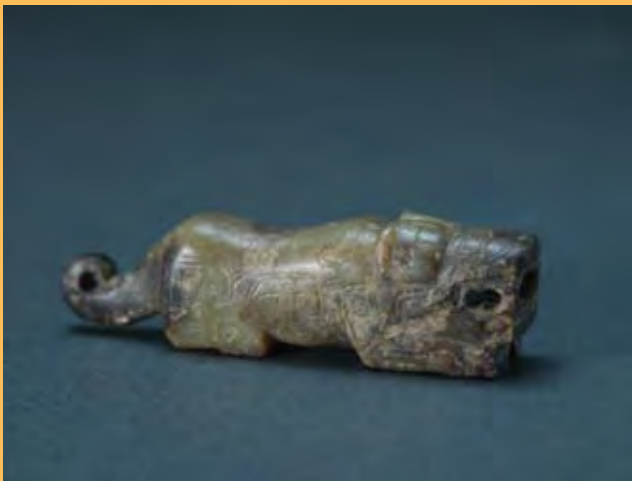
**Fig. 6**

White jade owl form  
pendant

Neolithic period,  
Hongshan culture (c.  
4500–3000 B.C.E.)

(Photo courtesy of the  
Ai Weiwei Studio)



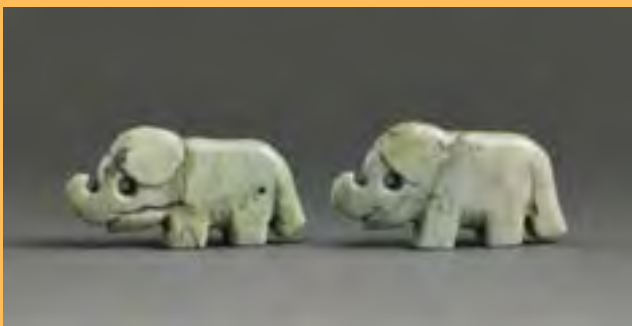


**Fig. 7**

Green jade figure of a crouching tiger

Shang dynasty, c. 1600–1046 B.C.E.

(Photo courtesy of the Ai Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 8**

Grey jade elephant form ornaments

Shang dynasty, Anyang phase 12th–11th century B.C.E.

(Photo courtesy of the Ai Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 9**

Grey jade water buffalo form ornament

Shang dynasty, Anyang phase 12th–11th century B.C.E.

(Photo courtesy of the Ai Weiwei Studio)



**Fig. 10**

Light brown jade turtle-  
form ornament

Western Zhou dynasty,  
c. 1300–1100 B.C.E.

(Photo courtesy of the  
Ai Weiwei Studio)



## AN INTERVIEW WITH DR FLAVIA FANG

**Hello Dr Fang! Thank you very much for joining us! Could you start by telling us a little about your journey through Cambridge?**

Thank you very much! I would love to! I came here five years ago as a PhD student. It was something of a surprise at first, I had been working outside of academia for a few years in International Development, working as a consultant within The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. I was also writing my first book at the time, in Italian, and I really enjoyed the process of reading and researching.

This led me to apply for graduate school and well, Imre took me on as a student!

**So was your previous study also in the field of Classical Chinese?**

It was actually in comparative literature! I specialised in English and French, but then ultimately I wrote a thesis comparing European and Chinese literature. I was very interested in the theme of dreaming, of wakening. There are many interesting tropes within this theme, for instance, the experience of one awakening from sleep. Such a trope occurs in *Zhuangzi*, *Tang chuanqi*, *Honglouloumeng*, but also in medieval Italian short stories, in Shakespeare and Pedro Calderón de la Barca. I found this very intriguing! So I compared how this differently and traced some of the philosophical roots.

**Very multilingual! So what was the project that you proposed to Professor Galambos?**

I was interested in connections between cultures, so, I applied to Imre with a project focussing on the Silk Road's influence on women's experience in Tang China. I wanted to look at how the inculcation of this spirit of openness, of new ideas and of new cultures had a social and a cultural impact on everyday life.

But then through the process of writing about this project I came to the subject that became my PhD thesis: smell. How the past smelled like, how people in medieval China described their olfactory perceptions and how this tells us about the mentalities at that time and place. Looking back, with both the 'dreams project' and the 'smell project', I have always been very interested in the lived, embodied experiences of the past. Only with the PhD thesis, I am switching to a more historical consideration using an interdisciplinary approach.

**I can see the continuity now of your temporally and spatially wide-ranging subjects! So how was the experience of moving to Cambridge from Italy?**



I had been living in Rome for seven years before moving to Cambridge, at first of course I missed Rome a lot. But then after not a very long time at all I grew to really love living here. The university and our department were such wonderful places to be a research student, I felt so lucky to have scholarship from the St John's College. And I so enjoying the opportunity to try to expand, to push my intellectual boundaries without having to worry about anything else. I mean, there are always so many interesting talks in our faculty, or at the Needham Research Institute, or beyond! Our faculty's place as a meeting point of disciplines makes for a highly stimulating environment, and then college is so caring as well. So many events in such a small place! It's very concentrated, it's very easy to live here.

**And how have you found the switch from studying full time to researching and teaching?**

Well the switch between 'study' and 'research' isn't much of a transition, and I had done a bit of teaching during my PhD. Certainly this year teaching has started to take up more of my time, but then I really love teaching. I love how you read more, and more broadly, because you have to cover so many more bases.

I also really enjoy interacting with the students. It is very rewarding working to inspire the next generation (at least I hope to inspire them!). Lecturing also forces you to articulate your own ideas more clearly, and sort out your own knowledge. That's another positive.

**And could you tell us a bit about the direction your research is now taking?**

Well my Postdoc project has been exploring death! Part of my interest with smell might more broadly be described as an interest in lived experience: records, narratives, and not only what prominent intellectuals thought about the matter, but also how olfaction turned up among common people and in everyday interactions. About the ideas that they had on society, the supernatural, foreigners, there are plenty of amusing anecdotes to be found! So I've slid across some overlapping sources to come to my current project on death. There were a good number of sources I encountered describing dead bodies as 'fragrant' in medieval hagiographies. This led me to wonder about the physical and imaginary dimensions of death, there isn't much in current scholarship.

**Well thank you very much! And before you go, could you tell us a little about your spare time? I understand you are a person of many hobbies!**

Well, I do enjoy a number of creative pursuits, I love calligraphy and painting, tennis, knitting, cooking, these sorts of things! I find them all very relaxing!

**Thank you very much for chatting with us!**

You're very welcome!



*Photos taken by Giovanni Oakes*



# AN INTERVIEW WITH ALUMNUS PROFESSOR JULIA LOVELL

**Hello Professor Lovell, thank you very much for joining us. Please could you tell us about your time at the department here in Cambridge?**

At school I always loved languages and history. When I got to Cambridge, I flipfopped between the two: I applied to study French and Spanish, but switched to history a few weeks before I started. Then in my third term of history, my mother lent me a copy of a book that was a bestseller at the time: Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*. Within the weekend I had finished it; I also knew that I was fascinated by China and its history, but to know more about either I would need to learn the language. The next day, I asked my College tutor how I could change to Chinese.

Because I could only switch to Chinese in my third year (after finishing a two-year History Part 1), I only had 2 years in the undergraduate course and didn't get a year abroad, of course, but I had a wonderful time at the department. The course was the ideal combination of disciplines and subjects: modern and classical language, history, literature and philosophy. All my teachers were so conscientious and inspiring. I graduated after my Part 1 (I finished with 2 Part 1s: in History and in Chinese) then spent a year at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center for Chinese and American Studies, which was once more an incredible experience, being taught academic subjects (history, literature, philosophy, sociology) in Chinese by professors from Nanjing University. During that year in China, I applied to do an M.Phil. and Ph.D. in modern Chinese literature back at the department in Cambridge, which I completed with the amazing Susan Daruvala (now emerita).

**As an Undergraduate did you always know that you would like to become an academic?**

Not at all; I've always had, and continue to have, impostor syndrome. I never dreamed that I could have the competence to be an academic; I begin every research project with the firm belief that I won't be able to complete it. But I was very fortunate to have parents who were teachers, who filled the house with books, who encouraged me to read and study foreign languages, and who talked to me about literature, ideas and history. So I came from a background that told me studying culture and languages was important and worthwhile.

**What first sparked your interest in Chinese studies, and what did you write about in your Master's and your PhD?**

I studied modern and contemporary literature as a graduate student. My M.Phil. focused on a contemporary writer called Feng Jikai, an extremely versatile novelist and essayist, who courageously and creatively built new spaces to write about the historical experience of the Cultural Revolution. My Ph.D., which I completed 1999–2002, wrote about the preoccupation of Chinese intellectuals with winning a Nobel Prize in Literature.



Until Mo Yan won in 2012, a mainland Chinese author had never won a Nobel Literature Prize, and between the 1980s and 2000s this became a source of anxiety within China. Many asked: what was 'wrong' with Chinese literature that it could not win this literary 'world cup'? Through the topic, I was able to explore some very interesting issues in modern and contemporary Chinese culture: China's yearning for external, Western recognition; the contradictory idea that literature (an elite, individual form of expression) can somehow represent a collective national identity; an uncertainty about who Chinese literature should be for – a popular Chinese readership, or the Swedish judges of the Nobel Prize? I got the idea for the project by attending, in my final year as an undergraduate, a dissertation talk by that year's fourth years, which mentioned in passing, in relation to a novella that she had studied, China's 'Nobel Complex'. The reference stuck with me and I developed it into my PhD and first book. This experience told me that you never know when you're going to encounter an idea that will inspire or influence you; it's important to be open to all the opportunities and ideas that being at Cambridge can offer!

**And how was your experience of the 'student life' here in the department, and in Cambridge?**

We were a small cohort, just 5 students in my year, but everyone was very supportive, especially if one of the group was struggling with a topic (I always struggled with classical Chinese, I'm afraid – I love it but I've never been very good at it). Studying Chinese was a different experience to doing History; the Chinese course is so much more structured. When I was doing History, I had a bit more time for extracurricular interests, like music and drama, which faded somewhat when I started Chinese, but I really loved having the structure and intensive teaching of the Chinese course – it was endlessly

fascinating and furthermore left no time for existential crisis (which I'm otherwise prone to).

**Could you tell us a little about what you are working on at the moment?**

I'm working on a history of Chinese archaeology, a study of how the modern, scientific study of antiquity has moulded political, social and cultural identity in China over the past 120 years. Across many Chinese social strata, a sense of China as an ancient, continuous civilisation is fundamental to cultural and political pride. Harvard's Rowan Flad recently argued that this is a golden age for Chinese archaeological discovery, and yet stunning excavations receive little public attention in Western countries. In October, I made my first visit back to China post-Covid, and was excited and fascinated to visit archaeological excavations and museums across north China. Through this and subsequent visits, I hope to build a history of how interpretations of the deep past have shaped China's sense of itself today.

**Thank you very much!**

You're very welcome!



## AN UPDATE FROM BEIJING BY PROFESSOR HANS VAN DE VEN

Here in Beijing, Covid is gone. At least, the measures to contain it are gone. The response of China's universities to the lifting of Covid restrictions has been to try to hold all the conferences, seminars, and workshops that did not take place over the last three years in one, albeit 16-week, semester, equivalent to two Cambridge terms. For me that has been a good thing. I have been able to present my research on Asia's Second World War at seminars here in Beijing at Tsinghua University and CASS's Institute of Modern History, at the Global Humanities Institute of Nanjing University, and at the Institute of Advanced Studies at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou. The feedback from a wide range of historians has been truly helpful to me.

One thing I have learned is that WeChat has become an important research tool at least for modern China historians. WeChat's 公众号 – public service accounts – are not just the way that news about academic events is spread. They are used to circulate PDFs of papers and books, distribute blog posts, and, crucially, release archives.

I am far from having a good handle on this world, but my graduate students have been helping me find my way into it. This is world with which we will need to come to terms. The downside is that a new generation of researchers will be less familiar with the more old-fashioned research tools of indexes, bibliographies, and catalogues. Knowledge will be gained; knowledge will be lost.

The highlight of the term has been the Beijing Forum, for which I organized a sub-forum on 'the end of empire and the transformation of Asia.' The sub-forum brought together scholars from China, India, Indonesia, the UK, and the Netherlands. One aim was to facilitate conversations between scholars in Asia who have good connections with Europe and America but not with each other. The sub-forum was a small but useful step in the right direction. A highlight was a paper by 徐冠冕, my Beida colleague, who, trenchantly but also humorously, called for the decolonization of the buffalo, demanding that we rid ourselves of bucolic images that we have of it and think through how this powerful beast functioned in Indonesian agricultural practices and rendered unnecessary the plantation systems of the Americas.



## CHINA RESEARCH SEMINAR SERIES UPDATES

This term we have a diverse lineup of speakers, across the disciplines of politics, literature, history and contemporary art.

On October 12, we welcomed **Professor William Hurst**, who recently joined the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies as the Chong Hua Professor of Chinese Development. His presentation is titled 'Institutional Politics and Social Change through Multiple Lenses: Looking at Labour, Law & Land in Contemporary China', in which he shared his personal experience of doing research in China over several decades, as illustrated by various conceptual and methodological tools used for his two books and one ongoing book project. He specifically discussed subnational comparative analysis and interview-based research in relation to his first book on labour and unemployment in the Chinese state sector, which included case studies of the massive layoffs in China in the 1990s.

In addition, for his second book on law and legal institutions in China and Indonesia, he used cross-national paired comparison and observational, interview, and document-based research. His third book project is on land in Mainland China, Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Professor Hurst's broad research methods and international comparative perspectives, particularly on social and political issues in China, are quite unique in the recent China Research Seminar series, and his addition to the faculty will undoubtedly lead to more exciting discussions in the future.

On October 26, **Professor Jeffrey Riegel**, who retired from the University of California, Berkeley (1979–2007) and The University of Sydney (2007–2017), gave us a talk on 'Readings from A Journal of My Misgivings: Liang Yusheng, Sima Qian, and the History of Qin'. Over the last seven years, Professor Riegel has been closely reading the *Shiji zhiyi* 史記志疑 of Qing scholar Liang Yusheng 梁玉繩 (1744–1819), which is a detailed analysis and critique of Sima Qian's famous 史記 *Shiji*, the ancient Han dynasty account of China's earliest dynasties and ruling houses from legendary times until the second century BCE. Now Professor Riegel has produced a book-length study focusing on Liang's comments on the *Shiji* passages and weaving

Liang's scholarship into a revision of Sima Qian's narration of the transformation of Qin from a marginal state to a hegemonic power. In the talk, Professor Riegel used examples of Liang's methodology and the more dramatic revisions suggested by his scholarship to demonstrate the importance of including Liang's interpretation for the study of *Shiji*, even if Liang's revisions might be outdated or incomplete.

We reconvened on November 9 for the talk of **Dr John Alekna** of Peking University, a historian of information, technology, and politics in modern China. He was a visiting research fellow at the Needham Institute during the Michaelmas term of 2023. His talk focuses on his upcoming book *Seeking News, Making China: Information, Technology, and the Emergence of Mass Society*, which will be published by Stanford University Press. Dr Alekna traced the history of news in twentieth-century China to show how major structural changes in technology and politics were perceived and felt. He weaved together both rural and urban history to tell the story of the rise of mass society through the lens of communication techniques and technology, demonstrating how the news revolution fundamentally reordered the political geography of China.

The following week, our very own faculty member **Dr Heather Inwood**, Associate Professor of Modern Chinese Literature and Culture (who was also educated in the Chinese Studies department as an undergraduate), gave us an engaging talk on 'Outbreak City: Undead and Online in Hong Kong Popular Fiction'. The talk takes a light-hearted topic, the zombie-centred genre of fiction and movies in Hong Kong, to discuss Hong Kong's political and social issues, as well as anxiety about the city's identity and future. It is full of fun facts, especially the various shapes, images, and allegories of zombies.

One of the key works in discussion was the phenomenal movie *The Midnight After*. Dr Inwood examined the co-existing fantastical worlds, political crisis, identity anxieties, and an imaged past all prevalent in Hong Kong popular culture, drawing on existing *goeng si* 殭屍 (reanimated corpses that hop around on two legs and originate in traditional Chinese supernatural fiction, or the Chinese equivalent of zombies) scholarship. This talk sparked many questions from students eager to share their observations and experiences with Hong Kong pop culture as well as Japanese and Korean animation and movies.

The last seminar of the semester fell on November 23, when we welcomed **Dr Xie Bo** from Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts and a visiting scholar at SOAS, University of London. Dr Xie is an art historian of Daoist art, specialising in Chinese landscape paintings by Daoist artists. For this talk, she discussed her latest research on contemporary Chinese sculpture artist Sui Jianguo 隋建国 and his work *Garden in Data Cloud: Forty Instants* 云中花园/40个瞬间. In approaching Sui's seminal work, Dr Xie focused on the concept of 'emptiness' 空, as well as the possibilities for the concrete art form of sculpture to represent this seemingly opposite concept of 'emptiness'.

citing Tang poet Wang Wei 王维, as well as works by world-renowned sculpture artists Anish Kapoor and Albert Giacometti. This poetic and philosophical talk drew a variety of questions from the audience about alternative discursive and comparative frameworks, such as Korean artist Lee Ufan in the context of art history, Zen Buddhism in relation to 'emptiness', and different interpretations of Daoist ideas of energy and non-action.

By Liu Di, PhD Student



# GLOBAL HISTORY AND CHINA WORKSHOP

On the 16th of October, in the second week of the Michaelmas term 2023, scholars and postgraduate students working on China and global history across the Faculties of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies (FAMES), History, History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) as well as from beyond Cambridge (Oxford, Erlangen, Göttingen, Ohio, etc.) participated in the 'China and Global History Workshop' at the Needham Research Institute, Cambridge. This was enabled by the generous support of the Needham Research Institute and the organisation of the programme by **Dr Xin Fan**.

The day started at 9 a.m. with a panel discussion by PhD students from Cambridge and Oxford, chaired by **Dr Noga Ganany**. **Sun Wen Chan** from FAMES presented his work on 'The Bull that Left the China Shop: British Businesses in Shanghai, 1945–1953'. He shared his preliminary research on how British firms such as Unilever operated amidst numerous challenges in China during this period. Next, **Leo Chu** from HPS talked to us about this research on 'Taiwan, Cold War Science, and the Green Revolution in Southeast Asia'. **Ying Tong** successfully made the difficult journey from distant Oxford to share with us 'Unique to the Chinese Battlefield: Pragmatic Style, Solidarity, Familial Bonds of Shanghai Working Women's War Zone Service Corps'. Lastly, **Yizhuo Li** from FAMES elaborated on her project 'Seeing Herself: Women's Self-Portraiture and the European Glass Mirror in Eighteenth-Century China', examining how the European glass mirror as a global commodity influenced the common experience of women in the boudoir to perceive and portray themselves under their brushes.

Members of the audience raised numerous critical and thought-provoking questions.

**Professor Marc Matten**, who had travelled from Erlangen, Germany, gave the 'State of the Field' talk. He highlighted asymmetries between scholarly work that had been translated from English to Chinese and vice versa, the former outweighing the latter by a great margin. He introduced the project he is leading in Germany to translate articles written by Chinese historians from Chinese to German and English, which he hopes will improve Western understanding of academic work in history in Chinese. The infectious talk ignited reflections, questions, and comments from colleagues and scholars across the room.

After the lunch break, **Professor Dominic Sachsenmaier** zoomed in virtually from Göttingen to give the Keynote Speech. Only having just recovered from pneumonia and advised not to travel, he eagerly shared with us 'Beyond Centrisms? Questions of Privilege and Perspective in Long Twentieth-Century Chinese History', which is based on a recent article of his. He reflected on the contradictions of decentralising history in 'global humanities', arguing that Western hegemony in academia is still strong.



For instance, scholarly exchange between India and China remains limited. Discussants **Professor Hans van de Ven** (remotely from Peking University) and **Professor Ying Zhang** (remotely from Ohio State University) contributed to the discussion by sharing their experiences and reflections on the methodological practices of 'Global Humanities' and the intersections of history and feminism. The chair of the session, **Professor Adam Yuet Chau**, helped field a wide range of questions and comments from the audience while adding a few of his own insights.

In the second panel, chaired by **Dr John Nilsson-Wright**, the imagination of China and Global History was widened once again. Joined by **Dr Mohammed Al-Sudairi** from Göttingen on 'The Global Imagining of an Islamised China at the Turn of the Twentieth Century'; **Dr Thomas P. Barrett** (FAMES) on 'The 1886 Burma Annexation, Tributary Relations, and British and Qing Manipulations of 'Face''; **Dr Janice Jeong** (Göttingen) on 'The Politics of Inter-Asian Muslim Mobility in Inter-War and Wartime China', and **Dr Dan Knorr** (History) on 'Globalising the History and Historiography of Chinese and U.S. States'. They are all doing pioneering work in their fields of research, to which the audience applauded and offered comments and questions.

The Roundtable at the end of the Workshop was a highlight of the workshop. **Dr Xin Fan** brought the China experts dispersed in three different faculties and departments in Cambridge to sit together and exchange ideas and comments on their approach to the history of China and its relation to global history. They were **Dr Mary Brazelton** in HPS, **Dr Rachel Leow** and **Dr Dror Weil** in History, **Dr Xin Fan** in FAMES, also joined by **Professor Marc Matthen** from Erlangen. It was very clear that the discussion of 'Global History' and 'Global Humanity' is methodologically broad and far-ranging.

Upon concluding that much needs further exploration within the field and the initiative, the Workshop drew to an end, leaving everyone all the more intrigued and excited by 'China and Global History'.

All in all, the Workshop was a successful event engaging scholars in China across the University of Cambridge as well as beyond. It highlighted the importance of having international dialogues and discussions on this emerging field.

By Lynn Zhang, MPhil Student





## BOOK CULTURE IN BUDDHISM AND BEYOND: DR MING TAK TED HUI ON REPRINTING THE BUDDHIST ĀGAMA COLLECTION IN KHARA-KHOTO

Supported by the Glorisun Global Network, the recently inaugurated lecture series titled 'Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond' has commenced in the Michaelmas Term of 2023. The series features talks on writing and publishing in the Buddhist tradition and in related religious and cultural spheres. Lectures in this series offer insights into the various ways in which writing and printing has been shaping Buddhism, as well as the multifaceted impact of Buddhism on book culture in East Asia,

past, present, and future. This lecture series is organised by **Dr. Noga Ganany** at Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge.

On 22 November 2023, we enjoyed the first lecture by **Dr Ming Tak Ted Hui** who explored the theme of 'Reprinting the Buddhist *Āgama* Collection in Khara-Khoto'. Dr. Hui, an Associate Professor of Classical Chinese and Medieval China at the University of Oxford, shared his expertise with an audience eager to delve into the historical intricacies of Buddhism. His academic journey includes a B.A. from the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2009 and a Ph.D. from Harvard University in 2020. Dr. Hui is concluding a book project that explores the multilingual environment of the Yuan dynasty in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a period when China was under Mongol rule.

This lecture focused on the history of reading and printing Buddhist texts in the 11th-century Tangut empire, with a spotlight on the Tangut edition of the *Āgama* sutras (*Ahan jing* 阿含經) discovered in Khara-Khoto. This unique case study unraveled the Tanguts' perspective on Theravada Buddhism, shedding light on *Āgama*, an understudied Theravada Buddhist text.

Dr. Hui introduced the discovery of Khara-Khoto, a once-thriving city situated in the western part of Inner Mongolia, which has yielded a wealth of manuscripts and printed texts, presenting a unique opportunity to explore the circulation and practice of Buddhism in Tangut society.

Dr. Hui further delved into the Tangut reprinting of the Buddhist text, drawing comparisons between the Chinese texts of Āgama printed in Tangut and the received editions. He argued, based on evidence such as *Qian Zi Wen* 千字文 (*Thousand Character Classic*) signifiers, that the Khara-Khoto Āgama was reedited and reprinted in Tangut, rather than directly from the Song Buddhist Canon. Drawing connections between illustrations of the Dharmapāla Divine King printed in Tangut and Khitan Liao, Dr. Hui explored the potential influence of Liao on Tangut Buddhism.

The lecture illuminated textual variations and editorial practices employed by the Tanguts in reprinting the Buddhist text and examined the roles played by Song, Liao, and Tangut in the circulation of Āgama in the 11th century. The engaging Q&A session showcased the enthusiasm of the audience, who posed insightful questions.

This successful initiation into understanding the Tangut reception of Buddhism sets the stage for forthcoming lectures in the series. The upcoming sessions will traverse medieval times to the twentieth century, exploring deities, vernacular literature, Buddhist conceptions, and readership through the lens of book culture in East Asia. Anticipation is high for the continued exploration of this fascinating intersection of culture, religion, and written tradition.

By Li Yizhuo, PhD Student

### **'Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond' Lecture Series:**

*This new lecture series, launching in Michaelmas Term 2023, features talks on writing and publishing in the Buddhist tradition and in related religious and cultural spheres. Lectures in this series offer insights into the various ways in which writing and printing has been shaping Buddhism, as well as the multifaceted impact of Buddhism on book culture in East Asia, past, present, and future.*

*All talks take place at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge. Registration is not required. The lectures are free and open to scholars, students, and the public.*

*Please note: all events take place in person at the University of Cambridge. Exact times and location will be circulated via email and posted on the faculty website <https://www.ames.cam.ac.uk/whats-on/book-culture-buddhism-and-beyond-2023-24>.*

*This lecture series is organised by Dr Noga Ganany with the generous support of the Glorisun Global Network.*

## NEEDHAM RESEARCH INSTITUTE SEMINAR SERIES UPDATES

It has been another busy term here at the NRI with a rich and varied seminar programme.

**Roel Sterckx** (Cambridge) opened the seminar programme for 2023–24 with a text-reading session on the *Classic on Fish Farming* (*Yang yu jing* 養魚經) by Huang Xingzeng 黃省曾 (1490–1540). **Verna Yu** (Oxford/ SOAS) and **Alaric Searle** (ZMSBw Potsdam) presented on 20th century intellectuals, with the former on Xu Liangying's 許良英 transformation from 'professional revolutionary' to 'dissident physicist' from the 1930s to the 2000s, and the latter on the politics of academic and state awards presented to Joseph Needham, 1946–1994.

**Lisa Raphals** (UC Riverside) offered a cross-cultural comparative seminar on Chinese and Greek accounts of chance and randomness. The programme also featured visiting fellows of the NRI **Zhang Changping** (Wuhan) on the sacrificial aspects of the Sanxingdui site, **John Alekna** (PKU) on the movement and meaning of science in 19th century China by way of a case study of Notes from Enlightenment Studio (*Deyi Zhai Waiji* 得一齋外集), and **Li Xinsheng** (Southeast University) on the development of maize in China.

A highlight on this term's calendar was the 6th Needham Memorial Lecture delivered by **Professor Dame Jessica Rawson** on 3rd November, titled 'Finding China's Present in Its Past', which saw over 100 attendees gathered together in the Riley Auditorium in Clare College Memorial Court.

The workshop 'China and Eurasia: Metallurgy and Society', jointly organised by the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge and the NRI, took place at the KP Tin Hall on 13 October 2023. A group of scholars presented their most recent research on metallurgy and society in ancient China and Eurasia, with a focus on the early cultural interactions between China and the Eurasian Steppe from the Bronze (2nd millennium BCE) to the historical period.

The *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 reading group, convened by **Arthur Harris**, continued to meet on Wednesdays at 10–11am. Anyone interested in joining the group should contact Arthur at ([ah954@cam.ac.uk](mailto:ah954@cam.ac.uk)).

We look forward to sharing the Lent Term seminar programme in January and to seeing many of you at our events!

Jenny Zhao, ISF Academy Senior Research Fellow, Needham Research Institute



# FINDING CHINA'S PRESENT IN ITS PAST BY PROFESSOR DAME JESSICA RAWSON (MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD)

**Professor Dame Jessica Rawson** needs no introduction, and she needed no notes to deliver a highly engaging and wide-ranging discussion of what makes China itself.

Professor Rawson argued that in order to understand the culture of China, Classical and Modern, one needed to respect the climate. The Western heights of the Tibetan plateau and the deserts and mountains of central Asia and the steppe formed an impasse between China and its 'neighbours' in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean. With maps and charts Professor Rawson showed that to the east of this impasse the climate was dominated by the Pacific Monsoon in the summer, and weather that alternated with the Westerlies in the winter, thereby leading to an agriculture different to that the other side of the plateau and the steppe. On this geographical basis Professor Rawson's talk went subterranean: she showed us the bronze banqueting vessels, bell chimes, and the lacquered furniture familiar to readers of her myriad books, chapters, and articles. She argued that, unlike the monuments of deities and temples familiar in Egypt, Greece, Rome, the evidence underground is that along with agriculture, culture also developed separately and differently. Onto this basis also were built social structures that Professor Rawson argued persist to the present day, despite ever-faster communication and transport across the steppe and the central Asian deserts.

The audience was as rich and varied as the talk. Familiar sinological faces were all present, but the general accessibility of the talk and the renown of the figure brought listeners from across faculties, and from wider than Cambridge. The questions were therefore similarly varied. Some questioners pushed back slightly on the timelessness of such social structures, some enquired about the nature of China today. The variety of questions was testament to the broad interest of the subject.

What I found most charming about the talk was Professor Rawson's insistence on a left-field 'methodological approach': walking. There were a number of her friends in the audience with whom she had tied up walking boots and explored these areas of impasse that she brought into her talk. She herself had surveyed the Tianshan mountains, and pondered crossing the Central Asian deserts, and she had done so along with fellow academics with whom she could discuss all that she was thinking, and learn of the geography and botany of the region. After the talk I mulled over my friends' academic projects, and wondered whether many couldn't benefit from this fresh yet classic methodological approach.

By John Donegan-Cross, PhD  
Student

## WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



**Hu Haohua** is an art historian specializing in Chinese art and collecting of the twelfth to sixteen centuries. She received her PhD from China Academy of Art with the thesis *Reconstructing the Essential Criteria of Antiquities: hierarchy, taste and identity in 12th–15th century China*. She was an academic visitor to the University of Oxford in 2016–2017. She is currently an associate professor in School of Art Management and Education, China Academy of Art. Her academic work focuses on various aspects of ancient Chinese art history from museology, Chinese literati collecting to Chinese ancient texts and prints. Her current project in the Needham Research Institute takes a comparative approach to natural history illustrations in both ancient China and Europe.



**Guo Jianbo** currently holds a position at the Sichuan Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. He obtained his undergraduate degree from Northwest University and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at Sichuan University, focusing on the protection and archaeological research of Sanxingdui bronze artifacts and silk technology. His research primarily concerns bronze casting techniques and cultural exchanges during the pre-Qin period in the Sichuan Basin.



## WHO'S NEW AT THE NEEDHAM INSTITUTE?



**Dong Junqing** is an Associate Professor and a Master's Supervisor of the Shanghai Institute of Optics and Fine Mechanics, Chinese Academy of Sciences. He received his PhD in Materials Science from University of Chinese Academy of Sciences. His research focuses on scientific and technological archaeology of glass, ceramic and jade relics. He has co-authored two books, and has published over 18 papers as 1st author and 27 papers as a co-author in peer-refereed journals. During his time as Li Foundation of New York Fellow at the NRI, he works on the technology and culture exchanges along the Silk Road reflected from ancient Glass in China.



John Alekna is a historian of information, technology, and politics in modern China, currently an Assistant Professor in the History of Science, Technology and Medicine Department at Peking University in Beijing. He received his PhD from Princeton University. His first book, a history of news in twentieth-century China, investigates the ways that information technologies and social practices interact to create new political orders. His current research uncovers the little-known story of China's 19th-century 'Great Game' through the life of the late-Qing mathematician, astronomer, and explorer Huang Maocai (1843–1890). Examining the intersection of science, technology, and geo-politics, the project tells the story of these large structural changes in science and politics 'from below,' through locales outside coastal cities and individuals outside the national elite.

# FIRST YEAR UPDATES

A simple 'Ni hao'

'That's interesting.'

'What career can you go into?'

'Why would you study that subject?'

These are typical responses a student specialising in China might encounter. These were the questions I was determined to answer at the beginning of term. I was humbly equipped with 'ni hao' and 'baozi', which would definitely not impress my language teachers, nor a native Chinese speaker.

Looking back now, I had no idea what was in store for me.

One of the first classes I attended, my language teacher introduced the idea that characters are like 'friends'. Friends who we must develop and nurture a loving relationship with. This can only be done through consistent revision. That seems simple enough, right? I've come to learn that certain friends can be quite 'high maintenance'. In light of this, I will continue referring to characters as 'friends'. Unlike learning Chinese characters, making friends with my class came easily. We got all well quickly, everyone was more than willing to help each other, there was a real sense of community. The pace of our classes was fast. Our language teachers did a great job of breaking down complex grammar (such as the infamous 了) in an easy and understandable way.

After class, quite often, I would walk the streets of Cambridge. To my surprise not only did I hear Mandarin, but I understood it. It was as if I had discovered a newfound superpower.

Reading the menu at Boba shops, understanding Chinese song lyrics, impressing my friends with my reading ability. However, just as the week five blue were starting to kick in, I fell ill with something else. Something not so easily curable. I would like to diagnose myself with 'language amnesia'. A feeling, I'm sure, most language learners can relate to. No matter how many times you revisited a certain word, you just can't seem to remember it.

Towards the end of term, I was undoubtedly feeling quite overwhelmed, stressed and disheartened. After many attempts to memorise characters, it seemed that my case of 'language amnesia' was quite severe and there seemed no end in sight. My overworked brain, and my dejected heart decided it was a time for a break. Where did this break take me? The White cliffs of Dover. What would appear to be a random trip away from Cambridge, turned into the highlight of my first term.

During my time there, an innocent group of Chinese tourists came towards me asking me to take a picture. Luckily for me (or unluckily for them) little did they know I had a few words of my own.



To both our shock, I was able to reply in Mandarin. Originally a conversation starting with 'you're welcome' turned into me explaining why I study Chinese. This conversation was completely in Mandarin. At not one point did I use a dictionary or stumble on my words, it was simply me, myself and my 'friends'. Luckily for me, I managed to leave the conversation before I ran out of 'friends' to use. Although, if it ever came down to it I would've used my trusty '我不会汉语' (I don't know how to speak Chinese). Nonetheless, in the moment, all the hard work, struggle and despair washed away and was replaced with a new sense of purpose.

The prominent question 'why would you study that subject?' had a quite simple answer: connection. Through dedicating my time, slowly improving, wrestling with my language amnesia I had unlocked the door to connecting with people I would've never had the opportunity to before. Although, we came from vastly different backgrounds, countries and ideologies in that moment we were united by a common language.

With my newfound confidence in my language ability, I was joined by my classmates in our annual poetry recital. The overall spirit was high as we had cheered each other on. It was very impressive seeing my classmate's language skills develop so quickly, everyone performed their piece elegantly. Overall, this term has taught me a lot! Alongside the language, I'm grateful for my classmates and teachers believing, supporting and most importantly being patient with me.

I have by no means mastered the Chinese language; however, I've progressed significantly from my humble beginnings, starting with a simple 'nihao'.

By Sarah Aaliyah Kleinmoedig



## SECOND YEAR UPDATES

Few things compare to returning under the guiding hands of Wang Laoshi and Wu Laoshi as we buckled in for the typical blistering 8 weeks of AMES language learning. Joining the roster this year also were Dr Zhao and Dr Inwood. With Zhao Laoshi, we finally gain the right to call ourselves intermediate learners as she sets us apace with on-the-spot translations of texts in Intermediate Comprehensive Course I. Steamrolling through the ample/copious internalised thoughts of Tianmei in Qiu Shanshan's 'Afternoon Tea', Dr Inwood has introduced us to our first sip of modern Chinese texts.

Accompanying the modern language, we once again acquired new knowledge whilst thinking over the old, as we read our first classical Chinese poetry and *zhiguai* stories under the captaincy of both Professor Sterckx and Dr Fang. From the Nineteen Old Poems to Zhiguai stories featuring a heroic dog named Black Dragon, the term was satisfying albeit challenging.

Second year is also a year in which we comrades began to pursue our varied interests. With some classmates, including myself, taking on Professor Chau's C8 Globalisation in China, we will continue to ponder whether an 8000-word assignment can be considered a mini-dissertation. Then again, perhaps it is our linguistic failure to understand the subjective semantic meaning of what Professor Chau considers 'mini'. Others delved into C7 History of Dynastic China—going through all manner of events from the Qin to the Qing periods. C10, J8, and K1 also joined the mix—demonstrating the diverse range of our comrades' interests.

Michaelmas also included the most esteemed End-of-Term Recital. Whilst it is probably best to plead the fifth on our singing performance, renditions of Xu Zhimo's works flowed off the tongue as we familiarised ourselves with the talented poet and prominent alumni of King's College, Cambridge. And as we too 再别剑桥 for the break from lectures (but not work), we can only cast our gaze ahead for what Lent has in store for us. No doubt it will be difficult and tiring, but where else can someone (who began first year without a lick of Chinese) find themselves a year later translating classical poetry and understanding modern Chinese literature? The 8 weeks are gruelling, but always equally as rewarding.

By Molly Barlow



# UPDATES FROM TAIWAN





As 2023 draws to a close, now seems like the perfect time to reflect on the first few unforgettable months of our year abroad in Taiwan! Looking back on the period before leaving for Taiwan, which consisted of many admin jobs (with the tireless support of wonderful Wang Laoshi), the prospect of moving here for a year seemed almost unimaginable. Admittedly, I was equally as daunted as I was excited. But having experienced the most incredible six months, getting to know the country and its truly warm and welcoming people, I now realise that there was no need to feel daunted.

For many of us, our Taiwan adventure started with a summer course funded with a Huayu-Cambridge scholarship. My course was in Tainan, a city in the south. I was thrown into the deep end in terms of my language skills,

as very few people spoke English, and among many of my classmates, Mandarin was often our only common language. This forced me to rely on Mandarin to make myself understood, and I found myself becoming more confident in my speaking skills by the day.

Upon moving to Taipei in September, I was reunited with my classmates, and we started our course at National Taiwan Normal University. In our oral classes and news discussion classes, we have learnt to debate a wide range of topics from freedom of speech to the Chinese-American tech war. We also take a writing class to keep up with our narrative writing and descriptive skills. Additionally, we have been partnered with study buddies, students from NTNU, which has not only allowed us to practice our speaking skills, but also helped us make friends with our Taiwanese peers. In light of this, our course feels very well-rounded, challenging us in all aspects of language acquisition.

However, it is our experiences outside of the classroom that are the most memorable. Taiwan is a country of contrast; an hour's drive from the modern, bustling hub of Taipei, you can find yourself in the idyllic Yangming National Park, with its luscious green mountains, or soaking up rays at Dawulun beach.





Some of our favourite spots for enjoying Taiwan's natural beauty include Taroko National Park, Kending, Alishan, Shifen waterfall, and Sun Moon Lake. The beautiful old town, Jiufen, also provides great views while you can browse tea shops, souvenir shops, and food stalls. Our teachers have also been kind enough to take us on a few excursions, namely the Presidential Office Building and Dadaocheng Market. Taiwanese culture also seems to encapsulate a contrast in itself – Chinese, Japanese, and Indigenous elements fuse together to create an environment quite unlike any other.

Of course, it wouldn't be a complete Taiwan update without mentioning the vast array of amazing food that is on offer!

Taiwan's night markets are a feast for the senses; red lanterns line the bustling streets packed with stalls that offer every snack you could dream of, and the smell of deep-frying sweet potato balls, *congyoubing* (scallion pancakes) and *jipai* (fried chicken) alternates with the aroma of bubble tea (although the occasional whiff of stinky tofu can be a nasty surprise)! The class has also enjoyed many chats over bowls of steaming beef noodle soup, which has a wonderful ability to warm the soul on one of Taiwan's uncharacteristically cold days.

While university life, exploring Taiwan's nature and cuisine has been one of the best experiences I have ever had, what has struck me most deeply about Taiwan has been its people. From the moment I arrived, every encounter I have had with the people here has been one where I feel welcomed and supported. From the restaurant workers who patiently wait while I struggle through my sentences as I order meals, to people I ask for directions when I'm lost, to the border security employees who told me how I can amend my visa (message to second years: don't forget to put your middle name on your visa) – people have been genuinely eager to help me and have treated me with a kindness I will never forget. On the 10th of October, (Double Ten – Taiwan's National Day),



I stood in a sea of people holding national flags, banners, wearing red and blue clothes, eagerly awaiting the parade to walk past. This deeply moved me, as it was refreshing to see such a display of national spirit and a collective pride in Taiwan's democracy. I really hope to return after our year abroad finishes in June!

By Lara Shakhshir





## FOURTH YEAR UPDATES

After 10 extremely fulfilling months in Taiwan for our year abroad, the prospect of coming back to Cambridge for one final year of academic rigour and the prospect of dissertation writing and final exams loomed over us like the cloudy English weather. Of course, as soon as we arrived for the start of Michaelmas, these worries faded away as we were warmly greeted by the Faculty and got (re)acquainted with everyone.

Another bizarre feeling we have had to come to terms with over Michaelmas was that this will be our last as undergraduates in Cambridge. This has not stopped us from trying to make the most of our time, with classmates participating in extracurricular activities such as boxing, table tennis, student journalism, the China Forum, Judo, and many others.

We have also had the chance to interact with the first and second-year students in and outside the Faculty, with a very good turnout for our yearly 'Long March' Chinese Studies pub crawl, and a very entertaining end-of-year poetry recital (including our somewhat questionable rendition of '如果可以' and Danny's unforgettable '我要找到你' solo performance).

I obviously cannot write this update without mentioning our classes, which have been challenging but also very satisfying as we have definitely made progress since the end of our second year. Our interpreting course in particular left an impression on us, having to read through a text in English and translate it into Chinese on the spot, which has proven to be quite the task. Fortunately, I can safely say that we have all improved tremendously since the start of October. Our content papers have been equally fascinating, with some of us delving into the intricacies of Chinese grassroots politics with Professor Hurst, others reading beautiful prose from Republican-Era literature, and a few of us taking the 'China in a global World War II,' who were lucky enough to meet with Yang Zhiyi, the author of one of our readings, and discuss her book with her.

Although we are frequently reminded that this will most likely be our final Michaelmas in Cambridge, I know for a fact that we will look back fondly on this time of our lives. As graduation approaches, we all realise that all good things must come to an end, but that does not mean that our journey as a class is over just yet. For now, we will cherish the rest of our time together in Lent and Easter, and we hope that you all have a wonderful festive period. 明年见!

By Romano Tucci



## STAFF UPDATES

This autumn, **Dr Noga Ganany** launched a new lecture series at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, titled 'Book Culture in Buddhism and Beyond', which is sponsored by the Glorisun Global Network. In organising this new lecture series, Dr Ganany hopes to create a platform for our academic community and the general public to engage with international scholars in conversation on the relationships between book culture (practices of writing, reading, and circulating texts) and Chinese religious traditions (with a particular focus on Buddhism). In September, Dr Ganany gave a talk at the annual meeting of the British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS) in London, and in October she gave two talks in Paris – one at Université Paris Cité and one at Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (Inalco). After joining the board of directors of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religion (SSCR) over the summer, she is now co-organising an SSCR event in conjunction with the next meeting of the European Association for Chinese Studies (EACS).

**Dr Xin Fan** had a busy term that started with an invited talk at Ohio State University in the United States and ended with another one at the University of Göttingen in Germany. He also had the opportunity to present his papers at Peking University and the Autonomous University of Catalonia. In October, with the help of many people, he organized the Global History and China Workshop in Cambridge. He enjoyed teaching as well as researching. He signed a book contract with Palgrave to complete a new book on Global History in China, which he hopes to finish soon, and, meanwhile, he continues working on his monograph

on the emotional history of Chinese nationalism. In addition, he published several book reviews. While travelling to the conference in Beijing, he had a chance to see Cambridge diasporas over there, – Hans van de Ven, James Farquharson, and Juliette Odolant. He particularly enjoyed seeing how James was drinking beer out of a teacup. Total Chinese style!

**Professor Adam Chau's** chapter, 'Temple Inscriptions as Text Acts', came out in *Chinese Popular Religion in Texts and Acts*, edited by Shin-yi Chao (Amsterdam University Press). He was invited to be one of the keynote speakers at the International Conference on 'The Changing World and Religious Studies' of the Religious Studies section of the 2023 Chinese Social Sciences Forum (中國社會科學論壇【宗教學】：世界之變與宗教學研究國際會議) on 23–24 Sept, 2023, organised by the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the Chinese Association of Religious Studies. He presented on the relevance of the 'modalities of doing religion' model for understanding religious transformations under modernity.

He then gave a lecture on 25 Sept at the Institute of World Religions in the 貢院人文與宗教講座 series on 做宗教: 宗教研究與概念化 ('Doing Religion: Analysing Religious Life and Generating Concepts').

**Professor Roel Sterckx** published 'Excreted and left untreated? Human and animal waste: from Dunhuang back to Laozi', in *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine* (Brill) 55.1 (2023), pp. 1–41; and 'To Rule "All under Heaven"' in *Ties Dams*, Ingrid d'Hooghe and Lily Sprangers eds., *Undercurrents. Essays below the surface of China's geopolitics* (The Hague: Clingendael Institute and Leiden Asia Centre, 2023), 39–45. He gave talks at the University of Leipzig and the Sorbonne.

On October 16, **Dr Thomas Barrett** gave a talk titled 'The 1886 Burma Annexation, Tributary Relations, and Anglo-Qing Manipulations of "Face"' at the China and Global History workshop organised by Dr Xin Fan at the Needham Research Institute. On November 9, he gave a talk titled 'Shinmatsu Chūgoku to gaikō kihan: Shinchō chū-Ei kōshikan'in Makātonī no ukeoi gyōmu wo kirikuchi toshite' (Halliday Macartney, the Qing London Legation, and Late Qing China's Engagement with Diplomatic Norms) at a conference on 19th century East Asia held at the RCAST Open Laboratory for Emergence Strategies at the University of Tokyo.

Dr Barrett also recently received two prizes for his work: the 10th Historical Association of Japan Prize for his work on the Ryukyu Annexation and the Royal Asiatic Society's 2023 Bayly Prize for his doctoral dissertation completed in 2022 at the University of Oxford.



## A CHINESE ARTIST IN CUMBRIA: THE HOPEFUL ART AND VISION OF LI YUAN-CHIA (1929-1994) AT KETTLE'S YARD, CAMBRIDGE

The current exhibition *Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia and Friends*, at Kettle's Yard in Cambridge, has been hailed in the Guardian by Laura Cumming as a captivating and uplifting show for the dying days of autumn. 'Everything about it is bright, beautiful, hopeful and as amiable as the subtitle suggests'. While the artist, poet and museum owner, Li Yuan-chia (1929-1994), may not be an established household name; however, he was loved and respected by many. He established the LYC (after his initials) Museum & Art Gallery in 1972 in the remote village of Banks beside Hadrian's Wall in Cumbria, where he purchased a derelict house and barn from the painter, neighbour and close friend, Winifred Nicholson (b. 1893-1981). For the next decade, Li exhibited and worked alongside 320 artists at LYC, which swiftly established itself as an experimental space for displaying and making art. The exhibition celebrates this spirit of experimentation as much as the artefacts themselves.

Li was born in Guangxi Province, China, where he was given up for adoption at a young age. He was sent to a number of orphanages ending up in Taiwan in his late teens where he enrolled at the Taipei Normal College for Teacher Training to study art education. He rose to fame after co-founding the Ton Fan Group 東方書會, Taiwan's first modern abstract artists in 1956. Through his association with the group and to escape martial law in Taiwan in the early 1960s he travelled first to Bologna in Italy,

then to London and eventually found his home in Cumbria, where he spent the last 20 years of his life.

Li became famous for his work known as the 'Cosmic Point' – an example of which is included in the exhibition where an ink dot on a screen gradually becomes an increasingly larger circle, spreading out as if embracing the world within. Li's 'Cosmic Point' is meant to be experienced and contemplated. It is beautifully Zen-like – calming, yet utterly alive and new-age. It engages with the artist's interest in Zen Buddhism, Daoism, technology and ecology. For Li, 'Cosmic Point' became an idea that connected small things (hence the small circle) into larger systems with the aim to help us imagine our place in, and our effect on, the world and the universe beyond the familiar every day. At the heart of Li's artistic and philosophical mission was his belief that art, life and friendship were inseparable. Indeed, the exhibition held at Kettle's Yard is most appropriate. Jim and Helen Ede's approach to life and art represented very similar values and ambitions. The exhibition is intended to illustrate the LYC's ethos in a similarly minded setting.

The exhibition spreads across three rooms, and around the Kettle's Yard site, inviting visitors to discover different aspects of Li's creative practice. Alongside his works, there are paintings and artefacts by artists who were influenced by Li or had spent time working with him at LYC. Through the exhibition we 'enter' the world of LYC – a true haven for like-minded people. All ages were welcomed at LYC, the museum even had a children's room, a performance space, a printing press, a communal kitchen and a garden. Like the Ede's Kettle Yard, there was also a library and a large table for hosting visitors and enjoying afternoon tea. A wonderful photo showing a smiling Li holding a large tray of flapjacks, which we're told he liked to bake and share with his friends, represents what it must have felt like being at LYC (Fig. 1). Seeing this and some of Li's early works, to which I was drawn immediately for his use of traditional Chinese ink, brought a smile to my face. I thought, 'He must have been a kind and gentle man'.

The exhibition is a feast for the eyes and senses. On display are paintings, mobiles, wood carvings, paper-mache, earthenwares, textiles and others – a rich tapestry of material and range of artefacts. There is so much to behold and enjoy. Everything you see is playful and immediate – some of my favourites include the painted fabric hanging on the wall (Fig. 2), the triad ink and oil painting on wood (Fig. 3), and the photographs of Hadrian's Wall framed like windows in Chinese gardens (Fig. 4). Instinctively, I wanted to touch and hold many of the objects on display. This may have been possible at LYC – who knows? What is also apparent in the exhibition is that everything and everyone are on equal standing. There is no hierarchy, whether it's a piece of textile, a chair, a painting or a sculpture.

Differences are removed, as are time and space to give a refreshing new view of seemingly ordinary objects. A piece of wood takes on the role of a landscape while a Cumbrian slate becomes part of a painting. Anything and everything is art or becomes art. This exhibition is an invitation to be creative and to think creatively. Even though the LYC has long closed its doors, its ethos remains active as long as exhibitions like this keep it alive and we keep going to view and share it.

*Making New Worlds: Li Yuan-chia & Friends runs between 11 November 2023–18 February 2024.*

By Dr Hajni Elias



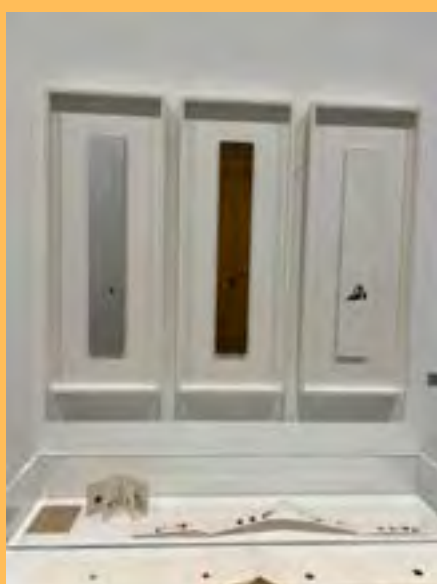
**Fig. 1**

Photo of Li Yuan-chia at  
LYC, Banks, Cumbria



**Fig. 2**

Li Yuan-chia, Untitled,  
1970, Painted on fabric



**Fig. 3**

Li Yuan-chia, Untitled,  
1963-64, Ink and oil on  
wood



**Fig. 4**

Li Yuan-chia, *Untitled*, 1993–94, Paint, photographs, fibreboard





## THE ANNUAL POETRY RECITAL

The annual poem recital event, held on November 28th, provided a much-needed respite following eight weeks of intensive study. Students congregated in Rooms 8 and 9 of the faculty. The first-year students, as newcomers to the FAMES family, were understandably nervous as they readied themselves to present their recitals.

In preparation for their debut within the FAMES community, each student delivered a brief introduction, followed by their individual recitals, showcasing their language prowess. The eloquent readings had already left a profound impression,

but the pinnacle of the event was reached when the first-year students took the stage to perform their song, '对不起，我的中文不好'. Their dedication and hard work paid off, as they delivered a performance that will be etched in our memories for a lifetime.

The song commenced with a short play underscoring the significance of tones and pronunciation in the Chinese language. This was followed by the melodious strumming of three guitars and the harmonious vocals of the first-year students.

The second-year students presented various modern Chinese poems, such as Xu Zhimo's 徐志摩 '再别康桥', in small groups. Their song performance, '但愿人长久' a classic song by Teng Li-Chun 邓丽君, filled the room with their harmonious voices, evoking a sense of nostalgia for the Chinese teachers present at the event.

Another highlight of the evening was Wu Laoshi's recital of Fan Xiaochun 樊小纯's '借我', allowing everyone to bask in the beauty of the words and sounds of Chinese language. Adding to the festivities, the fourth-year students delivered a lively karaoke rendition of '如果可以'. The event concluded with a raffle, providing everyone not only with cherished memories but also a small keepsake to take home. This marked the perfect conclusion to an unforgettable event.

By Ms. Wang Hsioching





## UPDATES FROM DR KELSEY GRANGER, FORMER STUDENT AND NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Since completing my doctorate at Cambridge late last year (2022), I have been an Alexander von Humboldt Research Fellow at Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich. My German is mostly limited to conversations with friendly bakers in the 'bakerei' conveniently located directly below my apartment, as it has been my personal mission to try each and every new confection that appears as the seasons roll by. The astonishing variety of *lebkuchen* available have certainly made the blizzard conditions of the past few weeks far more bearable!

It hasn't all been dining out on *brezz'n* and visiting fairytale castles though. My current project on postal horses has seen me temporarily move away from the comforts of Tang dynasty lapdogs and into the unfamiliar territory of Han-era administrative slips. Working with archaeologist and early China historian Prof. Armin Selbitschka, I have been trawling through excavated documents concerning horses from the Xuanquan postal station, located on the fringes of the Han empire.. In doing so, I aim to highlight how human-horse relationships were

challenged by the precarity of life at this postal station. The first part of the project centred on the 103 unique horse names recorded in the Xuanquan slips. The postal horses were named in all sorts of unusual ways – from Cinnamon Stick to Skittish Fish – and were even given aged honorific names like Elderly Uncle and surnames like Mr. Chen the Light Black Horse! Hopefully, my work on these names will be published as an article in the near future.

My focus on postal horses meant I couldn't miss out on the unique Easter tradition held at nearby Traunstein. Once a year, this little village is completely crowded with locals dressed in their



lederhosen to watch the Georgiritt, or Ride of St. George. Bright and early on Easter Monday morning (this year being a very, very cold morning), a parade of over 400 horses passes through the town and out to a little chapel on a grassy hillock. Then, they all come back into town again. The horses are adorned in flowers and plaits, and the riders wear traditional dresses and hold up flags. Huge carriages bring through bands playing folk songs, as well as barrels of beer (naturally). Topped off with sword dancing, flag twirling, and huge wooden models of churches carried along by the local children, it was certainly the most surprising research trip I've done!

It's certainly been a year of unexpected surprises. I was delighted to be interviewed for local broadcaster Bayern Radio 2 on the history of lapdogs. Even if I'm dubbed over in German, it was such a thrill to just about hear myself 'live on air' for the first time! The podcast version is available online [here](#) if anyone is interested/wants to practise their German. It came as an even greater surprise to receive the 2023 Sir George Staunton Prize for my recent article in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 'From Tomb-keeper to Tomb-occupant:

The Changing Conceptualisation of Dogs in Early China'. This article traces the evolution of how dogs were placed in tombs from the pre-imperial to early medieval period. The article itself is open access, but I also produced a short blog-post for the Royal Asiatic Society website summarising my findings, as available [here](#).

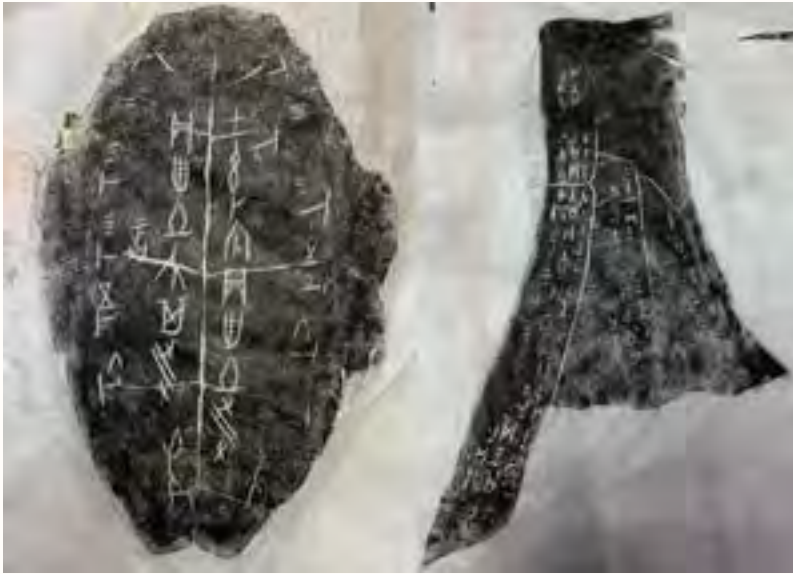
In May, I returned all too briefly to Cambridge for my Ph.D. graduation. It was especially poignant to find myself sat back in Prof. Imre Galambos' office where I had spent much of the past four years discussing my thesis, assisting with the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series, and struggling to translate a strange story about a boy having his penis bitten off by a lapdog (yes, you did read that right!). Prof. Galambos inspired me to study medieval China and the Silk Roads in that very office back in 2015, when I was the only student for his special fourth year paper 'Dunhuang and the Silk Roads'. He would slide a printed Dunhuang manuscript over the table and have me try and translate it. It was always a challenge, but to know I was reading someone's hand-written note or letter from over a thousand years ago, replete with their doodles and mistakes, humanised what had been until then a deeply philosophical and immaculate version of Classical Chinese. I was *hooked*.

It's therefore been such a great delight to work with Prof. Galambos on a co-edited volume, forthcoming with Brill. *Saved by Desert Sands: Re-discovering Objects on the Silk Roads* is the direct result of the flourishing Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminars we organised together over four years, with all the contributors being previous speakers in the series. We were so inspired by the research presented at these seminars that we wanted to bring together these scholars to forward the importance of *things*,

of objects, in understanding the Silk Roads. Even a text is, itself, an object, made of paper or bamboo and designed to be held, displayed, or used. As this project fast approaches publication next year, it will be an honour to have my name in print alongside my long-time supervisor and mentor. As I head into my second and final year of my fellowship here in Munich, I am looking forward to continuing my research on Xuanquan postal horses, organising the upcoming 'Edge of an Empire' Workshop on the Hexi Corridor region, and giving talks at the Royal Asiatic Society in London and at the Société européenne pour l'Étude des Civilisations de l'Himalaya et de l'Asie Centrale (SEECHAC) in Paris. Another busy Bavarian year awaits!







## AN UPDATE FROM PEICHAO QIN, A SECOND YEAR PHD STUDENT

Under the supervision of Prof. Roel Sterckx, I have been continuing to work rigorously on the subject of Shang oracle bones (B.C. 1250–B.C. 1046). And next January will mark the end of my second year here in Cambridge. There is no doubt that the last semester has been a bit of a blur for me. Stepping into second year means things are finally moving on track and significant progress in terms of dissertation writing is naturally expected from us. And that can be a different kind of stressful compared to the constant uneasiness and uncertainty felt in the first-year. For me personally, apart from writing thesis chapters, responding to calls for papers and attempting fanatically to conclude a variety of my side projects, my attention has also been divided between the regular PhD supervisions, weekly library work at UL, midnight coding sessions (mainly excruciating debugging) and international conferencing. This certainly adds to the already taxing year. But amid all the chaos and anxiety,

there is also a sense of fulfilment and relaxation to be experienced, knowing that the year is not all wasted.

Luckily, now having worked several years on the subject of oracle bones, the ecosystem and academic intricacies of this field has become very clear to me. Being a relatively new-born subject, oracle bone scholarship has only been developing from 1899. After a hundred years of accumulated research, there is a great hoard of excellent literature out there, but the main difficulty of doing such corpus-based research on our Hopkins collection of oracle bones, is the lack of indexed and accessible literature. Often an interpretation of a character, or discussion of a specific oracle bone piece is hidden in a journal piece with completely irrelevant titles. Scattered and fragmented, it is not always possible for a single researcher to find all that is relevant. That means information sharing and scholarly communication is crucial for researchers in order that they can avoid uninformed opinions. This has happened to me recently. For example, while working on the bones in our university library. I noticed that on one of the ox scapulae (CUL No. 52, see figure 1), there is a small area of green smudge around the socket area.



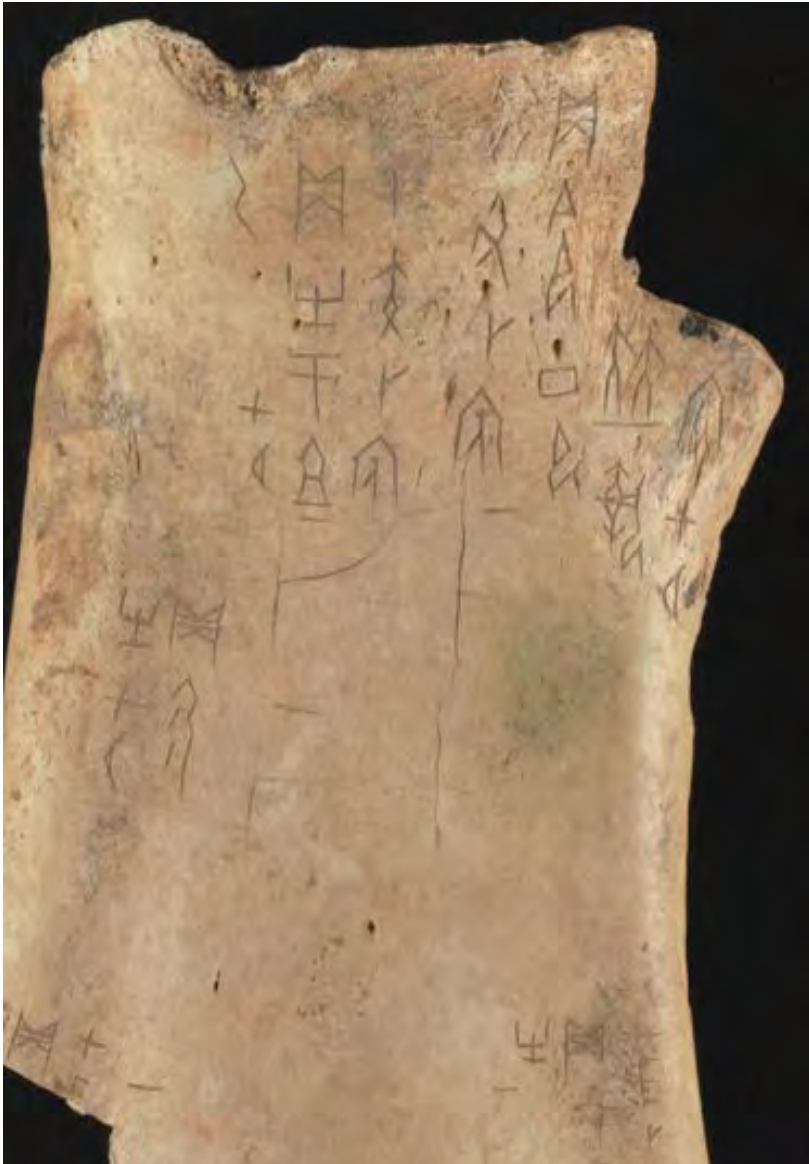


Figure 1.

Having never encountered such a smudge and relevant literature, I speculated that it might be some accidental pigments caused during transportation or in storage after the excavation or even some sort of decorations as a scribal practice. But a meeting with an archaeological expert changed my mind. The expert just took one short glance at the bone and quickly revealed what the green smudge is: metallic contamination due to direct contact with Bronze artefacts while underground. This means rather than pigment decorations, it is patina residues born of accidental burial positions and exposure



Figure 2

(this is more obviously seen on the 宰丰骨匕 in figure 2). Such issues might have been discussed in the field of archaeology or in archaeological reports. And how wrong I would have been if this was interpreted otherwise in my dissertation!

This shows that the process of thesis writing is ultimately an example of scholarly discussion and determined largely by the

quality of exchanges between you and other scholars, past or present.

In light of this, I have been actively partaking in conferences and academic visits beginning from March this year, trying to expand my knowledge and understanding of and beyond the field. Early in March, thanks to the recommendation from Dr. Yan He, I presented at the conference called 'The Tools of the Trade' organized by Prof. Peter Bol at Harvard and the subsequent AAS conference. I had the opportunity to showcase many of my computation work on oracle bone fragment reconstruction and OCR training and have received useful reviews from fellow digital humanities (DH) researchers. While there, I was also reunited with Prof. Joachim Gentz, who has been my M.A supervisor in Edinburgh and we went "seminar hopping" together for a while. With the AAS being my first big international conference, the experiences I have accumulated there will surely be valuable for years to come.



Also, lasting from June to October, using the chance of my PhD annual leave, I left for China to gather more materials for my thesis. Under the invitation from Zhi Xiaona 鄧晓娜, a researcher at Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and Song Zhenhao 宋镇豪, the previous head of Xianqin history research at CASS, I was given the precious opportunity to present at the 'The Fifth National Oracle Bone Collation and Research Forum' (see link [here](#)) in Anyang during June regarding our collection in Cambridge and its related research. This exclusive venue gathered a group of top oracle bone experts and museum curators in the country, many of whom I had the chances to speak to. The team of Digital Oracle Bone Laboratory at Anyang Normal University and their work have resonated greatly with my own. Since our research in oracle bone digitalization such as glyph recognition, fragment reconstruction, duplicate checking via template matching greatly overlap with each other's, we have reached an agreement about long-term cooperation which will surely benefit my study a lot.

In the months following I have been doing a lot of travelling between Beijing and Anyang. But at the end of September, in anticipation of my return to Cambridge, I was invited to CASS and spent a full day there to learn the technique of 'rubbing making' in case it proves useful in our future research of the Hopkins collection of oracle bones at the library. What is known as the 'rubbing making' process is a reproduction technique that has been present since the Han-Wei Period in China, which uses ink and special Chinese art paper to cover artefacts like bronzes, tablets (or in our case, oracle bones) and make use of the indentations in the artefact inscriptions to produce monochrome rubbings. It proves particularly useful for paleographers as it highlights mainly the characters on the artefact and filters out the irrelevant information in the process.

During my visit to CASS, many other researchers and grad students who specialize in oracle bone research were also there,

and many of them kindly dropped their work and helped pitch in some excellent advice in making the best-quality rubbings, for which I am tremendously grateful. This shows great enthusiasm and spirit of collaboration from our fellow CASS researchers.

All in all, this past semester has been quite fulfilling for me. Now that I have finished my second-year examination report and am progressing steadily to the third year, I can't wait to see what the next semester will bring and experience all that what Cambridge has to offer.







## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY CHINA FORUM MT REPORT

With a Committee full of fresh faces, our main goal for this term was to get the ball back rolling and continue the great work and foundations that the previous members had done. Our efforts and events in Michaelmas bode well for Lent, where we aim to keep bringing interesting speakers to Cambridge and discuss relevant and interesting topics.

Our first event happened in week 2 with **Professor Steven White** from Tsinghua University, who talked about China's 'middle-income trap', and how China's entrepreneurial ecosystem was impacted by this. Although the talk was on Zoom, Professor White was incredibly engaging and we had many questions from the audience,

especially relating to the up and coming use of A.I. from Chinese companies.

We were glad to see that our presence at this year's Freshers Fair did help tremendously in bringing a new audience in, and more importantly, more members to our committee, going from a group of 6 people during the summer break to 12 at the time of writing this report.

Our second event was our first in-person event of the year with returning guest speaker **Professor Jonathan Sullivan** from the University of Nottingham. His talk focused on the upcoming January 2024 Taiwan Presidential Elections, giving a concise rundown on each of the candidates and summarising the implications this would have with regards to mainland China. We had a very productive Q&A session, with the audience bringing up some very good points.

We are always very happy to host Professor Sullivan, whose breadth of knowledge and presence truly engrossed all of us.

Our final event, co-hosted by the Centre for Geopolitics, was a discussion with historian and broadcaster Michael Wood on his recent documentary, 'How China Got Rich'.



The documentary, which focuses on Deng Xiaoping's reform and opening-up policies explored how China became the economic superpower it is today. We are very grateful to **Professor Hurst** for helping organise the logistics for this event, which happened in the Divinity Faculty's Runcie Room, followed by a drinks reception. Once again, we had a very big turn-out of around 40 attendees for our second in-person event, which is a good sign for our future projects.

We are very happy with the continued interest, not only from within the Faculty, but also from everyone else who is keen on learning about China, and we hope to bring you many more interesting people and events in Lent! In the meantime, be sure to follow our Facebook (Cambridge University China Forum) and Instagram (@cucf\_china\_forum), and if you have any questions or requests for talks on a particular topic, please let us know by contacting us at [camchinacontact@gmail.com](mailto:camchinacontact@gmail.com). In the meantime, happy holidays!

By Danny and Romano (CUCF Co-Presidents)





## THOMAS WADE SOCIETY UPDATES

Following Sarah and Morrison's recent appointments as President and Vice President in July, the Thomas Wade Society has been actively engaging our community of former students and staff, and we're thrilled to share some highlights with you.

### Socials

With temperatures dropping to sub-zero in recent days, we're excited to announce our upcoming festive drinks in London at the Old China Hand (the name originates from the fact that three generations of owners have spent time living and working in China!) on 9 December. So, if you're London-based and would like the chance to reconnect with old mates

(or, to coin the Cockney term, 'China plates') put on your winter gear and come on down to Clerkenwell! Sign up now online [here](#), or contact Liam: Saturday 9th, 7pm.

Zooming over to China, our recent Shanghai social was a relaxed occasion for alumni based in the region to catch up over drinks. We're planning on coming to Beijing in the new year, so watch our email updates for more information.

## Book Club

The book club will be meeting online on 7 January at 10am (UK, 6pm CN) to read the classic Water Margin 水滸傳. Don't worry if you don't get a chance to read the whole book – we'll be delighted to see you regardless. Contact Sarah to join ([thewadesociety@gmail.com](mailto:thewadesociety@gmail.com)).

## Committee

Last but not least, we're excited to welcome two new members to the TWS committee: Alexander Johnstone, who joins as Treasurer, and Liam Elliot Brady, who joins as UK Socials Officer.

Alexander, a 2019 graduate from John's, is now an Equity Analyst at Royal London Asset Management. As Treasurer, he takes on the responsibility of managing the society's finances, contributing to our mission of fostering dialogue among alumni and current students.

Liam, who graduated from Clare College in 2023, is currently pursuing a master's degree in History and International Relations at the London School of Economics. His passion for Chinese food and literature, combined with part-time work at a Taiwanese restaurant, makes him a perfect fit for the role of UK Socials Officer.

If you don't currently receive our email updates, please sign up [here](#). We'll only contact you about upcoming events or society activities of interest, once per month or less frequently, no spam. You can unsubscribe at all times.



# UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE ALUMNI THOMAS WADE SOCIETY

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

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



## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY CHINA FORUM 劍橋大學中國論壇



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

Looking to join our seminar series mailing lists? Please email **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 together 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](mailto: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](mailto:qi@crouchrarebooks.com)

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