Reading Their Way Out of China

A materialist history of China Jesuits’ translations (ca. 1687-1740)

Dr WU Huiyi (Needham Institute)

5pm, February 8, 2017 (Wednesday); Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES

All seminars take place on Wednesdays (unless otherwise arranged) at 5pm in rooms 8 & 9 in the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies. Tea will be served at the same venue at 4:45pm. All are welcome!
Abstract  The Sinological literature produced by Jesuit missionaries in China (late 16th- late 18th century) has been extensively studied as intellectual history, with their translations of Chinese texts in particular appearing as an encounter between two chief systems of thinking and beliefs. Yet translation also signifies an intensive form of reading, therefore bearing testimony to how missionaries made sense of China through the texts they encountered. Following the trajectory of individual missionaries and the gradual building-up of certain Jesuit sinological monuments such as the *Description de l’Empire de la Chine* (1735, Paris), I attempt to examine the translations produced between ca. 1687 and 1740 as an integral part of individual missionaries’ everyday existence in China, reflecting the contingency of individual itineraries and the needs for knowledge in given contexts, the physical availability of limited resources at a certain place, and the manifold practices missionaries used to process, validate and communicate information.

Speaker  Dr Wu Huiyi is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Needham Research Institute, and associate researcher of the Centre d’études sur la Chine moderne et contemporaine of Paris. She received professional training as a translator, before completing her PhD in history in 2013 under joint supervision between Université Paris Diderot and Istituto Italiano di Scienze Umane (Florence). Her dissertation (in French) entitled *Translating China in the 18th century: French Jesuits as translators of Chinese texts and the renewal of European knowledge about China (1687-ca. 1740)* will be published in April 2017 by Editions Honoré Champion, Paris.