



East Asian Studies
Postgraduate Conference
Conversing Across East Asia

June 22-23, 2026



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Faculty of
Asian and Middle
Eastern Studies

Table of Contents

Programme at a Glance	3
Acknowledgements	4
Keynote Speaker Bio	5
Detailed Programme	6
Day 1 (June 22).....	6
Day 2 (June 23).....	9
Abstracts	12
PANEL 1: Ordering Modern East Asia.....	12
PANEL 2: Adapting and Negotiating Religious Power in East Asia.....	14
PANEL 3: Preserving the Body Politic in Premodern East Asia.....	16
PANEL 4: Framing East Asia: Cultural and Material Production Across Borders.....	18
PANEL 5: East Asian Film and Literature at the Interstices.....	20
PANEL 6: Nationalism and the Making of Difference from the Cold War to Today.....	22
PANEL 7: Movement, Place and Practice in Contemporary Chinese Encounters	24
PANEL 8: Contemporary Challenges: Aesthetics, Affect, Action.....	26
PANEL 9: Hygienic Modernity in an Age of Crises	28
PANEL 10: Remaking Knowledge in 19th and 20th Century East Asia.....	30

Programme at a Glance

Time	Room 8/9	Room 10
Day 1 — 22 June 2026, Monday		
9:00 – 9:15	Registration / Welcome	
9:15 – 10:15	Keynote speech: “What ship is it?”: Chosŏn Diplomats learn Japanese	
10:30 – 12:00	Panel 1: Ordering Modern East Asia	—
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch Break	
13:30 – 15:00	Panel 2: Adapting and Negotiating Religious Power in East Asia	Panel 3: Preserving the Body Politic in Premodern East Asia
15:15 – 17:00	Panel 4: Framing East Asia: Cultural and Material Production Across Borders	Panel 5: East Asian Film and Literature at the Interstices
Day 2 — 23 June 2026, Tuesday		
9:00 – 10:30	Panel 6: Nationalism and the Making of Difference from the Cold War to Today	Panel 7: Movement, Place and Practice in Contemporary Chinese Encounters
10:45 – 12:15	Panel 8: Contemporary Challenges: Aesthetics, Affect, Action	Panel 9: Hygienic Modernity in an Age of Crises
12:15 – 13:15	Lunch Break	
13:15 – 15:15	Panel 10: Remaking Knowledge in 19th and 20th Century East Asia	—
15:15 – 15:30	Concluding Remarks	
15:45 – 17:00	Fitzwilliam Museum Tour	

Acknowledgements

This event was made possible with funding by the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge. Our sincere gratitude to Professor Laura Moretti, Professor Mikael Adolphson, Professor Roel Sterckx, and Dr. Nuri Kim for their generous support and guidance in planning this event.

We are honoured to welcome Professor Richard Bowring as our keynote speaker and to express our gratitude for his decades of dedication to Japanese Studies at Cambridge and his continued encouragement of new generations of scholars.

Organising Committee: Carmen Cao, Rashaad Eshack, Shannon Gilbert, Kim Mi Jin, Yutong Li, Risha Roy

Image Credit: Luce Debus <https://www.lucadebus.com>

Keynote Speaker Bio

Prof. Richard Bowring

Professor Richard Bowring is Emeritus Professor of Japanese Studies at the University of Cambridge and former Master of Selwyn College. Before joining Cambridge in 1985, he taught at Monash, Columbia, and Princeton. In 1985 Japanese Studies was in danger of being closed down, but he successfully managed to revitalise and strengthen the subject. He also raised the funds for the Aoi Pavilion in the University Library. His contribution to Japanese studies was recognised by the Japanese government with the award of the Order of the Rising Sun in 2013. Since 2013, he has also served as a member of the Editorial Board of Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism.

A leading scholar of Japanese literature, religion, and intellectual history, Professor Bowring has published extensively. His principal publications include *Mori Ōgai and the Modernization of Japanese Culture* (1979), *Murasaki Shikibu: Her Diary and Poetic Memoirs* (1982), *Murasaki Shikibu: The Tale of Genji* (1988; revised edition 2004), *An Introduction to Modern Japanese* (with H. Laurie, 1992), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Japan* (with P. Kornicki, 1993), *The Diary of Lady Murasaki* (1996), *Cambridge Intermediate Japanese* (with H. Laurie, 2002), *The Religious Traditions of Japan 500–1600* (2005), *The Myōtei Dialogues: A Japanese Christian Critique of Native Traditions* (with J. Baskind, 2015), and *In Search of the Way: Thought and Religion in Early-Modern Japan* (2017).

Detailed Programme

Day 1 (June 22):

Panel 1: Ordering Modern Asia	
10:30 – 12:00 (Room 8/9) Chair: Donghyun (Robert) Lee, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge	
10:30–10:50	The Intersection of Orientalism and Sinocentrism: Reconstructing the East Asian culture through exhibitions in Meiji Japan Yuanxi Tan <i>Keio University</i>
10:50–11:10	“Supercrrips” of the Empire: Disability, Affect, and Colonial Governance at the Chesaengwŏn Kim Mi Jin <i>University of Cambridge</i>
11:10–11:30	Humanitarian Crossings: The Chinese Red Cross and Repatriation in Cold War East Asia, 1953–1966 Jingqi Su <i>University of Hong Kong</i>
11:30–12:00	Panel discussion

Panel 2: Adapting and Negotiating Religious Power in East Asia	
13:30 – 15:00 (Room 8/9) Chair: Ilay Golan, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge	
13:30–13:50	Deliberating Authority and Identity: Consensus-Based Monastic Assemblies in Medieval Japan Mirko Winckel <i>University of Cambridge</i>
13:50–14:10	Statue Inscription, State Sacrifice, and Sacred Space: The Jiangdu Cult in Ming Chengdu Liu Yisu <i>École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE, PSL), Paris & Sichuan University</i>
14:10–14:30	傳 Zhuan/Chuan?: Operational Protocols and the Grammar of Efficacy in The Great Numinous Canon (靈經大傳) Gennie Zhang <i>University of Cambridge</i>
14:30–15:00	Panel discussion

Panel 3: Preserving the Body Politic in Premodern East Asia

13:30 – 15:00 (Room 10)

Chair: Dr Geonyoung Kim, Faculty of Archaeology, University of Cambridge

13:30–13:50	Wrapped Rulership: Xin 心, Xinbao 心包, and the Politics of Protection in Early Chinese Medical and Political Cosmology June Lin <i>University of Cambridge</i>
13:50–14:10	When Body Suffers: Li Gao and the Theory of Internal Damage during the Siege of Daliang, 1232–1233 Carmen Cao <i>University of Cambridge</i>
14:10–14:30	Conversing with the Sage-King: Shun, Cultural Memory, and Political Authority Across East Asia Jeongwoo Lee <i>Indiana University Bloomington</i>
14:30–15:00	Panel discussion

Panel 4: Framing East Asia: Cultural and Material Production Across Borders

15:15 – 17:00 (Room 8/9)

Chair: Carmen Cao, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

15:15–15:35	Beyond Queenly Portraiture: <i>Court Ladies Painting</i> and Substitute Images of Royal Female Presence in Early Joseon Korea Yi-rong Chen <i>Seoul National University</i>
15:35–15:55	Folk Painter, Court Scribe, or Mounting Technician?: Reconsidering the Production Context of a Ch'aekköri Folding Screen attributed to Han Ŭng-suk Sungjin Kim <i>Korea National University of Heritage</i>
15:55–16:15	Modish Operandi: Merchants and Commercial Self-fashioning in Late Tokugawa Japan Natsuha Kataoka <i>University of Cambridge</i>
16:15–16:35	Beyond Records: Authenticity through Subjective Experience in the Eijūmaru kuchigaki Testimonies José Manuel Escalona Echániz <i>University of Cambridge</i>
16:35–17:05	Panel discussion

Panel 5: East Asian Film and Literature at the Interstices

15:15 – 17:00 (Room 10)

Chair: Zhilin Xu, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics, University of Cambridge

15:15–15:35	Butterflies and the Brand-New Panther: Animal Life in the Making of Chinese New Poetry Zhenyu Xu <i>University of Cambridge</i>
15:35–15:55	Multiscriptism in Maqiao Shannon Gilbert <i>University of Cambridge</i>
15:55–16:15	Yoko Tawada's The Naked Eye and Yiyun Li's 'A Thousand Years of Good Prayers' Heng Xie <i>King's College London</i>
16:15–16:45	Panel discussion

Day 2 (June 23):

Panel 6: Nationalism and the Making of Difference from the Cold War to Today	
09:00 – 10:30 (Room 8/9) Chair: Kim Mi Jin, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge	
9:00–9:20	Between Empire, Ethno-nationalism and Multiculturalism: Renegotiating National Boundaries in 1990s Japan Risha Roy <i>University of Cambridge</i>
9:20–9:40	Conversing Across Borders: Chaoxianzu and the Transnational Making of Chinese Nationalism (1949–1992) Giulia Rossi <i>Università di Roma Tre</i>
9:40–10:00	Tainted Heritage: War of History and Identity in Northeast Asia Surrounding UNESCO Heritage Inscriptions Donghyun Lee <i>University of Cambridge</i>
10:00–10:30	Panel discussion

Panel 7: Visions of China? Perceptions of Place from the Imperial Imagination to Contemporary Practice	
09:00 – 10:30 (Room 10) Chair: Yutong Li, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge	
9:00–9:20	Making the Frontier Visible: Qing Miao Albums and the Problem of Difference Yihua Yuan <i>Minzu University of China & University of Illinois Chicago</i>
9:20–9:40	Making Remoteness: Trekking, Mobility, and Nation-Building along the National Highway G318 in the Sino-Tibet Borderland Yanke Wang <i>University of Manchester</i>
9:40–10:00	We Are Eating Together: Co-eating Events as an Art Intervention Practice in Urban Villages by Shakehands 302 in Shenzhen Miao Li <i>Monash University</i>
10:00–10:30	Panel discussion

Panel 8: Contemporary Challenges: Aesthetics, Affect, Action

10:45 – 12:15 (Room 8/9)

Chair: Shannon Gilbert, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

10:45–11:05	Nostalgia as Futurity: Chinese Dreamcore and the Poetics of Stuckness Mengqi Zhou <i>The University of Texas at Austin</i>
11:05–11:25	Alternative Happiness: Danmei Fans' Navigation of Intimate Fantasy and Real-Life Relationship Practice Lynn Zheng <i>The University of Sydney</i>
11:25–11:45	Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds: Afterimages of Scar Literature in The Battle at Lake Changjin Duology (2021-2022) Timothy Natcher Pruett <i>University of Cambridge</i>
11:45–12:15	Panel discussion

Panel 9: Hygienic Modernity in an Age of Crises

10:45 – 12:15 (Room 10)

Chair: Yutong Li, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge

10:45–11:05	Translating Hygiene across East Asia: Yang Huating, Sterilisers, Face Masks, and Acupuncture Practice in Republican China Yen-chieh Wu <i>China Medical University, Taiwan</i>
11:05–11:25	Hygienic Citizens, Hygienic Consumers: The Nationalist State, Businesses, and the Popularisation of Hygienic Eating in Urban China, 1928–1937 Tsz Ki Christy Liu <i>University of Cambridge</i>
11:25–11:45	Japanese Authority and Sanitary Recovery in Shanghai, 1932 Cong Liu <i>The University of New South Wales</i>
11:45–12:15	Panel discussion

Panel 10: Remaking Knowledge in 19th and 20th Century East Asia

13:15 – 15:15 (Room 8/9)

Chair: Risha Roy, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies,
University of Cambridge

13:15–13:35	Queen Dowager Regency in Nineteenth-Century Chosŏn Korea: The Precedent of Song Dynasty Regency Lucy Waugh <i>SOAS University of London</i>
13:35–13:55	Not a National Tradition: Remaking Seal Connoisseurship between China and Japan Yujie Zhao <i>Columbia University</i>
13:55–14:15	Beyond Empire: Korean Students in Beijing and the Reception and Practice of Modern Learning under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1910s–1930s Grace Eunhyeh Hong <i>Peking University</i>
14:15–14:35	Intimate Revisions: Translating Female Same-Sex Love in Early 20th Century East Asia Marina Teresinha de Melo do Nascimento <i>University of Pennsylvania</i>
14:35–15:05	Panel discussion

Abstracts

PANEL 1: Ordering Modern East Asia

The Intersection of Orientalism and Sinocentrism: Reconstructing the East Asian Culture through Exhibitions in Meiji Japan

Yuanxi Tan (Keio University)

It is widely acknowledged that exhibitions played a central role in producing and visualizing cultural order in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Japanese exhibitions have often been analyzed as manifestations of Orientalism, less attention has been paid to how this framework intersected with earlier ordering principles, particularly the Sinocentric worldview. This gap is significant, as Japanese exhibitions developed through a longer historical genealogy rather than as a simple import of Western models. This study examines major domestic exhibitions in Meiji Japan, focusing on classification systems, pavilion design, and the representation of colonial territories. By analyzing both official discourses and exhibition displays, it approaches exhibitions as sites where multiple normative principles, such as the construction of cultural centrality, the adoption of Western models of civilization, competing claims to legitimacy, and strategies of assimilation, were articulated and reconfigured. The analysis shows that Japanese exhibitions did not simply adopt Orientalism but instead produced a hybrid exhibitionary order in which multiple principles coexisted and interacted. Japan simultaneously sought to distance itself from China while re-centering itself within a regional hierarchy, revealing tensions between competing claims to legitimacy. Thus, this study argues that Japanese exhibitions functioned as sites where an East Asian order was actively reconstructed through the interaction of multiple, historically layered normative frameworks, rather than through a unilinear diffusion of Western models.

Keywords: Japanese exhibitions, Orientalism, Sinocentrism, Exhibitionary order, Assimilation

“Supercrrips” of the Empire: Disability, Affect, and Colonial Governance at the Chesaengwŏn

Kim Mi Jin (University of Cambridge)

On 11 July 1937, Helen Keller arrived in Japan-occupied Korea as part of a goodwill tour, her itinerary including a well-publicised visit to the Blind and Mute Department of the Chesaengwŏn, an institution housing orphaned and disabled children under colonial administration. Her visit rendered disability spectacular, a public theatre of imperial compassion for the most pitiable.

Drawing on Japanese and Korean sources, including social work journals, institutional records, and student testimonies, this paper examines the Chesaengwŏn and Keller's visit as windows into the affective logic of disability governance in colonial Korea. It argues that discourse surrounding the institution constructed an explicit parallel between the disabled child and the Chosŏn-era Korean as the Japanese imagined them: unenlightened, unproductive, yet malleable.

Central to this affective terrain was what disability studies identifies as the supercrip, the figure whose triumphant self-overcoming reproaches those without disability who fail to measure up. Keller was its most celebrated international embodiment, and the Chesaengwŏn had already produced its own: graduates who became business-owners or secured employment at Government-General hospitals. This paper argues that both crystallised what the archive figures as a circuit of shame and hope: shame, felt socially and intimately, at the perceived backwardness of Korean society and the stigma of disability itself; and hope, felt by families and disabled children, for whom education represented possibility of class mobility. By putting this history in dialogue with affect theory, disability studies, and transnational histories, this paper argues that marginalised subjects are central to the historiography of colonial Korea.

Keywords: colonial Korea, disability studies, affect, special education, Chesaengwŏn

Humanitarian Crossings: The Chinese Red Cross and Repatriation in Cold War East Asia, 1953–1966

Jingqi Su (University of Hong Kong)

Established in 1904, the Chinese Red Cross (CRC) was taken over by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and became involved in Korean War relief efforts. Then it continued to function as a state-controlled humanitarian organization. This paper examines how the CRC used humanitarian procedures to manage repatriation in Cold War East Asia. It argues that the CRC connected China to Japan and Korea through repatriation between 1953 and 1966.

Drawing on multilingual archives, newspapers, and publications, the paper focuses on CRC repatriation work after armed conflicts. Rather than treating repatriation as a simple journey home, the CRC turned it into a managed humanitarian route across Cold War borders. First, the CRC became involved in Korean War POW repatriation, which made it a politically charged issue. More importantly, it helped Japanese civilians in the PRC return to Japan when Beijing and Tokyo lacked formal diplomatic relations, making repatriation an administratively manageable process. Meanwhile, it helped make the PRC a corridor for Zainichi Koreans in Japan to travel to North Korea.

The paper shows that the CRC provided a politically usable humanitarian channel through which the PRC addressed sensitive questions of human mobility that formal diplomacy could not always handle directly. Instead of viewing East Asia as a fixed regional unit, this paper reveals that it was partly produced through efforts to manage the human aftermath of armed conflicts. The CRC thus serves as a lens for rethinking Cold War East Asia as a contested space connected through humanitarian practice.

Keywords: Chinese Red Cross; Repatriation; Cold War East Asia; Humanitarianism; Cross-Border Mobility

PANEL 2: Adapting and Negotiating Religious Power in East Asia

Deliberating Authority and Identity: Consensus-Based Monastic Assemblies in Medieval Japan

Mirko Winckel (University of Cambridge)

Historians have been greatly inspired by the theses of Kuroda Toshio, which argue that Medieval Japan was ruled cooperatively by not only court nobility and warrior class, but also by powerful religious institutions. Subsequent scholarship has refined the understanding of involved actors—particularly religious institutions—contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Medieval Japanese polity.

Although several studies have examined Buddhist institutions and their clerical assemblies such as those at Enryakuji and Kōfukuji, there is still ample room for further research.

This paper focuses on the monastic organisation at Tōji, which comprised multiple monk assemblies that played a crucial role in conducting temple affairs and possessed considerable agency. Assemblies had varying roles and met frequently to deliberate on affairs at hand. Decisions were recorded in journals, which serve as important and rarely drawn upon historical sources for the study of medieval temple organization.

A review of these journals and related sources shows that monk assemblies fulfilled administrative, judicial, and ritual functions, having had ample contact with actors of different social strata. Exhibiting a strong sense of identity, rooted in the Buddhist concept of the sangha as a self-governing monastic community. This identity differentiated them from other internal temple institutions and was recognized beyond the confines of the temple gates.

These findings demonstrate that the Buddhist tradition of consensus-based decision-making persisted into the Japanese medieval period, influencing monastic assemblies which played a significant role at the junction between lay communities, internal and external temple organisations, and other power blocs.

Keywords: Tōji; Medieval Japan; temple organization; consensus-based; monastic assembly

Statue Inscription, State Sacrifice, and Sacred Space: The Jiangdu Cult in Ming Chengdu

Liu Yisu (École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE, PSL), Paris & Sichuan University)

State sacrifice to the Five Sacred Peaks and Four Waterways (wuyue sidu) was a central institution of the imperial ritual order in traditional China. Among the Four Waterways, the Jiangdu (Waterway of the Yangzi) held particular importance, with its principal sacrificial center established in Chengdu from at least the Tang dynasty owing to the city's proximity to Dujiangyan. Yet the Jiangdu cult in Ming Chengdu has received little scholarly attention. Three Ming bronze cult statues of the Jiangdu deity survive today beside the Sichuan Provincial Museum, their inscriptions never systematically studied.

Drawing on the author's fieldwork—inscription transcription, high-resolution photography, and three-dimensional modeling—this paper shows that the statues were cast in 1470 under the patronage of the Princely Estate of Shu. Against the prevailing assumption that the two attendant figures are consorts of the deity, the inscriptions identify them as his sisters, a reattribution with significant implications for the cult's divine genealogy. Comparison with the bronze Zhenwu statue in the Jindian atop Wudang shan reveals striking parallels in scale, iconography, and ornamentation, suggesting that the Shu princes deliberately emulated the imperial court's sacrificial paradigm. The paper further situates the Jiangdu Temple within Ming Chengdu, at the convergence of Daoist sacred space (Qingyang gong), princely political authority, and the Jinjiang itself. Together, these three unpublished statues offer a case for rethinking state sacrifice at the imperial periphery—not as passive execution of central norms, but as active adaptation by regional powers.

Keywords: Sidu cult; Ming dynasty; cult statues; state sacrifice; sacred space

傳 Zhuan/Chuan?: Ritual Mechanisms of Lady Linshui's Martial Goddess Persona in Lingjing dazhuan

Gennie Zhang (University of Cambridge)

The character 傳 (zhuan/chuan) carries a rich polysemy across Chinese textual traditions. This presentation examines specifically Lingjing dazhuan (靈經大傳), a late-imperial vernacular drum-ballad narrative devoted to Lady Linshui (臨水夫人), with particular attention to the significance of zhuan in its title and to narrative strategies of chuan in performance. The very designation dazhuan positions the text as a “great transmission” of the goddess’s hagiography, from ritual arena into story, from local practice into canon, from hagiographic imagination into communal devotion. Lingjing dazhuan thus functions as a compositional hagiography that preserves ritual formulas, authorizes local cult practice, and canonizes the goddess within southern traditions.

I argue that the text constructs and perpetuates Lady Linshui’s martial exorcist persona through two ritual mechanisms: “summoning demons” (傳妖) and “summoning spirits” (傳魂). Demons are ritually summoned and subdued, not only to show her combating them, but also to textualize exorcism itself. Whereas the summoning of spirits dramatizes her role as rescuer of souls and guardian of the vulnerable, binding martial ferocity to maternal care in a ritualized performance of violence and compassion.

Thus, this study situates Lingjing dazhuan within the broader landscape of female-centered narratives in southern Daoist repertoires. It contributes to our understanding of how local goddesses were textualized, ritualized, and canonized through narrative performance, and how martial female agency was inscribed within the Chinese religious imagination. More broadly, by attending to the polysemy of 傳, the paper suggests that East Asian religious narratives are often shaped by terms that move across the boundaries of text, ritual, and performance.

Keywords: Goddess, Hagiography, Ritual, Textuality, Performance

PANEL 3: Preserving the Body Politic in Premodern East Asia

Wrapped Rulership: Xin 心, Xinbao 心包, and the Politics of Protection in Early Chinese Medical and Political Cosmology

June Lin (University of Cambridge)

The twelve organ-offices of the Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經 (Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor) map the body as a bureaucracy: the heart is the ruler, the lungs the chancellor, the liver the general. Eleven of these offices are defined by what they do. One is defined by whom it serves. Xinbao 心包, the heart's envelope (conventionally translated "pericardium"), is the only organ-office in the system that derives its substance from the organ it is meant to protect. It is also the only one assigned a relational rather than functional title: chenshi zhi guan 臣使之官, "the office of the subject-envoy." My paper argues that xinbao's elevation from a cardiac membrane to a full organ-office was not an anatomical refinement but a political one, encoding a theory of bounded sovereignty within the body.

Drawing on Suwen 素問 (Basic Questions), Lingshu 靈樞 (Divine Pivot), the Nanjing 難經 (Classic of Difficult Issues), and Han political texts including the Guanzi, Xunzi, and Huainanzi, I show that xinbao occupies a structural position identical to the inner court in Han political cosmology: it shields the ruler by enclosing him and serves the sovereign by governing access to him. A counterfactual analysis testing xinbao against alternative anatomical candidates (the diaphragm, ribcage, and skin) demonstrates that the system selected not the best protector but the only structure that makes the ruler both singular and governed. The twelfth organ-office, I conclude, was not cosmological bookkeeping but constitutional provision: sovereignty bounded by its own architecture.

Keywords: Huangdi neijing, body-state homology, bounded sovereignty, organ-office system, Han political cosmology

When Body Suffers: Li Gao and the Theory of Internal Damage during the Siege of Daliang, 1232–1233

Carmen Cao (University of Cambridge)

In the brutal winter of 1232, people besieged in the city of Daliang (present-day Kaifeng 開封) faced extreme hunger, starvation, and the constant military threat that Mongols would breach the walls. Li Gao 李杲, a notable physician of the Jin dynasty who lived through the siege of Daliang, witnessed firsthand the widespread death caused by the severe living conditions. In his medical treatise *On Misunderstandings in Distinguishing Inner from Outer Damage* (*Neiwai shang bianhuo lun* 內外傷辨惑論), Li Gao challenged prevailing medical approaches to illness. Those approaches attributed most disease to external damage (*waishang* 外傷), such as wind-chill. Li Gao instead formulated a theory of internal damage (*neishang* 內傷), grounded in his own experience as both physician and sufferer during the siege. He attributed it to irregular food and drink, excessive labour, irregular times of waking and resting, and the failure to regulate cold and warmth properly. Existing scholarship has suggested that epidemics were the main cause of the mortality during the siege. This study instead focuses on the often overlooked role of starvation during the siege and the effects it had on medical theory. It argues that severe living conditions in Daliang shaped Li Gao's influential formulation of internal damage. In this light, medical theory of the time should be understood within that historical context of food scarcity, labour exhaustion, and mental stress. It suggests that starvation was at least as important as epidemics in shaping mortality and medical understanding, challenging the dominant historical paradigm in medical history.

Keywords: Medical History, Environmental History, Li Gao, Theory of Internal Damage, Hunger, Famine, History of Epidemics, Chinese Medicine

Conversing with the Sage-King: Shun, Cultural Memory, and Political Authority Across East Asia

Jeongwoo Lee (Indiana University Bloomington)

When can figures from remote antiquity discipline a living ruler? In the Veritable Records of the Joseon Dynasty, the sage-rulers Shun 舜 and Yao 堯 of early China appear with striking frequency—approximately 2,000 and 1,700 times respectively—often more than contemporary political actors. This repetition signals not antiquarian interest, but their enduring normative authority within Joseon political discourse.

This paper asks how such figures allow us to rethink East Asia not as a fixed cultural unit, but as a space constituted through ongoing textual and political engagement. Situating Joseon within a broader circulation of classical authority, it examines how Shun was mobilized as a shared resource for political remonstrance across contexts. While scholarship has largely focused on the formation of sage-king narratives in early China, less attention has been paid to their transmission and transformation beyond China.

Combining quantitative analysis with close readings of early Joseon annals—especially during the reign of King Yeonsan (r. 1494–1506)—this study shows that invocations of the sage-ruler Shun functioned as instruments of political pressure rather than mere moral rhetoric. Officials repeatedly cited these figures to urge the ruler to heed remonstrance, discipline elites, and embody Confucian governance. During moments of crisis, such references intensified, before becoming politically constrained and selectively appropriated by the king himself.

By tracing how sage-kings from early China were reactivated in Joseon political practice, this paper reimagines East Asia as a shared political space, shaped by the circulation, contestation, and strategic deployment of shared classical memory.

Keywords: Sage-ruler, Shun, Joseon, Cultural Memory, King Yeonsan

PANEL 4: Framing East Asia: Cultural and Material Production Across Borders

Images of Royal Court Women in Early Joseon: The Court Ladies Painting in a Japanese Private Collection

Yi-rong Chen (Seoul National University)

The near-total absence of royal female portraits in Joseon Korea (1392–1910) represents a remarkable anomaly in the history of Korean painting. This article reexamines Court Ladies Painting (Gungnyeo-do), a work recently republished in Japan and previously identified either as a portrait of a queen or as an image connected to Tang representations of Yang Guifei and themes of feminine accomplishment. Building on recent scholarship that dates the painting to the first half of the sixteenth century, I propose an alternative interpretation that situates the work within the broader visual and ideological context of female imagery in early Joseon. Rather than viewing the painting solely through the lens of court portraiture or Tang precedents, the article argues that its imagery reveals distant yet discernible connections to Ming and Qing woodblock prints and must be understood against the religious and social conditions that shaped the representation of women in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. As Neo-Confucian norms increasingly regulated women's conduct and mobility, royal and elite women were largely excluded from direct participation in artistic production. In this context, many surviving images of women remained closely tied to Buddhist patronage, particularly ritual commissions. By placing Court Ladies Painting at the intersection of imported visual models, local gender ideology, and the transition from Buddhism to Neo-Confucianism, this study offers a new framework for understanding female imagery in early Joseon painting.

Keywords: Joseon painting; female imagery; Neo-Confucianism; Buddhist patronage; court ladies painting

Folk Painter, Court Scribe, or Mounting Technician?: Reconsidering the Production Context of a Ch'aekkŏri Folding Screen attributed to Han Ŭng-suk

Sungjin Kim (Korea National University of Heritage)

This paper reexamines the production context of a *Ch'aekkŏri* (paintings of books and scholar's accoutrements) folding screen attributed to Han Ŭng-suk (韓應淑, 19c.?), focusing on the multi-layered professional identities of painters in late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century Korea. While folk paintings are often perceived as anonymous, certain Ch'aekkŏri works reveal evidence of identifiable makers and workshop-based production.

Drawing on archival records and a material culture approach, this study argues that members of the Cheongju Han family, a middle-status (中人, *chung'in*) lineage, served as court scribes (寫字官, *sajagwan*) while simultaneously operating workshops outside the court that integrated painting and mounting (裝潢, *ch'anghwang*) practices. Amidst the institutional transformations at the end of the Chosŏn dynasty, these individuals may have drawn on the expertise and reputation gained through court-commissioned mounting work as they moved toward the burgeoning commercial art market. This case suggests how court-linked technical expertise in scribal service and mounting could be redirected toward private and market-oriented production, forming part of a longer history of craft transmission in modern Korea.

By centering on the intersection of official duty and private craftsmanship, this research challenges the rigid dichotomy between court and folk art. It proposes a more fluid understanding of East Asian artistic production, where a single practitioner or lineage could encompass multiple roles to adapt to socio-economic shifts. Ultimately, this case study illustrates how East Asian visual culture was shaped by the adaptability of professional identities during the transition to modernity, transcending the fixed boundaries of traditional social and artistic categories.

Keywords: Ch'aekkŏri painting; Chung'in (middle-status class); Chosŏn dynasty Korea; art market; Mounting (ch'anghwang)

Modish Operandi: Merchants and Commercial Self-fashioning in Late Tokugawa Japan

Natsuha Kataoka (University of Cambridge)

In this paper, I examine how commercial enterprises in late Edo Japan fashioned themselves as authoritative and fashionable businesses within an increasingly competitive urban marketplace. While previous scholarship has emphasised either state regulation or consumers' pursuit of status and taste, less attention has been paid to the role of merchants in shaping the commercial environments where fashionable items were sold. Focusing on fabric retailers in the city of Edo, I argue that merchants did not merely sell fashionable goods; they actively fashioned themselves as trustworthy and fashionable businesses.

Edo's rapid urban growth and expanding consumer economy produced a dense retail landscape in which merchants competed not only through the quality and price of their products but also through their public image, business practices, and cultural visibility. Within this environment, prominent retailers such as Echigoya (the predecessor of Mitsukoshi today) established themselves as authoritative institutions through a combination of strategic location, innovative sales practices, extensive commercial networks, and repeated appearances in visual and printed media. These merchants became more than successful businesses; they emerged as cultural landmarks and arbiters of taste. I then analyse a middle-tier silk retailing Hitachiya's self-fashioning. Hitachiya's promotional material reveals that commercial authority could be hoped to emerge not only from economic dominance but from the ability to project an image of trustworthiness, fashionability, and modernity. As such, branding in late Edo Japan was not about uniqueness, but strategic alignment of oneself with already recognised forms of commercial prestige.

Drawing upon visual materials, commercial publications, and business history, I hope to contribute to scholarship on Edo consumer culture and commercial society. Beyond Japanese studies, it suggests that fashion should be understood not only as a property of garments but also as a process through which businesses themselves became objects of cultural aspiration. The making of fashionable goods depended, in no small measure, upon the making of fashionable shops.

Keywords: Early Modern Japan, fashion, textile production, commodity culture, rurality

Beyond Records: Authenticity through Subjective Experience in the Eijūmaru kuchigaki Testimonies

José Manuel Escalona Echániz (University of Cambridge)

Hyōryūki (castaway narratives) constitute a body of texts documenting the lived experiences of Japanese sailors following shipwrecks. During the Edo period (1603–1868), the production and circulation of such records increased markedly, due to the expansion of domestic maritime trade and natural conditions. At a time when overseas travel was prohibited under the shogunate's maritime restrictions, shipwrecks inadvertently brought Japanese individuals to foreign shores. Although returning sailors were officially treated as criminals, they were also valued as sources of information in a country where foreign contact was tightly controlled.

Among mid-nineteenth-century hyōryūki, a distinct series of official records concerning the crew of the Eijūmaru cargo ship is particularly significant for documenting interactions between Japanese sailors and the peoples of Mexico in the 1840s. This study examines the sailors' interrogation records (kuchigaki) produced upon their return to Japan, arguing that they extend beyond the mere description of events to articulate distinct voices of subjectivity. Through an analysis of memory, orality, non-verbal communication, perceptions of the Other, and emotional expression, it demonstrates that these texts transcend the boundaries of conventional "historical records," revealing how subjective experience functions as a key marker of authenticity within the sailors' testimonies.

Keywords: Castaways, Edo period, cultural exchange, subjectivity, Mexico

PANEL 5: East Asian Film and Literature at the Interstices

Butterflies and the Brand-New Panther: Animal Life in the Making of Chinese New Poetry

Zhenyu Xu (University of Cambridge)

This essay employs the thematic concerns and theoretical parameters of animal studies to take the modern poets Hushi and contemporary poets such as Zang Di's poems as a case study to examine how butterflies and a brand-new panther are interwoven with the intellectual and national discourse in Chinese New Poetry, and how these animals represent the evolving implications of New Poetry itself. The essay centers its analysis on the creative elements in their works and how they are linked to animal studies. Along the way, this essay illustrates the persistent tension between anthropocentric representations and real animals. This inquiry seeks to discern the extent to which animals provoke poetic reflection in modern Chinese poetry, assessing the correlation between poetic depictions and the realities of the animals depicted. The analysis further questions whether animals serve merely as metaphors within poetic narratives or if they leave an indelible impact that extends beyond their poetic boundaries, thereby contributing to the discourse on animal representations in poetry and their implications for understanding animal subjectivity and human-animal relations.

Keywords: Animal study; Modern and contemporary Chinese poetry; Hushi; Zangdi

Multiscriptism in Maqiao

Shannon Gilbert (University of Cambridge)

That multiple scripts should be used in Han Shaogong's dictionary-novel *A Dictionary of Maqiao* (1991) is perhaps inevitable: the pronunciation of Maqiao's language requires a Latin alphabet to be denoted, foreign words illuminate differences between the meaning of terms in Maqiao and standard Mandarin, and the novel is set in the aftermath of PRC orthographic reform.

Attempts to rectify writing and rectify through writing are a recurring concern in the plot, as characters negotiate an ordering linguistic regime, but also in the 'root-seeking' tendency to which the novel belongs. Thus, recording a partly-fictionalised local language has been read as a celebration of the marginal; the overlooked made visible through lexicographical endeavour. Yet this visibility is mediated by the written forms used to record it, creating complex effects beyond the critique of and remedy to the imposition of linguistic power. The dictionary structure invokes a form of textual authority: the written word's capacity to organise and display the world; simplified characters, implicitly aligned with Mandarin, and pinyin-like transliteration become the means through which Maqiao's language is made perceptible.

In analysing the novel's multiscriptism, I explore scripts readily apparent on the page and those that are hidden or implicit. I first show how the novel's primary script, alongside conspicuous insertion of the Latin alphabet, organise and mediate Maqiao and its language. Next, I consider scripts embedded 'subvisibly' within the dominant script, indicating the limits of its exhibiting capacity. Finally, some writing takes on a monstrous 'visage' that suggests escape from structures of written organisation. Characters that are orthographically deformed or semantically hybrid seem to shape-shift, proliferate, and demonstrate an uncanny extra-human agency that relocates textual authority beyond human control.

Keywords: Multiscriptism, visibility, monstrosity, fictional dictionary, textual authority

Yoko Tawada's *The Naked Eye* and Yiyun Li's 'A Thousand Years of Good Prayers'

Heng Xie (King's College London)

This paper compares Yoko Tawada's *The Naked Eye* and Yiyun Li's *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, together with their film adaptation, to examine how translingual writing reconfigures East Asian (China and Japan) subjects' modes of perception through cinematic techniques and linguistic estrangement. It argues that both writers transform cinema from an object of representation into an alternative language. In *The Naked Eye*, the protagonist's imagined dialogue with the French New Wave actress Catherine Deneuve turns the cinema into both a visual medium through which an Asian woman deprived of legal identity and linguistic belonging can orient herself in the real world and a temporary shelter. In *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, by contrast, Li's restrained English prose, marked by the lingering cadence of Chinese, resonates with Wayne Wang's adaptation through long takes, pauses, and a sparse soundscape, translating unspoken familial fractures into visible bodily rhythms and spatial relations.

This paper treats food, silence, and spectatorship as key interfaces within the same translingual process. Food carries Asian cultural memory, while also exposing the bodily boundaries that migrant subjects are compelled to renegotiate in European and American contexts. Silence is a historical residue shaped by post-socialist paradigms, familial ethics, and the failure of language. Spectatorship, meanwhile, offers a perceptual form through which subjectivity can be provisionally sustained after the loss of the mother tongue. Drawing on translingualism, intermediality, and Agamben's notion of bare life, the paper argues that these two works reveal East Asian experience as something continually reshaped through movement, translation, and distortion both within East Asia and between Asia, Europe and America. By placing Tawada and Li together, the paper not only considers how non-native writing challenges monolingual hegemony but also rethinks how cinema and translingual writing together constitute a politics of perception.

Keywords: translingualism; intermediality; cinematic perception; East Asian migration; food studies

PANEL 6: Nationalism and the Making of Difference from the Cold War to Today

Between Empire, Ethno-nationalism and Multiculturalism: Renegotiating National Boundaries in 1990s Japan

Risha Roy (University of Cambridge)

In 1980, the Japanese government reported to the United Nations that ethnic minorities did not exist in Japan. Yet by 2006, multicultural coexistence (*tabunka kyōsei*) had become an official policy objective. How did a society that had long emphasized homogeneity begin to imagine itself as multicultural? Drawing on parliamentary speeches, government documents, and contemporary writings, this paper examines how national discourse discussed the boundaries between nationals and foreigners in Japan during the 1990s, a moment when multiculturalism had not yet emerged as a prominent discourse.

The 1990s marked a significant shift in Japan's demographic landscape. While the population of long-established resident foreigners, particularly *zainichi* Koreans, was gradually declining and becoming less visible statistically, the arrival of new migrants from elsewhere in Asia and beyond attracted increasing public attention. Through a close reading of Diet debates surrounding the 1999 revisions of two bills—the Alien Registration Law and the Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act, both rooted in colonial legacies—this paper examines how understandings of foreigners and the ideological boundaries of the Japanese nation were negotiated during this transitional phase.

By situating Japan within transnational flows of people, ideas, and colonial legacies, this paper explores how political actors debated who belonged in Japanese society and what was expected of those who did and those who did not. In doing so, it highlights how national boundaries vis-à-vis foreigners were renegotiated in post-Cold War Japan. As residues of empire and existing institutional frameworks encountered new migration patterns, international norms, and social expectations, the boundaries between self and other were continually redrawn through compromise and contestation, setting the stage for the eventual emergence of multicultural discourse.

Keywords: Japan, Foreigners, National Boundaries, Multiculturalism (*tabunka kyōsei*), Ethno-nationalism, Colonial Legacies, Migration

Conversing Across Borders: Chaoxianzu and the Transnational Making of Chinese Nationalism (1949–1992)

Giulia Rossi (Università di Roma Tre)

This paper reassesses the trajectory of modern Chinese nationalism by positioning the Chaoxianzu (ethnic Koreans in China) not merely as a minority group, but as a critical laboratory for the negotiation of Chinese statehood. Moving beyond a "top-down" policy analysis, it argues that Chinese nationalism is a historically contingent process, continuously redefined through the tension between territorial sovereignty and transnational ethnic fluidity. The Chaoxianzu, situated at the geopolitical and ideological frontier of the Cold War, provide a revealing lens into how "Chineseness" was reconstructed as a civic and territorial category in direct response to regional pressures.

Drawing on a diachronic analysis of primary sources—including Ministry of Public Security reports on border mobility (1961), State Council directives on "national identity" (1970), and the 1984 Law on Regional National Autonomy—this study traces the evolution of state-led nationalism through three conceptual shifts. First, it examines the Socialist Internationalism phase (1949–early 1960s), where nationalism was subsumed under a transnational revolutionary brotherhood. Second, it identifies a Securitization and Radicalization turn (1960s–1976), where unauthorized mobility and the Cultural Revolution forced a shift toward defensive, assimilationist integration. Finally, the Pragmatic-Institutional phase (1978–1992) illustrates the transition toward a legalistic framework that anchored ethnic identity to administrative loyalty, culminating in the 1992 normalization with Seoul.

By foregrounding state responses to transborder mobility and dual allegiances, this paper argues that Chinese nationalism is a relational construct, shaped as much by the peripheries as by the center. The case of the Chaoxianzu demonstrates that the modern Chinese nation-state was not a static imposition, but a flexible, adaptive project that learned to define its boundaries through the very communities that threatened to blur them.

Keywords: Chinese nationalism, Chaoxianzu, Borderlands, Ethnic policy, Cold War Era

Tainted Heritage: War of History and Identity in Northeast Asia Surrounding UNESCO Heritage Inscriptions

Donghyun (Robert) Lee (University of Cambridge)

UNESCO heritage initiatives have enhanced global awareness and fostered engagement in the identification, preservation, and utilisation of heritage sites and items with universal significance that transcend geographical boundaries and time. However, heritage-related conflicts have increasingly emerged in Northeast Asia, where distinctive nationalistic and domestically driven agendas tend to hinder transnational cooperation through heritage. As the world has witnessed setbacks in multilateralism, this phenomenon signals a weakening of international organisations in the face of diplomatic power struggles and realist tensions. Given that the primary intention of heritage programmes is to serve as a medium for collaboration, current conflicts surrounding heritage nomination and the pursuit of accreditation effects must be realigned with their original objectives.

By analysing recent and salient cases across UNESCO heritage programmes—World Heritage (WH), Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), and Memory of the World (MOW)—this study argues that the underlying cause of heritage clashes in Northeast Asia stems from entrenched nationalism and competition over identity. Although several academic efforts have sought to address these issues, they remain fragmented and often fail to capture the core dynamics underlying these apparent disputes. Drawing on theoretical lenses from international relations, specifically constructivism and the English School, this research demonstrates the explanatory power of these frameworks in understanding the ongoing contestation over history and identity in the region. It further highlights the implications of such dynamics for international institutions and the prospects for cooperation. As an initial attempt to parse dissonance within multilateral mechanisms through relatively underexplored theoretical approaches, this study aims to reposition heritage not as a catalyst for continued conflict, but as a foundation for mutual understanding and deeper interconnection.

Keywords: Northeast Asia, UNESCO, Heritage, Identity, Nationalism

PANEL 7: Movement, Place and Practice in Contemporary Chinese Encounters

Making the Frontier Visible: Qing Miao Albums and the Problem of Difference

Yihua Yuan (Minzu University of China & University of Illinois Chicago)

This paper examines Qing dynasty Miao albums (illustrated manuscripts depicting non-Han groups in the empire's southwestern frontier) as visual technologies for producing and stabilizing knowledge about human difference. Rather than approaching these materials as descriptive ethnographic records, it argues that they actively construct a problem of difference that demands imperial interpretation and intervention. Focusing on the Hongmiao Guiliu Tu (Album of the Pacification and Incorporation of the Red Miao), and drawing selectively on other Miao albums, the paper shows how sequences of images generate a narrative structure moving from disorder to incorporation, thereby rendering the frontier both visible and governable. While centered on a single album, this approach reveals patterns shared across Qing representations of frontier populations.

By situating these visual materials within the epistemic practices of late imperial China, the paper highlights the role of images in shaping categories of identity, hierarchy, and cultural distinction. It shifts the discussion from representation to epistemology, asking not simply how the “other” was depicted, but how difference itself was made intelligible. In doing so, it engages with comparative scholarship, such as that of Laura Hostetler, which situates Qing practices within broader early modern traditions of classification and knowledge-making. By foregrounding the analytical role of images, this study contributes to ongoing conversations on visibility, knowledge production, and the governance of diversity in imperial contexts.

Keywords: Qing dynasty; Miao albums; Visual culture; Knowledge production; Frontier governance

Making Remoteness: Trekking, Mobility, and Nation-Building along the National Highway G318 in the Sino-Tibet Borderland

Yanke Wang (University of Manchester)

Over the past decade, mobility has become a central motif in Chinese state discourse of nation-building in Kham, the Sino-Tibet borderland. From invocations of the “Ancient Tea-Horse Road” and the Long March to more recent “Two Roads Spirit”, state narratives frame movement through this region as both historically grounded and politically aspirational. Yet despite the rapid expansion of infrastructural connectivity between inland China and Tibet, public discourse continues—and even intensifies—emphasis on Tibet's perceived remoteness.

Against this paradox, this paper examines the trekking practice along the National Highway G318, linking the Sichuan Basin with the Tibetan Plateau. This research addresses the questions: How is Tibet's remoteness embodied and (re)produced through trekking across the Sino-Tibetan borderland? What roles do rising mobility and connectivity between inland China and Tibet play in the ongoing project of Chinese nation-building?

Drawing on 16-month participant observation and in-depth interviews, this paper examines the embodied experiences and shifting subjectivities that shape how trekkers imagine, prepare for, undertake, and narrate their journeys. Through the researcher's engagement with Han Chinese trekkers, Khamba pilgrims, and tourism entrepreneurs en route to Lhasa, ethnographic evidence collected contributes to anthropological debates on the embodied dimensions of remoteness and mobility. The findings reveal an irony at the heart of the experience: closer encounters with local residents, environments, and cultural worlds often intensify and (re)produce, rather than diminish, perceptions of Tibet's remoteness in contemporary Chinese society. It suggests a reconsideration of mobility's role in China's nation-building at its ethnic periphery.

Keywords: Trekking, Sino-Tibet borderland, Mobility, Remoteness, Nation-Building

We Are Eating Together: Co-eating Events as an Art Intervention Practice in Urban Villages by Shakehands 302 in Shenzhen

Miao Li (Monash University)

Continuous migration across China to Shenzhen since 1980s has formed the largest immigrant city in southern China. In recent years, the municipal government has implemented a series of talent-attraction programs targeting young professionals, which has contributed to Shenzhen's notably young population structure, with an average age between 20 and 30. Urban villages, the so-called the first stop of Shenzhen journey (shenpiaodiyizhan, 深漂第一站), are the primary preference of low-budget and cost-effective dwelling place for newcomers who make a living and pursue their "Shenzhen Dreams". However, in such an efficiency-oriented and rationality-driven city under China's rapid urbanization and social reform, numerous anonymous migrant workers who suffer high workloads under 996 work schedule are forced to choose take-away food as their primary calorie intakes and thus result in social isolation caused by having dinners alone. Shakehands 302 is a Shenzhen-based art group which aims at stimulating individual creativity and public participation through community-based art workshops, city-walking, talks and research-based art practices among vernacular urban villages since 2013. Employing qualitative research methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and taking the participatory art projects Singleton Lunches (Danshenfan, 单身饭) and Singleton Take-away Food (Danshen Waimai, 单身外卖) as case studies, this study investigates how playful articulations generate moments of rupture and how networks of relational aesthetic practices function as forms of resistance in China's megacities, with co-eating practices operating as a resistance strategy rooted in contemporary Chinese art production. These art practices provide a platform for social interactions, encounters, and a temporarily community in which every community member acts as an equal subjects. Therefore, food here becomes a catalyst for reclaiming the everyday experiences and a discursive field for generating relational aesthetics. Co-eating is a process of artistic remediation and looking for temporary sense of belonging in the face of urbanization and development pressures, which is also basic revolutionary strategy to everyday life (Henri Lefebvre, 1991)

Keywords: co-eating; socially engaged art practices; urban village; public participation; Shenzhen

PANEL 8: Contemporary Challenges: Aesthetics, Affect, Action

Nostalgia as Futurity: Chinese Dreamcore and the Poetics of Stuckness

Mengqi Zhou (The University of Texas at Austin)

This paper examines Chinese Dreamcore (中式梦核), a cross-media cultural phenomenon spanning images, short videos, and indie games, as a new aesthetic formation emerging from post-pandemic China. Through faded imagery of liminal spaces—like old classrooms, decaying amusement parks, and urban-rural peripheries—it reconstructs the collective childhood memories of youth born in the 1990s and 2000s. Combining surrealist aesthetics with era-specific nostalgia, these spaces materialize a temporal crisis: the sense that the present has become unlivable and the future unimaginable.

A widely circulated caption reads: “We are all trapped in the millennium.” Games like *There Exists Nobody* (无人, 2024) literalize this entrapment as mechanics: the player is trapped in a childhood neighborhood with no exit. This entrapment indexes a broader stuckness, or what Lauren Berlant calls an impasse. In post-pandemic China, this ordinariness has specific coordinates: hardening class stratification, collapsing youth employment, stalled upward mobility, and the retreat of cosmopolitan promise. However, this predicament is a shared symptom of East Asia’s transition into a Post-developmental Era. Like Japan’s Showa nostalgia and South Korea’s pre-IMF retro longing, Chinese Dreamcore functions not merely as an expression of the zeitgeist, but as a crucial apparatus to negotiate late-modern precarity. This backward-looking gaze toward frozen spacetimes signifies the absolute impossibility of returning to a “golden age.”

Drawing on affect theory, this paper argues Chinese Dreamcore acts as an expressive strategy for youth to navigate structural stuckness. It radically reframes nostalgia not as a retreat, but as a paradoxical form of futurity—a mechanism for mourning a canceled future by clinging to an era when optimism still felt possible. Yet, this aestheticization carries an ambiguous agency: it creates a potential critical space under censorship, but also a mechanism that converts discontent into aesthetic consumption, quietly pacifying the desire for real social change.

Keywords: Chinese Dreamcore, Nostalgia, Impasse, Post-developmental Era

Alternative Happiness: Danmei Fans’ Navigation of Intimate Fantasy and Real-Life Relationship Practice

Lynn Zheng (The University of Sydney)

Danmei is a genre in China that features romantic relationships between male characters and is typically written by and for women. When discussed as a form of intimacy fantasy, existing scholarship has primarily focused on how intimacy is represented in danmei texts, often examining how women mobilize male-male relationships to imagine alternative relational possibilities or to critique elements that appear to reproduce heterosexual or heteronormative dynamics. However, representation alone remains analytically limited unless we also ask why certain relational configurations become desirable or undesirable within danmei fantasies, how fans articulate and make sense of their desires, and how these desires both emerge from and actively inform everyday affective orientations and practices. This chapter therefore examines how danmei’s intimacy fantasies are entangled with fans’ real-life relational decisions, and how fans negotiate the similarities, divergences, and mutual constitution between imagined intimacy and lived experience. Drawing on interview materials from twenty-nine participants, I theorize a pronounced affective divergence among my primary interviewees, who are single women and attracted to men: a heightened caution, even pessimism, toward heterosexual intimacy in lived reality, alongside a sustained investment in the production and consumption of idealized intimate fantasies.

I first theorize a feminist sensibility emerging in contemporary Chinese contexts: an awareness of structural subordination within an unequal gender order, coupled with heightened sensitivity to experiences that are often suppressed or rendered invisible, and frequently articulated through affective registers such as trauma, discomfort, disgust, and aversion toward heteronormative scripts. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s notion of the “happiness script,” I show how participants, informed by this feminist

consciousness, trace affective patterns of unhappiness as a means of critically reassessing the constraints imposed by heteronormative expectations. By rendering the “happiness script” unstable, suspect, or even injurious, these participants actively withdraw from or refuse real-life heterosexual intimacy.

This refusal of the happiness script in reality aligns with an active reorientation of what counts as intimacy and happiness within danmei fantasy. Through engagement with danmei fantasies, participants generate alternative narratives of happiness. By discussing the fantasy features of danmei and incorporating Black feminist scholarship on the constructive potential of joy, I seek to complicate Ahmed’s discussion of happiness as oriented toward normative scripts. I argue that contesting patriarchal authority over the definition of what counts as happiness and what one may be oriented toward constitutes a central agenda of danmei fantasy. It also provides affective and cognitive resources that support fans in deviating from, resisting, and transcending heteronormative happiness scripts.

This study also contributes to broader discussions of boys’ love cultures and their transnational circulation, particularly in East Asia, where affective and gendered imaginaries are continuously reconfigured through circulating fantasies, affective scripts, and shifting regimes of intimacy.

Keywords: danmei, happiness, intimacy, fandom, fantasy

Time Doesn't Heal All Wounds: Afterimages of Scar Literature in *The Battle at Lake Changjin* Duology (2021-2022)

Timothy Natcher Pruett (University of Cambridge)

The Battle at Lake Changjin duology (2021-2022), a retelling of China’s engagement in the Korean War, is among the most commercially successful main melody film productions, cinematic productions aligned with the ideological aims of the Chinese Communist Party, in mainland China. English-language scholarly engagement with the films, particularly the first movie, focuses on how the films reflect post-Cold War superpower dynamics and Chinese nationalism. In this paper, I take an alternate approach that uses genre theory to compare the films to the scar literature published in China in the late 1970s and early 1980s, following the end of the Cultural Revolution. By employing structural analysis and close reading, I will highlight the similarities between *Changjin* and scar literature, including an emphasis on frayed family bonds, events that occur on the periphery of Chinese civilization, and a “bright tail” that emphasizes the promising future of the People’s Republic of China. Additionally, I will draw historic parallels between scar literature, which pushed the boundaries of what could be published in China, and the movies, which were released during the Covid-19 pandemic and were among the first big-budget Chinese blockbusters to portray the Korean War. While I do not claim that *Changjin* can be categorized scar literature, by highlighting the resonance between the movies and scar literature, I argue that beyond present-day nationalism and geopolitical dynamics, China’s history and communal trauma are key factors in the reception of main melody movies like *Changjin*.

Keywords: *The Battle at Lake Changjin*; scar literature; main melody cinema; genre theory

PANEL 9: Hygienic Modernity in an Age of Crises

Translating Hygiene across East Asia: Yang Huating, Sterilisers, Face Masks, and Acupuncture Practice in Republican China

Yen-chieh Wu (China Medical University, Taiwan)

This paper examines how modern hygienic knowledge was translated into acupuncture practice in Republican China through the case of Yang Huating (楊華亭, 1884–1952), a physician active in Shandong. Rather than treating Yang as broadly representative of Chinese medicine, it uses his writings as a historically situated case to examine how epidemic experience, Japanese writings on acupuncture disinfection, and technical objects entered clinical procedure. Central to this study are Yang's explicit recommendation of face masks (hu kouzhao 護口罩) and the use of boiling sterilisers during acupuncture treatment in the early 1930s. Drawing on Yang's personal accounts, I suggest that these clinical protocols were informed, at least in part, by memories of the 1910–1911 pneumonic plague, which devastated his home region. By tracing the hu kouzhao from its earlier association with plague prevention to its recontextualised use during the 1932 cholera outbreak, the discussion shows how precautionary practices developed in response to one epidemic could be carried into new clinical contexts shaped by different forms of contagion. Read alongside contemporary Japanese writings on acupuncture disinfection and within an East Asian print culture, these procedural details suggest that the modernisation of Chinese medicine was as much material and procedural as it was theoretical. Focusing on sterilisers and masks as technical objects, I argue that Yang's practice offers a material lens through which to locate East Asia via the circulation of epidemic memory, hygienic technology, and clinical practice.

Keywords: Acupuncture, Hygienic Modernity, Republican China, Medical Materiality, Circulation of Medical Knowledge

Hygienic Citizens, Hygienic Consumers: The Nationalist State, Businesses, and the Popularisation of Hygienic Eating in Urban China, 1928–1937

Tsz Ki Christy Liu (University of Cambridge)

This paper examines how issues of public health – especially hygienic eating – became popularised and embedded in a rhetoric of modern lifestyle in urban China, by both the Nationalist government and private businesses during the Nanjing Decade (1928–37). Upon establishing the Nanjing Government in 1928, the Nationalists faced the reality of widespread seasonal gastrointestinal illnesses caused by poor food and water hygiene. Thus, the Nationalists assumed a tutelary role, launching campaigns such as the Summer Dietary initiatives 夏令飲食 to modernise food practices by promoting scientifically grounded public health and hygienic-eating ideals, influenced by both the West and Japan. Departing from existing scholarship that often approaches public health issues through a medical lens, this paper draws on archival materials from the Nationalist Government's Ministry of Health and advertisements published in major newspapers during this period to illustrate that food hygiene rhetoric did not circulate solely through government policy. They proliferated in urban society through state education and commercial marketing, making it central to imaginings of a modern, healthy lifestyle. While Nationalist campaigns did not immediately improve food hygiene in urban China, they reshaped public attitudes towards food consumption. Chinese businesses also capitalised on heightened public awareness of food-related public health and hygiene policies to advertise their products. Hence, a new food consumption culture emerged that linked the good, hygienic citizen to the good, hygienic consumer who carefully selected and purchased scientifically hygienic, healthy food products.

Keywords: Food Hygiene; Public Health; Consumption Cultures; Commercial Advertising; State-Business Relations

Japanese Authority and Sanitary Recovery in Shanghai, 1932

Cong Liu (The University of New South Wales)

Scholarship on the January 28 Incident, the 1932 Sino–Japanese conflict in Shanghai, has largely emphasized the conflict's military dynamics and diplomatic settlement. Shifting attention to the sanitation crisis in Zhabei, this paper examines how urban recovery in the Chinese district at the centre of the conflict, adjacent to the International Settlement and under Japanese military control, became a struggle over access and jurisdiction. It argues that the sanitation emergency made Japanese authority a contingent form of sovereignty–like power, exercised without sovereign title through control of passage into the district and the ability to make other authorities operate within those terms, a dynamic this paper terms 'threshold sovereignty'. In Zhabei, military occupation and sanitary crisis turned Shanghai's layered jurisdictional order into an immediate practical problem. Chinese authorities retained legal title, the Shanghai Municipal Council cast conditions there as an urgent sanitary threat to the International Settlement and sought to intervene, while the Japanese military controlled access, so that recovery turned on who could enter, undertake sanitary work, and direct the district's recovery. Drawing on Shanghai Municipal Council records, diplomatic correspondence, and Chinese–, English–, and Japanese–language press sources, the paper shows that this crisis revealed an early coercive mode of Japanese imperial power that would take a far more radical form in the reshaping of Shanghai's political order after 1937. More broadly, the case offers an early glimpse of a 1930s East Asia increasingly marked by intrusive Japanese imperialism, in which municipal life was militarised and existing jurisdictions increasingly unsettled.

Keywords: January 28 Incident; Japanese imperialism; sanitary governance; jurisdiction; mobility control

PANEL 10: Remaking Knowledge in 19th and 20th Century East Asia

Queen Dowager Regency in Nineteenth-Century Chosŏn Korea: The Precedent of Song Dynasty Regency

Lucy Waugh (SOAS University of London)

In nineteenth-century Chosŏn, each king ascended the throne either at a young age or without adequate preparation, necessitating periods of queen dowager regency (suryŏm ch'ŏngjŏng 垂簾聽政). To formalise these regencies, Chosŏn court officials drew on the historical precedent from China's Song dynasty. This study examines how the regency of Song's Empress Dowager Gao served as a key model for structuring Chosŏn regencies in the nineteenth century. The precedent of the Song dynasty was invoked to shape court protocol, including the queen dowager's style of address, court seating arrangements, and ceremonial procedures.

Focusing on the implementation of Queen Dowager Chŏngsun's regency for King Sunjo in 1800, this study examines how Chosŏn officials cited Empress Dowager Gao to legitimise and consolidate the queen dowager's position at court. Through textual analysis of Chosŏn court records including the Chosŏn wangjo sillok, Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi, and Ilsŏngnok, this study argues that court officials strategically adapted Song Confucian ideals as a political tool to navigate succession challenges and to secure queen dowagers' roles in court.

Queen dowager regency is underexplored in scholarship, with limited attention to the links between Song and Chosŏn regencies. By tracing how Song precedents were selectively adapted to implement nineteenth-century Chosŏn regencies, this study provides a new angle on the practice of Chosŏn queen dowager regency. It highlights the role of royal women in both dynasties and shows how Chosŏn Korea actively engaged with and reinterpreted regional legacies within Confucian statecraft.

Keywords: Chosŏn dynasty, Song dynasty, Regency, Queen Dowager, Royal Women

Not a National Tradition: Remaking Seal Connoisseurship between China and Japan

Yujie Zhao (Columbia University)

This paper examines how seal connoisseurship was remade through cross-border exchange between China and Japan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Histories of seal carving have often described Japan as a passive recipient of Chinese influence. I argue instead that standards for judging seals were reshaped through the cross-border circulation of catalogues and collecting networks. Some values later treated as internal to a Chinese seal tradition were stabilized only after being amplified in Japanese collecting and patronage circles.

From the seventeenth century onward, seal catalogues and seal-script dictionaries produced in Jiangnan circulated in Japan through commercial publishing and networks associated with Ōbaku monks. By the late nineteenth century, however, this movement no longer ran in one direction. Japanese scholars such as Kawai Senrō joined the Xiling Seal Society and participated in its activities. At the same time, publishers in Shanghai began to adopt Japanese editorial and visual conventions in the production of seal catalogues, altering how seals were arranged and read on the page. Meanwhile, the reputations of Chinese seal artists, including Xu Sangeng and Wu Changshuo, were increasingly shaped through Japanese patronage and collecting circles before being reabsorbed into Chinese discourse.

Using catalogue editions, layouts, and seal impressions, this paper reconstructs routes linking Nagasaki, Kyoto, and the Jiangnan region. It argues that cross-border exchange reorganized the visual and textual conditions through which seals were authenticated, admired, and historicized. Seal connoisseurship emerged not as a stable national tradition but as a product of ongoing Sino-Japanese negotiation.

Keywords: seal culture, Sino-Japanese exchange, print culture, cross-media practice, late Qing visual culture

Beyond Empire: Korean Students in Beijing and the Reception and Practice of Modern Learning under Japanese Colonial Rule, 1910s–1930s

Grace Eunhyeh Hong (Peking University)

This paper examines how Korean students in Beijing received and practiced modern knowledge under Japanese colonial rule. Challenging the prevailing focus on students in Japan and the United States, it positions Beijing as a critical yet understudied site of intellectual exchange in colonial East Asia. Drawing on Korean, Chinese, and Japanese archival and printed sources, the study surveys approximately 270 Korean students identified by name in Beijing's universities, whose enrollment peaked in the mid-to-late 1920s, analyzing their institutional affiliations, fields of study, and the academic and ideological environments they encountered. It argues that within Beijing's relatively open intellectual climate—the milieu of the New Culture Movement—Korean students engaged deeply with Western and Chinese reformist thought while building vigorous student organizations and a print culture linked to nationalist, anarchist, and Marxist movements. Through the contrasting trajectories of Chung Rae-dong, pioneering translator of modern Chinese literature, and Lee Yun-jae, historian and Hangeul advocate, it demonstrates how learning in Beijing fused with political practice and informed later visions of cultural and national reconstruction in Korea. By foregrounding Beijing as a key node in the transnational circulation of knowledge, the paper challenges the dominant Japan–West framework of colonial Korean intellectual history.

Keywords: Korean Students in China, Beijing, Colonial Modernity, Transnational Circulation, Intellectual History

Intimate Revisions: Translating Female Same-Sex Love in Early 20th Century East Asia

Marina Teresinha de Melo do Nascimento (University of Pennsylvania)

Despite the growing visibility of LGBTQ identities in contemporary East Asia, same-sex relationships continue to face significant social and legal challenges. Yet in the early twentieth century, particularly during the 1910s and 1920s, female same-sex intimacy was often framed as a natural and even necessary stage of girls' development. Across Japan, China, and Korea, writers depicted emotional and romantic bonds between schoolgirls as formative experiences that, while expected to culminate in heterosexual marriage, nonetheless played a crucial role in shaping modern womanhood.

This paper examines how such understandings emerged through the translingual circulation of Western sexological thought. Focusing on Japanese translations of Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, I argue that these works were not passively transmitted but actively reshaped by women translators and writers. Through selective emphasis, omission, and reinterpretation, these feminist mediators recast sexological frameworks, often grounded in pathology, into narratives that framed female same-sex intimacy as pedagogically valuable, temporary, and essential to emotional development. In doing so, they aligned Western theories with contemporary concerns surrounding girls' education, female solidarity, and women's autonomy.

Crucially, these reinterpretations did not remain confined to Japan. Through print culture and colonial and intellectual networks, these ideas circulated to colonial Korea and Republican China, contributing to the formation of a shared East Asian discourse of female intimacy as pure and formative. Translation thus emerges not as a passive transmission of Western knowledge, but as a feminist site of reinterpretation through which Japanese mediations reshaped how same-sex love among women was conceptualized across the region.

Keywords: Gender, Translation, Feminism, Sexology