

**China Research Seminar Series**

*The Fraught Marriage of Lin Ying  
and Han Xiangzi*

**Death and Immortality, Women and Men  
in Qing-Period Popular Literature**



**Professor Philip Clart**  
(Leipzig University)

**2pm, 24 February (Thursday), 2022**

**The Runcie Room, Faculty of Divinity (Sidgwick Site)**

**(Audience members please wear masks)**

## Abstract

The legend of the Daoist immortal Han Xiangzi 韓湘子 has been retold many times and in many literary genres since the ninth century, reaching its most complex and extensive formulation in an early seventeenth-century vernacular novel, Yang Erzeng's 楊爾曾 *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* 《韓湘子全傳》. According to its preface, the novel was partially based on popular story-telling and performance traditions, which Yang regarded as vulgar and crude. This Hangzhou-based literatus with strong Daoist leanings aimed instead to give the story of Han Xiangzi a worthier treatment, which turned out to be that of a Daoist *Bildungsroman*.

While Yang's immediate popular literary sources are (with one possible exception) no longer available to us, we do possess a large number of thematically related Qing-dynasty works from different popular genres, including prosimetric tales, ballads, songs, and local opera. There exists one nineteenth-century prosimetric redaction of the story that relies heavily on Yang's novel and is, in fact, a simplified version thereof, but most works of the period represent a quite independent narrative tradition, which may well be linked with Yang's Ming-period source texts.

Even without stipulating a continuous popular narrative tradition from the Ming (or even earlier) to the early twentieth century, the distinct plot variations between the novel and the popular narratives (as well as among different genres of the latter) highlight differences between elite and popular cultures in Late Imperial China, which this lecture will explore with particular attention to the negotiation of value conflicts concerning gender roles, personal cultivation, and family obligations.

## Speaker

**Philip Clart** is Professor of Chinese Culture and History at Leipzig University and currently a visiting fellow at St John's College, University of Cambridge. He is the author and editor of several books in the field of Chinese religions, including *Han Xiangzi: The Alchemical Adventures of a Daoist Immortal* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007); *Text and Context in the Modern History of Chinese Religions: Redemptive Societies and Their Sacred Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); *Religious Publishing and Print Culture in Modern China: 1800–2012* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

