The Politics of Hospitality in Maoist China

Dr. Julia Lovell (Birkbeck College, University of London)

Popular stereotypes have long depicted Mao-era China as isolated from, and often shunned by, the international community. Using memoirs and Chinese archival documents, this seminar aims to complicate this image, by describing some of the ways in which Maoist China reached out to the world beyond conventional diplomatic channels: the agencies that strove to spread internationally Chinese cultural and political influence and the success that they achieved. The talk will focus in particular on the way in which Chinese leaders and officials planned and orchestrated visits by potentially influential foreigners from both sides of the Cold War divide. In her paper, Julia Lovell will suggest that Maoist China poured large amounts of money and expertise into a painstaking and at times sophisticated soft-power programme; and that some of these efforts garnered rich political dividends.

Julia Lovell is senior lecturer in modern Chinese history and literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. She is the author of three books on modern China, most recently The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China (2011), which won the 2012 Jan Michalski Prize Her several translations of modern Chinese fiction include Han Shaogong’s A Dictionary of Maqiao (winner of 2011 Newman Prize for Chinese Literature), Zhu Wen's I Love Dollars, Zhang Ailing’s Lust, Caution and Lu Xun’s The Real Story of Ah-Q, and Other Tales of China. She is currently working on a global history of Maoism, and on a new, abridged translation of Journey to the West.

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome.