

ISSUE 6 Autumn 2023

NEWSLETTER



CHINA CENTRE

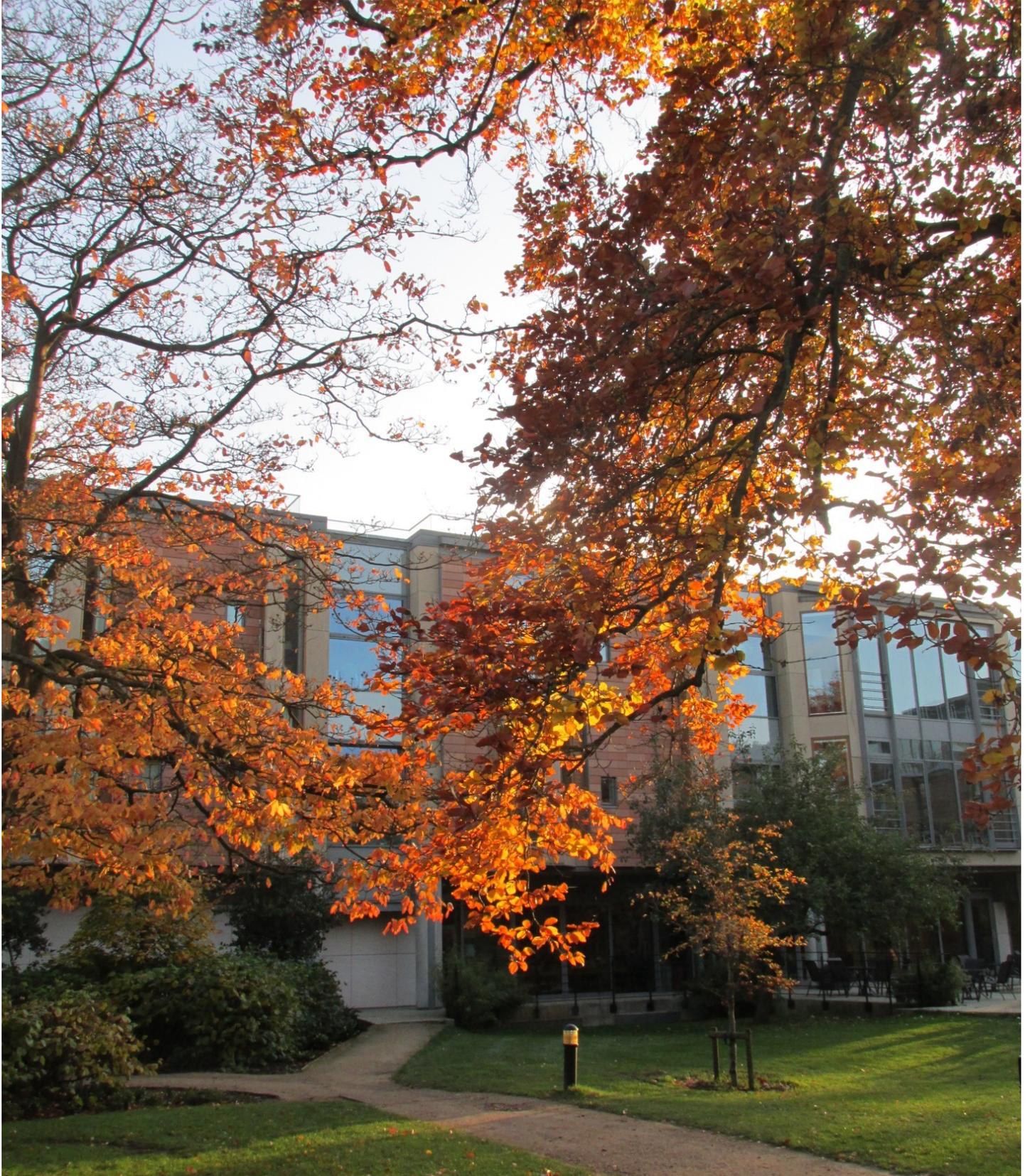


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Message from the Director



Greetings!

It has been wonderful watching the China Centre come back to life as the term has begun. We are happy to once again be hosting a full line-up of events across numerous disciplines and time periods, showcasing the real breadth of work being done on China and China-related topics. I would especially like to call to everyone's attention the Baillie Gifford sponsored lecture by Megan Walsh on the 14th of November at 17:00 in the China Centre lecture theatre. Titled "The Subplot: What China Is Reading and Why It Matters," it promises to be a fascinating look at literary interests within the PRC.

I am pleased to note that the café in the Woodsworth Tea Room is now open again, serving food items and drinks, and that the Mok Common Room is open and available for use by all China Centre associates.

We do hope to see you here!

Sincerely,

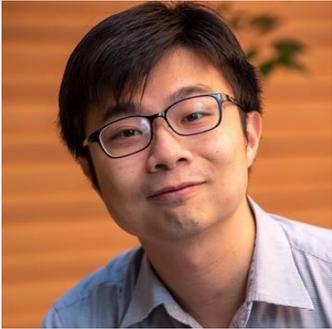
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Todd Hall'.

Todd Hall
Director of the China
Centre

An Interview with Dr Ming Tak Ted Hui, Associate Professor of Classical Chinese and Medieval China

Dr Ming Tak Ted Hui, Associate Professor of Classical Chinese and Medieval China at the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, talks to us about his research interests and current projects.

What are you currently working on?



I am currently in the process of preparing my book manuscript. This manuscript explores the cultural impact of the multilingual environment that emerged during the Mongol rule over China from the thirteenth to the fourteenth century. In 1269, Kublai Khan commissioned Phags-pa to design a script capable of transcribing various languages within the Mongol empire. The utilization of this script, along with the emergence of a creole language resulting from language contact, gave rise to a multilingual environment where scholars often possessed the ability to write in different languages. However, I argue that the promulgation of this script did not facilitate increased cultural exchange. Instead, the language policies enforced by the Mongols compelled the Han Chinese literati to produce works that reinstated the superiority of classical Chinese.

In my research, I delve into the aspects lost and gained during the process of translation, how the literati constructed a “national” literary tradition, and the impact of this multilingual environment on the literary field. To investigate these topics, I draw upon various sources such as travelogues penned by envoys, merchant guidebooks, edicts, steles, literary collections, and plays. By examining these sources, my project aims to shed light on how multilingualism exacerbated the disconnection between the political and cultural realms.

So how is that these policies led to a reinstatement of the superiority of classical Chinese?

Perhaps I can use two examples to illustrate this process. Firstly, the edicts issued by the Mongol Yuan rulers were written in a hybrid language that combined vernacular Chinese with the Mongol word order. The use of this language made the Chinese literati quite uneasy, and we can observe their discomfort when these government documents are included in literary anthologies. The literati would often rewrite these edicts, claiming that the hybrid language was inferior to classical Chinese.

Another example pertains to the promulgation of the 'Phags-pa script. Although the Mongol government had abolished the civil examination system, they established schools and incentivized people to learn the 'Phags-pa script by promising to recruit some of these learners as education officials. While some of the Chinese literati did begin to learn the script, others vehemently opposed it. They often contrasted the learning of the Chinese textual tradition with the learning of the Mongol script. Their argument was that while classical Chinese textual learning may not lead to officialdom, it held importance as a form of moral philosophy.

In both cases, the introduction of alternative forms of expression, whether it be through the use of a hybrid language or the adoption of the 'Phags-pa script, prompted the Chinese literati to contemplate the significance of the literary tradition rooted in classical Chinese texts.

Fascinating! Many thanks for sharing.

An Interview with Dr Bo-jiun Jing, Senior Research Fellow in Taiwan Studies Programme, OSGA

Dr Bo-Jiun Jing, a Senior Research Fellow in Taiwan Studies, Oxford School of Global and Area Studies talks to us about his research interests and current projects.

Tell us a bit about what you are working on



I am currently working on a book proposal based on my PhD thesis titled “Economic Hedging under the Radar? A Neoclassical Realist Analysis of Taiwan’s Foreign Policy towards Southeast Asia, 2008-2020”, which examines Taiwan’s policies towards Southeast Asia during the administrations of Ma Ying-jeou and Tsai Ing-wen. Additionally, I am collaborating with Professor Jessica Chen Weiss, Professor Ramon Pacheco Pardo, and Ms Eun A Jo on a project titled “Pivotal Powers in the US-China Competition”, which has received funding from the Cornell-King’s College London Global Strategic Collaboration Awards. Our aim is to elucidate the role that pivotal states play in great power competition, develop the concept of “pivotal powers”, and explore their significance. Furthermore, I am part of the ESRC-NSTC-funded networking project titled “Information Threats to Democratic Societies in the UK and Taiwan: Inter-regional and Interdisciplinary Approaches”, initiated by Dr Anna Wilson and Dr Ssu-han Yu.

So what is “economic hedging under the radar”?

Economic hedging refers to a strategic behaviour adopted by a state to safeguard its long-term interests. This involves pursuing a combination of economic measures that counterbalance each other, aimed at mitigating perceived risks arising from structural changes. In my research findings, both the Ma and Tsai administrations have employed economic engagement with Southeast Asia as a means of practising economic pragmatism and economic diversification – a strategy of economic hedging designed to protect Taipei from long-term strategic risks in an uncertain international environment.

On the one hand, Taiwan seeks to capitalise on the rapid economic growth of China and ASEAN by pragmatically establishing direct trade and investment links. On the other hand, the island aims to reduce economic risks associated with dependence on China by diversifying its external economic connections, particularly with Southeast Asia. I argue that this constitutes an economic hedging strategy that has gone somewhat under the radar, as it has been relatively underexplored in the field. This is partially due to the fact that most international relations research concerning Taiwan’s foreign policy tends to focus on cross-Strait or US-China-Taiwan relations. Additionally, it’s worth noting that the Ma administration did not explicitly employ the rhetoric of “Go South” to brand his policy initiatives towards Southeast Asia, potentially creating the impression that the administration did not fully recognise the strategic importance of the ASEAN region in its foreign policy agenda.

This also applies to places other than Taiwan, no?

Indeed, taking Southeast Asia as an example, there is a growing body of literature analysing the responses of ASEAN countries to China’s ascent and US–China competition in the region. The debate centres on whether the alignment behaviour of these smaller states can be categorised as balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging in international relations scholarship. Several studies have attempted to conceptualise hedging as a spectrum of policy options within ASEAN and have explored how ASEAN countries, such as Malaysia and Singapore, implemented economic hedging. These analyses can be used to elucidate Taiwan’s operationalisation of hedging in the region.

Interview with Bo-jiun Jing (Continued)

Even before China actively strengthened its trade and investment ties with Southeast Asia in the mid-1990s and emerged as a dominant power in the regional economic hierarchy in the 2000s, Taiwan, as one of the four newly industrialised economies (NIEs) of East Asia, commonly referred to as the “Asian Tigers”, was a significant foreign investor and trading partner of ASEAN during the 1980s and 1990s. Although Taiwan has been an active economic player and provider of higher education in the region since the early 21st century, the analysis of Taiwan’s engagement with Southeast Asia is remarkably limited and increasingly outdated. In addition to the factors mentioned above, this can also be partially attributed to the growing power imbalance between China and Taiwan, as well as the increasing disparity in their respective influence in Southeast Asia. Consequently, it is tempting to attribute the development of Taiwan-Southeast Asia relations solely to the constraints of Beijing’s “One China Principle” or the influence of China.

Thanks so much for taking the time to discuss your work with us!



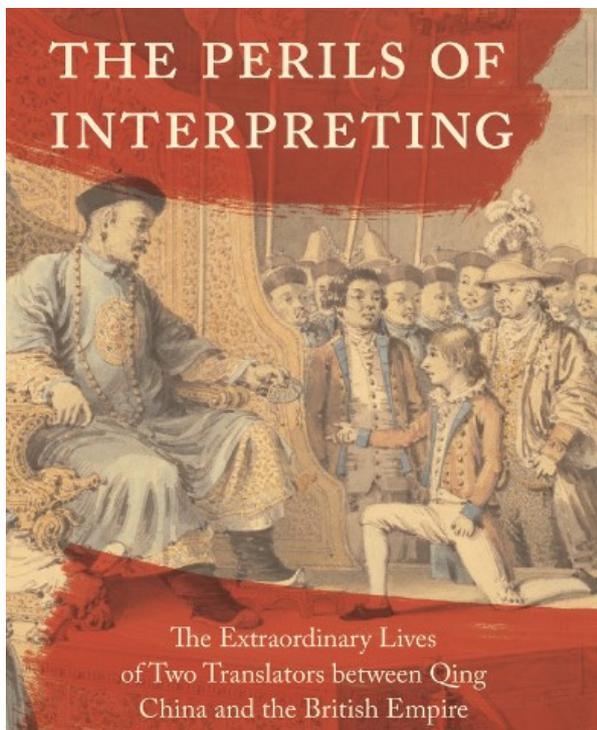
Oxford Taiwan Studies Programme

Oxford School of Global and Area Studies



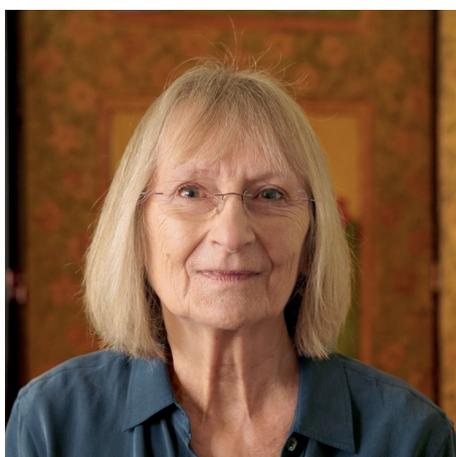
News Highlights

Professor Henrietta Harrison shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize



Professor Henrietta Harrison has been shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize 2023, with her book *The Perils of Interpreting: The Extraordinary Lives of Two Translators between Qing China and the British Empire* (Princeton University Press 2021). The book explores a fascinating history of China's relations with the West—told through the lives of two eighteenth-century translators. An interview with Professor Harrison can be found [here](#).

Professor Rosemary Foot invited to give keynote lecture at a meeting of the Association of Chinese Political Studies



Professor Rosemary Foot gave a keynote lecture at a meeting of the Association of Chinese Political Studies, held at the University of Duisburg, Germany, on 14 October 2023.

On 27 September 2023, Professor Foot gave a presentation in an online seminar with colleagues from Tsinghua university on China-Europe relations, and spoke on China, the Global South and Transatlantic Relations at a workshop in Lisbon 30 September 2023.

News Highlights

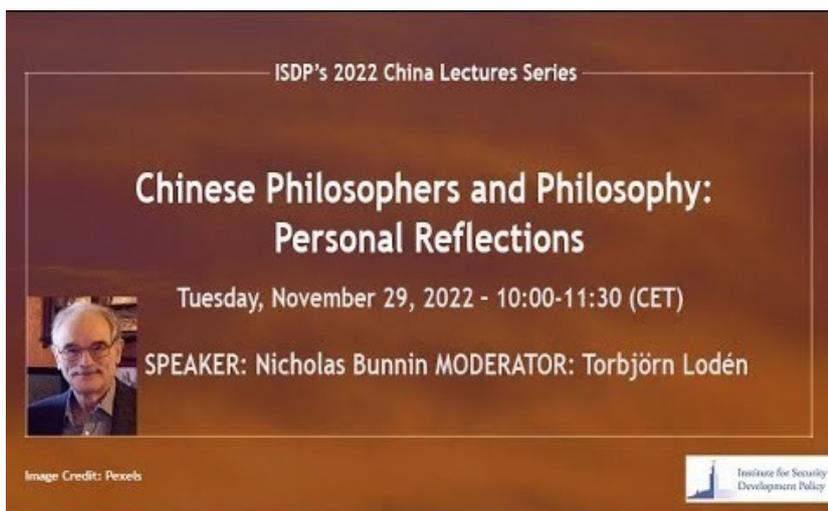
Todd Hall invited to speak at the Lee Kuan School of Public Policy



Professor Todd Hall was invited to speak at the Lee Kuan School of Public Policy, the National University of Singapore, as a Hong Siew Ching Speaker. Professor Hall's talk, "Making Sense of How we Make Sense of China's Foreign Policy", drew on a co-authored paper (with Andrea Ghiselli of Fudan University), which seeks to make sense of the diversity of the many analyses of China's foreign policy.

A video recording of the talk can be found [here](#).

Dr Nicholas Bunnin interviewed by the Institute for Security and Development Policy



In this interview, Nicholas Bunnin critically explored his four decades of engagement with outstanding Chinese philosophers and philosophy students, focusing on the Philosophy Summer School in China, which he co-founded with Professor Qiu Renzong. Their joint aim was to renew the creative development of Western philosophy in China that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. On the basis of his own studies of Chinese philosophy, this interview also explored what contemporary Chinese and Western philosophers have to offer one another in our own increasingly troubled times.

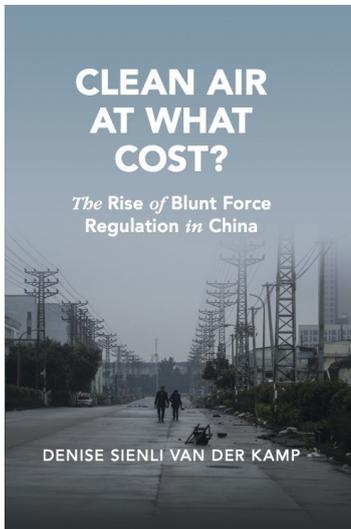
Nicholas Bunnin is Director emeritus of the Philosophy Project at the Oxford China Centre and a retired member of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford. He holds an AB summa cum laude from Harvard College and a DPhil in literae humaniores (Philosophy) from the University of Oxford, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar. His most significant publications include Bunnin and Yu, compilers, *Dictionary of Western Philosophy: English and Chinese*; Cheng and Bunnin, eds, *Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*; Qiu and Bunnin, eds, *Zhengzhi Zhexue* [Political Philosophy]. His papers on Chinese Philosophy mainly appear in the *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*.

The Institute for Security and Development Policy is a Stockholm-based independent and non-profit research and policy institute. The Institute is dedicated to expanding understanding of international affairs, particularly the interrelationship between the issue areas of conflict, security and development. The Institute's primary areas of geographic focus are Asia and Europe's neighbourhood.

Video available [here](#)

News Highlights

Professor Denise van der Kamp interviewed on *Clean Air At What Cost?*



Professor Denise van der Kamp has been interviewed by *Made in China Journal* (July 2023) and by *The China Project* (July 2023) on the topic of her book: *Clean Air At What Cost? The Rise of Blunt Force Regulation in China* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

The interviews can be read here:

[*Made in China Journal* interview](#)

[*The China Project* interview](#)

Dr Verna Yu invited to give talks at SOAS and the Needham Research Institute



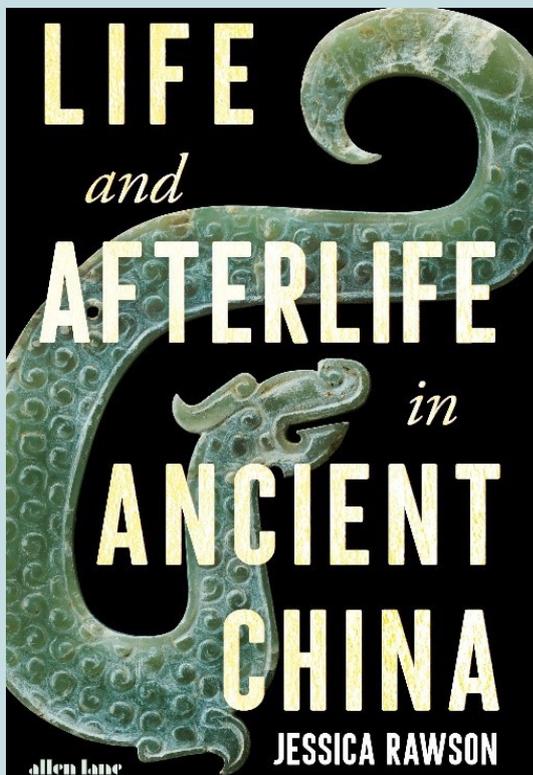
On 23 October 2023, Dr Yu gave a talk at SOAS on “Unfulfilled Dreams: China’s ‘Liberal’ Communist Party Intellectuals’ Struggle for Democracy from the 1930s to the 2000s”. More details [here](#)

On 16 October 2023, Dr Yu spoke at the Needham Research Institute, on “From ‘Professional Revolutionary’ to ‘Dissident Physicist’: Xu Liangying’s Intellectual Transformation from the 1930s to the 2000s”.



Featured Books

Jessica Rawson, *Life and Afterlife in Ancient China* (Allen Lane 2023). More details [here](#)



Throughout Ancient China, as in China today, the ancestors are ever present alongside the living. In terms of sheer scale, sophistication and a long history down to the nineteenth century, their tombs easily rival their equivalents in the rest of the world. And while the Egyptians built upwards, the Chinese dug downwards, honouring the dead by hosting lavish banquets and building richly furnished subterranean palaces – in one instance famously guarded by an army of terracotta warriors.

In *Life and Afterlife in Ancient China*, Jessica Rawson explores eleven grand tombs and a major sacrificial deposit from across China – each from a specific historical moment and place – showing what they and their contents reveal about the wider political and cultural developments of this continental power that demands our deep attention and understanding. The three millennia covered here cemented many of the distinctive elements of Chinese civilisation still in place today: formidable infrastructure and a manufacturing power that outperforms almost all others, a society based on strict generational hierarchy and a widely shared written script of characters, an enduring, active relationship with the steppe and Central Asia, a material culture of ceramics, bronze, silk and jade, and a unique concept of the universe, its ethical principles fostered over millennia with the primacy of the family. Records of these early achievements, and their diverse and unexpected long-term outcomes, often lie not in written history, but in how people assembled their personal possessions in the tombs that created their afterlives.

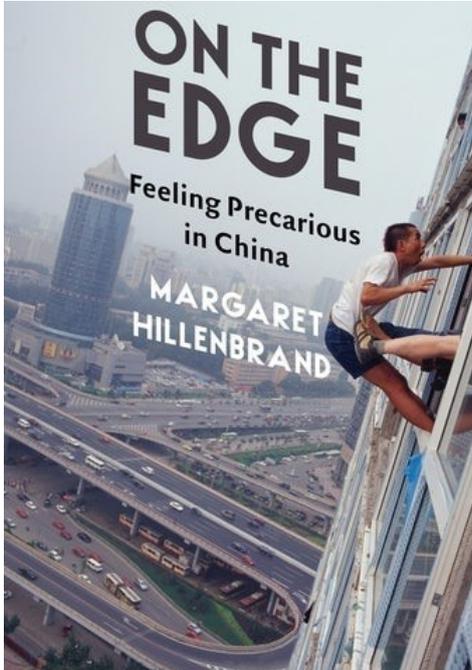
Beautifully illustrated and drawing on the latest archaeological discoveries, *Life and Afterlife in Ancient China* illuminates a constellation of beliefs about life and death very different from our own – and provides a remarkable new perspective on one of the oldest civilisations in the world.

Professor Dame Jessica Rawson received the Tang Prize in Sinology for 'Giving Voice to Mute Objects' in 2022.



Featured Books

Margaret Hillenbrand, *On the Edge: Feeling Precarious in China* (Columbia University Press 2023). More details [here](#).



Professor Hillenbrand has spoken about the book in a New Books Network podcast ([available here](#)).

Charismatic artists recruit desperate migrants for site-specific performance art pieces, often without compensation. Construction workers threaten on camera to jump from the top of a high-rise building if their back wages are not paid. Users of a video and livestreaming app hustle for views by eating excrement or setting off firecrackers on their genitals. In these and many other recent cultural moments, China's suppressed social strife simmers – or threatens to boil over.

On the Edge probes precarity in contemporary China through the lens of the dark and angry cultural forms that chronic uncertainty has generated. Margaret Hillenbrand argues that a vast underclass of Chinese workers exist in 'zombie citizenship', a state of dehumanizing exile from the law and its safeguards. Many others also feel precarious – sensing that they live on a precipice, with the constant fear of falling into this abyss of dispossession, disenfranchisement and dislocation. Examining the volatile aesthetic forms that embody stifled social tensions and surging anxiety over zombie citizenship, Hillenbrand traces how people use culture to vent taboo feelings of rage, resentment, distrust and disdain in scenarios rife with cross-class antagonism.

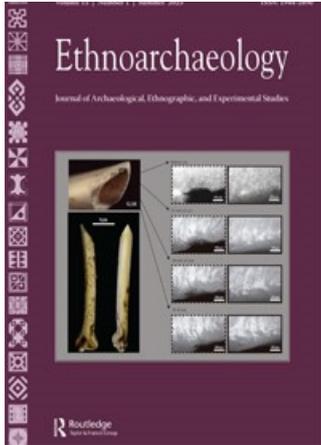
On the Edge is highly interdisciplinary, fusing digital media, art history, literary criticism and performance studies with citizenship, protest and labour studies. It makes both the distinctive Chinese experience and the vital role of culture central to global understandings of how entrenched insecurity and civic jeopardy fray the bonds of the social contract.

[Professor Margaret Hillenbrand's](#) previous books include *Negative Exposures: Knowing What Not to Know in Contemporary China* (Duke University Press 2020).

Featured Chapters and Articles

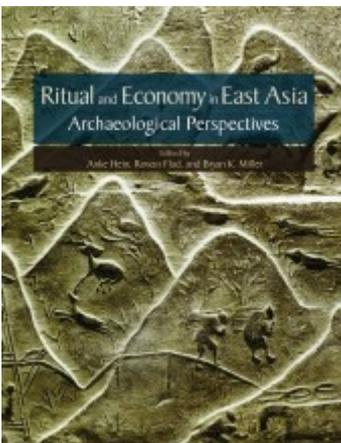
We are happy to announce articles and book chapters from associates.

Gao Xuyang, Anke Hein, and Patrick S. Quinn. 2023. "Tea for two: the dual modes of contemporary zisha tea-ware production and their implications for archaeological research". *Ethnoarchaeology*. Published online 20 October 2023. Available [here](#).



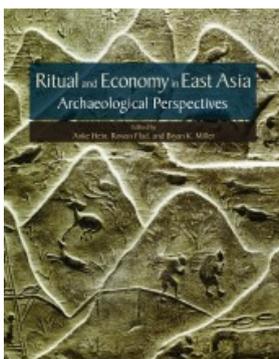
In archaeology, ceramics receive much attention because they are abundant in many archaeological contexts, chronologically sensitive, and provide a good window into past human behaviours, in particular decision-making in ceramic production which reflects past communities of practice and individual actions. While most studies tend to rely heavily on differences in object shape and style to distinguish between different periods and cultural contexts, the present ethnographic study focuses on one object type, namely *zisha* teapots from Yixing, China, to explore the hidden diversity in potting behaviours resulting in products that are visually nearly identical in form and style. The article raises awareness of potential differences in raw materials, techniques and markets for the production of morphologically similar vessels, which would be categorized as the same "type" within typological ceramic classification, and calls for careful evaluation of the complexities within technological practices and their corresponding social boundaries.

Anke Hein, Rowan Flad, and Bryan Miller, eds. 2023. *Ritual and Economy in East Asia: Archaeological Perspectives. Festschrift in Honor of Lothar von Falkenhausen's 60th Birthday*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute Press 2023. More details [here](#).



In commemoration of Lothar von Falkenhausen's 60th birthday, this volume assembles eighteen scholarly essays that explore the intersection between art, economy and ritual in ancient East Asia. The contributions are clustered into four themes: "Ritual Economy", "Ritual and Sacrifice", "Technology, Community, Interaction" and "Objects and Meaning", which collectively reflect the theoretical, methodological and historical questions that Falkenhausen has been examining via his scholarship, research and teaching throughout his career. Most of the chapters work with archaeological and textual data from China, but there are also studies of materials from Mongolia, Korea, Southeast Asia and even Egypt, showing the global impact of Falkenhausen's work. The chronological range of studies extends from the Neolithic through the Bronze Age in China, into the early imperial, medieval, and early modern periods. The authors discuss art, economy, ritual, interaction, and technology in the broad context of East Asian archaeology and its connection to the world beyond.

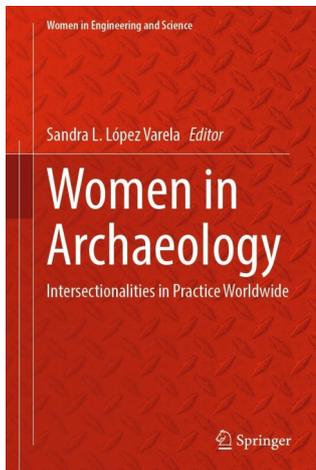
Hein, Anke. 2023. "Raw Material Hoards, Ritual Deposits, or Disturbed Burials? Object Pits in the Mountains of Southwest China". In *Ritual and Economy in East Asia: Archaeological Perspectives. Festschrift in Honor of Lothar von Falkenhausen's 60th Birthday*, edited by A. Hein, R. Flad and B. Miller. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute Press. More details [here](#).



Anke Hein has contributed a chapter to this volume, published in commemoration of Lothar von Falkenhausen's 60th birthday. Anke Hein's chapter "Raw Material Hoards, Ritual Deposits, or Disturbed Burials? Object Pits in the Mountains of Southwest China" is included in Part II ("Ritual and Sacrifice") of this volume. The contributions to this volume are clustered into four themes: "Ritual Economy", "Ritual and Sacrifice", "Technology, Community, Interaction" and "Objects and Meaning", which collectively reflect the theoretical, methodological and historical questions that Falkenhausen has been examining via his scholarship, research and teaching throughout his career.

Featured Chapters and Articles

Anke Hein, Jade d'Alpoim Guedes, Lin Kuei-chen and Teng Mingyu. 2023. Chapter 28. “Female Scholars and their Contributions to Chinese Archaeology”. In *Women in Archaeology, Intersectionalities in Practice Worldwide*, edited by S. L. López Varela. Cham: Springer. Available [here](#).



Most China archaeologists known abroad tend to be male; however, women have long contributed significantly to archaeological practice in China and make up an increasingly larger proportion of archaeology students. This does not mean, of course, that there is a level playing field for men and women. Men more often lead field projects, and research institutions focusing on fieldwork tend to employ considerably more men, while women rarely hold high-level positions. This chapter introduces female pioneers in the field of Chinese archaeology who are internationally hardly recognized, starting with the early fore-runners in paleography and then moving on to the first women involved in excavations during the first half of the twentieth century. We then turn to the first generation of university graduates after the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) and end with a discussion of the place of women in the archaeology boom in China since the 1990s. Our focus will be on women in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) actively involved in fieldwork. Additionally, non-PRC-nationals who work with archaeological material from China will receive mention.

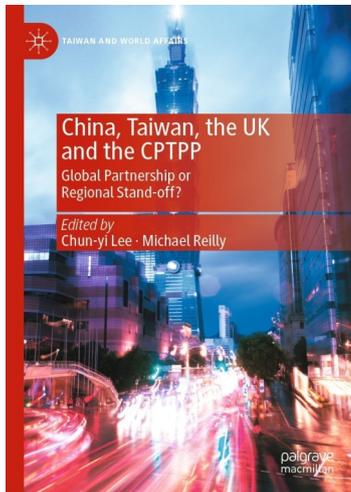
Denise Sienli van der Kamp, 2023. “Governance by Uncertainty: Changing Pattern’s in China’s Environmental Enforcement”. *Studies in Comparative International Development* (published online 8 June 2023). Available [here](#).



Governance in China is often characterized as dualistic. On the one hand, the state invests in stable, rule-based institutions to support effective policy implementation. Yet the state also engages in sudden regulatory campaigns, overstepping its own laws to implement rapid changes in key sectors. Businesses in China have developed coping mechanisms to weather these uncertainties; they cultivate political ties or learn to accommodate unexpected disruptions. Yet in the sphere of environmental policy implementation, businesses across the spectrum are starting to complain that local environmental enforcement feels unpredictable, even arbitrary. What constitutes unpredictable enforcement in an environment already characterized by high levels of regulatory uncertainty? What changes in environmental enforcement are driving these complaints? Using original data on nine years of city-level enforcement measures, I show that both campaign-style and rule-based enforcement have been increasing in intensity and frequency since the mid-2010s. Through qualitative evidence, I show how these two approaches work at cross purposes, generating mixed signals on which strategies businesses should use to reduce pollution or to mitigate regulatory uncertainty. Data shows that this is a nationwide pattern, which explains why business—even experienced, well-connected businesses—are complaining about arbitrary state action. This study draws attention to emerging stress tests of China’s dualistic governance, while delving into what these changes portend for state-business relations in China.

Featured Chapters and Articles

George Magnus, “Not a Fast Pass for China at CPTPP”. In *China, Taiwan, the UK and the CPTPP: Global Partnership of Regional Stand-off?*, edited by Chun-yi Lee and Michael Reilly. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.



Originally called the Trans-Pacific Partnership until the USA withdrew in 2017, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is an ambitious and wide-ranging free trade agreement between eleven Pacific countries. Far from faltering after US withdrawal, several more countries have since applied to join, including China, Taiwan and the United Kingdom. Some observers see in this a contest between China and the USA for wider influence through an attempt to control or re-write the rules of international trade; at a minimum accession by any of the three would have a major impact on the CPTPP as originally envisaged. This edited volume considers the three applications, the motivations for the three to join, and the likely responses of existing members. The implications for cross-Strait tension between China and Taiwan are fully considered, as is the ability or willingness of the USA to influence the outcome of the applications.

George Magnus has also published the following articles:

“East Asia Forum Asia’s Demographic Growing Pains”, 25 June <https://www.easiaforum.org/2023/06/25/asias-demographic-growing-pains/>

“Council on Geostrategy, De-dollarisation would upend the global economy, 4 July, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/de-dollarisation-would-upend-the-global-economy/>

“China Cannot Allow Jobless Young to Lie Flat”, *Financial Times*, 22 July, <https://www.ft.com/content/bcfb650a-e9ab-427d-baac-e22a06547e29>

“Beijing is Right to be Worried about the Chinese Economy”, *The Spectator*, 5 August, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/beijing-is-right-to-be-worried-about-the-chinese-economy/>

“Is China’s Economy Turning Japanese?”, *New Statesman*, 7 August, <https://www.newstatesman.com/comment/2023/08/is-china-turning-japanese>

“China Faces an Economic Perfect Storm - with Potentially Catastrophic Consequences”, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 August, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/08/10/china-faces-an-economic-perfect-storm/>

“China’s Recent Economic Woes Suggest there is Something Seriously Amiss”, *The Guardian*, 11 August, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/aug/11/china-economic-problems-show-things-are-seriously-amiss>

“Is a Declining China Even More Dangerous for the West?”, *Sunday Times*, 13 August, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/is-a-declining-china-even-more-dangerous-for-the-west-lxdh53ll3>

“Another False Dawn for China’s Private Sector?” *The Wire China*, 13 August, <https://www.thewirechina.com/2023/08/13/another-false-dawn-for-chinas-private-sector/>

“Xi’s Mission to Re-frame Global Governance”, LSE Blog, 19 August, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2023/09/19/china_globalgovernance

“Flux in China’s Top Ranks Could be a Moment of Acute Geopolitical Risk”, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 September, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2023/09/21/flux-china-top-ranks-moment-acute-geopolitical-risk/>

“China’s Troubled Property Market Faces a Painful Reckoning”, *New Statesman*, 3 October, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/asia/china/2023/10/chinas-property-market-evergrande-hui-ka-yan>

New Online Content

Remembering & Forgetting Pivotal Moments in Modern Chinese History

Professor Jeff Wasserstrom, UC Irvine
Professor Patricia Thornton, Oxford
Professor Margaret Hillenbrand, Oxford

2 May 2023



University of Oxford
CHINA CENTRE

A China Centre Conversation on the topic of “Remembering and Forgetting Pivotal Moments in Modern Chinese History” - with Professor Jeff Wasserstrom (University of California, Irvine), Patricia Thornton (University of Oxford) and Professor Margaret Hillenbrand (University of Oxford) - took place on 2 May 2023.

This interdisciplinary conversation, bringing together specialists in Chinese history, literature and politics, moves from the year of the Boxers through the time of Tiananmen. The focus is on the politics of memory and the different ways that contested events have been brought into or left out of narratives about China's past circulating inside that country and in other parts of the world. Moderator [Todd Hall](#), Director of the University of Oxford China Centre, is joined by [Jeffrey Wasserstrom](#) a cultural historian at UC Irvine who spent the spring of 2023 in London as a Leverhulme Visiting Professor at Birkbeck College, and local faculty members [Margaret Hillenbrand](#) of Wadham College and [Patricia Thornton](#) of Merton College. Between them, the panellists have written about many key events of the late Qing, Republican, Mao, and post-Mao eras.

Click [here for the recording](#)



Past Events

Why Is China So Big? Rethinking the Realm and its Subjects Under the Qing

The China Centre provided the venue for the **Astor Lecture in Global History 2023**, organised by the Centre for Global History (10 May 2023). The speaker was Professor Kenneth Pomeranz, University of Chicago.

It is now well known that the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) sharply altered their predecessors' understandings of what it meant to rule "all under heaven"; meanwhile Qing conquests doubled the empire's land area. Initially, much of the Chinese elite saw much of this new territory as mere buffer zones, to be occupied only insofar as this kept hostile nomads from doing so. A central reason for this skepticism was that many of the newly-acquired lands were ill-suited to agriculture, the "fundamental occupation" of "civilized" life.

By roughly 1850, however, many Han literati came to see many frontier regions as properly "Chinese" territory. More gradually, they also came to see certain previously despised groups of people – including such common frontier figures as miners and loggers – as potential "good subjects". These transformations – influenced both by changes in official discourse and changes in who was actually migrating – set the stage for further changes later: ones which re-imagined China's far west as resource-rich territories which had to be held and "developed", even when the Chinese state was hard-pressed on other fronts. A still further shift occurred in the 20th century, in which the people involved in exploiting these remote territories, not only ceased to be denigrated as dangerous "drifters", but came to be seen as part of the vanguard of the nation.

Conference on Chinese Art and Literature in the Republican Era and Beyond

To thank Dr Paul Bevan for his teaching at Oxford over the past few years and to celebrate his research, exhibitions, translations, and publications focussing on Chinese art and literature of the Republican era, a one-day conference in his honour took place at the China Centre on Wednesday 14 June 2023. The keynote was given by **Paul Bevan** ("Behold the Man: George Grosz – the Reception of his Work in China and Japan, 1923–1937"). Other speakers (on the Republican era) included **Craig Clunas** ("The Influence of the Republican Era on Ming Art"), **Jeremy Taylor** ("Imagining 'Central China' under Occupation: The Wang Jingwei Regime and the Visualisation of the Lower Yangtze Landscape in Wartime"), **Ann Witchard** ("Si-Lan Chen's Red Shoes"), **Huang Xulie** ("The Perfumed and the Libidinal: An Ol-factory Revolution of the Body in Republican China"); and (on contemporary visual culture) **Annabella Massey** ("Enzymes of the Soul: Sickness Narratives and the Wounded Healer in Bi Gan's Kaili Blues"), and **Margaret Hillenbrand** ("Read My Mind: Facial Recognition Technology and Contemporary Chinese Portraiture Street").

Conference on Chinese art and literature in the Republican era

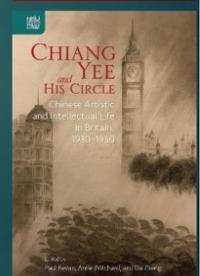
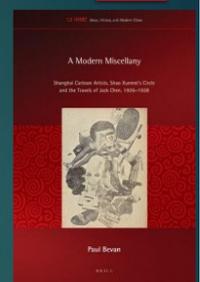
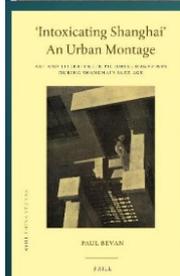
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Keynote by Paul Bevan
Speakers to include Craig Clunas, Jeremy Taylor, Ann Witchard and Huang Xuelei on the Republican era, and Annabella Massey and Margaret Hillenbrand on contemporary visual culture.

For further details and to register, please contact Margaret.Hillenbrand@chinese.ox.ac.uk



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www.chinacentre.ox.ac.uk



Past Events

China Centre DPhil Associate Seminar, 16 June 2023

We held the second China Centre DPhil Associate Seminar on 16 June 2023. Three China Centre DPhil Associates presented their work, after which faculty and peers provided comments and feedback.



Zhixiang Wan
DPhil candidate
Area Studies
(Japan)

The Role of Government in Digital Economy: Policy Approaches to the Digital Transformation in China

This doctoral research focuses on the government's role in digital transformation, exploring Chinese policies that facilitate and regulate the development and application of digital technologies specifically within the manufacturing sector. It employs an eclectic theoretical framework that combines Compressed Development theory as an overarching framework with national innovation systems theory based on a Neo-Schumpeterian perspective and Neo-Polanyian theories to explain state-market dynamics. Earlier this year, Zhihang returned from fieldwork and conducted interviews with policy makers and business practitioners in three provinces in China, each representing different regions and economic development stages. The provinces include Guangdong, Anhui, and Sichuan.



Shuwan Zhou
DPhil candidate
Sustainable Urban
Development Programme
Linacre College

Understanding the Role of E-planners in "People-centred" Neighbourhoods in China

Globally, the making of smart cities has become increasingly institutionalized in recent years. For its emphasis on public participation in the development of a smart neighbourhood, UN-Habitat named Shuangjing neighbourhood of Beijing a Sustainable Community Pilot in 2019. Using Lefebvres' work as a theoretical lens and Actor-Network Theory as an analytical tool, this study examines the role and material effects of e-planners and their expertise in the development of smart city infrastructure. It argues that e-planners have the potential to transform power relations for communities in making smart cities, acting as an intermediary between objectivity and subjectivity, rationality and emotion, and the top and bottom of society. This study is contextualized within the context of Chinese urban planning. It is intended to contribute to the general planning theory and global debates on smart cities.



Guanlin Wu
DPhil candidate
Oxford School
Global and Area
Studies
Jardine Scholar
Exeter College

The Political Economy of Regional Transitions: A Case Study of Shenzhen

Arguably as "the fastest-growing city the world has ever seen, Shenzhen has not received the scholarly attention it deserves". While some studies have been devoted to the identification of key factors enabling Shenzhen's phenomenal transformation, few have seriously delved into the actual process of such transformation, especially from a perspective of sectoral transition. Primarily adopting the method of processing tracing and synthesizing the literature on broadly defined state-market, central-local, and domestic-foreign relations, this project attempts to carefully unfold the highly challenging yet recurring cycle of Shenzhen's sectoral transition and to understand the fairly unusual yet persistent ability of Shenzhen to reinvent its growth models across different critical junctures of development. In turn, this project hopes to use the experience of Shenzhen to shed light on the political economy of regional development and sectoral transition in China and beyond.

Events and Talks

Baillie Gifford Distinguished Speaker Series

Reading the People's Republic

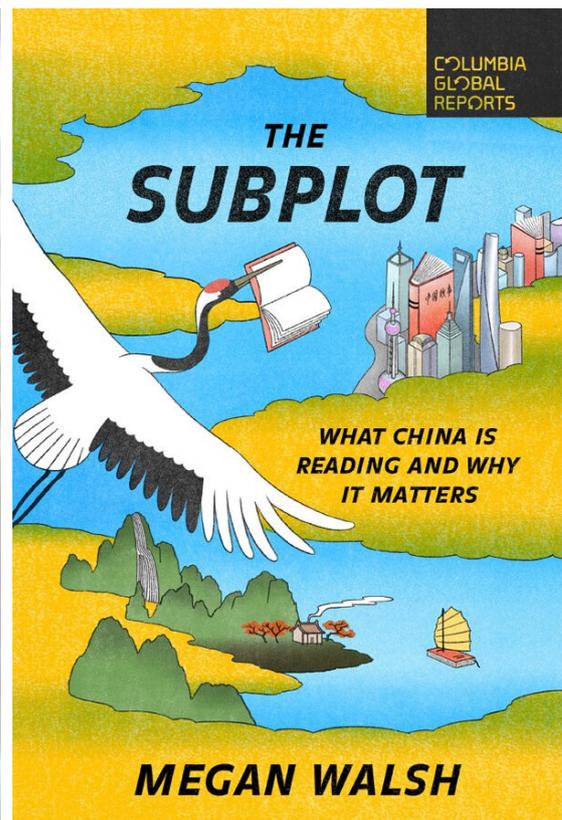
Megan Walsh

14 November, 17:00

Kin-ku Cheng Lecture Theatre

Megan Walsh, author of *The Subplot: What China Is Reading and Why It Matters* (Columbia Global Reports 2022), will discuss why it's important to finally pay attention to Chinese fiction – an exuberant drama illustrating the complex relationship between art and politics, offering an alternative way to understand the inherent contradictions that make up China itself.

Megan Walsh is a journalist who has lived in Beijing and Taipei, and holds a Master's in Chinese Studies from SOAS. She specialises in Chinese literature and film, and her work has appeared in *The Times*, *The New Statesman*, *TIME*, *The Literary Review*, *Lithub*, and *The Globe and Mail*. She lives in London.



China Studies Seminar Series

The China Centre Seminar Series is a weekly seminar series, run jointly by members of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies and the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies. Last term the seminars included “Negotiated Sovereignty: The Fishermen and the State in the Northern Gulf of Tonkin, 1954–1964” by Dr Qingfei Yin, LSE; “Rival Partners: How Taiwanese Entrepreneurs and Guangdong Officials Forged the Development Model” by Dr Jieh-min Wu, Academia Sinica (online); “Rejuvenating Communism, Youth Organizations and Elite Renewal in Post-Mao China” by Professor Jérôme Doyon, Sciences Po; “From Public Sympathy to Collective Anger: Media, Emotions and Politics in 1930s-China” by Dr Xin Fan, University of Cambridge; “Framed by the Archive: Maoist Revolution and the Case of Merchant Zha, 1949–1952” by Professor Brian DeMare, Tulane University; “An Introduction to and Revisionist Critique of the Case (案) as Historical Source and Administrative Artefact in Local Jurisdictions of the Late Empire” by Dr Maura Dykstra, Yale University; “Sino-US Relations: A Historical Perspective from the Pearl River Delta” by Professor John D. Wong, University of Hong Kong. Professor Jeff Wasserstrom (University of California, Irvine), Professor Patricia Thornton (University of Oxford), Professor Margaret Hillenbrand (University of Oxford) participated in a China Centre Conversation — “Remembering and Forgetting Pivotal Moments in Modern Chinese History”.

In Michaelmas Term, the China Studies Seminars will take place in-person in the Kin-ku Change Lecture Theatre. Please see our website for details.

Week 1

Professor Leigh Jenco, London School of Economics and Political Science

“Literary Transmission as Political Action: Feng Menglong’s *Mountain Songs* Compendium (c. 1610)”

Wednesday 11 October 2023, 17:00

Week 2

Mr Aaron Halegua (Aaron Halegua, PLLC)

“US and European Legal Responses to Chinese Forced Labour”

Monday 16 October 2023, 12:00

Week 3

Dr Ed Pulford, University of Manchester

“Spectres of Progress in a Northeast Asian Borderland”

Thursday 26 October 2023, 17:00

Week 4

Dr Olivia Cheung, SOAS

“Factional-Ideological Conflicts in Chinese Politics: To the Left or to the Right?”

Thursday 2 November 2023, 17:00

Week 5

Dr Elisabeth Forster, University of Southampton and Dr Isaac Taylor, Stockholm University

“Making Peace with the Devil: the Problem of Ending Just Wars”

Thursday 9 November 2023, 17:00

Week 6

Dr Chen Pin-chuan, Director of Cultural Division, Taipei Representative Office, UK

“Post Taiwan New Cinema Era: The Auteurs and the Industry”

Monday 13 November, 17:00

Week 7

Dr Desmond Cheung, SOAS

“Locust Control in Late Imperial China”

Thursday 23 November 2023, 17:00

Week 8

Professor Suisheng Zhao, University of Denver

“The Dragon Roars Back: Transformational Leaders and Dynamics of Chinese Foreign Policy”

Monday 27 November, 12:00

Week 8

Moderator: **Professor Todd Hall, University of Oxford**

Panellists: **Dr Bo-jiun Jing, University of Oxford, Ms Mariah Thornton, LSE**

“Analysis of Taiwan’s 2024 Presidential Election”

Thursday 30 November 2023, 17:00

China Centre Talk Series

Last term, China Centre Talks included: “Why Do Chinese Filmmakers Love Melons? And Other Questions from a New Digital Archive of Early Cinema” by Christopher Rea (University of British Columbia); “The US–Japan Alliance and Taiwan” by Adam Liff, Indiana University Bloomington; “Guarding Dictatorship: China's Surveillance State” by Minxin Pei (Claremont McKenna College); “China’s Path to Global Influence” by Richard Carney (China Europe International Business School (CEIBS), Shanghai); “Ruling the Sichuan’s Stage: Reading China’s Sociocultural Transformation from the 18th to the 20th Century through the Perspective of Opera” by Igor Iwo Chabrowski (University of Warsaw); “Decoupling in the Digital Age: China and the Challenge of Massive Modularity” by Eric Thun (University of Oxford); and “The Myth and Facts of China's Public Surveillance System: Evidence from the Government Procurement Contracts” by Pinghan Liang (Sun Yat-sen University).

More details for this term’s talks can be found on the China Centre website.

Week 0

Ian Johnson, Pulitzer Prize-winning writer

Sparks: China’s Underground Historians and Their Battle for the Future

Friday 6 October 2023, 12:00

Week 1

Vaudine England, Leiden University

“Hong Kong: Not Just Another Chinese City”

Tuesday 10 October 2023, 12:00

Week 2

Willy Lam, The Chinese University of Hong Kong

“Xi Jinping: The Hidden Agendas of China’s Ruler for Life”

Wednesday 18 October 2023, 12:00

Week 7

Shiping Tang, Fudan University

“Trustworthiness as Reputation in International Cooperation-building: Implications for US-China Relations”

Wednesday 22 November 2023, 12:00

Week 8

Tyler Jost, Brown University

“The Politics of Promotion and Survival in China's Foreign Affairs System”

Tuesday 28 November 2023, 12:00

Oxford Seminar Series on Visual Culture in Modern and Contemporary China

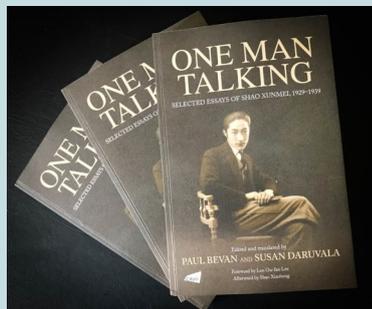
The Oxford Seminar Series on Visual Culture in Modern and Contemporary China is organised by Professor Margaret Hillenbrand and is open to the public. Last term the seminar series featured “Vessels and Cargos: Spaces of Inclusion and Exclusion in Johnnie To’s Drug War and Lee Hae-young’s Korean Remake Believer” by Jinhee Choi (King’s College London).

Week 2

Paul Bevan, University of Oxford
Susan Daruvala, University of Cambridge

One Man Talking: Selected Essays of Shao Xunmei, 1929-1939

17 October 2023, 17:00



Week 8

Kate Costello, University of Oxford

“Gao Xingjian’s Bilingual Experimentation on the World Stage: Encounters with Translation”

28 November 2023, 17:00

Ho Tim Seminar Room

Mandarin Forum

Our Mandarin Forum series is a platform that provides a Chinese-speaking environment for academic exchange for scholars in Oxford and beyond. Last term, the following Mandarin Forums took place: “Values Confliction and Identification in China’s Generation Y” by BAO Leiping, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences; “Network Games: Strategic Reasoning in International Relations (with Applications in Chinese Foreign Policy)” by Dr LI Yuke; “China’s Asymmetric Statecraft: Alignments, Competitors, and Regional Diplomacy” by HUANG Yuxing, Tsinghua University; and “Alterity of Original: The Text Construction and Classics Interpretation in the Translation of the Daodejing by James Legge” by LEI Ayong, Minjiang University.

The Mandarin Forum will resume in Hilary Term 2024.



International History of East Asia Seminar Series

The International History of East Asia Seminar Series is a weekly series that covers the international and transnational history of East and Southeast Asia, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Last term the seminars addressed a wide variety of topics: “Crossing the Bamboo Curtain: China’s Foreign Trade, British Merchants, and the End of the CHINCOM 1953-1957” by Yi Liu (Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies); “Shadow Economy and Underground Networks in Hong Kong during Early Cold War” by Kashing So, Binghamton University, SUNY; “Displaying Diplomacy: Cultural Diplomacy, Politics, and Ideology of The Exhibition of Archaeological Finds of the People’s Republic of China (1974)” by Shing-Kwang Chan (Princeton University); “Redefining Colonial Museums: The Asian Visitors in British East and Southeast Asia in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” by Reynold K. W. Tsang (University of Oxford); “Whose History? Delving into Personal Experiences and Intersections at the Base of the Japanese Empire” by Agnese Dionisio (Waseda University); “Love in the Age of Fascism: What the Letters of a Heartbroken Woman Reveal About Global Connections and Disconnections in the Summer of 19362 by Merle Kartscher (Harvard University); “The No.1 Order: A Potential Outbreak of Nuclear War between the Soviet Union and China” by Duanyi Yi (University of Glasgow); and “From Mediating to Dominating: Tumed Mongols and the Rise of the Chinese Communist Party in Inner Mongolia” by Chendong Pi (University of California, Davis).

This coming term will feature presentations in Weeks 3, 4, 6 and 8.

Week 3

Colonial Administration and Modern China

The Natural Alliance: Demystifying the Portuguese Response to the Hongkong-Canton Strike of 1925-26

Yimeng Cheng, University of Macao

Counting In, Counting Out: Practical and Ideological Considerations behind Nineteenth-century Shanghai Settlement Census-making

Qingrou Zhao, University of Edinburgh

Monday 23 October, 17:00

Lucina Ho Seminar Room

Week 4

Intersection across the Pacific: Race, Migration and the Environment in Modern East Asia

Imperial Imbrication: Lighthouse, Maritime Rescue and the Environment in the Taiwan Strait

Zelin Pei, University of Arizona

The Search for Freedom: Suiheisha’s Transpacific Journey and the Afro-Asian Intersection

Rory Qianqing Huang, Texas A&M University

Wednesday 1 November, 17:00 (**ONLINE**)

Week 6

Western Imports, Asian Agency: Encounters between Nationalism and Transnationalism in East Asia

Everyday Encounters: Colonialism and Modernity in the Interactions between Korean, American and Japanese Women in Korea, 1884-1945

Kyrie Vermette, University of British Columbia

The Struggle for Establishing a ‘Chinese Christianity’ in the Twentieth Century: A Case Study of the Sino-Theologian Zia Nai-zin

Andrew Ka Pok Tam, University of Glasgow

Wednesday 15 November 17:00

Lucina Ho Seminar Room + online (hybrid event)

Week 8

Transcending the ‘Bamboo Curtain’: Cultural Diplomacy and Tourism across the Taiwan Strait

Demonstrating the Sinicised Taiwan: Joseph Needham’s Visit to Taiwan in 1984

JPo-Hsun Chen, University of Manchester

Cold War Tourscape: China’s ‘Homeland Tourism’ and Hospitable Socialism (1950s-1970s)

Cho-kiu Li, Hang Seng University of Hong Kong

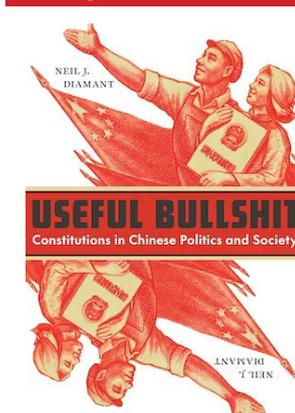
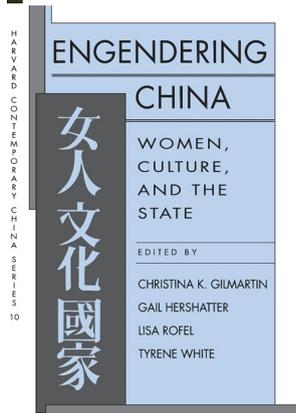
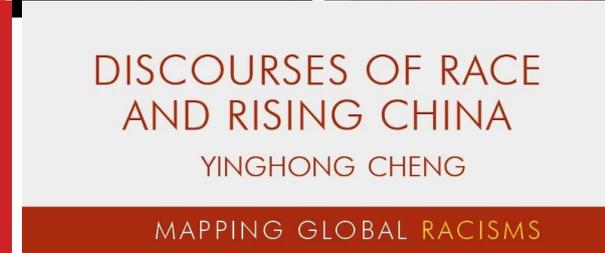
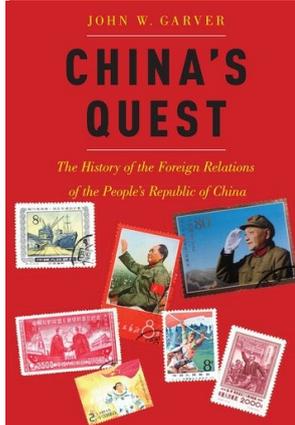
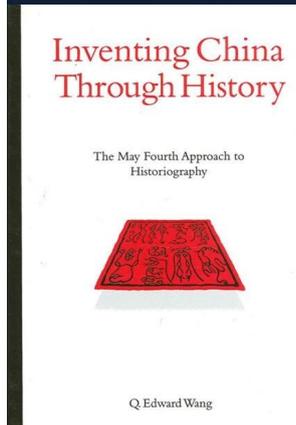
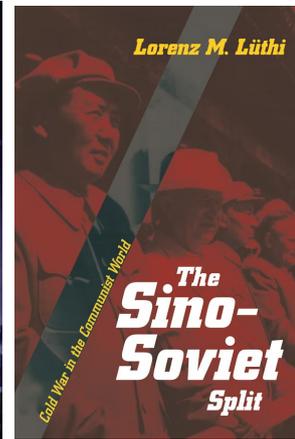
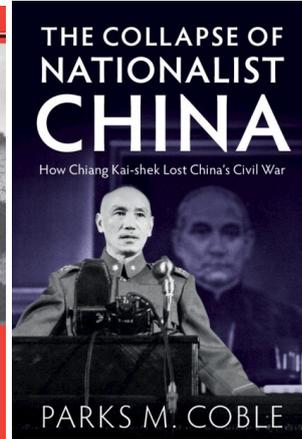
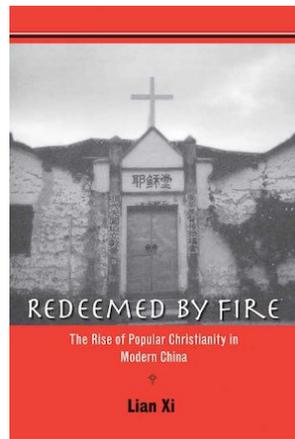
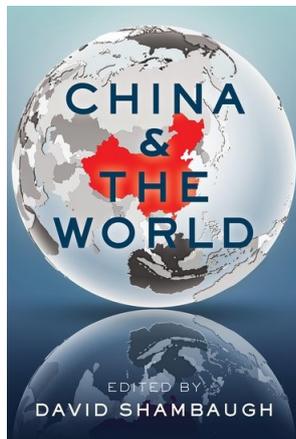
Wednesday 29 November 17:00

Lucina Ho Seminar Room

Oxford China Reading Group



Oxford China Reading Group is a student-led reading group on Chinese history which aims to deliver interdisciplinary insights into late imperial to contemporary China. It was founded in October 2022. It meets every Friday at 2–4 pm during term time in the China Centre. Some of the books read are listed below. Click [here](#) for details



CONTACT US



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