

China Research Seminar Series (Easter Term 2021)

FAMES, University of Cambridge

Abstract

It is a truism that Chinese characters are a Chinese national treasure. Therefore, it is inconceivable that a mere century ago, the Chinese faith in its own script wavered, crumbled, and imploded, launching a script revolution that aimed to eliminate Chinese characters and implement a Chinese alphabet. This book talk takes seriously the series of puzzles triggered by the script revolution: Why did it happen? How did it unfold? In what ways did it impact modern Chinese writing, literature, and culture? How and why was it contained? It treats the Chinese script as a representative of the nonalphabetic world and situates the script revolution in between two global moments. It begins with the dominance of phonocentrism established at the turn of the twentieth century; it ends with the global tide of decolonization and the resurgence of the “national form” around the mid-twentieth century, with enduring implications for the run-in between alphabetic and nonalphabetic writing systems and cultures.

Speaker



Dr Yurou Zhong is an associate professor at the Department of East Asian Studies, University of Toronto. She received her PhD from the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Institute for Comparative Literature and Society, Columbia University. Her research interests include modern Chinese literature and culture, writing systems and literacy, intersections between technology and writing, history of linguistic thought, and sound studies. Her first book *Chinese Grammatology: Script Revolution and Literary Modernity, 1916–1958* was published by Columbia University Press in 2019 and received the Honorable Mention for the 2021 Joseph Levenson Post-1900 Book Prize. She is working on her second project on the making of modern Chinese seals.