This talk attempts to examine the development of Colloquial Versions of the Bible in Southern China in the late Qing Dynasty, and the complex relationship between “Mandarin” and “dialects”. From 1860s, a new understanding of the dialect became prevalent among the missionaries in the South. They contended that only the local dialect was the “mother tongue” of southern people, and the classical Chinese or Mandarin would not be able to achieve a “unity of the written and spoken”. The rationale of their call for reforms in dialects can be broadly divided into two main types. One was based on the proposed "Church Romanization", or the "Romanization of Chinese" in its usage. The other, built on what had already been achieved through two eras of dialect literature in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, explored how "standardization", "refinement" and "modernization" can be applied into the written form of dialects, represented by the dialect union versions of the Bible. These two schools of thought had different impacts on the modern literary language. Based on above arguments, this talk will discuss the following questions: What was the relationship among the rise of the social status of dialects, the late Qing localism and the construction of local cultural identification? How was the intelligentsia in China influenced by the missionaries? What political aspirations as well as visions for a future China lay behind these efforts?

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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.