



Center for Global Asia  
环球亚洲研究中心



复旦大学亚洲研究中心  
ASIA RESEARCH CENTER  
FUDAN UNIVERSITY

Co-sponsored by Global Perspectives on Society program

# 5th Young Scholars Symposium Asia and the World

## Abstract and Bios

Conference Room E903-E904, New Bund Campus, NYU Shanghai

**11-13 April 2024**

The Young Scholars Symposium on “Asia and the World” is organized by the Center for Global Asia and the Global Perspectives on Society program of NYU Shanghai, and the Asia Research Center of Fudan University. It brings together doctoral and postdoctoral fellows at NYU Shanghai and other universities in China to share insights into issues pertaining to Asia in a global context. This is the fifth year of the symposium and it is open to scholars working on Asia-related topics, especially those who explore transregional connections, disconnections, and comparisons. The symposium welcomes scholars from a range of disciplines as well as those engaged in interdisciplinary studies. Participants can focus on topics on history, art, literature, society, archaeology, anthropology, and cultural studies, and examine and expand the ever-changing intellectual boundaries of academic scholarship on Asia and the broader world from different temporal perspectives. We will also have participants, young scholars as well as faculty members, from Peking University, Fudan University and Zhejiang University, who will share their research on the study of Asia.

**Thursday, 11th April 2024**

**Keynote Address by Lin Zhang**

**Lin Zhang (University of New Hampshire)**

*Entrepreneurial Labor and the China Paradigm: The Story of Taobao Villages*

Bio

Lin Zhang is an associate professor of Communication at the University of New Hampshire. Her research centers on critical innovation studies, platform studies, and intersectionality, focusing on China and ethnic Asian people in a global and comparative context. A communication scholar by training, her interdisciplinary research engages Asian/Asian American Studies, Science and Technology Studies (STS), Economic Geography, and Anthropology. She is the author of *The Labor of Reinvention: Entrepreneurship in the New Chinese Digital Economy* (Columbia University Press, 2023). Currently, she is working on a new monograph about China's biotech industry and US-China transnational linkages in biotech and bioscience.

Abstract

From start-up founders in the Chinese equivalent of Silicon Valley to rural villages experiencing an e-commerce boom to middle-class women reselling luxury goods, the rise of internet-based entrepreneurship has affected every part of China. For many, reinventing oneself as an entrepreneur has appeared to be an appealing way to adapt to a changing economy and society. Yet in practice, digital entrepreneurship has also reinforced traditional Chinese ideas about state power, labor, gender, and identity.

In this talk, Dr. Lin Zhang will tell one story about the entrepreneurial labor of reinvention from her recently published book *The Labor of Reinvention: Entrepreneurship in the New Chinese Digital Economy*. Focusing on rural e-commerce and the “Taobao Villages” phenomenon, she will depict, with rich ethnographic details, how domestic e-commerce corporations like Alibaba work with various levels of governments to facilitate city-to-countryside reverse migration, brand model peasant entrepreneurs, and shape a new entrepreneurial labor regime and subjectivities. Problematizing worldwide euphoria about digital entrepreneurship while complicating the dichotomy of “China threat vs. China model”, she argues for a “China Paradigm” that treats the Chinese experiences as an ongoing and open-ended experiment to rearticulate global principles to local trajectories in dealing with worldwide challenges posed by decades of neoliberal capitalism.

**Friday, 12th April 2024**

**Opening Remarks by David Atwill (NYU Shanghai)**

**David Atwill (NYU Shanghai)**

Bio

David G. Atwill is the Dean of Arts and Sciences at NYU Shanghai. As Dean, he is responsible for academic affairs, curriculum coordination, and intellectual development of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Atwill received his BA (1989) from Whitman College, and his MA (1994) and PhD (1999), in History, from University of Hawai'i, Manoa. A renowned historian of China and of ethnicity in early modern and modern China, Professor Atwill comes to NYU Shanghai from Pennsylvania State University, where he was Director of Graduate Studies in the History Department for seven years, and has chaired and served on committees pertaining to promotion and tenure, research funding, faculty mentorship, curriculum, accreditation, and many other such issues.

**Symposium Overview by Tansen Sen (NYU Shanghai)**

**Tansen Sen (NYU Shanghai)**

Bio

Tansen Sen is Professor of History and Director of the Center for Global Asia, NYU Shanghai. He received his MA from Peking University and a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He specializes in Asian history and has done extensive research on China and other Asian countries.

**Panel 1: China in International Affairs**

**Chair: Ivan Rasumussen (NYU Shanghai)**

**Ivan Rasumussen (NYU Shanghai)**

Bio

Ivan Willis Rasmussen is the Undergraduate Coordinator of Social Sciences and Associate Professor of Practice in Political Science at NYU Shanghai. Prior to joining NYU Shanghai, he was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Government at Hamilton College and a Research Fellow with the International Security Program at Harvard Kennedy School's Belfer Center. His research has appeared in the *Asian Journal of Public Affairs* and the *Chinese Yearbook of International Law and Affairs* with a recent co-authored book, *At the Dawn of Belt and Road: China in the Developing World* (RAND Report).

**Shashwat Singh (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Harvard Yenching Institute Visiting Scholar, Fudan University)**

*Chinese Images of International Politics in Pre-Qin Political Philosophy and its Implications for IR Theory*

Bio

Shashwat Singh is a PhD Candidate in International Politics at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, where he researches Chinese approaches to IR theory and Sino-Indian relations. He is the recipient of ICS-Harvard-Yenching Institute Doctoral Fellowship for China Studies 2022 and is currently a visiting researcher at Fudan University, Shanghai, for the academic year 2023-24.

Abstract

How does Chinese history and philosophy of the pre-Qin period conceptualize politics? What do philosophers of the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period have to say about problems of political formation and relations among political entities? How do they conceptualize international relations? What are their foremost concern in international politics? And where do they situate the causes of war and disorder in international relations? This paper looks at Chinese approaches to international relations (IR) theory that are rooted in pre-Qin political history and philosophy. Doing so, it identifies and engages with recent developments in Chinese IR theory, traces its roots in the broader disciplinary trends of non-Western IR and explores how Chinese traditions of political thought can add to the efforts to Globalize IR from a mere Western ethnocentric discipline to a global academic enterprise. This paper surveys the existing schools of Chinese IR – the Tsinghua School and the Relationalist School of Chinese IR – and discusses their epistemic and methodological contributions. Critically engaging with these approaches, the paper highlights the problem of imposing western philosophical concepts of politics onto Chinese thought and history and how it constricts the development of Chinese IR. It also discusses the problem of presentism in Global IR paradigm and identifies possible solutions to it. In conclusion, this paper paints a brief sketch of how pre-Qin philosophy and history can be leveraged to develop a novel approach to study of international politics and international relations theory.

**Haoyue Li (Zhejiang University)**

*Harmony in Debate: An Inquiry into the Environmental Discourse in Contemporary China*

Bio

Haoyue Li, an associate professor of Sociology at Zhejiang University, specializes in the intersection of environmental politics and cultural meanings, with an emphasis on China in the globe. Her work has appeared in journals such as Qualitative Sociology, Journal of Rural

Studies, Global Media and Communication. She is currently working on her book, *“Crisis, Legitimation and Contention”*.

### Abstract

This research project focuses on the evolution and transformation of environmental discourse in the Chinese domestic and global public spheres. Within the domestic realm, the inquiry aims to discern whether the Chinese state consolidates or decentralizes its power when shaping public discourse on environmental issues. I argue that the state orchestrates a nuanced interplay of power control and power-sharing with the civic public in discussing environmental issues. The investigation also extends to the global public sphere, where the inquiry revolves around China's global power struggles, particularly in response to President Xi's call to craft a compelling Chinese narrative that can rival Western narratives. The findings systematically illuminate the evolution of state, civic, and global discourse, unveiling corresponding tactics and circumventing strategies, and underscore the possibility of relative autonomy within the public sphere.

### **Bhagya Senaratne (NYU Shanghai)**

*BRI Infrastructure in Sri Lanka: Examining the Vernacular*

### Bio

Bhagya Senaratne is a Postdoctoral Fellow of Global Asia at the Center for Global Asia, NYU Shanghai. Previously, she was a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Strategic Studies, at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University, Sri Lanka (KDU) for close to a decade. Her research at the Center for Global Asia focuses on the BRI in South Asia, focusing on vernacular literature. She researches and teaches on areas related to Foreign Policy Analysis (Sri Lanka, China, U.S.), Diplomacy, Strategic Communications and Maritime Security. You can find more details on her personal website [www.bhagyasenaratne.com](http://www.bhagyasenaratne.com)

### Abstract

Sri Lanka was one of 23 countries to join the BRI as a founding member state in 2014. Infrastructure projects in Sri Lanka are often cited internationally as case studies when critiquing the BRI. Large-scale infrastructure projects such as the Hambantota Port and the Colombo Port City are two such projects that are considered as not being viable. This research paper contributes to the ongoing global discourse surrounding infrastructure development projects linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with a particular focus on Sri Lanka. Despite the significant impact of these projects, the voice of the Sri Lankan vernacular has remained conspicuously absent from scholarly investigations. Within this context, the study aims to address two central inquiries: Firstly, what narratives and perspectives emerge from the Sri Lankan vernacular regarding BRI-related infrastructure development initiatives? Secondly, how do these vernacular interpretations shape the

discourse surrounding BRI projects within Sri Lanka? To address these questions, this paper relies on several primary sources of data, such as over 200 vernacular sources of literature: scholarly articles and media reports, interviews with bureaucrats and data from various ministries of the Government of Sri Lanka. Through a rigorous analysis of the content, it highlights themes from the Sri Lanka vernacular that provides multifaceted perspectives from within Sri Lanka towards Chinese infrastructure development projects within their country. This contributes valuable insights to the broader discourse on the BRI and its engagements in Sri Lanka from an economic, political and security perspective.

**Pawan Damodar Amin (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Harvard Yenching Institute Visiting Scholar, Fudan University)**

*China and the UNSC on Military Intervention in Asia*

### Bio

Pawan is a recipient of the Harvard Yenching Institute – Institute of Chinese Studies PhD Fellowship. He is a PhD candidate at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and is presently a visiting research scholar at Fudan University, Shanghai. His doctoral thesis explores the evolution of China's ties with the United Nations and he has a keen interest on the history of China's foreign policy.

### Abstract

This paper examines China's approach to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) debates on military intervention in Asia through a comprehensive case study analysis. Focusing on significant conflicts such as the Gulf War, the Afghan Civil War, the Iraq War, the East Timor Crisis, the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, and the Yemeni Civil War, the study investigates China's diplomatic strategies, voting patterns, and stance on proposed military interventions. By analyzing China's participation in these debates, the paper aims to uncover the underlying factors influencing China's position, including principles of sovereignty, regional stability, and strategic interests. The paper also explores the implications of China's stance on conflict resolution efforts, peacekeeping initiatives, and regional security dynamics in Asia. Through an in-depth examination of each case, the study seeks to provide valuable insights into China's role in shaping UNSC discussions on military intervention and its broader approach to multilateralism in the context of Asian security challenges.

## **Panel 2: Buddhism in Asia: Past and Present**

**Chair: Jiamei Zhang (Peking University)**

## **Jiamei Zhang (Peking University)**

### Bio

Dr. Zhang Jiamei is Vice Dean and associate professor at the Department of South Asian Studies, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University. From 2004 to 2018, she visited Pakistan several times and participated in academic conferences and cultural exchange activities. In 2019, she was a visiting scholar at the Center for Religious Studies, Princeton University, USA. Her major research papers have been published in *South Asian Studies*, *Oriental Studies*, *Area Studies Journal of Peking University*, *Literature and History of Western Region*, etc. At present, she has published translated works such as *Track on Alexander's* and *Selected Poems of Pakistan*. She is the chief editor of the book "*Gandhara's Smile: A Tour of Pakistan's Monuments and Relics*". Member of the review group for the second and third volumes of the Urdu translation edition of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*. Presided and participated in a number of research projects at the home country and abroad.

## **Lele Huang (Peking University)**

*The Evolution of Avalokiteśvara's Iconography in Ancient India*

### Bio

Lele Huang, a Chinese National born into a Buddhist family, is currently doing her post-doctoral research at Research Center for Buddhist Texts and Art, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, Beijing, China. She completed her M.A., M.Phil. and Ph.D. from School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. Her research is focused on Buddhist Art and Architecture.

### Abstract

*Avalokiteśvara* (Deity who looks down) is a Bodhisattva who is believed to have made a great vow to assist sentient beings in times of difficulty and to postpone his own Buddhahood until he has assisted every sentient being in achieving nirvana. Among all the Bodhisattvas, *Avalokiteśvara* becomes the most important deity and is popularised throughout *Mahāyāna* and *Tantrayāna/Vajrayāna* Buddhism. *Avalokiteśvara*, the perfect embodiment of compassion, is deemed as important because he is said to be the Bodhisattva who straddles the period between the *Śākyamuni* Buddha and the advent of the future Buddha, i.e., *Maitreya*. He lives to work for the people as a guide toward knowledge and self-realization, i.e., to kill ignorance. This paper is going to look at the iconography of *Avalokiteśvara* in its homeland, i.e., India, during different time periods. Some interpretations and new lines of investigation to better understand the transformation of *Avalokiteśvara* and study some of those ideas reflected in the Indian images will be added as well in this paper.

## **Ziqi Hu (Peking University)**

*The Praise for Buddha in Inscriptions of Āndhradeśa before A.D. 300*

### Bio

Ziqi Hu, Ph.D. Candidate in the Department of South Asia Studies, School of Foreign Languages of Peking University. My research focus is Buddhism in Andhradeśa, early Buddhist literature, and inscriptions in south Asia. I'm working on my dissertation on Buddhism and society in Andhradeśa before 5th century AD. Published papers: Buddhist Cave Temple Records in Foguo ji and Datang xiyu ji; From India to Kizir: A Research of the Background and Evolution of Image "Indra's visit to the Indraśaila Cave".

### Abstract

The words praising the merits and virtues of the Buddha are found in the inscriptions of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda in the Andhra region before the third century AD. The study examines the meanings of the words and their usages in different literatures, especially in early Buddhist texts, sheds light on the concept of Buddha in the Andhra region. The praise in the inscriptions not only reflects the supermundane nature of the Buddha advocated by the Mahasamghikas, but also implies the worship of the Buddha's Dharmakaya. The same words are shared by the keepers of sutra in the Saddharmapūṇḍarīkasūtra, which reflects the intention of Saddharmapūṇḍarīkasūtra shifting to the worship of the sutra.

## **Xiaonan Li (Peking University)**

*From Scripts to Murals: Exploring the Inscriptions and Wall Paintings of Cave 16 in Bezeklik, Xinjiang*

### Bio

Xiaonan Li is a postdoctoral fellow at the School of Foreign Languages, Peking University, specializing in Sanskrit-Tibetan grammar, Buddhist literature, and inscriptions in Xinjiang cave temples. She embarked on her academic journey by enrolling in the Zero Beginner Class for Tibetan Language and Literature at the Institute of Tibetan Studies, Minzu University, in 2011. In 2016, she pursued advanced studies in Indian Language and Literature at Peking University. During this time, she undertook short-term academic visits to prestigious institutions such as the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations in France and the University of Cambridge. Benefiting from the China Scholarship Council's Joint Ph.D. Program, she conducted doctoral research at Harvard University from 2022 to 2023. In 2023, she was awarded a Ph.D. in Indian Language and Literature from Peking University.



## Abstract

Xinjiang has served as a crucial hub for cultural exchange and civilizational interaction in China throughout history. Particularly significant in this regard was its role in the development of Buddhism, acting as a crucible where various traditions converge. It protected the tradition as well as fostered innovation. This article delves into the exploration of a cave, established in the 13th century, which embodies this amalgamation of influences. Drawing inspiration from the artistic styles of Qiuci to the east, while also preserving the ancient traditions of the Sārvāstivāda school, the cave stands out for its remarkable wall paintings that depict scenes in which the Buddhist dharma is being preached. These paintings are accompanied by inscriptions in verse, further enhancing their significance. Excavated by expeditions from Germany, Russia, Japan, and the United Kingdom, some of the cave's paintings or portions thereof were removed and are now housed in museums and institutions abroad.

The primary objective of this study is to reconstruct the fragmentary paintings, and to attempt to re-assemble the fragments into a relatively cohesive whole. Additionally, the study aims to elucidate the sources of the inscriptions and analyze the depictions portrayed in the paintings. By undertaking this endeavor, which has not been previously explored by scholars, this research offers a fresh perspective on the art and historical documents of Xinjiang, enriching our understanding of its cultural heritage.

## **Huiyuan Bian (Peking University)**

*Cultural Construction and National Identity in Modern India: The Buddhist Path of "Indian Xuanzang"*

## Bio

Huiyuan Bian, received her Ph.D from the Dep. of South Asian Studies, School of Foreign Languages, Peking University in 2022, now conducts postdoctoral research in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Peking University. Her current research is focused on Nalanda Mahavihara and Sino-Indian cultural exchange.

## Abstract

The making of a nation-state is inseparable from the construction of a national academic system, in which national language and culture is often the most powerful means of shaping national identity. In the cultural initiative of constructing national identity in modern India, Buddhist thoughts and its historical narrative once became a utilizable medium for shaping common historical memory and reviving the value of Indian civilization, and then became an integral part of the ideology and discourse of Hindu nationalism, serving the political and economic strategies. In this article, we will use the reminiscence of Lokesh Chandra (1926- ), Vira's son, and the Hindi diary of the three-month visit to China left behind by Vira

as the main clues to examine the reasons that triggered the dramatic change in the attitudes of the linguistic and cultural scholar towards China. It has been proved that Vira's interest on Buddhist texts and art, in addition to his admiration for eternal human values and oriental spiritual heritage, had the urgent practical consideration, that is to make Buddhism the common spiritual value foundation and ideological resource for India to establish national consciousness internally, and to build a cultural network externally. In addition, the life story of Raghu Vira mirrors the exchanges and interactions of Buddhist thoughts and culture among China, Japan, and India in the modern era, which has truly influenced and involved in the course of Asian history.

### **Jinyi Ruan (Peking University)**

*Tracing the Nun Utpalavarṇā: A Case Study of Buddhist Narrative Iconography in Transcultural Context*

#### Bio

Jinyi Ruan is a post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Southern Asia Studies at Peking University. She received her PhD in art history, whose research has been focusing on Buddhist art and Chinese art history.

#### Abstract

Among the Buddha's disciples, the nun Utpalavarṇā who has attained a prominent place in Buddhist literature is a fairly complex and multidimensional female character. Texts from various periods, regions, and sources reflect different facets of her personality or behaviors, including her chequered experiences before the renunciation of worldly life, the miraculous power present at descent of the Buddha from the Trayastriṃśa (Sanskrit) or Tāvatiṃsa (Pāli), and additionally her disputable sex. It has been noted that such a repository of stories has given rise to a range of visual narratives. By re-examining images related to the theme throughout ancient Gandhara, Mathura and Northeast India, as well as Xinjiang, Tibet, and even the Central Plains of China, we can find out that, on one hand, the existing images of Utpalavarṇā are all placed in the episode of the Buddha's descent from Trayastriṃśa, the majority of which are presented in the form of single-scene illustrations bearing remarkable similarities; On the other hand, the intriguing differences are revealed both in the overall pictorial configuration and the nuances of the depictions of Utpalavarṇā, for instance, her alternative appearances as bhikṣuṇī or "nun-emperor", positions, postures and even the facial expressions. The paper attempts to classify the visual traditions of Utpalavarṇā into different types and preliminarily discuss their possible textual sources, thus arriving at an observation in the transcultural context of the image-text intertextuality.

## Panel 3: Visual Arts and Literature in Global Asia

Chair: Mengdie Zhao

### **Mengdie Zhao (NYU Shanghai)**

#### Bio

Mengdie Zhao is a scholar of Chinese literature with interests in legal history and gender studies. She received her PhD in Chinese literature from Harvard University in 2022. Prior to joining NYU Shanghai, she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Society of Fellows in the Humanities at the University of Southern California.

Currently, Mengdie is working on her book project, tentatively titled *Shades of Justice: Law, Legal Culture, and Literary Experimentation in Early Modern China*. This project examines the formation of new literary genres and narrative patterns in crime stories from the 15th to the early 20th century, coinciding with the expansion of the judicial infrastructure. Additionally, the book undermines unconventional critiques of law and presents alternative visions of justice as depicted in these popular literary texts.

### **Warren A. Stanislaus (NYU Shanghai)**

*Laughing at civilization: The Japan Punch, treaty port media and the reopening of Great Britain*

#### Bio

Dr. Warren A. Stanislaus is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow for Global Perspectives on Society (GPS) at NYU Shanghai. He received his PhD in history at the University of Oxford. With a particular focus on East Asia in the world, his research and teaching interests include transnational histories of emotions, music, emerging media, and the formation of popular cultures and identities across borders. Published in the Japan Forum, Warren's article, "From Cool Japan to Cold Japan: Grime Cyborgs in Black Britain," was awarded the 2022 Ian Nish Prize for best article by the British Association for Japanese Studies. Originally from South East London, UK, Warren studied and worked in Tokyo, Japan for 14 years.

#### Abstract

The story of the nineteenth century "Opening of Japan" has become central to the retelling of Japan's modern history and has shaped our understanding of Japan's encounters with the wider world. The notion of the "Opening" has almost always been associated with state actors, international relations and national building. The historiography traces a

unidirectional flow of knowledge from West to East, which initiated Japan's inevitable entry into a historical process of globalization and the spatial-temporal order of Western civilization discourse and modernity. Non-state transnational connections, multi-directional transfers and the emergence of competing visions of progress have been precluded from this established narrative. In this paper, I reexamine the popular illustrated satirical magazine *Japan Punch*, published in the Yokohama treaty port, and circulated for a global English-speaking audience by the British correspondent and artist Charles Wirgman from 1862 until 1887. Rather than a simple case of Victorian imperial values being imposed in a new context, or of asymmetrical power relations being duplicated through media and humor, I instead uncover in Wirgman's cartoons the use of laughter as a device for challenging and inverting the premise of "Western civilization" itself. I explore the origins and development of the *Japan Punch* as a publication, which used satire to disarrange the distinctions between West and East, center and periphery, colonizer and colonized, and civilized and uncivilized that iterations of *Punch*-style media in other parts of the world, whether they had pro- or anti-colonial agendas, widely accepted.

**Yiran Chen (Fudan University)**

*"Colonization" in Chinese Overseas Expedition Fiction (1900–1920)*

Bio

Yiran Chen, now conducting postdoctoral research at Fudan University, earned her PhD in Chinese from the University of Edinburgh in 2022. Her current research interest lies in the portrayal of the southwest primitive wilderness in martial arts fiction (1912–1949).

Abstract

The theme of sailing to foreign lands and establishing new settlements on uncharted islands was recurring yet under-discussed in late-Qing and Republican Chinese literature. The discourse and literature surrounding overseas expeditions is multifaceted and requires a comprehensive approach involving narrative analysis, semantic interpretation, referencing written press, and examining the perspectives of influential thinker(s) to fully comprehend its complexities. During the late Qing and early Republican period in China, *zhimin* 殖民 was a term that encompassed both colonization (the act of political domination and exploitation of foreign territories by powerful nations, often referred to as imperialism, involves the settlement of colonizers and exploitation of local resources, disregarding the opposition of native populations) and the self-determined migration of individuals, without the interference of a dominant ruling authority. In the Chinese context, the word "zhimin" might not carry aggressive implications, but rather reflect the practical and existential struggle of the Chinese people who felt "homeless" or "landless" at that time. This dilemma sheds light on why, between 1900 and 1930, there was a surge in "overseas expedition" fiction that enthusiastically imagined Chinese explorers embarking on adventurous voyages

and settling in sparsely populated foreign lands. Through these works of fiction, it is evident that the Chinese yearned for a peaceful place of prosperity, physical prowess to overturn the imagery of the "East Asian sickman," and a top spot in the global hierarchy of civilization.

### **Jay Ke-Schutte (Zhejiang University)**

*Pastoral Parodies and Re-Orienting Orders: Xu Bing's Background Story 7 at the British Museum*

#### Bio

Jay Ke-Schutte is an interdisciplinary ethnographer at Zhejiang University. Their work concerns Afro-Chinese interactions, the semiotics of human communication, and theories of (syn)aesthetics. More recently their work explores shared communicative foundations of language, music, historicity, and art.

#### Abstract

A recent trans-disciplinary reflexivity around museum coloniality and cultural appropriation has revealed a virtual 'common sense' within the Anglosphere around matters of non-Western representation in Western art worlds from Benin Bronzes to Ming and Qing Dynasty artifacts in the British Museum. Many intellectual reactions, finally taking seriously the proposition of repatriation or at least the recognition of compromised identities at stake (individual, social, and intersocietal), have been remiss in two important regards: firstly, in critically considering the epistemic ecology within which certain orientations of 'exotic' consumption emerged in Britain; and secondly, in presuming reflexive responses to coloniality and appropriation to be mute, absent, or characterized only in the form of revenge, outrage, or the Manichean definition of victims and perpetrators. Critically considering contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing's 2011 re-animation of a landscape piece by Wang Shiming – an artist active on the cusp of the Ming and Qing dynasties – at the British Museum, this paper considers a cultural dialogue across time: that between the British aesthetic proclivity for pastoral themes in their consumption of an array of exotic alterities; and Xu Bing's troping on this consumptive and representational legacy: The former being evidenced by the incorporation of Wang Shiming's and other Chinese artistic works within British collections; while the latter is explicated not only through the theme of Xu Bing's installation, but also through *Background Story 7's* selection of materials and modes of gathering. These selections and gatherings on the one hand parody an Anglo-pastoralist episteme, and on the other re-orient our gaze toward questioning inversions of semiotic and aesthetic order that engender speculative visions of productive dialogues around difference and shared human futures.

## **Keynote Address by Yongjia Liang**

### **Yongjia Liang (Zhejiang University)**

*Sinic Perspectivism in multi-universal epistemes: A Proposal for Chinese Area Studies*

#### Bio

Yongjia Liang is Qiushi Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Department of Sociology and Director of the Institute of Anthropology, Zhejiang University. In addition to numerous Chinese publications, he publishes with *American Anthropologist*, *Religions*, *China Review*, the *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, and *Routledge*. He is currently interested in social scientific knowledge production, religion and nation-building, and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

#### Abstract

Chinese Area Studies faces skepticism due to the immense volume of knowledge it encompasses. However, I propose a counterargument through the notion of "Sinic Perspectivism," which acknowledges multi-universal epistemes in a world of global diverse cultural systems. Rather than merely collecting information, Area Studies should interpret data through our unique perspectives, transcending the practice of provincializing Europe or unmasking orientalism. This approach reorients knowledge production to generate insights into global phenomena using diverse cultural frameworks. Thus, Area Studies offers an opportunity to broaden our understanding of China by embracing multi-universal perspectives. I will elucidate my arguments by analyzing a Melanesian exchange system through the lens of Laozi.

**Saturday, 13th April 2024**

## **Panel 4: Transnational/transregional Encounters**

**Chair: Sangeeta Banerji (NYU Shanghai)**

### **Sangeeta Banerji (NYU Shanghai)**

#### Bio

Sangeeta Banerji is an Assistant Professor of Human Geography in Humanities at NYU Shanghai, interested in the politics of informality within the cities of the Global South. Working at the intersection of anthropology of the state, Urban Studies and Development Studies, she is deeply influenced by a post-colonial and feminist perspective. After serving as an activist, urban planner and researcher in varying institutions of the megacity of

Mumbai, she started studying the role of fixers in making the urban planning bureaucracy within the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) visible to the public. In her research she illustrates that the fixers formulate the underlying geographical processes which variously shadow, support, and subvert the postcolonial bureaucracy.

**Ruiyi Zhu (NYU Shanghai)**

*Unfaithful interpreters: quotidian translation, perilous sexuality, and the anxious labor of mediation at a Chinese mine in Mongolia*

Bio

Ruiyi Zhu is a social anthropologist with a keen interest in the Sino-Mongolian interface. Her doctoral research is an ethnographic exploration of Chinese capital and labor in Mongolia's post-socialist extractive economy – a microcosm of China's recent global influence caught in complex and often fraught historical entanglements. She received her BA in History at Pomona College and completed her MPhil and PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. She is currently a Global Perspectives on Society postdoctoral fellow at NYU Shanghai.

Abstract

This article focuses on the quotidian translation activities at a Chinese mine in eastern Mongolia. I argue that interpreters not only bridge the linguistic and cultural gaps between Chinese foremen and Mongolian workers but more importantly, maintain a buffer between the two parties. Drawing on the anthropology of mediation, I examine the interpreters' backgrounds, positionalities, and functions in the Sino-Mongolian industrial sphere. Rather than acting as passive intermediaries, the interpreters assume the agentic role of mediators who navigate difference, distance, and, crucially, anxieties over “bastardry” (*erliiz* in Mongolian) at a contentious interface. Despite their reliance on translation, monolinguals on both sides cast suspicion on the moral character of bilingual interpreters, a contemporary iteration of deep-rooted interethnic mistrust fused with fears of China's capitalist expansion.

**Yu Qiu (Zhejiang University)**

*'We Africa has Pusa (Bodhisattva), too': the poetics of relevance in Afro-Asian cultural encounter*

Bio

Yu Qiu is a social anthropologist interested in intimacy, migration, ethics, and identity politics. She has conducted empirical research on various forms of Afro-China encounters in Nigeria, Tanzania, and China. Holding an M.Phil. and a Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the

University of Cambridge, she is ZJU100 Young Professor in Social Anthropology at Institute for Advanced Study in Humanities and Social Sciences at Zhejiang University.

### Abstract

This paper is about how a cultural heuristic model of relevance helps us understand contemporary forms of Afro-Asian trans-regional cultural encounter. Drawing from an ethnographic case of a committed young Tanzanian's initial engagement with Buddhism at a Chinese-sponsored temple in Tanzania, this paper explores how a seemingly 'unsuccessful' attempt of religious conversion has brought significant epistemic and ethical changes to his personal life. Particular attention has been put to this young man's re-positioning of deities, spirits, indigenous religious practice in relation to his ethical pursuit. The paper continues to argue the importance of analogical reasoning between Buddhism and African traditional religion in helping post-colonial African subjects incorporate what appears to be an initially foreign religious tradition. In so doing, this paper promotes a heuristic model of relevance, that is, the ways in which novel information and experiences are made *connected* to individuals' epistemic and cultural regime, in analyzing trans-regional cultural encounters. At the same time, in promoting a diffusive, unrooted perspective on the intricate processes of cultural transmission and translation, it also debunks an ethnocentric notion of 'global China' in understanding the multi-layered Afro-Asian religious and cultural exchanges.

### **Tongyu Wu (Zhejiang University)**

*Embedding Asian Societies within the Global AI Production Chain: Labor, Technology, and Transregional Dynamics*

### Bio

Tongyu Wu is a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Sociology at Zhejiang University. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology and a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from the University of Oregon, complemented by a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology with a minor in Chinese Literature from Sun Yat-sen University. Wu's research embodies an interdisciplinary approach, situated at the intersection of labor, technology studies, globalization, and gender. Her latest work, a forthcoming book titled *Playing to Submission: Gaming Capitalism in a Tech Firm* (to be released in June 2024 by Temple University Press), delves into the gamification of software development processes at a leading technology firm in Silicon Valley, U.S.A. In addition to her book, Wu's scholarship has been featured in several journals, including the Journal of Contemporary China, New Technology, Work and Employment, Sociological Perspectives, Sociological Review of China, The Economic and Labour Relations Review, and The Journal of Chinese Sociology. Currently, she is working on a project exploring the human labor that underpins artificial intelligence.



## Abstract

OpenAI's unveiling of GPT-3 in 2020 emerged as a watershed moment, igniting discussions on the transformative impact of technological innovation from the "global north" on the historic interplay between humanity and technology. However, the essential human labor involved in data annotation, training of the Transformer model, and addressing AI's cognitive deficits—predominantly outsourced to "Global South" countries such as China, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines—remains overlooked (Catanzariti et al., 2021; Gray and Suri, 2019; Le Ludec, 2023). This investigation delves into the hidden human labor behind AI, with a focus on Asian contexts, informed by three years of ethnographic study within China's data annotation sector and 154 semi-structured interviews with key figures from technology enterprises such as Alibaba, ByteDance, Tencent, and Baidu.

The study introduces the notion of Complementary Organizations to Algorithms (COTAs), highlighting the strategic organization of human labor and optimization of human skills to augment AI's cognitive limitations, supported by insights from economists like Autor (2015) and sociologists like Shestakofsky (2017). It explores how COTAs counterbalance AI's limitations by leveraging organizational resources within China's data industry. Additionally, the research illustrates the role of local actors—governments, NGOs, and vocational schools—as COTAs, re-embedding data production into local communities. A case in point is Guizhou's government, which leveraged patriarchal norms to interpellate a gendered subjectivity among middle-aged women as "digital heroines," cultivating desirable data annotation competencies while ensuring workforce docility and disposability to meet the fluctuating requirements of data annotation, essential for the continuous iteration of AI models.

## **Panel 5: Objects in Circulation**

**Chair: Erica Mukherjee (NYU Shanghai)**

### **Erica Mukherjee (NYU Shanghai)**

#### Bio

Erica Lynn Mukherjee is an environmental historian of South Asia. Her current book project, *The Impermanent Settlement: A History of the Actual Water and Soil of Imperial Bengal*, uses a material culture lens to explore efforts by the British East India Company to bring material and administrative stability to the watery landscapes of the Bengal Delta. These efforts ranged from property ownership legislation to the construction of infrastructure such as embankments and railways. Using this material approach to environmental history, Mukherjee is developing The Elemental Tours, a series of public walking tours that narrate the environmental history of Manchester through stories of

water, stone, fire, and air. Her commitment to public history also includes regular publications on Indian railway history with the Early Railways Committee of the Railway & Canal Historical Society in the UK. At NYU Shanghai she is the faculty course coordinator for Global Perspectives on Society (GPS) and teaches courses in South Asian and environmental history and the humanities.

### **Sarah Basham (NYU Shanghai)**

*One Object, Multiple Meanings: Tracking Material Changes in Wu bei zhi 武備志 (Treatise on military preparedness) from 1621 to 1911*

#### Bio

Sarah Basham is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow for Global Perspectives on Society at NYU Shanghai. She earned her PhD in early modern Chinese history from the Department of History at the University of British Columbia in 2019 and has worked as a consumer-trend analyst, as an instructor at UBC, and as a freelance editor and translator. Her research wrestles with connections between the history of technology, expertise, books, and reading praxis, specifically, the construction of expertise in late-Ming military encyclopedias and correspondence. Her industry job sparked interest in the impact of educational infrastructures on knowledge production both in and outside academia. Publications and more can be found at her personal website, <https://www.sarahbasham.com>.

#### Abstract

Mao Yuanyi's 茅元儀 encyclopedic *Wu bei zhi* 武備志 (*Treatise on military preparedness*, 1621) has been studied extensively as a representative text of late-Ming dynasty (1368–1621) military thought, techniques, technologies, and scholarly trends, especially statecraft (*jingshi* 經世) and concrete studies (*shixue* 實學). Likewise, studies of *Wu bei zhi*'s editions have identified a basic timeline of its reprints. However, scholarship has not tracked the ideological implications of material changes to and circulation of various editions of *Wu bei zhi* throughout China, Japan, and even Europe. This paper traces changes in physical copies of various editions of *Wu bei zhi* between its publication in 1621 and the end of the Qing dynasty (1911) and aligns them with shifting readings of the text and remembrances of the author. This paper argues that changes in both the physical object(s) and in readers' perceptions of the title reflect contemporaries' perceptions of their government's military circumstances and their own identity. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that physical examination of Ming titles, like *Wu bei zhi*, that survive in relatively large numbers worldwide can be used to highlight diachronic and geographic connections and disconnections in the meaning attributed to technical information in pre-modern Asia.

## **Yushu Geng (NYU Shanghai)**

*Undesirable Books: Colonial Censorship and Chinese Nationalism in British Malaya, c. 1930s*

### Bio

Yushu Geng is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Global Asia, NYU Shanghai. She obtained her PhD in History from the University of Cambridge in 2021 and worked as a postdoc at Trinity College Dublin between 2021 and 2023. Her PhD thesis explores the circulation and regulation of obscene publications in China and colonial Singapore during the early twentieth century. Her wider research interests include print culture, gender and sexuality, and overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia.

### Abstract

This paper examines the intra-Asia circulation and colonial censorship of Chinese-language books and periodicals for children in the 1930s, with a specific focus on the two port cities of Shanghai and Singapore. As transregional trade networks, global transport and postal services expanded significantly in the early twentieth century, mass-produced print materials – books, newspapers, periodicals, and pictures – printed in Shanghai reached not only other urban cities in China, but also overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. This large quantity of Chinese-language cultural commodities traveling to Singapore soon began to alarm the British colonial authorities, leading the colonial government to systematically censor incoming mails and parcels from China in 1930, to prevent the transregional circulation of ‘objectionable’ or ‘undesirable’ information. Among the banned communist, anti-imperial and anti-colonial, nationalistic, and obscene publications, the political content of school textbooks and children’s books was particularly heavily censored, gesturing towards the emerging colonial anxiety over the education of non-European local youth. Triangulating between archives in London, Shanghai, and Singapore, I will first explore what kinds of books for children and youth found their way into Singapore and what types of political narratives were censored. I will then investigate the strategies adopted by Shanghai publishers, exporters, as well as local importers to bypass censorship, such as creating different versions of textbooks that catered specifically to the requirements of the British colonial authorities. Lastly, I shall reflect on the implications of this Chinese diasporic book network on the development of Chinese nationalism in colonial Singapore. The movement of these cultural commodities and the ideas they aimed to circulate, as well as the restrictions placed on such movements needs to be understood within the interrelated contexts of colonialism, emerging anti-colonial nationalism, and the commercial incentives behind the international trade of prints.

## **Nan Hu (Fudan University)**

*Assisting the Home Front: Wartime Indian Cinematic Aid to China (1937-1945)*

### Bio

Nan Hu is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Chinese Language and Literature at Fudan University, Shanghai. She earned her Ph. D. in Chinese and Comparative Literature in 2021 at Washington University in St. Louis, where she completed a dissertation entitled “In Other Voices: Dubbing Foreign Films in Maoist China (1949-1976).” Her current research projects explore the idea of inter-Asia solidarity among Chinese intellectuals around the 1960s, and the ways zoos have reconfigured the human-animal relationship vis-à-vis the Chinese projects of nation-building, modernity, and revolution. Her studies have been funded by the McDonnell International Scholars Academy, the Center for the Humanities at Washington University, Ministry of Education (Taiwan), and China Postdoctoral International Exchange Program, among others.

### Abstract

This article explores cinematic support that India provided to China in World War II. It aims to engage with the current scholarship on Sino-Indian cinematic contacts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which focuses on the post-War especially the post-1949 years. As I will show in the article, large numbers of Hollywood and Indian films were sent through the hub of Calcutta to Chongqing during the war, creating sensations in the “home front area” of Southwestern China. India also provided technical assistance for filmmaking and screening, and was a popular destination for Chinese filmmakers seeking inspiration and resources. This article asks: How did India become a powerhouse for wartime Chinese film industry? How were the connections enabled, shaped, and restrained by the political geography in the border area between China, India, and Southeastern Asian countries, and what role did the US play in these exchanges? Which functions did the Yunnan-Vietnam Railway, the Burma Road, and the Hump Route serve throughout the war in these cinematic interactions? And how did the traffic of raw materials, finished products, techniques, travelers help with film businesses and the morale of soldiers, locals, and refugees? This article highlights the worldliness of wartime Chinese film industry and the important role that inter-Asian cinematic connections play in China’s war of resistance.

## **Panel 6: State and Society in Asia: Technology, Medicine, and Institutions**

**Chair: Ke Zhang (Fudan University)**

## **Ke Zhang (Fudan University)**

### Bio

Ke Zhang is an associate professor in the department of History, and serves as assistant director of the Asia Research Center at Fudan University. He got his Ph.D. Degree at Fudan in 2009. His research interests include modern Chinese intellectual history, conceptual history and the global history of cultural exchange. He is the author of *The Conceptual History of 'Humanism' in Modern China* (2015, in Chinese) and the co-editor of *The Production of Knowledge and the Politics of Culture in Modern China* (2014, in Chinese). He is currently researching a book project on the Sino-India cultural relations in Late Qing.

## **Liao Zhang (NYU Shanghai)**

*Navigating the Amur, Claiming the Borderlands: Soviet Customs Service and Border Making in Northeast Asia, 1920s-1940s*

### Bio

Liao Zhang is a GPS (Global Perspectives on Society) postdoc teaching fellow at NYU Shanghai. A historian of Eurasia by training, he has been studying the social and political transformation of the Russian Far East in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the lens of transnational history. He has also conducted research and taught courses on East European, East Asian, and global history in the past.

### Abstract

This paper is a comprehensive investigation into the inception, operation, and development of the Soviet Union's Customs Service on the left bank of the Amur- Heilongjiang River, a section of the Sino-Soviet waterway borders in Northeast Asia, from the early 1920s to the 1940s. I conceptualize the Soviet customs administration in the Amur-Heilongjiang River Basin, consisting of newly created customs houses and outposts and staffed with locally recruited officers, as a distinctive border institution. My investigation seeks to unfold the process, by which this border institution contributed to taming the frontier and shaping the borderlands' economic and social orders. It sheds light on major characteristics of the Soviet state making in its Northeast Asian periphery.

I organize my paper thematically and divide it into three interconnected sections. I first discuss the USSR customs service's establishment of customs houses and organizations from scratch in the Soviet Far East. I then scrutinize how local customs officials and staff engaged in ridding the waterway border of contrabands and managing cross-border trade and movements of people, especially various groups of East Asians. I consider how they developed their own border-policing techniques pertaining to the borderlands' socioeconomic and environmental specificities. In addition, I examine how this border institution took up the role as both collector of information on the borderlands' economic productivity and producer of knowledge of various social groups' habitual involvements in

border-crossing activities. Such information and knowledge made significant contributions to facilitating the USSR's stepped-up assertion of the Amur-Heilongjiang River and transformation of the left bank into socioeconomically self-sufficient, viable Soviet borderlands.

### **Yang Shen (Zhejiang University)**

*Secularism and the Arguments of Intellectual Freedom: Revisiting an Encounter between Ma Yifu and Cai Yuanpei in Early 20th-Century China*

#### Bio

Yang Shen is a cultural anthropologist of religion and secularism. Her work explores forms of Chinese secularism and how Chinese conceptions of religion and secularity transform global projects of modernity. Yang received her Ph.D. from Boston University in Anthropology and was a post-doctoral research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, Germany. She also taught at the Department of Asian Studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a Frieberg-Glorisun Fellow at the Louis Frieberg Center for East Asian Studies. Dr. Shen is currently an Assistant Professor in Anthropology at the Department of Sociology at Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, China.

#### Abstract

The paper suggests that the global arena of secular universities—rather than the national realms of “religion”—allows us to explore diverse pathways of intellectual freedom in a broad range of modernizing regimes. It focuses on the contrasting views of two key figures in early Republican China, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) and Ma Yifu (1883-1967), who had divergent perspectives on the idea of a university. Cai, a secularist and institutional reformer, advocated for the creation of a German Enlightenment-style secular research university, while Ma, an independent classical scholar, was critical of the university institution and instead favored a model based on Chinese Buddhist monasteries. Aware of the condition of financial independence of modern universities, Ma explained that the Buddhist monasteries were a rare example of supporting organized scholarship by social contribution—rather than through state patronage and public funding—in the context of Chinese histories. The paper argues that Ma's reservations about the university framework reflect a critical examination of the core promise of modernity and its organizational possibilities. By re-visiting the Ma-Cai encounter, this paper highlights the diversity of visions for intellectual freedom under secularist conditions. It also sheds light on the discrepancy between personal ethics and institutional policies and the cultural and societal contexts of the university institution.

## **Yun Zou (Michigan State University)**

*Gendering Nature: Environmental Transformation and the Making of Women in Mao's China*

### Bio

My name is ZOU Yun, and I am a 4th year PhD candidate at the history department of Michigan State University. My academic interests include the history of 20th century China, gender history and environmental history. My PhD dissertation explores the tripartite interrelationship between nature, gender, and ideology through the examination of various gendered environmental transformational projects in the Mao era in China. I am currently doing fieldwork in China.

### Abstract

In the Mao era, China's natural environment had undergone tremendous change to meet the state's requirements of socialist construction. Women were widely mobilized to take part in the transformation of nature to meet the state's ambitious goals of socialist production. This paper mainly focuses on a dam project established in the late 1950s in Hui'an county, Fujian province. Female workers accounted for more than 80% of the whole labor force for the construction of this dam. The gendered aspect of the dam was promoted nation-wide by the state. On April 27, 1960, CCP's official outlet *People's Daily* even published an article headlined "Ten Thousand Women Chained the Dragon" to praise Hui'an women's contribution to the dam. How do we understand the rhetoric of "women chaining the dragon" in Maoist China? How did women experience and perceive the construction of the dam? How was the local environment shaped by the gendered labor? These are the questions this paper seeks to explore.

## **Liangliang Zhang (NYU Shanghai)**

*Doing 'Chinese Medicine' across Ontological Differences: Alternative Healing and Citizen-State Coopetition in Contemporary China*

### Bio

Liangliang Zhang is currently a postdoctoral fellow and incoming assistant professor of Global China Studies (starting Fall 2024) at NYU Shanghai. She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Cambridge in May 2022, funded by a Gates Cambridge Scholarship. She also holds an M.Phil. in Social Anthropology (Medical Anthropology Concentration) from Cambridge and a B.A. in International Comparative Studies from Duke University. Her research occurs at the intersection of citizenship studies, health, and education in the context of a globalized China.

## Abstract

This study examines the practical and discursive formation of a non-materialist alternative healing program via a grassroots education-healing network in contemporary China. 'Wu-Wei' network participants co-elaborate the efficacy of this healing program, which they call 'China's Chinese medicine', by situating it in the recent state-backed 'Chinese Traditional Culture' revival, while distinguishing it sharply from the state-espoused 'Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)'. Asserting forms of efficacy and influence outside materialist causalities, the network avows non-materialist ontological commitments rooted in pre-modern cosmologies. Its healing program centers on the formation of cosmologically attuned persons, seen as uniquely responsible for and capable of health maintenance via autogenous self-cultivation. There is a marked tension in the Wu-Wei context: an uneasy coexistence of discursive affinities with, and ontological divergences from, party-state directives. I argue this tension is irreducible to party-state power. Instead, the conceptual ambiguities of this grassroots healing program illustrate a mode of citizen-state relation in contemporary China, which I term 'coopetition': Ambiguities in party-state directives (e.g. traditional culture revival) often enable grassroots and state actors to cooperate at the discursive and practical levels; however, this cooperation is simultaneously constrained by their differing structural positions and competing agendas. The analytic of coopetition has conceptual efficacy beyond studies of alternative healing.