

Cambridge Chinese Studies

Newsletter

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Illustration by Juliette Odolant, Undergraduate class of 2019

Inspired by a photograph she took on a recent trip to Paris' Musée Guimet of her friend wearing a mask in front of the "Peintures de fer: paysages de montagne," this piece represents what an appreciation of Chinese culture may look like for the foreseeable future.

Welcome Letter

Dear friends,

Welcome to our second newsletter!

You will not be surprised to learn that the last few months have been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. I am glad to be able to report that colleagues and students have adjusted to working online effectively, rapidly, and graciously. At the beginning of the outbreak, we moved our Year Abroad students from Beijing to Taipei. The University decided to make examinations for first and second year students 'formative,' meaning that students were free to take them or not, that no one could fail, and that they will not appear on transcripts. Most students did take them and their unofficial nature meant that we could give detailed informal feedback. We think this an improvement. Final Year students did have 'official' online examinations and our graduands will be invited back to Cambridge for a formal graduation ceremony when the situation allows for this.

What have we learned after learning and teaching online for one term? Our language teachers found teaching online language classes exhausting, but workable, and probably preferable to in-person classes where everybody has to keep two metres apart and must wear face masks. We cancelled the China Research Seminar, but Dr Galambos's Dunhuang Seminar restarted after a brief pause. It now has a larger audience



Third Years in Shanghai

than before: living online brings new opportunities. The pandemic has had serious, but still unclear, consequences for postgraduate students requiring access to libraries and archives and/or needing to conduct field research. Some are in the process of redesigning their projects.

The summer term has now begun. That allows us to return to our own research projects, but we are also preparing for the return of students to Cambridge next October, including by consulting each other about the best ways of delivering classes online.

Finally, some good news. I trust you will be as delighted as all of us at the promotion of Dr Adam Chau to Reader.

- Hans van de Ven

A Message to the Fourth Years

With arguably one of the most disrupted final years students have ever experienced, we want to congratulate the class of 2016 on completing their degrees. As formal graduation ceremonies are postponed and May Week has been cancelled, we hope

that the students still found a moment to celebrate their success and that they will be reunited soon with their classmates and professors to commemorate their impressive achievements.

China Research Seminar Series

Beginning with Prof. Romain Graziani's fascinating discussion of crime and punishment in pre-modern China, the Lent Term's China Research Seminar series provided students and Faculty with a wide survey of some of the latest research being done in the field of Chinese studies.

This was followed by a talk by Dr Sun Jicheng on translating the verse of Republican-era poet and Cambridge alumnus Shao Xunmei — a friend of the more well-known poet Xu Zhimo, whose memorial garden has graced the grounds of King's College since 2018.

Dr Gregory Scott discussed

the many lives of a Buddhist monastery in the wake of the Taiping War, providing a window into the sometimes competing, sometimes complimentary interests of national and spiritual rejuvenation. Meanwhile, our resident Ming historian, Dr Noga Ganany, continued the religious theme with her talk on material manifestations of the Zhenwu Cult in otherworldly guidebooks to Mount Huashan published by commercial presses in the 15th century.

Dr Judd Kinzley brought the conversation back to the 20th century with an exploration of the logistical dimensions of WWII and the

Chinese Civil War with a talk on China's 'Hog Bristle King,' and his surprising post-1949 bureaucratic rebirth. Finally, Prof. Barbara Mittler concluded

the research seminar with a socially-distanced discussion of both the production, and later artistic repurposing of archival photographs of Mao, raising compelling parallels with the return of political hagiography under Xi Jinping.

- Nick Stember

PhD student & DEAS Grad



Stills from Gigi Scaria's video installation *No Parallel* (2010), discussed by Prof. Barbara Mittler

Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar Series

As expected with a remit as broad as 'Dunhuang and Silk Road' studies, Lent term's seminar series boasted speakers from all disciplines and regional specialities.

We opened in January with Dr Agnieszka Helman-Ważny's (Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, Hamburg) talk on the spread of paper-making technology, which placed the medium of paper centre-stage.

From the technicalities of material production, Prof. Matteo Compareti (Shaanxi Normal University) pre-

sented the result of such skilled craftsmanship, leading us through the stunning murals of Afrasyab and analysing the rich symbolism therein to touch on Sogdian and Chinese customs and celebrations.

Our next speaker, Dr Antonello Palumbo (SOAS), also shed light on the hidden depths of extant material sources—exploring the interactions between imperial propaganda, Daoism, and Manichaeism in two Tang-era Dunhuang manuscripts.

Manuscripts were also central to our remaining

talks—Dr Lilla Russell-Smith (Asian Art Museum, Berlin) re-examined the well-known 'Sogdian Deities' sketch, while our own graduate student Feng Jing discussed, with brilliant demonstrations, the mystery of 'whirlwind binding.' The early Chinese Anhui Daxue manuscripts were re-interpreted by Dr Dirk Meyer (University of Oxford), including the beloved poem 'Guanju,' and the series concluded with Dr Brandon Dotson's (Georgetown University) talk on dice divination along the Silk Roads.

- Kelsey Granger



Dr Agnieszka Helman-Ważny



Dr Antonello Palumbo

Interview with Prof. van de Ven and Dr Galambos

In this issue, we speak with Prof. van de Ven and Dr Galambos on the past, present, and future of the China Research Seminar series and the Dunhuang and the Silk Road Seminar series.

The recent lockdown has given us all much time to stop and reflect—what were the original aims of your seminar series and do you feel these have changed over time?

Prof. van de Ven: We had three aims. The first was to strengthen a sense of cohesion among all those working on China at Cambridge by being together once a week. We also wanted to hear about important new research in the UK especially, although not only, by early career researchers. And finally we wanted to increase the visibility of China Studies within Cambridge. Over the years, we have brought in some innovations. We are now on Twitter and Facebook and have developed a substantial following. The next step will be to make better use of the online world, whose possibilities the pandemic has revealed to us. I would like us to stay local and not simply have big names from all over the world, which is a temptation. But our graduates are all over the world and the research we present will be of interest to many others as well. We should exploit that.

Dr Galambos: Originally, the seminar series were simply weekly meetings with a visiting graduate student who was working on a Dunhuang manuscript. Then my two visiting scholars from Beijing joined us, which resulted in much more discussion. Once we ran out of presenters, we invited others to present and to participate. This is how the Dunhuang and Silk Road seminar series started. Fortunately, there were always enough academics around Cambridge who were interested in the Silk Road and medieval China. So initially, the seminar series was a forum for researchers working on relevant topics in the Cambridge area. Later on, with the generous funding of the Glorisun Foundation and the Dhammachai International Research Institute, we were able to invite present-

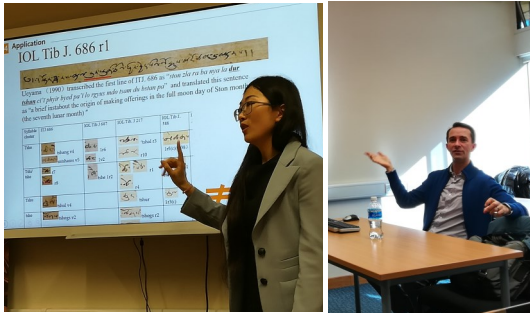
ers from other cities and countries, which was of course a major step forward.

What has been a highlight of the seminar series this academic year in your eyes?

Prof. van de Ven: First because of the UCU strike and then the pandemic, we twice had to cancel a talk by Jennifer Altehenger, a University Lecturer at Oxford and a specialist in early PRC history. She began her career as an undergraduate here with us. That was a pity, but we will have her back once we restart in the fall. For me, one highlight was a panel session on Reading the China Dream, presented by Timothy Cheek (UBC), David Ownby (Montreal), and Joshua Fogel (York University in Canada). Tim and David were class mates at Harvard, while Josh was a teacher there. We had lovely talks by Noga Ganyan and Hajni Elias, who are now colleagues. Another highlight was Barbara Mittler from Heidelberg University. She presented a wonderful talk about the uses of Mao portraits by an Indian artist. She did so from Heidelberg early on in the pandemic using Skype. Now that we are all on Zoom, Teams, and Meets, that now seems very old technology. It made clear the possibilities of the online, though.



David Ownby, Timothy Creek, and Joshua Fogel presenting at the China Research Seminar series (Mich '19)



Dr Li Channa and Dr Brandon Dotson presenting at the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series (Mich '19 and Lent '20)

Dr Galambos: I think most of the talks were very good. We try to have presenters from different academic backgrounds, so there have been talks on manuscript studies, art history, linguistics, history, religious studies, philology, etc. Some were by accomplished scholars, others by young academics at the start of their career. Occasionally, we have had Cambridge graduate students present. So rather than singling out one or two presentations, I would say that the best thing about this year was the wide variety of topics from a wide range of disciplines.

And have any of the talks during the seminar series' history been so eye-opening or ground-breaking that they still remain fresh in your mind?

Dr Galambos: Many of the talks were. Some of them were eye-opening for me because they were relatively distant from my own field of research. But even among those that deal with Dunhuang studies, we have had quite a few inspiring presentations along the way.

How has the lockdown affected the seminar series this year?

Dr Galambos: During the lockdown, we continued our seminars online, which was far from ideal but also meant that people from countries such as Germany and China could participate. It was good to see that visiting scholars who had already gone home were able to join us too. My primary aim was to break the monotony of the lockdown and to offer an intellectual stimulus to our graduate students and visiting scholars. There was an overwhelmingly positive response

and I am glad that we went ahead with the organising of the talks.

What can we look forward to in the future from these seminar series?

Prof. van de Ven: There will be change. Dr Adam Chau is taking over from me convening the seminar from next term. It will be up to him, but I suppose we will want to make more use of the new online possibilities. A great aspect of the series has been the post-talk dinners at Sala Thong, which really helped to create a sense of community and where invariably we had wide-ranging and in-depth discussions. Students were able to participate because we capped their expenditure at £10. Adam showed himself a masterly and effervescent host. We will have to see to what extent the pandemic will allow us to continue this tradition, but I would be very sad to lose it, as would Adam, I am sure.

Dr Galambos: We will continue to run this seminar series, whether at the faculty or online. If online, we could take advantage of being able to interact with people from distant countries and make it a bigger event. If holding them at the faculty, perhaps we could start recording the talks to make them available to a wider audience.

And finally, the China Research Seminar series always goes to local restaurant Sala-thong—Prof. van de Ven, what are your dish recommendations?

Prof. van de Ven: You must ask Adam. Rather than all of us ordering separately, Adam chose our food. We were never disappointed, but I therefore don't really know the dishes on the menu!

And Dr Galambos, the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series has experimented with lunches and dinners at various restaurants—which would you most highly recommend?

Dr Galambos: This is really a matter of preference, I think. I like Côte Brasserie and a couple of Chinese restaurants. We probably need more research in this area...

“I would say that the best thing about this year was the wide variety of topics from a wide range of disciplines”

Past and Present



Prof. Sterckx, Dr Loewe, and Jenny Zhao at Willow House, Grantchester August 2019

“One was almost a regular Daoist; he spoke Chinese and nothing else. Others took us along in conversational Chinese and we were free to get around the city as much as we could, which we did.”

In this issue, Prof. Sterckx and Jenny Zhao (research fellow at the Needham Institute / Darwin College) interview famed Faculty member and world-renowned sinologist, Dr Michael Loewe.

Since this interview took place in August 2019, Dr Loewe also celebrated fifty years as a Fellow of Clare Hall College in March 2020 with the launch of the Loewe Bursary for a Master’s student in the humanities.

Roel: Michael, what drew you to the Han dynasty when you started off?

What was I thinking in the 1950s? I took my degree in London; I believe it was in 1951. I decided that I was not vitally interested in pre-imperial history. On the other hand, for anything after Han, I concluded, you’ve probably got to learn Sanskrit. So there I was, landing in these early imperial times where I felt I could cope. Now, all your working life you have had the benefit of punctuated editions of the dynastic histories; oh no, we didn’t have those. Today you have your modern dictionaries, we only had the *Cihai* and the *Ciyuan*, and concordances.

Roel: If we go even further back. You come from a distinguished family, so when did China appear on your radar and why?

During 1942-45, I was working in GCHQ, breaking Japanese codes and ciphers, having been trained in Japanese language. Then came the end of the war, and I was asked by that office whether I would like to be trained in Chinese language and have a permanent job there? Well, put yourself in the position of a youngster in his early 20s – the world had been torn asunder, how was it going to come back into place again? Do you accept the job offer or do you say, no, I didn’t finish my undergraduate degree in Oxford, should

I go back to that? With hindsight, I should have done that, I know that perfectly well. But instead I stayed with GCHQ. So that put me on to learning Chinese, but this was for modern intelligence purposes. And while doing so, I then decided to read for a degree in Chinese in London with a focus on pre-modern Chinese.

Roel: In 1947, you go to Beijing, Beiping, for the first time. What do you remember of that visit?

I went with a colleague. There we were, two youngsters, 24 or 25 years old, posted to the consulate in Beiping. Our job was to learn language. The old British Legation was a park with several houses in it. We were assigned teachers. One was almost a regular Daoist; he spoke Chinese and nothing else. Others took us along in conversational Chinese and we were free to get around the city as much as we could, which we did.

Jenny: One area that has generated increasing interest, both in China and in the West, is the comparative study of empires, Rome and China. From your personal point of view, what would be the promising areas of investigation, in terms of comparison?

I have a book under review at the moment by a press on precisely this subject. You can look at it from ideas on how you govern and what types of institutions you set up to do so. You can also approach comparison by looking at empire as economic practice—

Past and Present contin.

where does stimulus come from, how is it constrained? You can look at the social distinctions which emerge and whether they may have been forced upon people or recommended. You can compare different ways of colonial advances, different in Rome, hardly a concept in China. You can focus on the concept of the individual to get to the really basic level. If you are a citizen of Rome, you are in a very different position than, say, if you were working on a plot of land, if you're lucky, in Hunan. These are the sorts of questions I have been trying to look at.

Jenny: Looking back at your academic career, would you say that you've been motivated by different kinds of questions at different stages of that career, or is there an overarching set of questions that has been driving you?

I have tried to apply myself to different aspects of early imperial Chinese society – basic philosophical background, administrative methods, careers of individuals. What I'm concerned about at the moment is Eastern Han, to which I haven't paid all that much attention. I'm thinking at the moment that, by that time, Han very soon became a shambles.

Roel: If you were to be studying a civilization other than China, would the type of research questions that you've asked been broadly similar?

I would say that it is the research field itself which regulates. Other people of course work from a completely opposite point of view. For instance, scholars of religion would ask very different questions. I would tend to say, well, here's the evidence, what does it represent, what does it reveal? Others would argue, well, what evidence is there in Shang society for a belief in whatever it would be? I think these are two different approaches.

Roel: What do you believe to be the sorts of issues that young scholars who study early and pre-modern China today should be looking at?

I probably would advise them to direct more attention to religious aspects and examine how these affected other aspects of Chinese society. I don't think I would personally concentrate too much on economic extensions, though there could very well be a case for doing that or for looking at social relationships and structure. Of course, there is always a very good case to be made for extreme specialisation – the history of texts. For instance, what I'm engaged in at the moment is the question of how many people wrote a *Hou Hanshu* – a history of the Later Han dynasty? My answer so far is there are fragments of about 20. I am looking at those fragments, trying to figure out motives, deficiencies in the texts which we've got. There is an enormous amount of work of that sort to be done, textual work, and that benefits enormously now from the machines [RS: Michael refers to computers and digitisation]. How far I'll be able to take it, I don't know. The more I look at it, the more I realise how much more work there is to be done.

For an extended version of this interview in Chinese, see: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/Olggf2TeExJAdPal9HJA>

or scan the QR code:



Dr Michael
Loewe

“The more I look at it, the more I realise how much more work there is to be done.”



Reducing the Distance

Things have certainly changed drastically from when our first issue was published last December. The past six months have seen our Faculty doors close, face-masks and PPE have become the new normal, and we are in many ways more remote from each other than ever before. However, our staff and students alike have proven that it is not the building that binds us all together—with zoom seminars, virtual hangouts, book clubs, and more uniting us and keeping us connected in these unprecedented times.



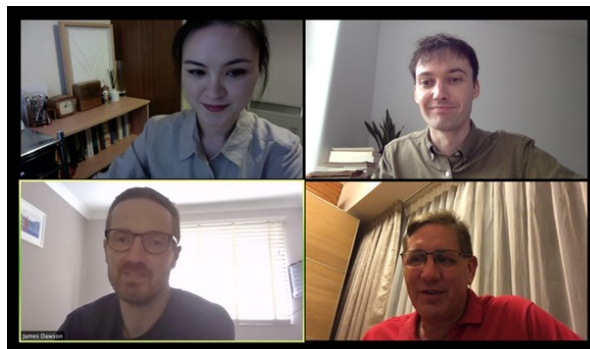
Our intrepid **First Year students (as seen above)** have certainly mastered the art of remote learning with Chinese language classes, history revision sessions, plus weekly virtual hang-outs, pub quizzes, and an end of term party, all taking place on zoom! Cheers indeed!

As already mentioned, the **Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series** continued this term on zoom—inviting speakers including Dr Sam van Schaik (British Library), Prof. Almut Hintze (SOAS), Dr Gábor Kósa (ELTE University, Budapest), and our own Dr Hajni Elias to speak on subjects as varied as Buddhist magic in Tibetan spell-books, Zoroastrian references in Sogdian art, and Chinese Manichaean manuscripts. If you wish to be added to the mailing list regarding future talks, please email kl394@cam.ac.uk

For **Dr Galambos**, he and his PhD students moved their text reading class of *The Sutra of Repaying Kindness* onto zoom and have timed each session with the musical arrival of a fish-and-chip van, to the great delight of all. Everyone has enjoyed reuniting each week, learning new Buddhist concepts, and debating over which English words work best for various references to 'light / radiance / rays' etc!

Our **graduate students (as seen below)** have also organised zoom hangouts (the youngest participant being six weeks old!) and started a book club—meeting on 8 July to discuss both Petre and Rugg's *The Unwritten Rules of PhD Research* (2020) and Kelskey's *The Professor Is In: The Essential Guide to Turning Your PH.D. Into a Job* (2015).

As Nick Stember (current PhD student and DEAS Student Rep.) reports, “participants shared their thoughts on the two books, and discussed their personal experiences navigating the transition from graduate students to would-be academic professionals. Of particular interest was the application process for post-doctorate and tenure-track positions, and current expectations of employers for competitive candidates. Distinctions between writing for the dissertation, and writing for publication were discussed, with reference to the debate over what one should publish when for maximum impact. Finally, the importance of building a support network of researchers in your sub-field was stressed, and online resources for doing so were shared.” Hopefully this is the start of a new venture in the Faculty!



First Years' Report on Lent '20



First Years at a Lent Formal Dinner

For many of us, Lent term (and Cambridge) may now seem a distant memory - so let's get nostalgic and recall the last time we were gathered together within the familiar brick walls of the AMES faculty building. It's an experience that just cannot be virtually replicated, no matter how many Sidgwick site backgrounds we put up on Zoom.

As we progressed towards a more advanced level of Chinese, our classes began to be taught almost entirely in Mandarin. Despite grappling with this at first, this immersive experience became incredibly satisfying once we realized how far our listening comprehension skills had come in the past few months. Conversations in Chinese between students began to take place outside of the classroom, eager as we were to show off our newly acquired 中文生词 (especially on nights out and during formals, for some inexplicable reason...).

In EASI, we delved into the modern histories of China, Japan, and Korea, with thematically

oriented seminars covering a wide range of topics. The thematic or chronological overlapping of different lectures allowed for a strong contextual understanding of key events or movements in East Asian history. For example, our exploration of the evolution of modern Japanese literature was facilitated by our previously acquired understanding of the Meiji Revolution.

During Lent term, we debuted our study of Literary Chinese under the guidance of Prof. Roel Sterckx and Dr Avital Rom, covering an array of Chinese philosophers and thinkers and spanning schools of thought from Daoism to Legalism. Despite our initial trepidation, the study of Literary Chinese proved an enriching challenge in that it required a complete shift in paradigm from the study of Modern Mandarin. Mastering Literary Chinese goes hand in hand with developing one's mental agility, as one must not only memorize a number of essential function words but only familiarize oneself with characters that can take on as many as twenty different meanings or grammatical functions based on syntactic context. This makes translating texts a sort of puzzle, one that is incredibly satisfying to solve, both individually and as a group, once the inherently logical and contextual nature of the language has been grasped.

Looking back now, we were fortunate to have been able to enjoy another full term in Cambridge, and we hope to be back again to experience another one in October. For the time being, 假期快乐!

- Juliette Odolant

Undergraduate class of 2019

First Years' Report on Easter '20

When Lent term ended and the quarantine period began, we were all devastated at the thought of not being able to come back to Cambridge for Easter term. We felt a term without intense EASI debates, tense 'tingxie's, Wu laoshi's jokes and trips to the buttery wouldn't be a real term at all.

However, Easter term online has far exceeded our expectations. EASI debates, tense 'tingxie's and Wu Laoshi's jokes, we are happy to say, have all remained important parts of our term online.

Fast paced quizzes using the annotate function on Zoom (with maybe a few artistic doodles added to the mix), tea and breakfast breaks, family and pet appearances and fun backgrounds have all been cheerful and heartening additions to our Cambridge learning experience. Weekly class chats over Zoom on a Wednesday evening have helped relieve exam stress, especially with a fantastic pub-quiz crafted by Sophie!

The end-of-term party, where the whole class gathered together with Hong Laoshi and Wu Laoshi (and Wu Laoshi's adorable son!) to watch our quarantine-related Mandarin video projects was a lovely way to finish what has been an extraordinary term.

We whole-heartedly thank all our teachers for

the dedication and commitment they have shown to our learning during this difficult time, and we can't wait to see each other again at Cambridge again soon!

- Harriet Howarth

Undergraduate class of 2019

I am grateful beyond words to our teachers, as always, for conducting this online term with such ingenuity and creativity. In a time when cancellations are many and disappointment is natural, the Chinese department inspired joy and motivation with their inventive teaching methods. Thanks to them, we will not look back on the term with regret, but rather remember the special memories that we made nonetheless, which will always make us smile as we look back on this challenging period. I will particularly cherish Hong Laoshi's online Zoom party, where we teamed up and created entertaining videos to share with our classmates. Thank you so much to our teachers for their unending commitment to us. Keep safe and in high spirits, everyone!

- Joe Beadle

Undergraduate class of 2019

First Years and Emma Wu posing with their textbooks on a Zoom call!



Maintaining and Improving Language Skills during a Quarantined, Taiwan-less Summer: A Student-Compiled Crash Course

This issue, First-Year student Juliette Odolant explores (and illustrates!) ways for students to keep up their language skills over the long summer break.

Is it possible to maintain language skills during the summer holidays, especially when the countries where said language is spoken have become inaccessible due to a worldwide health crisis? Should we simply take the loss of our Chinese as a given and move on? Must we accept the inevitable wrath of our teachers come October when we tentatively offer up our rusty 老师好's? The answer, fortunately, is no. To prevent panicking when presented with the directional complement structure next Michaelmas, I compiled a few solutions, then pestered teachers and fellow classmates alike for guidance regarding how to maintain and bolster our 汉语水平.

There are an overwhelming number of ways to consolidate one's language skills during the holidays. However it is important to remember that a vacation should first serve the purpose indicated by the word itself - that is, to momentarily vacate our positions as students, rid our minds of the pressures of university life, and in so doing, inevitably rid our minds of some of our so lovingly memorized 汉字. In order to avoid total amnesia, students and teachers recommend not forgoing language practice for longer than a few weeks. This may seem a short holiday when placed in the context of

our four month long summer. However by shifting our attitude towards work and treating language practice as a habit that forms part of our daily routine rather than a chore, this should soon come to feel perfectly feasible.

Once we have sufficiently vacationed and vacated, what next? A helpful method is to find a balance between passive and active language learning. On days when you're feeling less inclined to commit to a hands-on study session, you can prioritize passive learning.

Passive learning involves immersing oneself in a language through listening or reading, and is invaluable in increasing one's familiarity with vocabulary and speech flow. When you're feeling sufficiently 加油-ed, focus on some active learning - this consists of active memory recall through speaking, writing and translating.

As a means of passive learning, first years enjoy listening to podcasts, watching movies or tv shows or listening to music in their target language (some even go so far as analysing Chinese rap lyrics). As well as improving one's listening comprehension, these activities also allow for more engagement with everyday Chinese and Taiwanese culture and in so doing build up our appreciation for it, reminding us why we're studying the language in the first place. Here is a streamlined list of class recommendations:

Movies: 5th Generation films are an essential in any Chinese movie-buff's repertoire - Morrison recommends *To Live* and any other film by Zhang Yimou (*House of Flying Daggers*, *Shadow*). Try a Bruce Li film if you're feeling more action than dialogue. Some comedies recommended by James: *Hello, Mr Billionaire* (西虹市首富) and *Kung Fu Hustle*. Joe has offered up some tearjerkers with *A Sun* (陽光普照) and *Us and Them* (後來的我們).



TV Shows: In terms of TV shows, Netflix has a plethora of binge-worthy romance/dramas on offer - *Meteor Garden*, *The Princess Weiyong*, *A Love So Beautiful*, *Ice Fantasy*, *Scissor Seven*, *Dear Ex*, *The Untamed* are all worth a watch. Watch viral videos on Tencent, or contribute to dismantling the orientalist trope by exploring @goldthread2 Instagram IGTVs.

Podcasts: 听故事学中文 remains a class favourite, with *Pop Up Chinese*, *Chinese Pod* and *Speak Chinese Naturally* all tying in second place.



Reading in one's target language lies in the interim area between passive and active learning. Wu Laoshi encourages us to read aloud everyday - either from textbooks, classwork, supervision materials or authentic Chinese texts found online. Beginning with sim-

pler stories, students can work their way up to more complex texts with increasingly less comprehensible input such as newspaper articles, blog posts or book excerpts, making sure to look up words that they don't recognize and practicing writing them. Look for texts centered on your own interests, whether that be politics or the first cloned Chinese cat.

Some helpful reading resources:

<https://mychinesereading.com/>.

<http://chinesereadingpractice.com/>.

<https://hskreading.com/>.

<https://www.thechairmansbao.com/>.

If you're up for the challenge, try reading an article from *Global Times* or *China Today* - the latter also offers the option to read the same content in English. Reading bilingual materials online and attempting to translate texts from English to Chinese mentally before

looking at the given translation is a great way of maintaining linguistic agility.



Active learning also constitutes a vital part of language acquisition, albeit one that requires slightly more effort. Reviewing past lessons (vocabulary, grammar) is a must, so open up your Anki and listen to your laptop whir with disapproval as you try to remember the characters for "spicy red pepper". Engaging with new material can also be a way of renewing focus and motivation - some students have opted to follow an online course, while others have set themselves the project of memorizing a number of words from HSK 4/5 vocabulary lists each day. You could also try familiarizing yourself with interesting Chinese idioms and the stories behind them, in which case this list may be helpful: <https://www.saporedicina.com/english/list-chengyu/>. Write them down and stick them on your fridge or bedroom door, creating opportunities to learn at every turn.

For some fun active engagement, classmates organise zoom calls and challenge themselves to speak only in Chinese. Apps such as HelloTalk, where you are paired with a native Chinese speaker learning English, also provide opportunities for mutual language improvement as well as guaranteed amusement at every inevitable cultural faux pas.

I wish you the best of luck in your summertime Chinese learning endeavours! Remember to 享受 的工作, but don't forget to also 好好儿地休息!

Thank you to Wu Laoshi, Hong Laoshi, Sophie, Angel, Morrison, Jonathan, James, Harriet, Ella, Callum and Liam for their words of wisdom.

- Juliette Odolant
Undergraduate class of 2019

Year Abroad Updates

All Chinese Studies graduands come back from their Year Abroad with some crazy stories, from starring as background characters in movies to recording full rap albums. However, the class of 2017 might just blow these stories out of the water. Moving from Beijing to Taiwan during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Third-Year student Harriet Spring fills us in on an undeniably unusual Year Abroad experience.



My year abroad started out as would be expected for any other student in Chinese Studies, with my classmates and I moving to our university of choice in Beijing. Before long, we were nicely settled into our accommodation and keen to start our year at Peking University (PKU). I couldn't help but compare my initial experiences to the fondly-recounted memories shared by alumni: competing with the chaotic Beijing traffic in the mornings, delighting in steaming vegetable baozi in between lessons, and forging deeper bonds with my classmates, all the while working to a packed schedule on a beautiful campus.

Outside of our classes, we made sure to make the most of our free time by travelling to as many places around China as possible, from sizzling Sichuan to freezing Harbin, and the picturesque scenery of Hangzhou to the diverse architecture of

Shanghai. In January, we even took the opportunity to travel outside of China, where my classmates toured South Asia in true "gap yah" style, while I spent the whole period in Tokyo, with plans to reunite with my friends in Beijing in February.

However, these plans became impossible when we saw the news coming out of China. In just a few short days, we had to completely uproot ourselves from Beijing and relocate to Taipei, find a new place to stay, and enrol in a new university course. Thankfully, we were able to set ourselves up in a new apartment and join an existing course at the National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU), where we had done a summer course two years prior. Our experience at NTNU was very different to PKU, largely due to the increased administrative effort of attempting to retrieve our belongings from Beijing, along with the daunting prospect of organising our return through fluctuating

flight schedules. To offset this stress, I joined a football club, through which I met new friends and pen-pals, and made sure to explore as much Taiwanese regional cuisine as possible.

As atypical as our year abroad has been, I feel extremely lucky that I was able to further my studies despite the severity of the situation, and to have benefited from a rich and diverse set of experiences both in Beijing and Taipei, through which I have been incredibly fortunate to have such a supportive group of friends and classmates, who have taught me countless things along the way.

- Harriet Spring

Undergraduate class of 2017



Meet a Graduate Student

In this issue, we speak with current graduate student Feng Jing about their research on codicology and medieval Chinese manuscripts.

Jing, you are currently in your third year of your PhD here at Cambridge, can you give a short summary of your research topic?

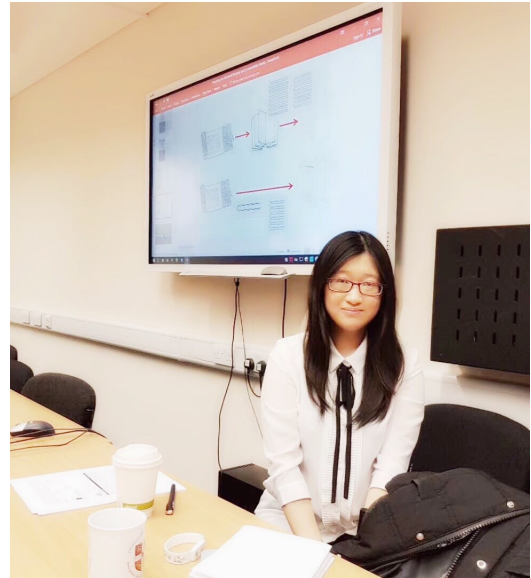
My PhD dissertation is a study of codices from the Dunhuang library cave and sites around Turfan in northwest China, with the aim of revealing the complex interplay of cultural, economic, and functional elements involved in the manufacture of manuscripts on the Silk Road from the ninth to the eleventh century. This entails examining the material characteristics of codices, including their format, binding, structure, ruling, paper, decoration, and layout, in order to show the motivations of different natures behind their production as well as to uncover the ways social interactions and cultural exchanges have shaped these manuscripts.



Jing presenting at the Needham Research Institute Seminar series (Lent '20)

This year you spoke at the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series as well as at the Needham Institute. What do you think makes the field of codicology so fascinating?

Codicology is a branch of scholarship which studies manuscripts as material artefacts. In a wider sense, it also includes the study of the social and cultural functions of manuscripts as a historical phenomenon.



Jing presenting at the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series (Lent '20)

In my opinion, the charm of codicology lies in two aspects: first, it is a refreshing departure from the established pattern of research which regards the text as the singular focus of enquiry. Codicology promotes the observation of the physical characteristics of manuscripts, which expands the scope of materials one can use while attempting to understand the history of books and enriches our current understanding of the transmission of texts from a material perspective. Codicological research also unearths valuable clues about techniques used to make manuscripts, and provides answers to a series of questions concerning the manufacture of manuscripts which have not been well answered by transmitted literature.

Secondly, while codicology has gained greater traction as an independent subject in recent years, from my point of view, its greatest potential lies in how it can be used to inform other subjects. Codicological research can advance

manuscript-related research in other fields, such as Buddhist studies, literature studies, and area studies, through offering additional information on the physical characteristics of manuscripts. This makes codicology an inspiring field full of infinite possibilities.

Along with other students supervised by Dr Galambos, you have been to see manuscripts in the British Library collections many times over these past few years. What is a standout manuscript that you were thrilled to see in person?

Seeing original items in person is always a thrill. You never know what is waiting for you. One example which gave me a great surprise is a leaf of the *Diamond Sutra* from the Stein collection. In terms of its content, this fragment is unimpressive, especially given the fact that there are many complete copies of the *Diamond Sutra* from medieval China. The edition on this fragment is also one which is commonly seen, offering no new insight with regards to textual criticism.

It is not until I examined the physical characteristics of the manuscript in person that I realised its value in demonstrating cultural exchange on the periphery of Central China. The leaf consists of two sheets of paper stuck together face to face. From published images we are unable to see this aspect because the manuscript is photographed as a flat object. Trivial as it might seem, this double-layer design is similar to Tibetan pothis, which indicates a Tibetan influence on the manuscript culture of Dunhuang from the second half of the eighth century.

What has been your most memorable experience during your time in the University of Cambridge?

Working as a supervisor of literary Chinese in my second and third year has been the most meaningful experience. It gives me a wonderful opportunity to talk with students and to learn how to teach. Through preparing mate-

rials and dealing with students' questions, I have accumulated valuable teaching experience and become more confident when facing students. This is very important for my future career as I would like to be a lecturer in a university. In Michaelmas 2019, I increased this to four hours of supervisions per week, which was a great challenge at first but later proved to be very rewarding. I found myself more skilled at expressing myself in English and more experienced in responding to students' questions as time went on.

And with the current lockdown, what aspect of student life at Cambridge do you miss the most?

The University Library and Faculty Library constitute significant parts of my research life in Cambridge, but unfortunately they have been closed during the lockdown. I miss the feeling of walking around in the library, and the unexpected joy when encountering books relevant to my research. As far as social life goes, May Balls, garden parties, and other celebrations which make up May Week are cancelled this year. Without Pimm's, strawberry ice-cream, midsummer fairs, and galas, Cambridge is a bit too quiet this summer!



Jing with her classmates and supervisor Dr Galambos at the British Library, Mich '19

Thomas Wade Society Updates



Year of the Rat in London



The Thomas Wade Society was founded in 2009 as the University of Cambridge Chinese Studies Alumni Society. Until 2016 the society was dormant, when the Class of 2016 decided to rebuild the society into something new that could bring faculty members, alumni and friends of the Faculty together.

In early February, TWS members in London gathered to celebrate the start of the Year of the Rat (pictured). Alumni and fourth year students enjoyed catching up over lunch and discussing career progression, travel tales, and plans for the coming year.

In March, TWS launched its new China Careers Directory – an online directory of graduates of the Cambridge Chinese Studies course that aims to enable current and former students to reach out to each other for career advice and networking. To date, nearly forty TWS members have shared their information, representing an astonishing vari-

ety of industries, professions and locations. Especially in these difficult times, with many people facing uncertainty regarding job prospects, the directory will hopefully prove useful for current students and recent graduates who are about to start their careers, as well as more seasoned alumni looking for opportunities to network.

If you are a current or former student of Chinese Studies and would like to gain access to the directory, please get in touch via thewadesociety@gmail.com. If you are an alumnus of the Chinese Studies course and would be willing to share your contact information through the directory (and have TWS members contact you for career advice), please fill in the following Google Form: <https://tinyurl.com/TWSCareersDirectorySignup>

- Caroline Meinhardt

Undergraduate class of 2012

Cambridge-Hamburg Graduate Student Conference 2020

This January, four of Dr Galambos' PhD students (Junfu Wong, Flavia Fang, Kelsey Granger, and Phra Kiattisak Ponampon) headed to Paris for the second Cambridge-Hamburg Graduate Student Conference on Manuscript Studies.

The first, held in Robinson College, took place in May 2019 and saw students from Cambridge, Hamburg, and Ghent discuss aspects of material culture and manuscript studies. The day of exciting talks concluded, rightfully so, with a traditional formal dinner in the college.

This follow-up conference was held in the École française d'Extrême-Orient and also involved trips to the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the Musée Guimet.

After a packed day of talks on topics as varied as Buddhism, Nestorianism, fragrance, and lapdogs, discussion continued over one of many wonderful dinners. Seeing and presenting on selected manuscripts from the Pelliot collection the next day was also a dream come true. Equally stunning were the treasures stored in the Musée Guimet, particularly the incredible Buddhist artworks not usually on display.

A third and final conference is planned for 2021 to be hosted in Hamburg, and all the students are excited to reunite and continue these fascinating discussions in the near future.

- Kelsey Granger



What's in a Picture? - A Course on Chinese Art and Material Culture



Fig. 1: Archaic bronze altar set, late 11th century BCE, Shang dynasty–Western Zhou dynasty (1046–771 B.C.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Not long after submitting my PhD dissertation, I was asked by someone how long it was. Although somewhat perplexed by the question (does length matter over substance?), I told the person that it was over 300 pages. The comment that followed was even more baffling, ‘but it has a lot of pictures doesn’t it?’

Why should we look at pictures and, indeed, why study art? Simply put, because it’s beautiful and interesting. At a deeper level, art from any period holds clues to life as it was. It can take us back in time and space, to periods different from ours. By seeking to understand an artefact’s subject, material, shape, colour, and use, we can learn about the culture and society that produced it. For example, as we interpret the images on archaic bronze ritual vessels, such as the magnificent pieces from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, dated to the late 11th century BCE (Fig.1), we can identify what was important to those who made them and how they wished to be remembered.

Art also provides a different, and often complementary, perspective alongside the reading of texts. Customarily produced by ‘local’ artists and craftsmen,

art conveys ideas in ways which contrast with texts, fashioned from words and verbal reasonings, perhaps written later in time and thousands of miles away. Sometimes, when texts do not exist material culture is all we have! Art can therefore provide us with different perspectives, allowing us to understand events, situations, cultures, and peoples in an informative and more nuanced manner.

The knowledge gathered from this experience can inspire and contribute to how we think, feel and experience our world today. The course I shall be teaching in the Lent Term, titled ‘Chinese Art and Material Culture’, is about looking at pictures and hundreds of them! We shall examine treasures from China’s bronze age; the magnificent tomb art of the Han dynasty; Buddhist sculptures produced on the grandest scale as seen at the Longmen Caves in Luoyang; the fusion of freedom and individual spirit found in objects made for the scholar-literati of the Song dynasty; the brilliance of blue and white Ming porcelain (as seen in fig. 2); and the propaganda art that celebrated the working class of the Great Cultural Revolution - just to name a few. We shall also look at the history of Chinese art collecting in the 20 - 21st centuries and consider current art market trends with some of the driving forces behind them.



Fig. 2: Ming blue and white porcelain

By the end of the course students will be able to discuss Chinese art from different periods and identify key artistic developments that shaped China’s material culture throughout history and be able to critically analyse media, design, and form, as well as have an understanding of key textual sources available for the study of Chinese art. So the question is not, ‘why study art?’ but should be, ‘why would you not study art?’

- Dr Hajni Elias

Staff Updates

Dr Imre Galambos has finished his book *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium*, on which he has been working for the past few years. It will come out in the *Manuscript Studies* series at De Gruyter.

He adds that “the lockdown certainly changed our lives and made us appreciate even more the wonderful libraries we have in Cambridge, as being without them is a challenge we feel every single day. At the same time, the fact that we could not travel anymore was a bonus which saved quite a bit of time and energy. It makes one re-think whether academic travelling is always worth the effort.”

As an academic visitor in the School of Sociology at Beijing Normal University during the second half of December, 2019, **Dr Adam Chau** gave a series of lectures and classes relating to his research and participated in two workshops, one on temporary built structures in ‘Old Beijing’ and the other on key words in folklore studies in China. His host was Dr

Ju Xi 鞠熙, an expert on Beijing folklore. Dr Chau also met up with some Chinese colleagues and old friends, including Prof. Yue Yongyi 岳永逸 and Dr Liu Jianshu 刘建树, who were visiting scholars in our faculty in 2012-13 and 2014-15 respectively.

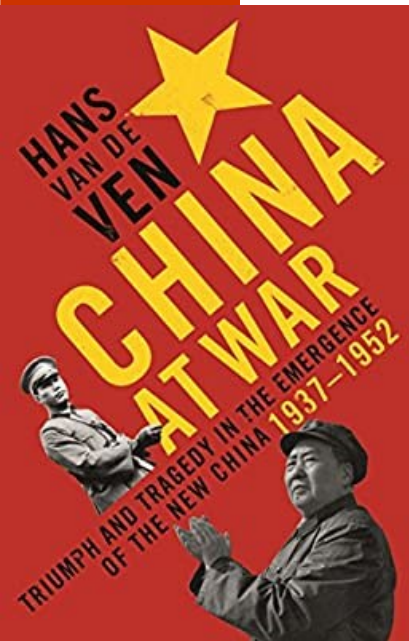
Recent articles include ‘The “Religion Sphere” (zongjiaojie 宗教界) in the Construction of Modern China’ in *Concepts and Methods for the Study of Chinese Religions II: Intellectual History of Key Concepts*, edited by Stefania Travagnin and Gregory Scott; ‘Temples and Festivals in Rural and Urban China’ in *Handbook on Religion in China*, edited by Stephan Feucht-

wang; and ‘Religion and Social Change in Reform-Era China’ in *Routledge Handbook on Chinese Culture and Society*, edited by Kevin Latham. He is currently coordinating and editing a book project called *Chinese Religious Culture in 100 Objects*, initiated by the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions.

We would also like to congratulate Dr Chau on recently being made Reader in the Anthropology of China.

Prof. Hans van de Ven reports on an array of publications this calendar year, with the Chinese translation of *China at War* coming out in Taipei this month alongside an article in *Twenty-First Century in Hong Kong* called ‘Wartime Everydayness: Beyond the Battlefield in WW2.’ He has also been the co-editor and contributor for the edited volume *The Chinese Communist Party: A Century in Ten Lives*, which he is thrilled to report is now in press at Cambridge University Press. This will be published next June, just in time for the centenary commemorations for the founding of the Chinese Communist Party.

Dr Joseph (Joe) McDermott reports that “During the past academic year, in addition to seeing the second of my Huizhou volumes to publication (CUP, 2020), I had the good fortune to spend the fall at Beida, where I benefited greatly from regular interaction with teachers and students, and then winter in Japan, where I researched Chaozhou, 1500-1650, for an introduction to the forthcoming volume *A. de las Cortes, A Visit to China, 1625* (trans.). During brief research visits to south China I gave research talks in Huizhou, Nanchang, and Shanghai. Since returning to Cambridge in March, lockdown has kept me at home, where I have continued research with the aid of books purchased in China.”



Staff Updates

Prof. Roel Sterckx spent most of the spring juggling online university teaching and supervising while (painfully) refreshing his maths for home-schooling and walking a labradoodle who grew quite fond of the extra attention and treats that come with lockdown. He served on an academic advisory committee for the City University Hong Kong and, together with Prof. Armin Selbitschka of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, secured a strategic partnership grant for a project entitled “The Materiality of Chinese Ritual.” He published “Agrarian and Mercantile Ideologies in Western Han,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 63.4 (2020). *Chinese Thought. From Confucius to Cook Ding* appeared in paperback (London: Penguin, 2020) and has been contracted to appear in Dutch, Chinese and Russian.

Leverhulme Early Career Fellow **Dr Hajni Elias** currently teaches Chinese History and, from the next academic year, a new course on Chinese art and material culture for both FAMES and History of Art students (as explored on page 15). Apart from teaching, her current research explores artistic and cultural transmission amongst early societies along the Southwest Silk Road, covering the territories of present day Sichuan, Yunnan and Vietnam.

She has recently completed her manuscript titled 'Recorded on Metal and Stone: Memorial Art of the Southwest in Early Imperial China' which has been the area of study for her PhD dissertation. Hajni's work on early China has appeared in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, in the journal *Early China*, and is forthcoming in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*.

Alongside her ongoing book project, **Dr Noga Ganany** is currently working on a research article examining a sixteenth-century hagiographical album dedicated to the Daoist immortal Xu Xun.

In addition, Dr Ganany is contributing an entry on a ritual guillotine called *zha* to a collaborative project headed by Dr. Adam Chau, titled *Chinese Religious Culture in 100 Objects*. She is also participating in the collaborative volume *Critical Terms in Chinese Religious Studies*, to which she will be co-authoring a chapter on the Chinese notion of *shen*. In the upcoming academic year, Dr. Ganany will welcome two students to our doctoral program: Li Yizhuo will be joining us from Hong Kong and Hu Hsin-yi from Taiwan.

Prof. David McMullen updates us on the past few years—he has given one talk in PKU and two in Wuhan in 2018. The trip to Wuhan was particularly special because the translation of his 1988 book was done there and he wanted to personally thank the colleagues who undertook this work.

Du Fu and his perspective on provincial government has been the subject of a recent article published in *Tang Studies*. Another article on Du Fu has also been conditionally accepted with the same journal. Prof. McMullen is currently spending his time working on a draft chapter on the Confucian tradition and on official history writing for the second Tang volume of the *Cambridge History of China* series. A further article on Du Fu is also in the works, wherein he seeks to explain why Du Fu only acquired a reputation as an important literary figure some three or four decades after his death in 770.



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The Thomas Wade Society was founded in 2009 as the University of Cambridge Chinese Studies Alumni Society. Until 2016 the society was dormant, when the Class of 2016 decided to rebuild the society into something new that could bring

faculty members, alumni and friends of the faculty together.

If you would like to join the TWS network, please complete the sign-up form at <http://tinyurl.com/twssignupform> and/or join the society's social media groups on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/553636164826475/>) and LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8577879>). If you have any questions, would like to find out more or even help out, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the committee at thewadesociety@gmail.com.

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For more information and updates, check the Cambridge Chinese Studies twitter account: <https://twitter.com/ChinaCambridge>

Looking to join our seminar series mailing lists? Please email kl394@cam.ac.uk (Kelsey Granger) to be added to the Dunhuang and Silk Road Seminar series mailing list and jjv10@cam.ac.uk (Prof. van de Ven) to be added to the China Research Seminar series mailing list.

Plus, check our library's twitter account for events and information: https://twitter.com/ames_library

Is there something you would like to be included in our next issue? Don't hesitate to contact the editor by email at kl394@cam.ac.uk whether it be with regards to an event, advertisement, interview idea, general suggestion, or an article contribution. Alumni 'where are they now' suggestions, vintage photos of the Faculty, and class (virtual) reunions are especially welcomed!