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Letter from the Editor

Dear friends,

Welcome to another issue of the Newsletter! This will be my sixth issue as Editor-in-chief and, sadly, my last.

What has never failed to surprise me is how much there always is to report on in each issue. I start planning out the issue a few months ahead of time and, as soon as I start to sketch out space for our recurring features like seminar series reports, graduate and staff updates, and Thomas Wade Society and CUCF news, we almost have a full issue already! Then once you add annual events like the Chuan Lyu Talks, AMES Garden Party, Faculty Research Day, and Thomas Wade Society Careers Day, you have another full issue again!

Editing this newsletter for the past three years has brought me a lot of joy—I've got to know my peers, professors, and students better, whether by interviewing them about their research or finding out about their secret hobbies. Who knew that my PhD peer Flavia was such a green thumb? Or that my student Sam was a brilliant baker? So too have I enjoyed hunting down lesser-known research opportunities, like the Hopkins Collection of Oracle Bones in the UL and the holdings of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. The newest feature that I am particularly invested in is the 'How I Came to Cambridge' section. As an undergraduate student, I saw my professors as vaunted academics—a position I mistakenly saw as unattainable. Having read Prof. Adam Chau and Dr Heather Inwood's journeys through academia, it has been so reassuring to see the learning, uncer-



With staff and graduate students at the Chuan Lyu dinner

tainties, and excitement that predicated their current positions.

What I hope this newsletter has brought, and will continue to bring, is a sense of community. There is such an active community in Chinese Studies here that it's hard to keep track of without a newsletter! Without these reports and records, it's also easy to take these many activities for granted. Seeing updates spread across well over 30 pages each issue really makes you realise just how lucky we are!

Graduating after a total of eight years in this Faculty is bittersweet—while I am excited to take on the challenge of a post-doc abroad in Munich, I will also miss the wonderful people I have met here, especially our librarian Miki Jacobs who, after my being away from Cambridge for two years, remembered my name and Hermes email as soon as I walked back through the door. It felt like coming home. I'm sure we all have those moments here.

I hope you enjoy this issue and all those to come!

- Kelsey Granger

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF AI WEIWEI'S EXHIBIT

By Oliver Harris (4th Year)

In Ai Weiwei's new exhibition entitled 'The Liberty of Doubt', the freedom of thought that seems to be slowly slipping through the net in China is challenged by what we enjoy in the West. As China develops more sophisticated methods to keep its population under control through the strong grip of Xi Jinping, Ai Weiwei uses a broad range of sculptures, some from his personal collection, some modified by himself, and some synthesised for the purpose of the exhibition to explore control, authenticity, and China's relationship with its past.



In the first room, Ai recreates a deliberate act of smashing the past – in 1995 he intentionally dropped a Han Dynasty urn while being photographed. In this recreation, Ai has reconstructed the three photographs in LEGO bricks, perhaps suggesting a desire to repair the broken pieces of the past. Originally, this act was intended to highlight the loss of heritage that China was suffering and caused significant controversy given its monetary value as well as its cultural capital and prominence in Chinese history. China has a long history of attempting to preserve cultural heritage since the control of cultural heritage is viewed as part of state sovereignty i.e. it is a highly politicised arena.

[1] With the reform and opening up of the 1980s in a post-Mao era, a movement known as “The Movement to Liberate Thinking” started to trickle into Chinese political and intellectual ideologies.[2] This came with a rejection of the past and a plan for China's future. Over 25 years on, perhaps Ai sees China as reversing its course and rediscovering its traditional roots. Whilst Ai Weiwei himself

doesn't give a deeper reason other than “why not” for the use of LEGO bricks to reconstruct the images, the LEGO monochromatism of the images condenses the original black and white images into four greyscale colours, reminding the viewer of how simple things may seem in the past. Nonetheless, context is important to understanding the complex background in which historical events take place. For me, this draws a parallel between how Chinese politicians (especially Xi Jinping) craft the narrative of China's past as an “unyielding struggle against all struggles ... over the past century.”[3] It's easy to frame the past as merely a pretext for what is happening now, but Ai Weiwei reminds us that discerning the authenticity of the past is crucial to protecting the democratic freedoms of the present.[4]

As Beijing's draconian policies continue to permeate through China, one cannot help but think it harks back to high levels of population and surveillance control imposed in dynastic China. Sima Qian reports in the *Shiji* that “those who failed to report



criminal activity would be chopped in two” when referencing Shang Yang’s reforms imposed in the late Warring States Qin.[5] It is this concept of surveillance that Ai Weiwei explores through the surveillance camera and reoccurring motif of ‘camera oppression’ seen particularly in the “Blue and White Porcelain Plates.” Here, Ai Weiwei intersperses traumatic imagery (refugee crisis, war, ruins, demonstrations etc.) with surveillance cameras. In the words of Ai Weiwei himself: “China thinks like an old Empire – the old traditional ways are the best.”[6] It is this way of thinking that has led China to rediscover its traditional roots and perhaps seek a new form of diplomatic, economic and political control to further China’s ambitious targets. Ai Weiwei challenges these ideas further with the interplay between popular consumer culture and traditional Chinese wares in the “Han Dynasty Urn with Coca-Cola Logo.” Ai’s works also allude to globalisation, such as “Marble Takeout Box” and “Marble Toilet Paper.”

Tying the exhibition together is an underlying theme of having the liberty to challenge irrational things. Ai Weiwei contrasts new and existing art alongside historic Chinese objects from his personal collection. The decision to display different works from different periods together whose full identity has not yet been researched or established makes us question the truth (or ‘untruth’) of things in light of recent attempts to counter misleading information online. The exhibition

questions how we preserve cultural heritage (as a society and as institutions) – celebrating certain objects and not others. Ai sees the West as obsessed with notions of truth and artistic authenticity, whereas truth in Chinese philosophy is allied to nature and is therefore constantly in flux. He himself claims that “China thinks the West is trapped by rationality” and will be our demise in the end. Though this attitude attributes value to the defective and the imperfect, the exhibition also celebrates the craftsmanship displayed in all the works and objects: ancient, forged, and commissioned by Ai from some of the most skilled artisans in China.

In conclusion, this exhibition successfully synthesises a critique of China’s restrictive approach to freedom and truth whilst displaying a unique combination of Ai Weiwei’s work. It challenges the audience on ideas of truth. Despite receiving mixed reviews in the UK press, with one art critic describing the art as muddying “his previously clear stance for freedom by implying democracy is just as unfree as a totalitarian state”, a sense of despondence comes through the exhibition that highlights Ai Weiwei’s longing (and perhaps desire) to see China change its ways. This exhibition highlights the problems Ai Weiwei sees with contemporary China. The objects are then physical representations of the scars that the attack on freedom has left in China.

1: Lai, Guolong. “The Emergence of ‘Cultural Heritage’ in Modern China: A Historical and Legal Perspective.” In *Reconsidering Cultural Heritage in East Asia*, edited by Aki-ra Matsuda and Luisa Elena Mengoni, 47–86. Ubiquity Press, 2016.

2: Davies, Gloria, and Gloria Davis. “Habermas in China: Theory as Catalyst.” *The China Journal*, no. 57 (2007): 61–85.

3: “2022 New Year address by President Xi Jinping”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, Last Modified 31st December, 2021.

4: Exhibition catalogue.

5: Lewis, Mark Edward. *The Early Chinese Empires Qin and Han. History of Imperial China.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 31.

6: Ai Weiwei, interview by Oliver Harris, 11th February, 2022.

DR HEATHER INWOOD

HOW I CAME TO CAMBRIDGE

I'm afraid my "how I came to Cambridge" story is not the most exciting: Cambridge is and almost always has been my home, as I was born in the city and spent most of my childhood in villages just to the north, not far from where I find myself living now and bringing up my own children. My childhood dream was to escape the fens by becoming a detective or spy: I used to wander the village in a dressing gown and floppy hat, wielding a plastic magnifying glass that I used to find evidence of unsolved crimes. This was more down to me being a slightly unusual child than to any innate talent for intelligence work, although I did make some progress investigating a burglary in my primary school and a local house fire.

At school, I was drawn to languages and creative subjects like music and art, but also enjoyed sciences and had no idea what I wanted to do in life. I ended up on a music scholarship for the last three years but didn't have what it takes to become a professional musician – I probably spent as much time writing silly poems and pop songs on my guitar as practising the flute. Applying to do Chinese at university was a stroke of genius from my mum, who knew I loved languages and that I was up for a challenge. I must admit I was pretty clueless about China in my admission interviews, to the evident horror of one interviewer at another university to the north – I suspect I got into Cambridge largely on the basis of naïve enthusiasm (which wouldn't be enough now, for the record).

I didn't have any thoughts of pursuing a career in academia until I was getting towards the end of my undergraduate degree. I was always stronger on the modern language side but struggled with my other papers – I had no idea how anyone was supposed



to come up with an original argument in history and wasn't especially good at literature essays either. I decided to try my hardest in my final year to make postgraduate funding a more realistic possibility further down the line, just in case. I would highly recommend memorising vocabulary every night and listening to Chinese news on the radio every morning over a bowl



With classmate Nicki Lim as an undergraduate in 2003

of cereal! I did enjoy writing about a Beijing-based folk singer called Yang Yi for my fourth-year dissertation and ended up presenting my first conference paper about his music at the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) in Singapore, encouraged by a supervisor at the time.

After I graduated from Cambridge, I moved to Beijing with the goal of trying to make my modern Chinese as fluent as it could possibly be. I first enrolled on Tsinghua University's Inter-University Program and then in the Chinese Literature department of Beijing University, paid for by a government scholarship that I won in the "Chinese Bridge" language proficiency competition (a hugely embarrassing but still worthwhile experience). Most of my time, however, was spent hanging out with local friends and doing a bunch of odd and not-so-odd jobs: recording dialogue for TEFL CDs; copy editing textbooks; teaching English to wealthy businesspeople; singing and playing the guitar – badly – in Wudaokou bars (a mixture of Oasis, Britney Spears, and Zhang Huimei); translating – and censoring – rap lyrics into Chinese for MTV China. I still hang on to these experiences all these years later as a reminder that I haven't always been in universities, even if it has felt so at times.

I applied to do my PhD back in the UK after just a year of my MA at Beida, mostly because my grandfather was unwell and I wanted to be closer to home. SOAS was a brilliant place to study, not just because I was lucky enough to have full AHRC funding and a fantastic supervisor (Michel Hockx, now at Notre Dame in the US), but also because it – and London – was different from Cambridge in so many ways. A highlight was doing fieldwork in my second year, which involved participating in poetry festivals from as far south as Hainan Island to as far north as Inner Mongolia, where I was mistaken for a local ethnically-Russian child and was forced to get horrendously drunk by the village propaganda chief. While writing up my dissertation in my third year I



With local villagers from E'erguna in Inner Mongolia in 2007

had a crisis of confidence – AKA reality check – and thought hard about career pathways outside of academia. The SOAS careers service was a bit more practical than the one I'd visited as an undergraduate, when the only option I had come away with was revisiting my childhood ambition of becoming a spy.

In the end, I got lucky (again) on the academic job market and was offered a tenure-track position in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Ohio State University, where I worked for five years alongside Kirk Denton and other amazingly supportive colleagues who were kind enough to overlook the fact I was only in my mid-20s and extremely ignorant. One truth about academia is that you always feel ignorant, or at least painfully aware of how much there is you still don't know; another is that you need to be prepared to move around a lot if you want any hope of making a living. I also had interviews in Texas, Iowa, and Washington DC, having never imagined I'd end up in the US, let alone the Midwest.

Thankfully, Columbus, Ohio turned out to be a fantastic place to live and work and was where I

DR HEATHER INWOOD

HOW I CAME TO CAMBRIDGE

discovered craft beers, cheesy detective shows, American football (still a complete mystery to me), and long riverside runs, among other things.

But I missed home, so applied for jobs back in the UK and taught at Manchester for a few years before returning to Cambridge after the retirement of my wonderful predecessor, Susan Daruvala, in 2016 – definitely a case of lucky timing. It still feels strange working in the office where I once had modern Chinese texts classes as a teenager; I'm often caught up in memories of my undergrad years, even as I try to act like the serious academic I'm supposed to be.

Despite my occasional efforts to live elsewhere and consider alternatives, I love Cambridge and my job here – the teaching (if not always the marking!), getting to know and learning from students and colleagues across the university and the wider world, coming up with new ideas, and sharing my delight in the things I research, especially the funnier and more imaginative aspects of contemporary Chinese culture. What I like best of all is the feeling of forever being on the edge of knowing something new – of waking up in the morning and wondering what I might come across or figure out today. I like to think that these are things that a languages degree equips all students with: the ability to think creatively, to feel at home in more than one language and culture, to come up with solutions to problems you



On horseback at the poetry event in Inner Mongolia

didn't know existed, to give structure to ideas, and to work with people from all walks of life. Where that leads you is your own life's work to find out!

A poetry meeting near Suzhou while doing fieldwork in 2007



DUNHUANG AND SILK ROAD SEMINARS

Lent and Easter Terms 2022, by Kelsey Granger

This term saw the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series continue online, attracting both listeners and speakers from Europe and further afield.

Our Lent line-up covered the length and breadth of the Silk Road, introducing a Sinological audience to such fascinating topics as the Tibetan Rāma story (presented by **Prof. Ulrike Roesler**), Syriac prayer amulets (presented by **Dr Erica Hunter**), and Old Uyghur poetry (presented by **Prof. Peter Zieme**).

Religion was a key feature this term, with **Prof. Max Deeg** raising the tricky topic of silk in Buddhist sources. So too did our very own **Junfu Wong** give a fascinating talk on the ritual practices associated and depicted on steles from Guanzhong. Finally, **Dr Mark Dickens** closed off the term with a captivating discussion on Christian fragments from Turfan.

Our Easter term programme focused more closely on Dunhuang itself, seeking to apply Sinological approaches to the codicological and social history of the region. We opened with **Laurent van Cutsem**, who centred his talk

on extant manuscript copies of praise verses for Chan masters. This detailed codicological study was entirely fitting for our aims this term. This careful and focused approach was continued with **Prof. Lewis Doney**'s talk on Dhāraṇī texts discovered in Dunhuang.

Manuscripts were the mainstay of two further talks in this series: the first being our very first hybrid event where **Dr Zhang Zhan** presented a wide array of contracts on slaves in Khotan. This led to much in-depth discussion of kinship terms and whether you really would sell your brother's child into slavery! **Prof. Abdurishid Yakup** focused on Old Uyghur's use of Chinese—a fascinating insight into the relationship between these two scripts and languages.

The term, and indeed the academic year, was concluded with the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series' organiser **Prof. Imre Galambos**, who engaged listeners with progressively anterior examples of horizontal Chinese writing. Comments and questions spilled over the allotted time as topics of religion, writing experiences, and ritual unfolded from this talk.

This term also marks my final



term assisting in organising the seminar series—a role I have had since 2018. In that time, we have hosted 65 seminars in-person and, now, online. The seminar series is only going from strength to strength with a mailing-list of over 250 scholars and a growing YouTube channel (the link for which is [here](#)). Prof. Galambos and I are also co-editing a collected volume *Saved from Desert Sands* to be published early next year with Brill, including contributions from many past speakers.

If you would like to be part of the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar mailing list, then please contact Prof. Imre Galambos at iig21@cam.ac.uk. These talks currently take place on Zoom on Thursdays at 5pm.

CHINA RESEARCH SEMINARS

Easter Term 2022, by Nick Stember



Illustration by Nick Stember made with the posters for each talk

Easter term of the China Research Seminar began in a literary vein with a talk by **Professor Barbara Bisetto** (University of Verona) on Yu Xuelun's 1918 retelling of "The Tale of Yingying," the celebrated Tang dynasty tale which would go on to inspire the Yuan drama, *Romance of the Western Chamber*. As Professor Bisetto elucidated, the paratextual mediation of 17th century literatus Jin Shengtang completed during the Ming-Qing transition played a key role in Yu's creative reinterpretation of this beloved story, shedding light on the complex interplay of *yanyi* and translation over the course of Chinese literary history.

Turning to military matters,

Professor Franciscus Verellen (École française d'Extrême-Orient) introduced us to Gao Pian's pivotal defensive campaigns against the invading Nanzhao tribes in Protectorate of Annan (today's North Vietnam) during the late Tang. Framing these campaigns within the context of the disastrous An Lushan rebellion, Professor Verellen argued that Gao's ability to repel the invading tribes can be traced to not only to his strategic brilliance, but, furthermore, to his skills as a diplomat and ethno-religious mediator.

This term's seminar concluded with the Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies, delivered by **Philip Clart** (University of Leipzig, Germany). The first of these talks was on the emerging trend

for ostensibly secular museums to be founded by religious organisations with both public and private support. In the second talk, Professor Clart turned to the performance of ritual divination by "spirit writing cults" as a source of religious advising. Taken together, these lectures provided a fascinating window into popular religious practice in Taiwan today. (Both of these talks are explored later in this issue.)

If you would like to be part of the China Research Seminar mailing list, then please contact organiser Prof. Adam Chau at ayc25@cam.ac.uk

These talks currently take place on Zoom on Wednesdays at 5pm.

CAMBRIDGE-HAMBURG GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE ON MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

By Junfu Wong

After a year of delays due to the pandemic, the third annual Cambridge-Hamburg Graduate Student Conference on Manuscript Studies was held at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg on the 14th and 15th March.

This follows the first such conference held in Robinson College back in 2019 and a well-timed second conference at the EFEO, Paris in January 2020.

There were eight graduate students from University of Cambridge, University of Hamburg, and Ghent University who presented on subjects relating to Chinese manuscript culture, especially Dunhuang and Buddhist topics.

The conference was followed by a visit to the Turfan Collection at the Brandenburg Academy of Science and Humanities in Berlin, guided by **Dr Lilla Russell-Smith**.



TZU CHI CAMBRIDGE GRADUATE STUDENT CONFERENCE ON EAST ASIAN BUDDHISM

By co-organisers Junfu Wong and Yizhuo Li

On 13th and 14th of June, the first Cambridge Graduate Student Conference on East Asian Buddhism was successfully held in the Faculty, sponsored by the Tzu Chi Foundation whose support of Buddhist Studies at the University of Cambridge is managed by **Dr Noga Ganany**.

Themed “Journeys: Spiritual and Physical Experiences in East Asian Buddhism,” this



conference welcomed ten graduate students from UK universities to present their research in person at FAMES. A wide range of topics regarding Buddhism were discussed, from a historical study

of Hōe soundscape in medieval Japan to anthropological research on contemporary Fo Guang Shan humanistic living Chan. Audiences and presenters enthusiastically participated in

Q&A sessions.

The conference provided graduate students in Buddhist studies with a great opportunity to share their research in public and establish academic networks.

NEEDHAM RESEARCH INSTITUTE SEMINARS

Lent and Easter Terms 2022, by Dr Jenny Zhao

A series of nine fortnightly seminars took place at the Needham Research Institute over the Lent and Easter Terms, featuring a wide range of topics and themes in the areas of philosophy, religion, and science. The majority of talks took place in person, which facilitated conversation and exchange.

Yumi Suzuki from the University of Bern opened the Lent Term programme with a talk titled 'Plants and Animals in Early Confucianism: Conflicts and Harmonies between the Human and Non-human Realms in the *Mengzi*, the *Xunzi*, and Beyond'. Two PhD candidates from FAMES presented their research: **Junfu Wong** on the production process of religious stone stelae among Guanzhong lay communities and **Flavia Fang** on the politics of olfaction in Medieval China. **Yijie Huang** from our own Department of History and Philosophy of Science delivered a talk via Zoom on John Floyer's (1649-1734) conflation of European and Chinese pulse-taking touch. The term concluded with a talk given by **Christopher Cullen**, emeritus

director of the Needham Research Institute with Catherine Jami (CNRS) in absentia, titled 'Did Wu Mingxuan produce a "Muslim calendar" in 1669? Religion, rhetoric and astronomical conflict'.

In the Easter Term, **Liyuan Yue** of the University of Science and Technology Beijing shared her recent research on biochemist Dorothy Needham's (Li Dafei's 李大斐) Scientific Career, her cooperation with Joseph Needham, and her interactions with China during WWII. **Bernhard Leitner** from the University of Vienna traced the colonial legacy of neuroanatomy and psychiatry in Austria, Japan, and Japanese-ruled Korea from 1900 to the 1930s. **Hyungsub Choi** from Seoul National University of Science and Technology discussed via the history of technology in modern Korea from the perspective of 'imitation as innovation' via a number of case-studies. The final talk of the term was given by **Franciscus Verellen**, pictured below-right, emeritus director of École française d'Extrême-Orient, titled 'City Walls, Excavations, Explosives: Two Inscriptions on Innovative Engineering in the late Tang'.

Aside from the Friday seminars, the NRI also hosted an interdisciplinary workshop on 9th-11th June titled *Science in the Forest, Science in the Past* (SFSP), the third in the SFSP series organised by **Geoffrey Lloyd**, **Aparecida Vilaça** and **Willard McCarty**. Anthropologists, histori-



ans, philosophers, and artificial-intelligence researchers (including **Prof. Dagmar Schaefer** pictured below-left) gathered in the KP Tin Hall to engage in discussions on the broad theme of health and wellbeing. Parts I and II of SFSP have already been published (by Hau and Interdisciplinary Science Reviews / Routledge respectively); plans are in place for the publication of SFSP III – watch this space!



If you would like to attend the NRI Seminar series, search 李约瑟研究所 on WeChat

(or scan the QR code attached) and see our [Facebook page](#).



QING LITERATURE READING GROUP

Michaelmas and Lent Terms 2022, by Yizhuo Li



Meeting weekly and spanning Michaelmas and Lent terms, we were lucky to have **Professor Philip Clart** from the University of Leipzig (visiting Cambridge as Beaufort Visiting Fellow at St John's College) to guide us through a variety of late-imperial popular-literature texts on Han Xiangzi 韓湘子—one of the Eight Immortals (baxian 八仙) and the subject of Prof. Clart's new book project, following up on his earlier translation of 韓湘子全傳 (*The Story of Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal*). Regular participants included **Daphne So, Ting Li Quek, Mengyuan Tian, Yizhuo Li** and **Professor Adam Chau**, with the occasional attendance by **Monica He, Dr Noga Ganany, Dr Dror Weil** (History) and second-year undergraduate **Charles Galland**.

We read and translated different genres of texts including the popular novel *Hanxian baozhuàn* 韓仙寶傳, a Cantonese Dragon Boat Song (longzhouge 龍舟歌) depicting the scene 'Delivering Winter Clothes at Night' (Ye song hanyi 夜送寒衣) in which Han Xiangzi repels his wife's sexual entreaties, and a Daoist daoqing 道情 performance text about how Han Xiangzi attempted nine times to deliver his uncle Han Yu 韓愈, the famous Tang-Dynasty literatus, to the immortal realm. These texts show an intriguing variety of plots and perspectives which provided us with literary, historical, and ethnographic angles to observe how social locations and cultural inclinations shaped narratives and interpretations of the same religious figure in popular

and folk literature of late imperial China.

Han Xiangzi's real identity was a divine white crane who had been banished to the mortal world. He was inadvertently offended by a divine reed, whose human incarnation Lin Ying eventually became his wife in a twisted turn of fate. Their marriage was never consummated because of Han Xiangzi's determination to cultivate himself back to the immortal realm (which at the same time was a way to avenge the previous offence, unbeknownst to either party). We can examine through Lin Ying's perspective in some texts not only the passivity of women's roles in matrimony but also their expressive agency that complicates dominant religious and gender ideologies.

During the process of translation, we came across unusual textual forms and expressions from time to time, which triggered some delightful discussions. Words from dialects such as Cantonese can be quite difficult to understand, e.g., 折墮 (jit dor), which means something negative happening provoking disgust and pity; and 慳尖 (yim jim), which means being unreasonably fastidious. Having Cantonese speakers in the group was a big help! When we read prosimetric performance texts such as daoqing, Professor Chau suggested that we should try to sing some of the tunes, imitating sample tunes in the video clips that Professor Clart showed us. He offered to sing a segment according to the Shuahai'er 耍孩兒 tune, and I also gave it a try by combining this with some Peking Opera melody. All in all, this reading group was at once a useful academic training and a relaxing gathering in the (always!) sunny afternoons in St John's College's Old Divinity School, a memory that we will all deeply cherish.



CHUAN LYU TALKS 2022

By Fuyuan Luo and Mengyuan Tian



With the easing of pandemic restrictions, we have finally been able to resume the Chuan Lyu Lectures in Taiwan Studies after a two-year hiatus. The annual lecture series, hosted by the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Cambridge, has been endowed by the Chuan Lyu Foundation and its founder, **Dr Lee Hwa-lin**. For over three decades, notable speakers from academia as well as different professions have delivered insightful lectures on different aspects of Taiwan (history, religion, literature, art, politics, etc.). This May, we were delighted to have **Professor Philip Clart** from the University of Leipzig (and Beaufort Visiting Fellow at St John's College) as the distinguished speaker. Prof. Clart provided insights into the role of religion in contemporary Taiwanese society in two lectures. The first addressed the use of museums by religious organisations as interfaces with a secular public order and the official educational system. The second addressed the religious practices of individuals and small-scale temple-focused communities. Both lectures attracted students and scholars from across the University of Cambridge.

The first lecture (delivered on 10th May) was titled 'Religious Museums in Taiwan: Intermediate Spaces between Sacred and Secular Spheres?' Relying on decades of ethnographic research, Prof. Clart analysed the strategic discourses within religious organi-

sations concerning the aims and purposes of their museum projects, in particular concerning the definition and differentiation of secular and sacred spaces and functions. He provided rich details through six case studies: the Museum of World Religions, the Buddha Museum, the Chung Tai World Museum, the Taiwan Soka Association Art Centre, museums attached to Yiguandao temples, and a museum attached to a local temple. Prof. Clart used brochures, photographs, and interview data to examine how the museums functioned within the sponsoring religious organisations' ongoing negotiation of their relationship with secular institutions and agents. He further demonstrated the dual functions of a museum: as a religious site developing a significant part of the spiritual context in contemporary Taiwan, and as a cultural centre adopting the responsibility of representing local culture. He highlighted the ambiguity in the roles that a museum plays in the spheres of education and cultural cultivation. Prof. Clart concluded by highlighting some of the core functions of these religious museums: spreading the Dharma through art, creating value in life, and preserving and transmitting the founder's charisma. The audience raised interesting questions about the dichotomy between sacrality and security, the operations and promotional





strategy of the museums, and the development of their cultural products.

The second lecture (delivered on 12th May) was titled 'The Gods as Agony Aunts: Divination, Individual Problem-Solving, and Popular Religion in Contemporary Taiwan'. In this lecture, Prof. Clart answered the intriguing question of 'what do people believe in Taiwan?' Instead of relying on interviews and questionnaires, he pointed out the limitations of these methods. He argued that researchers tend to emphasise notions and questions that are relevant to them, and not necessarily to the research subjects. Therefore, Prof. Clart introduced a different body of data that holds great promise for the study of popular beliefs, consisting of thousands of records of individual divination sessions published in the magazines of Taiwanese spirit-writing cults, so-called phoenix halls (luantang 鸞堂). Since these records are initiated by the believers themselves in the form of questions posed to the presiding deities of the phoenix halls in question, they are free from researchers' biases.

Prof. Clart started the lecture with a YouTube clip from a local Taiwanese TV show, showing the process of welcoming the deities, being possessed by them, and writing down their messages in the form of poetry. The vivid details aroused great interest in

the audience and provided context for Prof. Clart to explain his fieldwork experiences. Instead of focusing on questions asked by researchers, Prof. Clart's research examines believers' questions, which are selected and published regularly by phoenix halls. He first introduced two types of Taiwanese phoenix halls: the traditional, membership-based type and the

newly-developed, more open type. He then presented the questions that people had asked the deities in categorised and tabulated formats (disaggregated by age, gender, geographical information, etc.), arriving at a general view of key notions and issues in popular belief in Taiwan, the relative importance of particular beliefs, and their changes over time in the recent past. The most popular questions asked by believers were about their fortune, marriage, wealth, career development, as well as the fate and afterlife of their family members, especially their parents. The audience was enthused by the topic and asked questions about the profile of believers, how their questions were selected and published, and the differences between answers to similar questions. This was followed by a lively dinner at St John's Chop-house which continued these discussions.

We were extremely lucky to have Professor Clart share his extensive experiences living in and researching Taiwan, which began thirty years ago with his doctoral research on spirit-writing cults in Taiwan. With rich ethnographic details and insightful analysis, his lectures revealed the social dynamics of the present religious landscape in Taiwan. It was a great way to restart the Chuan Lyu lecture series, and we look forward to more thought-provoking lectures and discussions on Taiwan in the coming years!

AMES GARDEN PARTY

By Kelsey Granger



On the 10th June, staff and students gathered outside the Faculty for our annual AMES Garden Party. The prosecco was flowing and the excellent selection of canapés and desserts were greatly enjoyed (particularly the brownies which practically caused a stampede!). The sunshine made it an idyllic summer's day, free from exams at last! Many students even finished their exams right before the party, joining us after the classic prosecco showers.

For our fourth-year undergraduates, the party was a chance to thank their teachers and talk about their future plans. For those in their second year who are about to embark on their Year

Abroad, it was an opportunity to quiz those who have been there and done that! So too did graduate students have the afternoon off away from their thesis deadlines and job / post-doc applications, catching up with friends from across EAS and MES disciplines.

We wish all those graduating this summer the best of luck in their future endeavours, and look forward to hearing all about the current second year students' adventures on their Year Abroad in our next issue! Thank you as well to those who organised this year's Garden Party—it was, as always, a great success and a wonderful way to close the academic year.



TAIWAN FOOD FESTIVAL

By Jiayi Tian



The Taiwan Food Festival finally returned this year on 25th May 2022 at the Needham Research Institute, the first time this event has been held since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Dr Po-Hsi Chen, Post-Doctoral Fellow in Taiwan Studies and the organiser of this food festival, welcomed everyone at the beginning of the event. He expressed special thanks to **Professor and Director Jianjun Mei**, **John Moffett**, and **Susan Bennet** from the Needham Research Institute, who all provided indispensable support to hold this event. The food was provided by Ling Ling's Steam Kitchen, while Kang Chiao Bakery was the supplier of the bubble milk tea. Jessica Chen, the owner of the Bakery, expressed her welcome as well.

According to the fellow students' feedback, the Taiwanese food and drinks were a real hit! Buns (guabao 刈包) stuffed with pork belly, fried chicken, or tofu; popcorn chicken; and tea eggs, all alongside bubble milk tea; oolong tea; and earl grey tea were all greatly enjoyed. The buns were the most

popular dish—upon taking a bite, the softness and sweetness of the bun is just a prelude to the delicious sauces and meat or tofu within. The coriander interspersed in the bun further adds some liveliness to the taste. It's a mix of freshness and mellowness.

Before long it started to drizzle a little but this could not drive people away. Instead, students and teachers hid under the shelter of the food van or under the trees and kept enjoying the food and conversation. Everyone had a great time. Dr Chen tells us that he is also planning another food event for the Mid-Autumn Festival in Michaelmas Term 2022.



SECOND YEAR UPDATES



After a busy (and in-person) Lent Term, we headed into Easter Term with excitement and a little nervousness at the looming prospect of exams, mini-dissertations, and essays needing to be submitted. We continued to look at new texts focusing on relevant and important topics such as health insurance premiums (保费) and fast fashion (平价快速时尚) under the guidance of **Wang Laoshi**. We also entertained each other with our PowerPoint presentations for oral class on Fridays, as well as in discussions and small debates on Tuesdays. In addition, we had a few very helpful revision sessions with **Nick Stember** for C5 and a 2-hour-long session with **Dr Ganany** for C6. During the two-week exam period, it was always reassuring to run into classmates in the different libraries across Sidgwick Site and revise together.

At the end of our final exam and after some of us got sprayed with prosecco by friends, we started (and have yet to finish) planning our year abroad in Taiwan. Who knew it would be so confusing?! Luckily, we have been speaking to the third and fourth-year students, as well as **Zhao Laoshi**, who have all been very patient and always willing to answer our questions. Our group chat has been very active with all of us trying to figure out how

the visa application process works, which flights to book, and where to live. We have become miniature independent travel agencies, and we have learned a lot about our new home in anticipation of our arrival there by watching videos on YouTube or looking at the “Taiwan” section on Moodle.

The day after our exams, the whole class went to the Faculty Garden party, where we enjoyed some great food and even greater company. We said our good-byes to our teachers and took some nice pictures with them. One final piece of good news was that Wang Laoshi will be coming with us to Taiwan, and we are all very excited to see her there!

This second year at Cambridge proved to be very challenging and rewarding, and we all have cherished our time in class thanks to all our professors, supervisors, and 同学 who will be dearly missed. In the meantime, we cannot wait for our year abroad to begin. Here’s to 2022/2023 being even better than this year. 暑假快乐!

-Romano Tucci
2nd Year Student

TAIWAN UPDATES



On the early morning of the 18th September, the third year Chinese class bid farewell to their families and gathered at Heathrow. Delirious with tiredness, our journey was comfortable but disorientating. As soon as we landed, we were hurried to buses by airport staff in white protective suits and driven through lush green mountains to our quarantine hotel. Although pleasantly surprised by our ocean view, it was only when we closed our doors and sat in isolation that we were able to fully process the magnitude of our journey.

For 15 days, our exposure to Taiwan was limited to the view of holidaymakers at the beach from our balconies and several daily loudspeaker announcements, which by the end of the fortnight were almost glued to our memory. Whilst understandably difficult for some, for others this strange period eased us into the new environment and provided plenty of time to reflect on our upcoming adventure.

Once we were let out, the class split up into small groups and each settled into life in Taipei. We convened every weekday for classes at MTC, which covered language, news, literature, and translation. Our teachers were great and taught us a lot about Taiwanese culture, including **Lin Laoshi** who took us on a class trip to The Grand Hotel for a tour and a meal, and who made sure we were familiar with all the Taiwanese KTV classics!

In our free-time, we took trips to many different areas in Taiwan: misty Jiufen for tea drinking, sunny Xiaoliuqi for

scuba diving, as well as Hualien, Tainan, and Yilan for scootering, cycling, mountain climbing, and, of course, eating! The class also enthusiastically explored the varied and delicious food that Taiwan has to offer, and were regular visitors to night markets, soymilk breakfast stalls, fancy brunch restaurants, and artsy cafés, as well as the all-too-convenient 7-Eleven. Many members of the class also took this time to learn new skills, joining societies for Mahjong and roller skating and attending lessons in Taiwanese, Japanese, salsa, guzheng, and even pottery! Personal highlights involve regularly watching the sunset from the steps at Chiang Kai Shek Memorial Hall, shopping in the bustling and sparkly Zhongshan, and dancing outside late at night with the NTNU's street dance society. I also found delight in observing, in both myself and my classmates, how Taiwan slowly felt more and more like a home.

From the moment we first stepped into the warm and humid Taiwanese air until now, when members of the class are leaving one by one, we have all learned so much about Taiwan, life and ourselves. Thinking back on the experiences we have had and the friends we have made, I'm sure we are all filled with immense gratitude for this opportunity and are eager to come back and explore more of this wonderful place in the future.

- Harriet Howarth
3rd Year Student

FOURTH YEAR UPDATES



Our class matriculated in 2018 – at that time we had a different Prime Minister, pandemics only occurred in “other” countries and the price of a Big Mac was roughly £4 (now at a cool £5.45...). In that time, only one thing has stayed constant: our Chinese class. We quickly became a close-knit group of friends particularly on our first trip to Taiwan in 2019.

Now, having spent a year together abroad and a final year at university, I can only imagine our class will be staying in close contact for a long time after! We’ve experienced the joys of writing a dissertation, the lows of actually doing exams in-person, and the mediocre moments of sometimes forgetting the Taiwanese slang we learnt last year. As a class, we celebrated dissertation submissions by heading to an unusually empty Clare Cellars and taking over the basement bar to force others to listen to our stories of Taiwan’s energy crisis, 17th Century Chinese literature, and niche Daoist sects. Whilst some of our experience

this year was disrupted by COVID, this didn’t stop many of our class still missing lectures despite isolating at home and having the option to join classes remotely.

It’s been truly wonderful spending time with this amazing group of people. The FAMES Garden Party was an emotional goodbye but very much not the end. You might spot an extra face in our final photo together; Charlie McLean’s bizarre decision to switch to Part II management will always confuse Wu Laoshi but no doubt he would join me and my classmates in thanking all our instructors, professors and supervisors (including in Taiwan) over the four years for their immense effort in bringing us up to our Chinese level we have today. We will all miss FAMES deeply!

- Oliver Harris
4th Year Student