**BACS Conference 2023 Programme**

**King’s College London**

**7 & 8 September 2023**

**Preconstituted Panel Abstracts**

(In order of appearance in the overall programme)

**A2: Double Vision: On the Interplay Between Religion and Literature in Late Imperial Chinese Dramaturgy, Hagiography, and Biography**

Panel Abstract:

Late-imperial China bore witness to a growing impulse of syncretising the Three Teachings (the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings) in tandem with an intensified interweaving of literary and religious writing. Situated at the intersection of literary and religious production during this period, this panel investigates a wide scope of materials ranging from Yuan-dynasty deliverance plays, through late-Ming origin narratives, to women’s biographies in the Qing dynasty. All three papers highlight the entanglement of materials ostensibly belonging to different ends of the cultural spectrum, at a time when religious information was increasingly woven into literary texts as well as paratexts, such as prefaces and appendices. The core questions that preoccupy the panel pertain to the ways in which literary genres reconfigure the emotional norms proposed in doctrinal teachings, the possible functions that hagiographic writings fulfilled in late-Ming print culture, and how religious tropes inform the negotiation of women’s memory and morality with orthodox gender ideologies. As such, these papers shed new light on the interaction and intersection of literary and religious writing in late imperial China from emotive, embedded, and embodied perspectives.

Focusing on the depiction of anger in *dutuo ju* (deliverance plays), Xin demonstrates how a dramatic subgenre both negotiates with Daoist teachings in approaching emotions and affectively thickens the linear conception of enlightenment. Ganany draws attention to the cultic paraphernalia included in *The Account of Guanyu* to explore late-Ming origin narratives’ multiple roles as sources of information and entertainment for an expanding audience of readers-cum-worshipers. Investigating Qing biographies and epitaphs, Ma focuses on how Buddhist rhetoric was deployed to ascribe both erotic and exemplary connotations to the female body in decay and legitimise violence as a catalyst in making women’s bodies public. Proposing a series of double visions on these diverse materials, the panel envisions a much more interwoven and interdisciplinary field that engages literary and religious writings in dynamic conversations.

Chair and Discussant: Gregory Adam Scott

Zhaokun Xin, *Violence, Patience, and Transcendence: Anger in Deliverance Plays*

*Dutuo ju* (deliverance plays), a subgenre of *zaju* (Northern drama), proliferated in the latter half of the thirteenth century and closely intertwined with the development of Quanzhen Daoism. Apart from incorporating the religious corpora, deliverance plays further feature dynamic interaction with Quanzhen Daoist writings. This paper treats the emotion of anger as an entry point into the complex discursive negotiation. More specifically, the Quanzhen Daoist teachings conceive patience as a consistently efficacious way of quelling anger, which persists into such deliverance plays as *Ren Fengzi* (Crazy Ren) and *Renzi ji* (The Story of “Patience”). However, other plays within the subgenre, including *Huangliang meng* (The Dream of Yellow Millet) and *Jintong Yunü* (Golden Lad and Jade Lass), have questioned the presumed efficacy of the virtue in containing the emotion. Not only do these plays feature the delivered characters’ failed restraint of anger, but more significantly a succession of dramatic actions also ensues from such failures to fulfill the deliverance. The complementary sequence begins with evoking the delivered person’s fear by imposing violence and ends with his (and always his) symbolic death. In a larger sense, focusing on the sedimentation of the delivered characters’ emotional experiences alerts us to the reductive tendency of applying the linear schema inherent in the rites of passage to this dramatic subgenre.

Noga Ganany, *Temples, Texts, and Divine Traces: Cultic Reverence and Popular Literature in Ming Hagiographic Narratives*

Late Ming saw a surge in publication of hagiographic narratives retelling the lives of gods, immortals, and folk heroes in lively *xiaoshuo*, often accompanied by illustrations. These books, which I term origin narratives, weave the protagonists’ iconographies, sacred geographies, and ritual traditions into the narrative. The multitextuality of their main narratives is complemented by various “religious” paratexts, including news of local temples, writings attributed to the protagonists (revealed through spirit writing), and detailed instructions for their cultic worship, complete with sacrificial lists and calendars. In this paper, I will look at the interplay between cultic reverence and popular literature by focusing on *the Account of Guandi* (*Guandi lidai xiansheng zhizhuan* 關帝歷代顯聖誌傳) as a case study. *The Account of Guandi* explores the life and lore of Guandi (Guan Yu / Guangong) from a cultic perspective, centering on the miracles performed by Guandi and his temple worship. The book opens with a series of stone stele inscriptions located at Guandi temples (*miao bei ming* 廟碑銘), followed by a series of couplets (*bian lian* 扁聨) donated by devout pilgrims, most dating from the Ming. I argue that late-Ming origin narratives like *Account of Guandi* provided informative yet entertaining portfolios of cultic figures that address the concerns of an unprecedently-wide audience of readers-cum-worshipers. As such, they shed invaluable light on the multiple roles that commercial publishing played in shaping the Chinese religious and cultural landscape during the Ming dynasty.

Xu Ma, *Revealing and Concealing: Spectacularizing the Female Body in the Qing Biographies*

In premodern China, the principle of gender segregation prohibits public exposure and evocation of a woman’s face and body. As a result, not only are model women supposed to cloister in their inner quarters, but their biographical memory also tends to minimize portraits of their physical appearances and countenance. As Susan Mann points out, premodern Chinese writers of female biographies are less concerned with the “visual” aspects than “deeds” which they believed were the touchstones of women’s morality. This paper, however, discusses some Qing biographical accounts which included explicit descriptions of female subjects’ bodies in decay (diseased, disfigured, dying, or dead). Strikingly, this unconventional focus on the “visual aspects” of the female subject and/or her grotesque body often employs Buddhist vocabulary and allusions, representing the woman as both a Confucian paragon and a religious saint. Enshrined in the textual inscription of her (un-/)putrefying body, a Confucian model’s exemplarity takes on a corporeal expression coded in religious (Buddhist) rhetoric and tropes. As the woman’s body becomes both a site of sight and a site of sanctity, the twinned fascination with the erotic and exemplary female body is justified by women’s self-consecration as well as by the male right to gaze and evaluate.

**B6: International Politics and Security Across the Taiwan Strait**

Panel Abstract:

China's rising power in the Indo-Pacific region has been the subject of much discussion in recent years, as it has become increasingly influential on the global stage. Its rapid development and strategic ambitions have raised concerns among stakeholders in the region. Against the backdrop of the Ukrainian-Russian War, China faces a critical juncture in its future trajectory. With the ongoing rivalry between the US and China, the Taiwan-China relationship has become a crucial factor in terms of geopolitics, military strategy, and regional security. In response to these challenges, the proposed panel seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of the tensions and security challenges that exist across the Taiwan Strait. Comprising four papers, the panel draws on a range of disciplines to explore key themes related to cross-strait dynamics, offering valuable insights into the complexities of the region. The panel is notable for its diversity, with an equal balance of male and female members who bring a wealth of academic and professional experiences. The panel includes members with master's degrees from prestigious UK institutions, as well as those with doctoral degrees in various fields and experience working in think tanks in Taiwan. As the panel focuses specifically on security issues in East Asia, its predominantly Taiwanese membership is well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to both theoretical and practical fields. The panel's emphasis on security and military aspects of the Taiwan issue promises to make a valuable contribution to the broader discourse on East Asia. We anticipate lively and informative discussions during the conference, as experts from different disciplines and backgrounds come together to share their insights and exchange ideas.

Chair TBA

Nicholas Yi-Chuan Chiu, *Examining How China, Taiwan and the United States of America Responded to the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crises (2022)*

Cross-strait relations have recently gained attention due to the increasing possibility of war, with China conducting military drills around Taiwan in August 2022 after US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei, which was dubbed the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis. However, diverging identities remain the core issue for cross-strait dynamics. While China sees its identity as incomplete without unification, Taiwan is carefully moulding a separate identity from China without declaring legal independence. The US repositioning its China strategy under the "democracy versus autocracy" division and putting Taiwan at the centre of this narrative further complicates the interrelationship of cross-strait identities.

This paper explains why a seemingly symbolic visit ignited a military crisis through the Balance of Identities (BOI) framework. BOI includes an "internal" (Chinese) and "international" frame for accommodating the three parties' identities, and cross-strait stability depends on balancing identities in both frames. Each party's strategy is influenced by its evolving identity and the frame they prioritise. Through the prism of BOI, the Fourth Taiwan Strait Crisis is a result of incompatible identities and the renegotiation of the two frames. Though Taipei retains its China-related official name and Washington still nominally upholds a One China Policy, Beijing fears that Taipei is joining "external forces" to reframe cross-strait relations as an international problem. Military drills were thus Beijing's way to solidify the internal frame. Though the three parties have different preferences for framing cross-strait dynamics, they remain prudent since keeping the paradox of both frames better serves their respective interests.

Yun-Ju Huang, *Bluffing or Keeping Cards Close to the Chest? An analysis of China’s Red Lines on Taiwan*

This article attempts to answer a highly discussed but rarely explored question- what are China’s red lines? How do Taiwan and the United States perceive China’s red lines? Since 2016, the official and unofficial interaction between the two sides of the Straits and China and the U.S. have decreased, while the relations between Taiwan and the U.S. have increase. China has constantly warned the governments of Taiwan and the U.S. not to cross its red lines. However, China’s red lines signal didn’t stop the U.S. congresswoman Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan in 2022 and ROC President Tsai Ing-wen’s meeting with the U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy in the U.S. in 2023. This article applies signalling theory and deterrence theory to analyse the definition of China’s red lines, as well as how Taiwan and the U.S. interpret China’s red lines. Besides the official documents, reports, journal articles, and media news, we will also conduct interviews with high level officials and China experts to further understand China’s red lines. The findings of this paper show that Taiwan and the U.S. have different understandings about China’s red lines and China’s “talk too much but do little” signal and behaviour offered both of Taiwan and the U.S. to take bold steps to challenge China and neglect its red lines signal.

Eli Yin-Shan Huang, *Interstate Relations and Military Conduct - Analysis of the Activities of Chinese Military Aircraft around Taiwan*

While many believe that the political situation affects the scale and intensity of Chinese military activities around Taiwan, the phenomena reflect that perhaps Chinese military aircraft activities around Taiwan are not entirely related to political dynamics. The existing IR theories are insufficient in explaining Chinese military aircraft activities under the current Taiwan-US-China dynamics. The first is the limitation of offensive and defensive determination. A country’s offensive and defensive actions depend on the country’s motives. However, weapons and military activities have both offensive and defensive meanings. The gray area is even more difficult to judge. Secondly, in the past, the analysis of state behavior in international relations literature focused on static observations, such as the structure of the international system, but little attention to the dynamic between political relationships and military activities. Finally, in addition to sending a warning message, military aircraft have different types of functions, and different formation combinations also reflect various missions.

Although taking a qualitative research method, this paper collects a lot of data on the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) activities from Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense, Japan’s Joint Staff, China’s Maritime Safety Administration …etc. By analyzing the type, flight path and formation of military aircraft, combined with external factors such as China-US-Taiwan trilateral political dynamics and foreign military activities, this paper aims to identify priorities and explore the nature of Chinese military aircraft activities around Taiwan. The results not only expected to understand the cause of the crisis in Taiwan Strait but also further supplement the concept of crisis escalation in IR theory.

Zack (Tzu-Hao) Liao, *Unleashing the Dragon: How Technological Advancements in PLA MOOTW Shapes Threat Perception*

The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) technological advancements have had a significant impact on China's military capability, particularly in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). China has invested heavily in advanced military technologies to enhance its MOOTW capabilities. However, the technological leap in the PLA and its concomitant growth in military capabilities can significantly affect the threat perception of China in other governments, particularly those who view China as a strategic rival or competitor. This paper proposes to explore how the role of the PLA MOOTW capability have influenced the British threat perception of China. The Integrated Review and Integrated Review Refresh mention China as a systemic challenge, indicating a trend towards perceiving China as a potential threat for the UK. Furthermore, Taiwan has been mentioned in British high-level strategic and political documents for the first time. By discussing how the technological advancements in PLA MOOTW affect the British threat perception, this paper will closely examine and analyse British official strategic documents and major publications of official-related think tanks, such as RUSI, IISS, and Chatham House, to find a path of British threat perception on China and make contributions to current policies and approaches. This paper aims to provide a deeper understanding of the political, strategic, and military dimensions of China's rise and the implications for the UK. It will also identify areas where UK must be cautious to mitigate risks to its national security. The findings of this paper will contribute to current policies and approaches towards China and inform future policy decisions.

**B7: Planning and Promoting Republican China in the 1940s:**

**New Perspectives from Local to Global**

Panel Abstract:

This panel offers new perspectives on Nationalist China in local, national, regional and international settings in the crucial years of the Second World War and the early post-war. Building on recent historiographical reassessments of the role and reach of the Nationalist state in the period immediately before its collapse on the mainland, this panel focuses on a series of overlooked case studies of planning and promoting Republican China, from the city level to the United Nations. Helena Lopes recovers the history of Chinese women who acted as prominent cultural ambassadors for Nationalist resistance in Europe and the Americas during the war with Japan. Tehyun Ma investigates the design and implementation of a new education programme both in the mainland and, later, in Taiwan between WW2 and the Cold War. Zooming in on land disputes derived from wartime upheaval in Changsha, Toby Lincoln analyses the complex post-war reconstruction efforts of municipal officials and local residents. Finally, Yui Chim Lo uncovers Nationalist China’s work, alongside India, to shape Asia-centred projects for regional development at the UN Commission for Asia and the Far East. Taken together, the four papers contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Nationalist visions for China at home and abroad during and after the War of Resistance. They also shed light on the diverse range of individuals who were involved in formulating, implementing, and representing those plans to domestic and foreign audiences.

Chair TBA

Helena F. S. Lopes, *Forgotten cultural ambassadors: Cosmopolitan women and global Chinese resistance, 1930s–1940s*

China’s War of Resistance against Japan generated momentous political and international transformation in the country. Amidst the mass destruction and displacement inflicted by the Japanese occupation, the war also represented a period of unprecedented opportunities for many women. Whilst women’s participation in relief activities, welfare provision and guerrilla warfare has merited some scholarly attention, and the *national* dimension of women’s political mobilisation has been highlighted by several historians, the prominent role women played in harnessing *global* support for Chinese resistance has been surprisingly overlooked. Drawing on memoirs, newspapers, archival records and other sources, and on global history and gender history approaches, this paper sheds new light on the role of Chinese cosmopolitan women as major actors in China’s cultural diplomacy during World War Two. It argues that the contingencies of the war created new, albeit short-lived, opportunities for international mobility and visibility for women with particular linguistic skills who embraced new roles as informal ambassadors for Chinese resistance to diverse international audiences in Europe and the Americas.

Tehyun Ma, *Envisioning the nation: education planning and reform in postwar China and Taiwan*

Not long after the Japanese surrender in 1945, Guomindang cadres and educators met to design a new education program for the Chinese nation. The curriculum standard they produced was the most thorough and systematic effort undertaken by the Nationalists to create a compulsory national program. Much like the fashioning of post-conflict plans in the social policy arena, the program reflected not only China’s new standing in the postwar order but also the Guomindang’s ambitions for the nation. However, the task was not completed until 1948 when the Nationalists' fortunes were on the wane. Nonetheless, the design found a second life on Taiwan and served as the underpinning of the Nationalists' spiritual mobilisation of the island in the early Cold War. This talk will explore the vision of the nation set out by Nationalist educators and how the policy manifested on the island.

Toby Lincoln, *Who owns the land? Management and disputes in Chinese cities after WW2*

The end of war with the Japanese in 1945 left the embattled Nationalist Government and the Chinese people the huge task of reconstruction. In many cities, over 50% of buildings were damaged, refugees slept amidst the rubble on the streets, and government officials and charities were short on resources. Among the problems facing the Nationalist Government was the issue of who owned the land. During the war, Japanese soldiers or Chinese who had stayed behind had occupied houses. They made repairs, enlarged their properties, and in some cases rented them out. On returning home, the original owners understandably wanted their houses back but in many cases they did not have documents to prove ownership, which led to disputes. Additionally, regulations on reconstruction required municipal officials to set aside vacant land for development.

Focusing on the city of Changsha, this paper explores how the Nationalist Government managed land disputes. I demonstrate that despite corruption, destruction, and lack of resources, local officials were able to manage many land disputes successfully. Beyond this, they presided over the creation of new urban plans that imagined how cities should be reconstructed and expanded, but which created tensions with existing land use, such as temporary refugee settlements. In deciding who owned the land, urban officials and inhabitants were not only securing their post-war futures, but in many cases, making sense of their wartime pasts.

Yui Chim Lo, *Post-War Economic Asianism? China, India and the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, c. 1947-1950*

China and Asia in the late 1940s have often been examined in terms of national conflicts, for example the Chinese Civil War and Partition. Much less is known about how emerging nation-states such as China and India exercised their influence at the *regional* level. This paper examines how China and India shaped the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE), a regional commission of the UN Economic and Social Council founded in 1947 and still functioning today as the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Frustrated with a Eurocentric UN, Chinese diplomat P. C. Chang led UN members in the Global South to call for a regional commission that supported Asia’s developmental aims, a loose network that India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru drew on in his later diplomacy. Indian delegates demanded that ECAFE boldly launch developmental projects in areas such as industrialisation. By contrast, Chinese diplomats expected ECAFE to help Asian countries rehabilitate their economies first. Yet both sides believed that ECAFE should ultimately help Asia construct at a pace much higher than the pre-war period. Despite the irony that Asian countries were working with an international organisation to resolve regional issues, their efforts compelled these organisations to move beyond an Atlantic orientation. Moreover, developmental projects were not simply initiated by the UN or the superpowers. China and other budding Asian nation-states actively promoted them to redefine Asia’s self-identity: from underdevelopment and a supposed spiritual superiority in the early twentieth century to prosperity and ‘modernity’.

**E2: ‘The World of Yesterday’: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue on Liminal Memories of the Mao Era**

Panel Abstract:

While Stefan Zweig’s ‘The World of Yesterday’ reflects his emotional connection to pre-WWII Europe, this panel focuses on China’s ‘world of yesterday’ - the Mao era and its memories. This panel aims to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue between media and film studies, sociology, and visual culture to comprehensively investigate the intricate relationships between memory mediation, collective memory, and the socio-cultural environment from which such memories emerge. Throughout this dialogue, we pay particular attention to what we call ‘liminal memories’ referring to neglected objects and events of the past and their inherent complexity, heterogeneity, and interconnectivity.

This panel adopts a diachronic approach to explore the memory of the Mao era (1949-1976), investigating the memories and legacies of often overlooked cases and groups of Maoist China. First, Jin Dai will present her ethnographic interviews with 15 multi-generational Han families in the XPCC, organised around the discussion of the mnemonic practices of family-owned photographs and the role these photographs play in the formation and circulation of both vernacular and official memories. Next, Mingkun Li uses a government-produced television programme from the 1990s to memorialise the Third Front as a case study of the various conflicts and negotiations in the production of official memory. Following this, Avital Avina, explores the gap between memory and propaganda to unpack the motivation–or lack thereof–for female perpetrated violence during the CR. Finally, Jiawen Sun conducts a multi-dimensional comparative research of two subgroups of educated youth, arguing for the influence of the political environment on collective memory and emotions based on a life-course study.

Chair TBA

Jin Dai, *Rituals, Transmission, and Community Construction: Vernacular Photographs of Han Resettlement to Xinjiang and Practices of Remembering within Family*

This paper examines the mediation of memory of governmental-led Han Chinese who relocated and resettled to China’s north-western Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC, hereafter) at the peak period of China’s 1950s-1960s. This internal relocation of Han to Xinjiang was part of an ideological project in contributing to socialist constructions on China’s north-western borderland, which involved agricultural reclamation, frontier safeguarding, building infrastructure, developing population and other activities. Going beyond mainstream political discourse that primarily constructed and presented Han migration as “borderland constructors” in Chinese nation-building, this paper seeks to uncover a more complex mnemonic landscape by shifting attention from dominant official memories to vernacular memories of Han migration themselves.

Based on the ethnographic qualitative data received through qualitative interviews with fifteen multigenerational Han families in Xinjiang, organised around the discussion of the mnemonic practices of family-owned photographs including taking, storing, displaying and sharing photographs within families, this paper investigates how Han settlers themselves memorialise their resettlement between ‘ideological frontier construction’ and ‘personal life survival’ in vernacular narratives, and more, the paper reveals how family photographs work as markers of special moments and means of connection that ritualise personal resettlement, strengthen generational connections, and consolidate a community’s identity within families. Furthermore, an analysis of the interaction between vernacular and official memories embedded in family photographs also be reflected.

Mingkun Li, *The ‘Parapraxis’ of Official Memory Production in China: Mediating the Memories of The Third Front Student Through the Television Documentary in the 1990s*

This article analyses how the Shaanxi provincial government mediated the sensitive history of the Third Front students through a television documentary in the 1990s. The Third Front students were 30,000 teenagers aged around 15 who were involved in the construction of the Xiangyu Railway as part of the Third Front project in the 1970s, and most suffered physical and psychological injuries. In 1996, the Shaanxi government decided to produce a documentary to commemorate this history. Using textual and archival analysis, this paper analyses the text and context of the documentary, highlighting the complexity of official memory production in China to counter the view of official historiography as a monolith in previous discussions of Mao-era memory.

The paper adopted Thomas Elsaesser's concept of 'Parapraxis' - meaning 'failure and performance' - to develop its argument. Firstly, the text of this official documentary is a 'performance of failure' that employs both dogmatic and contingency poetics, official and anti-official discourse, to convey paradoxical feelings and contradictory perceptions of this history and to allow the viewer to perceive conflicted group images. Secondly, the production of the documentary was a 'failed performance' - a commemorative performance that aimed to popularise the official ideology failed. This article analyses the conflicting interests and intricate interactions between official institutions and the local Third Front group, as well as the group's own crisis of meaning and identity, behind the paradoxical cinematic texts, then illustrates the complexity and heterogeneity of the official memory production.

Avital Avina, *Contradictions in Action and Memory: The Gap between the Visual and the Recollection of Female Perpetrated Violence in the Cultural Revolution*

During the Cultural Revolution (CR), gender equality, especially through performative actions, was embodied as a new era of purported female equality. This turn towards gender equality was, however, only skin deep and the period was characterised by masculinisation of the female form in art and societal roles. As a result, the CR was the first public movement where women directly took part in the violence with documentation recording female involvement in brutal behaviour.

This paper takes a closer look at the role of women during the first few years of the CR, especially in mass violence, and the propaganda that was intended to motivate them. ‘Even more than in previous instances of mass mobilization, the Cultural Revolution relied on emotional transformation as a catalyst for carrying out these cruel acts’, and it was the propaganda, in its various forms, that triggered the ‘emotion work’ of the masses (Perry 2002, 122).

Through the analysis of the posters and memoirs that contain instances of female perpetrated violence, the gap between what is in the memoirs and what is depicted in the imagery shows a significant inconsistency in motivation and resultant action. The results of the poster study, that women were not motivated to commit violence at the same levels as men, especially as lone attackers, contradicts many of the memory-based documents that assert girls and women were key perpetrators of violence.

Jiawen Sun, *A Comparative Study on the Collective Memory of the Educated Youth from Two Military Farms in the Mao Era*

During the Down to the Countryside movement (1968-1980), the Production and Construction Corps across China received approximately 2.5 million educated youths (*zhiqing*). Geographically situated in frontier areas, and managed as a paramilitary organization, the Corps provided the *zhiqing* there with a special life experience, which shaped their collective memory that differed from that of other sent-down youth. Based on fieldwork during doctoral research, the author conducts a multidimensional comparative study between the Heilongjiang Corps and the Yunnan Corps, examining various factors such as the history, geography, composition, and political capital accumulated by these two. This study highlights how geographical, cultural, and political factors influence the formation of collective memory and mentality among the *zhiqing*. The Heilongjiang Corps accumulated positive “red” political capital, resulting in the development of a “pioneer spirit” among the *zhiqing*, whereas the mistreatment of the Yunnan Corps to the *zhiqing* led to the initiation and ultimate success of the Great Return Campaign: a resistance movement launched by the *zhiqing* at the end 1978 to return home. The author argues that the collective memory and mentality of these sub-groups of *zhiqing* differ, much like the “Mandarin Orange in the South and Trifoliate Orange in the North” proverb, where the same plants bear different fruits depending on the environment. The study contributes to the field of *zhiqing* studies by establishing a middle ground between macro and micro perspectives and demonstrating the subtle and complex internal structure of educated youth, despite their reputation as a unified “lost generation (*génération perdue*)”.

**E3: Be Real, But More: Extending Documentary Cinema and Filmmaking in the PRC**

Panel Abstract:

The documentary is about “the creative treatment of actuality.” Still, when we say a documentary has everything to do with real, reality, factuality, and actuality among others, what exactly are we talking about? In line with such a rationale of enquiry, this panel delves into the fundamental, if not ontological, question of what it means to be real and actual in documentary films. More importantly, what else can documentary cinema achieve and/or become? This panel aims to ponder the conditions of documentary, with equal attention given to the current film creation and distribution practices and the large body of knowledge regarding film theory, media studies, and film history since the socialist era. Concerning four different topics related to documentary films, we will walk through and demonstrate (1) the animated, experimental visuality as a nascent way of knowledge construction, (2) the legal history reconfigured and mediated by things in independent documentary cinema, (3) the first-person filmmaking in the socio-cultural investigation of the rural village, and (4) the emerging trend of the cloud-storage new wave, thereby explicating the multiple possibilities and the multifaceted history of Chinese documentary cinema. In particular, with scholars and filmmakers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC who share different backgrounds, research focuses, and gender and socio-cultural identities, this panel will accommodate both academic and industrial perspectives and cover an immense variety of issues concerning the Chinese documentary film history, theory, and production from past to present, from earth to cloud. As such, this panel is expected to extend the very notion of documentary cinema and what it means to make documentary films.

Chair TBA

Muyang Zhuang, *Animation of Experiment: The Science Education Film and Useful Animation in China*

From the early 1950s to the mid-1990s, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) produced numerous science education films, which were largely documentaries. Many utilised animated effects to promote the reception of scientific knowledge and ideological messages by audiences. Current scholarship on Chinese animation history stresses films made by the Shanghai Animation Film Studio, neglecting animation created by filmmakers in science education film studios. In this article, I argue that the history of useful animation in science education films provides a different approach to understanding Chinese animation as the animation of experiment. Animation functioned as scenes of experiments that enabled science education films to deliver a message of knowledge; they also inspired amateur experiments with animated filmmaking and experimental animation practices in the post-socialist era. This article analyses animation for science education films, amateur animation practices, and experimental works inspired by or benefited from science education filmmaking. It will enrich the scholarship on Chinese animation and shed new light on the history of Chinese documentary film culture in the PRC.

Yijiao Guo, The Cultural Revolution in Dossiers: Reconfiguring a Legal History of Unlawfulness in Xu Xing’s *Summary of Crimes*

Focusing on how things in this documentary film have reconfigured the unrepresentable, traumatic, violent past, I examine the Chinese independent documentarian Xu Xing’s depiction of the Cultural Revolution in his *Summary of Crimes* (2014). Analyses will be given upon how Xu Xing disclosed the status of unlawfulness, rather than lawlessness, of the Cultural Revolution by visualising the unique type of dossier – the summary of crimes – produced and issued at the time in Zhejiang Province. The reconfiguration of the Cultural Revolution in this film illustrates that the law was not cancelled or abandoned in rural villages but remade through unlawful practices. I argue that Xu Xing, different from the previous documentary unearthing of violence and ordeal in the past, brings to light a considerable number of disregarded stories through his investigation of the legal practices and the socio-political context. Moreover, Xu Xing has also pondered the paradox between the status of unlawfulness and the newly implemented revolutionary order of law. Consequently, he demonstrates that the atrocity and complexity of the Cultural Revolution do not necessarily and entirely lie in the status of lawlessness and the state of exception, but a de facto unlawfulness in which the law was remade by legally and juridically violating the law in rural China. In my view, such a historical paradox and legal-juridical complexity will not be palpable and perceptible until the past has been reconfigured in and via things in independent documentary cinema.

Ang Gao, *Filming in Rural China: From Observational to First-Person Film*

This paper come out of a six-year documentary filmmaking practice-led PhD research. This creative research reflects a “becoming” process. The project began with an observational documentary in my hometown, Tanghe County in Henan Province, which intended to reflect the gap between the Chinese rural policies and the real lived experience of villagers. I was interested in how the village seemed to stand still in time – a fading image of a troubled and best-forgotten history. However, as the research developed, I discovered that the relationship between a researcher and her research objects broke down through my embodied filmmaking practice, which raised my concerns about the objectivity/subjectivity binary in documentary filmmaking. By interacting with them more personally and allowing them to share their private life and memories with me, I was more aware that the observed subjects were people who shared ties and connections of many kinds with me, and the filming practices also became a self-discovering process for me. Consequently, this research ended up as a first-person film Reading Jiaoxing Village I, in which my understanding towards myself, my filming practice, and the world(s) I inhabited can be equally found. Moving from the detached observation to an embodied presence, I argue that this documentary film and the particular method of first-person documentary filmmaking enables the creation of more authentic visual images and explores the ethical complexities of the filmmaker-subject relationship.

Yijiao Dong, *“Pirated” Future? Chinese Online Independent Cinema and Wangpan New Wave*

During the pandemic outbreaks and lockdowns, some Chinese directors began to send their films via links for free downloads when physical cinemagoing became impossible. One representative example is documentarian Jiang Nengjie, who sent the link to his latest documentary film to people in Douban in 2020. This trend has also sparked heated discussions and is later known as the “Wangpan New Wave (网盘新浪潮, literally meaning cloud-storage new wave). Adopting discourse analysis and interview primary data, I examine this nascent phenomenon of online documentary film-watching and dissemination in relation to a broader pattern of innovations in independent filmmaking in the PRC in recent years. I argue that Wangpan New Wave has enabled a new distribution model in the industrial sector, which has changed the relationship between filmmakers and audiences. In addition, I also define and theorise the Wangpan New Wave as an emerging film (sub-)culture that continues to fulfil the tasks of the Chinese new independent documentary movement in the status quo.

**E7: 19th-Century China’s Economy in a Globalized World: Trade Dynamics, Power Interplays, and Social Restructure**

Panel Abstract:

This panel investigates the multifaceted interactions between the 19th-century China and the globalized economy, examining monetary stability, fiscal transformation, market integration, and frontier commercialization. Amid intensifying globalization, the Qing Empire faced significant internal shifts, such as widespread rebellions and financial decentralization. The panel seeks to determine the extent to which China's economic changes during this period resulted from international influences and domestic transformations.

Xiaoyu Gao reevaluates the traditional silver outflow thesis through an in-depth analysis of both silver and copper currencies, providing a comprehensive evaluation of China's international trade and emphasizing counterfeiting of copper cash as a vital factor in understanding the economic landscape. Xu Xi investigates Robert Hart's influence within the Qing bureaucracy, uncovering the structural constraints he encountered. By examining Hart's attempts to control likin from local Chinese officials, Xi's work reveals power dynamics in late Qing China and its interplay with Western influence. Gehui Zhu examines the rice trade in Wuhu treaty port, illustrating the impact of increasing decentralization on regional commerce from the mid-19th century and refining market integration theories and treaty port implications. Siping Shan investigates the global commodity network's impact in Mongolia, detailing a conflict between Beijing authorities and Mongol tribes over a Mongol prince's distillery in the 19th century, exposing the emergence of a monetary economy in pre-modern Mongolia and its role in fundamentally restructuring local social and economic order.

Collectively, the panel contributes to ongoing debates surrounding globalization's effects on national politics and economies, aiming to provide a nuanced understanding of the forces driving China's economic transformation.

Chair TBA

Xiaoyu Gao, *Revisiting the 19th-century Qing Monetary System: Beyond the Silver Outflow Thesis*

The Qing Empire's dual monetary system, comprising copper cash coins and silver currency, experienced a dramatic transformation in the 19th century. While the Qing Empire stabilized the 18th-century currency exchange rate through market intervention, between 1820 and 1850, the silver price of copper cash plunged by 76%, resulting in a 40% decrease in state fiscal revenue and an increased tax burden on the Chinese populace. This financial turmoil significantly contributed to the catastrophic Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s, claiming over 20 million lives.

Traditional analysis of the 19th-century monetary system predominantly focuses on silver, with copper cash being subsidiary. Most studies investigate the relationship between silver currency flow and international trade, with the silver outflow thesis, proposed by Tang Xianglong in the 1920s, asserting that the British opium trade triggered a massive silver outflow in mid-19th century China.

While the silver outflow thesis gained traction in 20th-century China due to rising nationalism, recent research questions its validity. This thesis relies heavily on trade records between China and the English East India Company, which constituted a mere 30% of China's international commerce. Additionally, opium imports accounted for only 3.6%-6.7% of the Qing Empire's total silver supply or 6% of the state's annual fiscal revenues, insufficient to be the primary cause of China's economic depression. To comprehensively understand 19th-century China's financial and economic landscape, I suggest considering both *silver and copper* currencies and a much more comprehensive picture of China’s international trade, with particular emphasis on the rampant counterfeiting of copper cash.

Xu Xi, *The Power of Robert Hart within the Qing Bureaucracy, 1863-1901*

Robert Hart has been regarded as one of the most influential Westerners not only in Chinese history but also in the writing of modern Chinese history. Scholarship on Hart has focused on his role in international relations and Western imperialism in late Qing China. Little attention, however, has been paid to his situation within the Qing court, the bureaucratic characteristics of which limited his power in a variety of ways. By a case study of Hart’s failure in taking over likin from the local Chinese officials, this article demonstrates the power structure of the late Qing dynasty which was shaped by tensions between the central government and the local powers, between the foreigners and the Chinese, and between the Han elites and the Manchu nobles. And from institutional, informational, and financial perspectives, this study examines Hart’s power within the Qing bureaucratic system. It explores the structural limitation of Hart’s power and how Hart interacted with the existing power structure of China, which contributes to the academic understanding of how late Qing China digested the influence from the Western power.

Gehui Zhu, *Unraveling Wuhu's Rice Trade Development: Consumption, Competition, and Political Manipulation (1862-1895)*

This research aims to explore the unexpected transformation of Wuhu, a significant treaty port in the Lower Yangtze Delta, from a planned international tea trade center to a leading domestic rice trade hub between 1862 and 1895. Based on British and Chinese archives, such as the UK Parliamentary Papers, Chinese Maritime Customs, Qing official memorials, and the *Shenbao* newspaper, this study critically examines the political and economic dynamics, in terms of consumption demand, customs management, and Likin-policy manipulation. This research examines the intricate interplay of these factors that shaped Wuhu's trade landscape.

Furthermore, this research challenges the prevailing market integration theory that seeks to explain grain trade in the Lower Yangtze Delta in Qing China. Contrary to previous studies suggesting robust market integration in the 18th century, this investigation will demonstrate a decline in market integration during late 19th century, following the Taiping Rebellion. Within this context, Wuhu emerged as a prominent domestic rice-trade center. This study posits that three factors significantly contributed to a more disintegrated market economy: the weakening of the central government's power in grain tribute, the rice-opium transaction pursued by local society, and interprovincial Likin manipulations.

Ultimately, the examination of Wuhu's trade development within the broader trend of global trade expansion in the 19th century offers valuable insights into China's market integration and the impact of the treaty-port system. This research will shed light on the complex relationship between central and local governments and the intricate evolution of modern China's economy.

Siping Shan, *Why Could a Late Qing Mongol Prince Not Establish His Own Distillery?*

In the spring of 1891, a secret report presented to the Qing emperor Zai Tian, also known as the Guangxu emperor, indicated that a Mongol prince of the Aohan banner was trying to establish a distillery on his own domain – an issue which obviously proved to be very sensitive to the emperor. Therefore, secret investigators were deployed by the emperor himself, involving officials from the Grand Council to county magistrates, from the imperial censor to local special agents: every level of the imperial administration was set into motion for this investigation.

In this context, there were two key questions which remained unanswered in the report, and which are extremely important for historical research to understand the nature of this event. Firstly, what motivated a distinguished Mongol prince to establish his own distillery? Secondly, why did such behaviour prove so sensitive during the late Qing period? In answering these questions, this paper will reveal the dynamic nature of the Qing frontier policy, as well as the transformation of local society and power structures in Mongolia. Moreover, these changes can be clearly linked to the emergence of an integrated market in pre-modern Asia, with truly global connotations.

**E8: War and The Written Word: Language, Literature and Letters in The Sino-Japanese War and Its Immediate Aftermath**

Panel Abstract:

This panel explores textual culture in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong during the Sino-Japanese War and its immediate aftermath. Featuring three researchers at different stages of their PhDs and one postdoctoral researcher, ‘War and the Written Word’ considers questions of linguistic politics, self-expression and ideological transformation against the backdrop of conflict and its impact on intellectuals and ordinary people.

Paper 1 focuses on the writings of Ding Ling, arguing that we can trace continuity in her writing prior to and after 1942 by focusing on her self-cultivation as an ideal revolutionary, particularly in the dimension of the subject-object relationship between intellectuals and the masses. Paper 2 offers a complementary perspective, looking at the postal service across China during the war to emphasise the importance of letter-writing to ordinary people during a period of strife. Despite shifting the focus to Taiwan, Paper 3 also reaches for understandings of the personal in the writing of war, with a focus on Taiwanese intellectuals and Sino-Japanese self-translation as a site of civic transformation and existential angst post-1945. Lastly, Paper 4 spotlights Hong Kong author Ye Lingfeng, focusing on how his writing negotiated the political dilemmas of the period whilst expressing and reflecting the everyday experiences of war.

In sum, the panel offers a multi-site, multilingual view of textual culture between 1937 and 1947. It showcases the diversity of ongoing research into different forms of writing during this transformative decade in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan’s twentieth-century history.

Chair TBA

Ying Tong, *Revisiting Ding Ling's "New Writing Style": Continuity in Self-Cultivation as a Critical Revolutionary and Writer Before and After the Rectification Movement*

In 1936, Ding Ling (1904-1986), a well-known female leftist writer and activist, arrived at Mao's base in Northwest China and participated in the war effort (1936-1938), socialist practice, and the Rectification Movement (1942-1945) which aimed to unify cadres' thoughts into proletarian ideology. Her later works, such as Tian Baolin田保霖, which focused on peasants, did not exhibit the individual and feminist standpoints found in her stories before 1942. Some argue that this change demonstrates that she submitted to Mao's proletarian discourse and his idea that literature must serve politics. This paper challenges the notion of Ding Ling's submission and demonstrates her intrinsic continuity as a writer and party cadre who consistently reinvented ideal revolutionary subjectivities, both before and after the Rectification Movement. Her writing prior to 1942 had already problematised frustrated sentimental cadres who criticised undesirable external environments, indicating a trajectory in which she tried to address cadres’ internal crisis and the tensions between intellectuals and the masses. Ding Ling's reportage works after 1942, which Mao appreciated as exhibiting a "new writing style," were a continuation of this trajectory regarding self-cultivation and her cognition of proletarians. These works featured documentary details about peasant role models and the absence of the narrator's personal voice. It resulted from her painstaking self-rectification as an empathic observer and humble learner, cautious against intellectual superiority while she lived among the masses. The cancellation of her individual viewpoint thus showcased the robust revolutionary subjectivity she advocated within the new prescribed class order.

Ling-chieh Chen, *Postal Communication and Everyday Life in China during the Second World War*

This paper aims to explore how Chinese people could rely on the postal service in wartime, and to what extent the entire postal system functioned both domestically and internationally for the people during the Second World War. The Second Sino-Japanese War between 1937 and 1945 was the most severe challenge to the Chinese Postal Service ever since its establishment in 1896. It started with the Lugou Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937 and ended with Japan’s surrender in August 1945. It was not just a war in China but was subsequently involved in the Second World War which had wider impact on the international postal service. Although postal communication could be difficult and often interrupted at that time, Chinese wartime diaries, letters and memoirs suggest that the postal service was still available and accessible. To what extent even a basic postal service could be maintained in wartime China? What kind of difficulties did arise? How important was postal communication for the people and society during the war? This paper includes different Chinese people’s wartime experiences from different background to discuss the significance of information and communication in wartime, and evaluate the role of postal communication in people’s daily lives during the war. I argue that the separation caused by the war created greater need for postal communication. Because of the separation from relatives and friends, postal communication was more relied on by the people in wartime. Correspondence became an important part of wartime life in China and comforted people while going through a very difficult time. Meanwhile, the modern postal system played its role to provide a reliable service even beyond the boundaries of hostile regimes and countries. In fact, the postal service was not only just ‘there’, but generally operated surprisingly well even during the war.

Aoife Cantrill, *Like Losing Our Eyes: Translation Politics and Linguistic Grief in Taiwan’s Japanophone Press 1945-47*

Studies of Taiwan in the immediate aftermath of World War Two tend to characterise translation as a tool of state that aided the consolidation of KMT rule following August 1945. Moving away from this depersonalised ‘bird’s-eye’ view of regime change, this paper pivots to consider the personal dimensions of mandatory language change for the creative practice and identity of young Taiwanese authors. Using Japanophone texts from publications such as *New New* (*Xin xin* 新新), I spotlight young Taiwanese intellectuals’ reactions to the imposition of language reform, showcasing a spectrum of emotional responses that range from grief to defiant redefinition. I argue that these perspectives offer essential insights into the effect of language reform on individual writers, particularly as they provide a window on the psychological ramifications of linguistic reform during the brief period when Japanophone and Sinophone columns coexisted in Taiwan’s post-war popular press. Furthermore, I suggest that these texts show how translation should be understood as more than an abstract tool of state during this period by showing how it also served as a site of civic self-transformation and existential angst. Placing these reflections in conversation with the conceptualisation of language reform by official political organisations, in particular The Taiwan Institute for Translation and Compilation (*Taiwan bianyi guan*台灣編譯館), this paper fleshes out the psychological landscape of language reform prioritised by the KMT government in their post-war plans for cultural and linguistic control in Taiwan.

Ryan Choi, *Collaborationist Literature in Wartime Hong Kong: Ye Lingfeng’s Role as a Literary Producer under Japanese Occupation (1941–1945)*

This paper argues that collaborationist literature, widely criticized as the literature of the Han traitor (Hanjian), was often hybrid, adeptly combining a myriad of modernist literary techniques and crossing the boundaries between the popular and the elite. Hong Kong, renowned for its robust print culture, has provided a fertile breeding ground for intellectual exchange and artistic experimentation. Thus, during the Second Sino-Japanese War, a bevy of Chinese intellectuals from Shanghai sought refuge in this city. Nevertheless, the far-reaching impact of the Japanese invasion and subsequent occupation of Hong Kong in 1941 on the city’s cultural and intellectual life is frequently downplayed. Despite the disruptive nature of the war, Hong Kong’s literary scene during the occupation was a complex amalgam of collaboration, resistance, and passivity, with intellectuals exploring divergent perspectives and ideologies. This paper scrutinizes the overlooked collaborationist literature of Hong Kong’s wartime era, with a particular emphasis on the substance and style of collaborationist literature, and investigates the dissemination of literary works during this turbulent period. Ye Lingfeng, the most eminent collaborationist and the overseer of literary publications in occupied Hong Kong, has been unjustly neglected. Therefore, this paper delves into Ye’s literary career in occupied Hong Kong, with a specific focus on his work, “The Erotic and Strange Tales of a Bibliophile,” which skilfully interweaves modernist literary techniques with elements of Chinese and Hong Kong’s culture, allegorically representing the quotidian lives and struggles of the populace amid the dire circumstances of Japanese occupation.

**F1: (ROUNDTABLE) Teaching ‘decolonising’ Chinese History in Britain and Europe: a roundtable discussion**

Roundtable Abstract:

Recent debates, both in public and academic spheres, around the ‘Decolonising the Curriculum’ have witnessed an acute awareness of and increasing urgency to incorporating non-Western history to classrooms in the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) (Royal Historical Society, 2018; Behm et al., 2020). To engage in this important and ongoing conversation, this roundtable reviews the current practice and provision of teaching Chinese, and more generally, East Asian history in several British and European universities. Drawing on participants’ professional experiences as HEI educators, and occasionally, as former postgraduate students in Britain and Asia, and by comparing similarities and differences in regions in the British Isles and continental Europe with an increasingly diverse student body and everchanging public demand, the panel hopes to explore the limitation and potential of what it means to teach Chinese history in the current HEI sector; how this practice is informed by and contributing to a global approach that steers away from the Euro-centric assumptions; and how an East Asian approach can enrich the provision of a broad, Asian and Minority history curriculum within and outside of HEIs. Furthermore, the panel recognises the challenged that, with its long-term imperial and colonial orientation, Chinese history itself implies a different, Sino-centric worldview that is not dissimilar from its European counterpart, albeit in a different spatial and temporal dimension. The aim of this roundtable is to share its participants’ reflections and questions with their fellow colleagues in the audience and, in doing so, further the ‘decolonising’ discussion in our field.

Moderator: Susan Daruvala

Panelists:

Kaori Abe, Song-Chuan Chen, Geng Yushu, Yi Li, Toby Lincoln.

**F2: The Uncertain Present: Stories of suspension in contemporary China**

Panel Abstract:

Nation-building and development projects all across China have encouraged and reinforced certain temporalities that often seek to fix the country’s past, present and future in accordance with coherent and teleological narratives. Sacrifices in the past and present for sake of better futures feature strongly in such stories of progress and growth. However, these narratives are, more often than not, complicated or even ruptured by historical contingencies and the real-life situations of people’s everyday lives in the present. A plan for a museum to celebrate the shared past amongst ethnic groups may never acquire its physical existence. A nation-wide military defence project initiated at the height of Maoist industrialisation may continue to function in the era of market reform, but only in a perpetual state of suspension. A dilapidated inner-city neighbourhood designated to become a heritage site may deprive its residents, mostly migrant workers, of their present means of livelihoods. Entrepreneurs who sought to achieve material success on the China and Vietnam border might find themselves caught in indefinite waiting at high economic costs as cross-border trades are suspended during the pandemic. This panel brings together four case studies, all of which look closely at the uncertainty and conflicts in the present, as people participate in and are implicated by certain state encouraged temporal projects, including urban redevelopment, heritagisation, ethnicization and infrastructural engineering. We see them as stories of suspension and ambivalence that help deepen our understanding of the complex and rapidly changing landscape of China’s uncertain present.

Chair: Harriet Evans

Philipp Demgenski, *Permanently Temporary: Livelihoods of migrant families and the spectre of heritage in contemporary urban China*

The attempt to turn old and dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods into “historical districts” for tourism and consumption has been a common phenomenon across urban China. Such renovation projects, however, frequently run into difficulties as funds dry up, political priorities shift or local leadership changes. A state-sponsored heritage revival and a current political mandate to preserve rather than demolish has made the implementation of urban renewal even more challenging. This paper examines how the fragmented and prolonged process of “heritagization” shapes the livelihoods of migrant families living and working in the old, former colonial town centre of Qingdao. I explore how a sustained state of suspension of urban renewal opened up a concrete space for migrants to exploit the inner city for their own ends and needs, but also how the imminent risk of redevelopment compelled them to be ready to adjust to (un)expected interruptions at any moment. Particularly as the area increasingly became a target of preservation, migrants’ ways of using the physical environment for work were viewed as wrongful representations of the inner city, delegitimized, and deemed inappropriate. In the end, migrant families were driven out of the area without compensation money and deprived of their socio-spatial base to make a livelihood in the city. My ethnographic examples illustrate the permanently temporary existence of migrant families who live in a state of constant instability, which provides a range of precarious opportunities, but also structures their subjectivities, working conditions and family relations in ways that makes any future-oriented planning impossible and pegs them to a haphazard present.

Paul Kendall, *Suspended Construction: The Third Front in the Reform Era*

Recent years have seen a proliferation of scholarly interest in the Third Front, a massive industrial-military project launched in 1964 by the CCP in response to the possibility of attack by either the United States or the Soviet Union. Studies of the Third Front have highlighted the epic migratory journeys and rapid construction efforts of workers, as they were relocated from big cities to build factories from scratch in remote mountain valleys of the Chinese interior. Scholars typically date the end of the Third Front to the late 1970s, in alignment with a tendency to divide PRC history into Mao and post-Mao eras. However, this paper argues that the Third Front did not end with the Mao era, but rather existed in a state of suspension throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as a national priority of the past whose factories and workforce continued to exist in the present. As the diplomatic tensions that produced the Third Front eased, government policy quickly shifted away from this militarised industrialisation of the interior. My case study of Base 083 in southeast Guizhou, however, shows that the physical spaces of the Third Front could not be so quickly transformed. While the base’s work units seemingly provided stabilities of employment, welfare and community, their remote locations rendered them spatial anachronisms amid market reforms, to create a suspended experience of Maoist industrialism. Eventually, most factories went bankrupt or relocated away from the mountain valleys, and workers found themselves on the move again, as part of a project which had supposedly concluded in the late 1970s.

Pan Luo and Lisheng Zhang, *A Museum of Suspension: Displaying Ethnicity at the Chinese National Museum of Ethnology*

The establishment of the Chinese National Museum of Ethnology (CNME) in 1984 was a key effort to consolidate the PRC’s official narrative of ethnicity, made based upon a systematic ‘ethnic identification’ programme during the 1950s. Yet after almost 40 years, the museum has not been granted a permanent venue for exhibition, and has hence been forced to operate on the premise of this suspended existence, caught, as a result, in a quandary where it has to simultaneously meet the needs of knowledge making and propagandist purposes. This paper is an ethnographic exploration of the practices of the CNME as a ‘museum of suspension’ to reflect upon the existing disjunctures between ethnic policies, professional museum work, and anthropological/ethnological knowledge-making. “Suspension” is an adequate trope for our inquiry as it indicates a mode of being constantly shifting, adjusting while staying uncertain towards the future, which describes the CNME’s work of seeking a balance among its functions of research, display, and propaganda [while envisioning change among actors/stakeholders]. Meanwhile this feeling of suspension looms beyond the everyday practice and demands the problematisation of the broader context of understanding ethnicity in China.

Peter Guangpei Ran, *The economy of suspension: The China-Vietnam border in times of Covid*

During the time of the pandemic, the China-Vietnam border was closed down with minimal access to pass. The border town of Auspice, once characterised with vibrant cross-border trades and cargo shipping, went all quiet. Many entrepreneurs from elsewhere had initially come to Auspice after material success promised by China’s increasing interaction with Vietnam and involvement in southeast Asia over the past two decades or so. Their visions of prosperity came to a halt as border control tightened. A number of them subsequently fled at the early days of the pandemic. For those who remained, it was a matter of enduring the uncertainty and indefinite wait with meagre hope for the border to reopen. However, the suspension of border crossing had economic costs. A large sum of the local population was mobilised to engage in border control measures, including stationing along the borderline to prevent illegal immigration. At the same time, the border town itself was designated as a place to contain the positive cases and stop the pandemic spreading further to the hinterland. It accommodated those who tested positive amongst the Chinese returnees from Vietnam as well as those from all around Guangxi Province. Hotels already verging on bankrupting when Covid first broke out, quickly turned into quarantine infrastructure and made swift profits. This paper probes into the political economic processes behind the appearance of quietness, stagnation and inactivity of this border town at the time of the pandemic. While various parties sought to sustain such ostensible ‘peace’, a sense of fear still lingered around as the reported number of positive cases increased day by day. This speaks for the huge pressure and risks undertaken by the local people resulted from deep geo-political inequality that renders the border a particularly precarious place to be in.

**F3: Chinese Film Global: Intermediating Idealism and Realism**

Panel Abstract:

The post-epidemic world seems to hope to sort out a new system, but in their respective societies they are faced with the urgency of deconstruction and reconstruction. This allows us to see more clearly the aftereffect of globalisation - cultural globalisation. The formation of cultural globalisation was initiated alongside the development of globalisation as a whole, and yet the recurrence of localism seems to be happening. Now its progress seemingly comes to ‘revisit the local’, which refer to re-reexamine social meanings of locality based on globalisation. This panel named “Chinese Film Global: Intermediating Idealism and Realism” is to signify the research purpose that contextualizing current Chinese society variation especially the Mainland by focusing the role of media text/genre. It insists media text/genre play a crucial role in reflecting the current trends in the society, promoting cultural identity, collective self-reflection, and transnational cultural consumption. In particular, China’s recent official policy of “telling a good story about China” has resulted in a national movement towards new narratives and media discourse, reflecting their ideas, values, attitudes, and beliefs about life. This has led to the creation of a diverse and significant film industry.

We argue that due to advancements in media technology, media text has become increasingly

complex, and symbols work within a new identity construction. However, post-/structuralism remains a useful and effective theoretical framework for decoding all types of media texts. The panelists attempt to explore macro- and micro-perspectives on life philosophy and cultural attitudes, encouraging self-reflection among social members in the recent Chinese film work. Essentially, the emergence of streaming media has placed diverse media productions within a global context. As a result, transnational aesthetics, production, distribution, and audience practices have become increasingly important. Exploring this trend is helpful to view the development of ‘cosmopolitanism’ on the basis of globalisation.

While the structuralist approach in examining Chinese films remains valuable, the panelists also employ critical perspectives, including historical approaches, contextual analysis, literature reviews, and textual analysis. The panel encompasses various aspects of Chinese cinematography and televisuality, featuring the following presentations: “Global Gaze: Cultural Connotations and Shared Future in Chinese Apocalyptic Movies” examines the cultural implications and the concept of a shared future depicted in Chinese apocalyptic movies. “Lou Ye’s Film Genre: Exploring the Auteur System and Postmodernism” delves into Lou Ye’s distinctive filmmaking style and its connection to postmodernism, showcasing the evolving landscape of Chinese cinema. “Female Gaze: Greed,Gamble, and a Woman Bate-Ficha in *A City Called Macau*” explores the portrayal of female characters in Chinese films, focusing on the challenges, resilience, and social implications faced by women in a male-dominated society. “‘Matching’ in the New-Era: Unveiling Social Values in Chinese Dating Media Culture” investigates the social values embedded within Chinese dating media culture, shedding light on perceptions of love, marriage, gender roles, and family dynamics in contemporary Chinese society. “Investigating the Trans-cultural Visual Style of Hollywood Film Noir in Contemporary Taiwanese Crime-thriller Films: Analyzing the Influence of *Who Killed Cock Robin* (2017)” analyses the influence of classic and neo-noir aesthetics on Taiwanese crime-thriller films, examining the narrative structure, visual style, and cultural context of the film.

The panel offers a comprehensive exploration of Chinese film by incorporating diverse perspectives and interdisciplinary approaches. Its objective is to deepen the understanding of the interplay between idealism and realism in contemporary Chinese cinema. Through the analysis of various genres, cultural connotations, auteurship, female representation, and trans-cultural influences, the panelists aim to illuminate the intricate dynamics of Chinese film within a global framework. Together, these investigations contribute to a nuanced understanding of Chinese cinema's role in shaping cultural identity, reflecting societal trends, and facilitating transnational cultural consumption.

Chair TBA

P.J. Britto, *Global Gaze: Cultural Connotations and Shared Future in Chinese Apocalyptic Movies*

The ‘Mainstream Melody’ genre has served as a means to shape the national image in China’s film and television industry. However, as an imported cultural commodity in China, film possesses global and cross-cultural characteristics. Consequently, the narrative of Chinese films has shifted towards a more profound concern for humanity. Leveraging advancements in filmmaking technology, this genre presents apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction with Asian faces, drawing on Chinese philosophy of life as its core spirit to construct a cross-cultural media text that conveys a Chinese-style community of shared future for mankind. This study conducts a literature analysis to outline the key elements and contextual development of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic movies. Chinese apocalyptic movies, such as “The Wandering Earth” and “The Wandering Earth 2,” have garnered tremendous acclaim in both the domestic and international markets. These films exemplify the strides made by China’s film and television industry in areas like screenwriting, shooting techniques, and post-production special effects. By successfully blending captivating storytelling with advanced cinematic technologies, these movies showcase the industry’s current advancements while captivating audiences worldwide. Applying the theory of cultural dimensions, this study analyzes the filmic use of modern technology to construct a multi-story world and explore numerous Chinese cultural connotations, including family affection and collective interests. It highlights the emotional differences expressed in the doomsday complex between China and the West, characterized by a near-future realism with technological elements.

Liru Li, *Lou Ye’s Film Genre: Exploring the Auteur System and Postmodernism*

China’s social system, often regarded as a fundamental aspect of structuralism, permeates the realm of film and television production, shaping the distinctive styles observed across the five generations of Chinese directors. These directors’ works are closely intertwined with their own social environments. However, the sixth-generation directors, known as the “rebel generation,” demonstrate a strong inclination to challenge the narrative structures employed by their predecessors, both in terms of creative themes and viewpoints. Eager to showcase their unique styles to the world, their creative paths reflect the deepening reforms within the Chinese film system, as well as the dismantling of conventional thinking to forge new directions. Among these directors, Lou Ye emerges as a representative figure whose films have come to epitomize authorship in contemporary China, while also bearing the distinct imprint of postmodernism. This study delves into Lou Ye's films as a model for investigating their distinctive visual styles and underlying influences. Through this exploration, we can reassess the enduring value of auteurism in a time of rapid change. In the current creative landscape, new directors no longer need to endure the "underground creation" days experienced by Lou Ye. Instead, they can draw upon his experiences to provide support and inspiration for aspiring film authors in the new era.

Yiming Wei, *Female Gaze: Greed, Gamble, and a Woman Bate-Ficha in A City Called Macau*

Female figure has taken a significant position on the Chinese screen history that has been related to the slogan “Women can hold up half the sky” put forward by Mao. Following the post-Mao era, the emergence of old concepts had profound social implications, resulting in a lack of nuanced portrayal of female characters, such as personality, in Chinese films. The specific film, “A City Called Macau,” is analyzed to examine the relationship between Chinese female film development and Western feminism, as well as how it exists and transforms within Chinese society. The choice of the film’s protagonist, Xiao-ou, as a Bate-Ficha in a male-dominated gambling casino, adds an additional layer of complexity to the narrative. By portraying a female character in a traditionally male role, the director highlights the struggle and resilience of women within a society that seems dominated by men. Through this representation, the film aims to communicate women's resistance and compromises in the face of prevailing social realities, as well as to address the contemporary needs of Chinese women in diverse circumstances. The portrayal of Xiao-ou as a normal woman enduring hardship while remaining hardworking and determined reflects the broader struggles faced by women in China during the post-socialism era. It serves as a symbol for all women in China who are fighting and working towards a better future.

Mandy Benec, *"Matching" in the New-Era: Unveiling Social Values in Chinese Dating Media Culture*

“Fei Cheng Wu Rao,” released in 2008, is a comedic movie that explores contemporary Chinese notions of marriage and romance, encouraging the phenomenon of dating shows in China’s television landscape. These shows offer a window into contemporary Chinese perceptions of love and marriage, challenging conventional notions of liberated relationships in today's fast-paced society. By examining the genre and dynamics of these programs, this research aims to uncover the underlying social values embedded within them. These dating shows not only feature young men and women as potential partners but also involve their parents, adding a unique dimension to the power dynamics at play. The inclusion of families assessing and evaluating other families for potential matches reveals the enduring influence of parental opinions and in-law relationships on a couple's future in 21st-century China. Conversations and decisions on these shows provide insight into various values, including the definition of a compatible couple, gender roles within marriage, family hierarchy, expectations placed on women, financial requirements for men, and moreover, they shed light on biases, discrimination, and the underrepresentation or invisibility of marginalized groups and minorities in Chinese media. Utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis, this research aims to examine how traditional Chinese family values are either reinforced or challenged by these dating programs. Furthermore, it seeks to understand the national image projected through the values manufactured by popular television shows, which have the ability to reach audiences beyond China's borders. Finally, the study investigates the connection between these values and China's "Socialist Core Values System," exploring the interplay between media representation, societal ideals, and national identity.

Xinchen Zhu, *Investigating the Trans-cultural Visual Style of Hollywood Film Noir in Contemporary Taiwanese Crime-thriller Films: Analyzing the Influence of Who Killed Cock Robin (2017)*

In recent times, the Taiwan film industry has witnessed a surge in crime-thriller productions. These films have employed narrative techniques and visual aesthetics reminiscent of classic and neo-noir Hollywood cinema. However, due to the specific context of the Taiwan film mark et, they also address social issues within Taiwan, presenting a noteworthy endeavor in trans-cultural aesthetic transformation within the film noir genre. This article adopts a case study approach to examine the narrative and visual style of the Taiwanese crime-thriller film *Who Killed Cock Robin* (2017), utilising film narratology and semiotics as analytical frameworks. By considering the fundamental characteristics of classic film noir and neo-noir, the study delves into four key aspects of the film: its themes, characters, visual style, and narrative structure. Findings reveal that the film adeptly appropriates aesthetic elements from classic Hollywood film noir and neo-noir, skillfully embedding Taiwan's distinct local culture and social phenomenon into the narrative, thereby enhancing the complexity of the storytelling and character portrayal through intricate narrative strategies. The character dynamics in the Taiwanese film exhibit a gender configuration reminiscent of classical Hollywood noir films, featuring the love and conflicts between the isolated and decadent male protagonist and the dominant female protagonist. However, due to the multiple characters and intricate plotlines, the deep narrative structure of the film diverges from that of classic Hollywood film noir, signing a cross-cultural negotiation between the director's authorship and the Hollywood aesthetics of film noir. Consequently, Who Killed Cock Robin showcases the distinct contributions of Taiwanese filmmakers to the narrative and aesthetic strategies of the global “neo-noir” genre.

**F4: On the Screen and In the Streets: Discussions On Gender and Queerness in Contemporary China**

Panel Abstract:

This panel broaches gender and sexuality in contemporary China through varied approaches to feminist and queer thinking. Grounded in different forms of text for analysis, we consider spy films, screen adaptations of detective stories, romantic comedies, and drag performances revitalised in the streets of Shanghai as vibrant sites of feminist and queer potential. The papers of *On the Screen and In the Streets* ask an important question: how do we navigate texts and contexts in feminist and queer thought in contemporary China? Acknowledging the heterogeneity in feminism and queer theory as well as the differentially construed epistemology and praxis surrounding the two, their affinities often lie in their common interests in subverting powers. This panel creates a dialogue between the feminist and queer reading of contemporary Chinese cultures.

The presenters will contribute to the panel from diverse research and professional backgrounds. Bingbing Shi explores how the portrayal of female spies in Mai Jia’s novel *The Message* and its screen adaptation can evoke feelings of visual pleasure and patriotism. Louie Liu proposes queer potential in a Chinese romantic comedy despite the observably normative tropes of representation of the cross-dresser. Monica He illuminates the ways in which an adaptative or interpretative strategy can be used to ‘queer’ conventional narratives in detective stories. Maximilian Langefeld investigates the potentials and limitations of contemporary drag performances in Shanghai’s burgeoning ballroom culture as a form of queer visual activism. Chaired by Dr. Ling Tang, the panel will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary feminist and queer cultures in China.

Bingbing Shi, *Literature-to-Screen Adaptations of Female Spy: Body, Trauma and Memory of Second Sino-Japanese War*

This paper examines the impact of media specificity on the memory of the Second Sino-Japanese War by discussing the spy genre films that became popular after 2007, including *Lust, Caution* (色戒), *The Message* (风声) and *Saturday Fiction* (兰心大剧院). Espionage has become a vital element in cultural products and people’s historical imaginations related to the war. While scholars have analysed this genre in the context of post-war politics and the Cold War (Dai 2010), this paper focuses on the “semiotic” and “material-technological” aspects of films (Ryan 2005), such as mise-en-scène, camera-eye narration, and sound. This paper discusses how the film works as an “affective medium,” (Bao 2015) interweaving visual pleasure, heroism, and nationalism into genres of thriller. It also examines this spy film as a continuous genre in the Chinese film industry and describes how the cinema exaggerates and subverts the female figures in the novel, eroticizing the female body to signify national trauma. It argues that the female body has been used to evoke two feelings – visual pleasure and national victimhood, which sometimes have been disguised by the discourse of independent women. By particularly focusing on *The Message*, a novel written by Mai Jia, and its screen adaptations, this paper displays the tensions between the representation of the female body and the discourse of war, national identity and consumerism.

Louie Liu, *Reading Queerness in Lu Ke’s Mr High Heels (2016)*

This paper aims to explore the question: can a queer reading emerge from Lu Ke’s romantic comedy *Mr High Heels* (*高更鞋先生*, 2016)? Unlike grassroots and independent queer filmmaking which is prevalent in the PRC, Lu’s film is a commercially produced fictional drama that has taken a cross-dressing character to the box office in China (线下影院). The film centres on the videogame designer, Hang Yuan, who cross-dresses as his made-up sister, Hang Wen, to win over the woman of his dreams, Li Ruoxin. On the one hand, the film’s representation of cross-dressing can be read as frivolous, to an extent, due to its comedic elements and various gender-normative tropes. On the other hand, a more optimistic and reparative reading can be elicited. This paper argues that it is also through humour, the film exposes the imperfections of heterosexuality and gender norms. In addition, a queer reading can emerge by focussing on the very presence of the cross-dresser and their relations with Li. In reading cross-dressers in different texts, Marjorie B Garber has problematised readings that merely follow the ‘progressive narrative’ which focuses only on the heterosexual coupling at the end of the story. This kind of reading is reductive and ignores the disruptive presence and affective potential of the cross-dresser. This paper seeks to locate the queer potential in *Mr High Heel’s* cinematic representation of cross-dressing.

Monica He, *Queering Detective Stories: Genre, Interpretation, and Gender Norms*

This paper explores the scope of the definition for “queer(ing)” as an adaptive or interpretative strategy in the context of contemporary Chinese detective stories. The discussion revolves around what it means when a detective story is “queered”? Historically, the genre of detective stories is not necessarily queer: a lot of the works have been accused of leaning towards “scientism”, that objectivity and logic are superior, and “gender essentialism”, that gender difference is inherent, while objectivity is “masculine”. Together these form a pervasive heteronormative-cisnormative narrative structure common to many detective stories. However, said narrative structure is never stable, especially when it becomes interpreted by real (as opposed to textually constructed) audiences. Through divergent readings and rewritings (termed “transformative works”), the initial story can undergo a drastic transformation, as the initially rigid narrative structure is subverted by interpreters to such an extent that it may be called “queer”. This paper closely examines how scientism and gender essentialism are deconstructed when the Chinese detective fiction *The Bad Kids* (坏小孩, 2013) is adapted and interpreted. The primary goal is to show how a heteronormative story, constantly under the suspicion of being misogynistic and homophobic, gradually becomes a queer story through its authorised adaptation (2020 web drama of the same title) and unauthorised adaptations (audience rewritings). The less immediate yet equally pertinent goals are to reflect on the genealogy of contemporary Chinese detective stories, as well as the importance of real audiences in the meaning-making of narratives.

**F5: Party Prescriptions under Xi Jinping: Impact on the Grassroots Party Apparatus**

Panel Abstract:

The four research projects in this panel investigate how various party institutions, especially at the lower structures of the party apparatus, have adapted to programmatic and ideological shifts under Xi Jinping. There have been significant efforts to institutionalize greater party discipline, promote party ideology, and ensure greater political conformity for both rank-and-file members and party cadres. How do new prescriptions, expectations, and requirements permeate down to the grassroots level of the party structure? How do party institutions adapt and respond to these changes? From party membership applications, the political activities of party members, the training of political cadres, and to the internal management of rural officials, each paper investigates how different institutions of the party respond to new prescriptions and priorities that come with changes in party leadership. The studies by Mittelstaedt and Chan focus on rank-and-file members and grassroots party cells. They address the notion of convergence and divergence; to what degree do the behaviors and activities of members and party cells conform to new expectations from the centre? The papers by Kubat and Snape address an important question about local governance; how are cadres trained and managed to conform to leadership demands and how does that impact local party institutions.

Chair: Patricia Thornton

Jean Christopher Mittelstaedt, *How Power Bends Time: Fracturing Temporal Patterns in the Chinese Communist Party*

In this study, I investigate the adaptability and resilience of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by examining "Thematic Party Days," local party events designed to reinforce party presence and influence at the local level. Drawing on Christopher Clark's eloquent observation that "as gravity bends light, power bends time," I analyze over 34,000 party events to identify distinct temporal patterns indicative of an internal "Party time" specific to the CCP's grassroots, which diverges from central-level time conceptualizations. I develop a theoretical framework integrating institutional theory and political time concepts to comprehend the implications of this internal "Party time" on local party organizations and the CCP's functioning and survival.

The paper argues that the CCP has constructed its own "time" - Party-time - which is, however, incoherent and fractured across different levels. At the top, the leadership, with Xi Jinping at the helm, adheres to a distinct Party-time punctuated by a procession of meetings and events, including politburo gatherings, plenary sessions, investigation trips, and the annual Beidaihe leadership meeting. These activities form part of the leadership's calendar and signify the "correct" time for document promulgation, slogan modification, model introduction, priority establishment, and campaign and policy initiative launches.

In contrast, at the grassroots level, rank-and-file Party members adhere to a different type of time. Instead of convening meetings, they study them; rather than innovating slogans, they reiterate them; instead of giving speeches, they read them; and rather than launching campaigns, they discuss them. In essence, the grassroots respond to the top while interpreting and adapting their behaviors to suit their local context, such as selectively delving into specific parts of a speech while skimming others. This often puts them at odds with the Party Center and its aims of centralization. This research contributes to the literature on Chinese politics and authoritarian politics in general and enhances our understanding of political time's role in shaping political institutions and processes across various contexts.

Evelyn Chan, *How to Join the CCP: Text Analysis of Party Membership Applications during Xi and Hu-Wen Era*

Membership into the Chinese Communist Party is often portrayed as a perfunctory and formalistic process. For instance, applicants often go online to copy materials for their own applications. Since President Xi Jinping came to power, there have been significant changes to party rule. Greater personalist rule as well as efforts to reinstall party discipline and ideological purity have had significant consequences for party officials at the elite level. How far do these trends permeate down to affect the lowest level of the party organization? How have these changes shaped the standards and content of party membership applications?

Using online templates of party applications, I conduct text analysis using natural language processing models to examine the saliency and frequency of key word phrases. The study seeks to discern if there are meaningful differences in the applications between the Xi and Hu-Wen era. Party membership applications reflect a form of *echoing* in which applicants emphasize their commitment to the goals and priorities of the party. If there are new demands and standards for party admission under Xi, how might they be reflected in these essays? If under Xi’s leadership, there is greater emphasis on ideology, the essays should have more references to official ideology. As well, a shift to a more personalist rule, would also be reflected in essay applications with greater references to Xi as a leader and his political concepts.

Text analysis of these essays demonstrate the extent to which party leaders can elicit political conformity. Personalist rule and stronger ideological standards not only have an effect at the elite level but also matter for ordinary party members. From patterns in key word phrases and topics, we can analyze thematically *what* do Chinese citizens write to join the CCP.

Aleksandra Kubat, *Partitioning the Apparatus: Organisational Adaptation of CCP Training Bureaucracy*

Cadre training apparatus is one of the earliest organisational structures developed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). With its main institutional framework- the Party School system- at the centre, it remains one of the main functional Party bureaucracies, and the only one tasked specifically with shaping and actualising Party cadres’ ideological, political, and professional skills. From courses in Party theory to financial management education, in post-Mao period cadre training apparatus accommodated shifts in party theory, policy language, and regime priorities of subsequent leaders, all the while maintaining its function of perpetuating the communist political regime. While scholars have previously commented on the changes to training content visible in post-Mao period, no systematic approach emerged so far which could elucidate on how this specific Party apparatus accommodates ideological shifts and political reprioritisations. To address this gap, this paper proposes to draw on organisational theory and the concept of *field-partitioning* to capture the structural dynamics within Party training apparatus as it faces new sets of political prescriptions. Focusing on Xi Jinping’s term in office and his political programme, this paper shows that, when asked to accommodate new or conflicting content, cadre training apparatus resorts to structural innovation and creates semi-independent organisational spaces where this new agenda is exclusively pursued. As a result, a specific sub-type of training institutions emerges whose objective is to actualise these new specific prescriptions without negatively affecting the existing ideology of the Party-state.

Holly Snape, *Governing the Governors in Rural China: Party Rules as Quasi-Administrative Law?*

During the first decades of reform and opening, studies explored the evolving rural “self-governance” system and village elections in rural China, contemplating the prospects for promoting good governance and democracy. In recent years, the focus has shifted to the growing likeness of “self-governance” systems to government administration (行政化). Yet today, as in other fields, the Chinese Communist Party is emboldening itself in rural governance structures and processes and changing its relationship with “self-governance organizations” and other non-party entities. While research is already beginning to examine Party building in various fields of policy and governance, there is a lacuna when it comes to the Party’s sweeping internal changes that are rewiring the way the Party governs itself and the implications thereof for governing the behaviour of those who wield power. Critically, but almost entirely overlooked in the literature, the “modernizing” of primary-level rural governance includes stronger internal demands within the Party regarding how it governs the behaviour of its increasingly emboldened Party members and organizations. This paper triangulates documentary analysis of state, Party and Party-and-state documents and regulations with interviews and conversations conducted in spring 2023. It attempts to take a novel approach by questioning the possible role of the Party’s internal rules system as a form of quasi-administrative law.

**F8: Making Do: Politics, Tradition, and Identity in Postsocialist Chinese Visual Cultures**

Panel Abstract:

Postsocialist Chinese art and literature draw on a productive tension between two worlds: the forwardlooking, precarious globalism of the neoliberal marketplace on the one hand, and the nostalgic and ostensibly stable provincialism of socialism “with Chinese characteristics” on the other. In one, it is the disinterested invisible hand which rules, disguising the coercion of the ruling ideology; in the other, it is the visible hand of the state which obscures a status quo in which ad hoc solutions allow an often surprising degree of heterogeneity and spontaneity. However essentialized and enervated, over the last five decades, the “three traditions” of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism have increasingly been incorporated into the authoritarian framework of “socialist spiritual civilization” providing an important outlet for self-expression and religious feeling.

In this panel, three examples of individuals finding their way through this *pas de deux* of state and civil society will be presented, beginning with the cartoonist He Youzhi’s attempt to elevate the artistic “quality” of *lianhuanhua* (comic books) in response to the “Opening Up and Reform” period of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In the span of just a few years, this once privileged medium for the adaptation of texts into visual narratives found itself increasingly out of touch, as translations of foreign language film scripts and novels flooded into the formerly closed off country, resulting in the nugatory Spiritual Pollution campaign of 1983.

This will lead into a discussion of avant-garde art and the New History Group’s use of vocabularies of contagion to explore anxieties about globalisation in Wuhan in the early 1990s. If the decade before had been characterized by a cautious optimism and defiant humanism, then this second decade of reforms saw the rise of the bitter satire of dashed hopes and crass commercialism, characterized by the surrendering of the formerly voluntary path of history to an increasingly mechanical determinism.

Concluding the panel, we look at the post-humanist turn that emerged in recent years through the example of LuYang’s *Gigant DOKU: LuYang the Destroyer* (2021). Specifically, we look at how LuYang challenges the binaries that order Chinese society through the creation of an avatar, DOKU, that straddles the material and virtual, and between presence and absence. Consequently, this digital performance art both reaffirms and denies an end to signification of the body through a Buddhist-inspired rejection and affirmation of the fragmentary, transient self.

Chair: Joshua Jiehong Jiang

Nick Stember, *Provocative Prototypes: He Youzhi and the artistic turn in early Reform era (1976–1986) Chinese comic books*

In the early 1980s the cartoonist He Youzhi was hired with much fanfare to teach lianhuanhua illustration at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. During the same period, He was active contributor to *ART magazine* (*Meishu* 美术), the flagship trade journal for professional artists in the PRC. Sharing backgrounds in print making, and taking classic works of modern left-wing literature as their subject matter, excerpts of several comics authored by He’s trainees were reproduced in *Picture Stories* (*Lianhuanhua Bao* 连环画报).

Drawing on the pioneering work of Yi Gu and Christine I. Ho on the practice of “drawing from life” (*xiesheng* 写生), it will be argued that these works not only provided prototypes for the more “artistic” approach to comics that He was promoting, but further document an attempt to forge new and authentically “Chinese socialist” ways of seeing. Viewed in this light, the collapse of the *lianhuanhua* industry in the mid-1980s and the medium’s contemporary afterlife as a form of “Red nostalgia” can be understood as an example of postsocialist connoisseurship, in which mass art is elevated through curation to the status of high art.

Through the example of He Youzhi, it will be suggested that this transformation is enabled by a form of targeted historical revisionism, in which the heterogenous corpus of *lianhuanhua* is arbitrarily reduced and limited to only the most “outstanding” examples, with a limited number of creators being admitted to the newly formed “canon” of great works. In revealing the essential arbitrariness of the criteria which undergirded this process of canon formation, my intent is not to problematize the canon—i.e. the valuation of certain works over other works—but rather to understand the unique constellation of interests and concerns which led to the formation of this particular canon in this particular place at this particular time.

Jiaqi Kang, *‘China’s art world has the cold and the flu’: ‘Product art’ and the New History Group in 1990s Wuhan*

“In order to breed a ‘healthy’ New History attitude and new humanist art, we are undertaking a series of experiments. […] The extermination of various viral diseases is the preparatory step in our experimental work,” announced the New History Group’s manifesto, distributed as leaflets to unwitting audience members at *Disinfection* (1992): an infamous action that saw the group’s members barge into the Guangzhou Biennial and spray antibacterial fluid all over one of the galleries.

Founded in Wuhan in 1992 and active until the mid-1990s, the New History Group was an art collective that saw themselves as harbingers of a new social and aesthetic age. Eschewing mainstream avant-garde movements in part because of their commercial and international appeal, New History Group sought to “clean up the mess” that was the Chinese art world, which they described as infected with various aesthetic “viruses.” This led them to sardonically create what they called “product art,” which sought to imitate and inhabit the processes of consumerism, marrying art and life in a way they believed Pop Art had never achieved.

This paper will discuss New History Group’s first product art exhibition, *New History 1993 – Great Consumption (1993)*—which they had originally intended to stage at Beijing’s brand-new flagship McDonald’s—alongside *Disinfection* as interventions into China’s emerging art market. Close attention will be paid to group member Ye Shuanggui and his 1993 *Virus Meal*, where he served steamed dough contraptions shaped like monsters to Wuhan restaurant-goers. Ultimately, I showcase that the New History Group’s conceptualist provocation was based in anxieties about Chinese artists' position on the international stage, anxieties that were expressed through a highly politicized vocabulary of sickness, health, and contagion—thirty years before their city would become the epicentre of COVID-19.

Goh Wei Hao, *Nothing Is Real: The Post-human in* Gigant DOKU: LuYang the Destroyer *(2021)*

*Gigant DOKU: LuYang the Destroyer* (2021) — named after the artist’s digital avatar DOKU — is a performance work by Chinese artist 陆扬 LuYang (b. 1984) which features a gigantic version of DOKU shooting lasers out of their eyes to destroy the city they are dancing on. The digital avatar was created using the artist’s face while their movement patterns are performed by a dancer and then recorded using motion capture technology and projected onto the work in real-time.

Through an analysis of this work, I look at how LuYang and DOKU subvert the different humanist systems that seek to control them — namely, gender binaries and the idea of a digital/‘real’ world divide — by creating a fragmented body that is capable of being endlessly destroyed and ‘reincarnated’ into different post-human bodies — recalling Buddhist traditions which the artist is inspired by. This subversion is achieved through the creation of different unique versions of DOKU through the utilisation of different digital technologies, such as motion-capture technology and virtual reality, and performance tactics that ensure each performance of the work is unique.

More importantly, the ability to create endless versions of DOKU challenges the process of signification itself as it suggests that the body is merely representational, made up of endless signs that are not inherently meaningful. I conclude, however, by discussing how and why this post-human body still possesses many humanist characteristics as it is still premised on the creation of ‘coherent’ bodies that can be understood by audiences as subversive. This is ultimately achieved through the use of symbols coded with humanist language such as religious and pop-culture iconography.