



華東師範大學
EAST CHINA NORMAL UNIVERSITY



HARVARD-YENCHING
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研修项目

印度洋世界的技术革新与文化交融

Training Program

Technological Innovation and Cultural Integration
in the Indian Ocean World

华东师范大学闵行校区
上海纽约大学前滩校区

East China Normal University, Minhang Campus, Shanghai
NYU Shanghai, Qiantan Campus, Shanghai

项目手册 Program

2026年6月1—7日

June 1 – 7, 2026



概述

本项目旨在为博士生及青年学者提供一套严谨的、跨学科的知识体系，助力其理解印度洋世界这一在历史进程中充满活力、且在当代仍具重要意义的海洋活动场域。项目以技术革新与文化交融为核心，聚焦航海技术与跨文化互动如何塑造环印度洋地区的经济体系、政治格局与社会形态。

本项目覆盖的技术发展范畴极为广泛，既包含前现代时期的造船工艺、航海知识与海洋基础设施，也涉及当代的港口设施、物流网络及海洋联通体系。在梳理这些技术发展脉络的同时，本项目将同时考察与之相伴的文化交流、人口流动及文明碰撞模式，追溯思想观念、行为习俗、宗教传统与社群组织在前现代与现代两个历史阶段的印度洋地区传播路径。

本项目采用长时段研究视角，将印度洋界定为一个具有历史关联性的海洋空间，它串联起多个海域、滨海地带与沿岸社会。参与者将运用历史学、考古学、人类学与经济学的多元研究方法，对不同时间尺度下的历史延续、断裂与转型模式展开比较分析。本项目特别关注海洋视角如何补充以陆地为中心、以民族国家为单位的研究框架，从而为理解海洋语境下的区域整合、人口流动与技术变革提供全新的分析维度。

本项目由印度洋史研究领域的顶尖学者领衔授课，通过专题讲座、学术研讨与协作式讨论相结合的形式，为参与者配备研究海洋历史所需的概念工具与方法论框架。本项目以海洋世界为主要分析切入点，阐释印度洋如何为重新审视技术革新、跨区域联结，以及亚洲乃至全球互联互通提供独特的研究视角。

主办：华东师范大学 哈佛燕京学社

协办：上海纽约大学

承办：华东师范大学国际合作与交流处 华东师范大学历史学系

上海纽约大学环球亚洲研究中心 华东师范大学思勉人文高等研究院



Overview

This intensive training program is designed to provide doctoral candidates and early-career faculty with a rigorous, interdisciplinary understanding of the Indian Ocean world as a historically dynamic and contemporarily relevant maritime arena. Centering on technological innovation and cultural integration, the program examines how maritime technologies and cross-cultural interactions have shaped economic systems, political formations, and social worlds across the oceanic rim.

The program foregrounds a wide spectrum of technological developments, from premodern shipbuilding techniques, navigational knowledge, and maritime infrastructures to contemporary port facilities, logistics networks, and ocean-based connectivity. These technological trajectories are examined alongside patterns of cultural exchange, mobility, and encounter, tracing how ideas, practices, religious traditions, and communities circulated across the Indian Ocean in both premodern and modern contexts.

Adopting a *longue durée* perspective, the training program conceptualizes the Indian Ocean as a historically interconnected maritime space that links multiple seas, littoral zones, and coastal societies. Participants will engage with historical, archaeological, anthropological, and economic approaches, enabling a comparative analysis of patterns of continuity, rupture, and transformation across different temporal scales. Particular attention is given to how maritime perspectives complicate and challenge land-based and nation-state frameworks, offering alternative analytical lenses for understanding regional integration, mobility, and technological change in oceanic contexts.

Led by leading scholars in Indian Ocean studies, this program combines lectures, seminars, and collaborative discussions to equip participants with conceptual tools and methodological frameworks for studying oceanic histories. By emphasizing the maritime world as an analytical lens, it demonstrates how the Indian Ocean provides a distinctive vantage point for rethinking technological innovation, transregional connections, and the making of interconnected societies across Asia and beyond.

Organized by

East China Normal University

Harvard-Yenching Institute

Supported by

NYU Shanghai

Hosted by

International Cooperation and Exchange Division, East China Normal University

Department of History, East China Normal University

Center for Global Asia, NYU Shanghai

Si-Mian Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities, East China Normal University

地点 Location:

华东师范大学（闵行校区，人文楼5303室）
ECNU (Room 5303, Humanities Building, Minhang Campus)

开幕式 Opening Session

10:00-11:00

致欢迎辞 Welcome Remarks

梅兵（华东师范大学校务委员会主任）

Bing Mei (Chair, the University Council, ECNU)

罗柏松（哈佛燕京学社社长）

James Robson (Director, Harvard-Yenching Institute)

童世骏（上海纽约大学校长）

Shijun Tong (Chancellor, NYU Shanghai)

合影 Group Photo

项目概述 Program Overview

朱明（华东师范大学历史学系教授）

Ming Zhu (Professor of Department of History, ECNU)

白姗吉（上海纽约大学人文地理学助理教授）

Sangeeta Banerji (Assistant Professor of Human Geography, NYU Shanghai)

午餐 Lunch

11:30-12:45

1:00-2:00

导言（印度洋对我及我的研究意味着什么）

Introductions (What Does Indian Ocean Mean to Me & My Research)

全球化之后的跨亚洲 InterAsia after Globalization

2:00-3:30

何永盛（杜克大学人类学与历史学教授）

Engseng Ho (Professor of Anthropology and History, Duke University)

阅读材料:

- 卡尔, 《I》(1945年), 选读(可选)
- 何永盛, 《面向流动社会的跨亚洲概念》, 《亚洲研究学刊》, 第76卷第4期(2017年), 第907-928页。

Readings: Carr, E.H., I (1945), selection (Optional)

Ho, Engseng, "Inter-Asian Concepts for Mobile Societies." *Journal of Asian Studies*, 76.4 (2017): 907 - 928.

3:30-4:00 咖啡/茶饮 Coffee/Tea

4:00-5:30 **讨论环节（由何永盛与白姗吉主持）**
Discussion Session (led by Engseng Ho and Sangeeta Banerji)

阅读材料：

- 何永盛,《圣战的道德经济：伊斯兰法遭遇印度洋马拉巴尔的纯净种姓与克里奥尔社会》，未出版手稿。
- 何永盛,《迪拜与新加坡：从印度洋港口到全球城市》，未出版手稿。

Readings: Ho, Engseng, "Moral Economy of Jihad: Islamic Law Meets Pure Castes and Creole Societies in Indian Ocean Malabar."
Unpublished manuscript.
Ho, Engseng, "Dubai and Singapore: From Indian Ocean Ports to Global Cities." Unpublished manuscript.

晚餐 Dinner at ECNU

6:00-8:00

Day 2

Tuesday, 2 June

地点 Location:

上海纽约大学（前滩校区，E903-904室）
NYU Shanghai (Room E903-904, Qiantan Campus)

机器中的幽灵：印度洋世界的技术形态
Ghosts in the Machine: Technologies of the Indian Ocean World

9:30-11:00 **达瑞克（康奈尔大学历史学约翰·斯坦博讲席教授）**
Eric Tagliacozzo (John Stambaugh Professor of History, Cornell University)

阅读材料：

- 达瑞克,《印度洋中的帝国主义技术》，《技术与文化》，第46卷第2期（2005年），第306-328页。

Reading: Tagliacozzo, Eric, "Technologies of Imperialism in the Indian Ocean." *Technology and Culture*, 46.2 (2005): 306-328.

11:30-1:00 **讨论环节（由达瑞克与朱明主持）**
Discussion Session (led by Eric Tagliacozzo and Ming Zhu)

阅读材料：

- 达瑞克,《在亚洲水域：从也门到横滨的海洋世界》，普林斯顿：普林斯顿大学出版社，2022年。（第9章：“从亚丁到孟买，从新加坡到釜山：殖民环路”）

Day 2

Reading: Tagliacozzo, Eric, *In Asian Waters: Oceanic Worlds from Yemen to Yokohama*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022. (Chapter 9: "From Aden to Bombay, from Singapore to Pusan: Colonial Circuits")

午餐 Lunch

1:00-2:30

2:30-5:00 学生报告 (10人) Student Presentations (10 People)

晚餐 Dinner at ECNU

6:30-8:00

Day 3

Wednesday, 3 June

地点 Location:

上海纽约大学 (前滩校区, E903-904室)
NYU Shanghai (Room E903-904, Qiantan Campus)

印度洋世界的策展实践 Curating the Indian Ocean World

9:30-11:00 纳塔莉·皮尔森 (悉尼大学考古学科遗产研究高级讲师、DECRA研究员)
Natali Pearson (DECRA Fellow and Senior Lecture in Heritage Studies,
Discipline of Archaeology, The University of Sydney)

阅读材料:

- 皮尔森, N. 《勿里洞: 一艘沉船的后世生涯》, 檀香山: 夏威夷大学出版社, 2022年。(引言与结论部分)

Reading: Pearson, N. *Belitung: The Afterlives of a Shipwreck*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022. (*Introduction and Conclusion*)

11:30-1:00 讨论环节 (由纳塔莉·皮尔森与黄嘉莉主持)
Discussion Session (led by Natali Pearson and Ka Lee Wong)

阅读材料:

- 皮尔森, N. 《勿里洞: 一艘沉船的后世生涯》, 檀香山: 夏威夷大学出版社, 2022年。(第4章: “争议”)

Reading: Pearson, N. *Belitung: The Afterlives of a Shipwreck*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022. (Chapter 4: *Contested*)

午餐 Lunch

1:00-2:30

2:30-5:00 学生报告 (10人) Student Presentations (10 People)

晚餐和电影 Dinner and Movie at NYU Shanghai

6:00-8:00

Day 4

Thursday, 4 June

地点 Location:

上海临港

Lingang, Shanghai

实地研究 Field Research

10:00-1:30 中国航海博物馆 China Maritime Museum

1:30-4:30 洋山港 Yangshan Port

晚餐 Dinner at ECNU

6:30-8:00

Day 5

Friday, 5 June

地点 Location:

上海纽约大学 (前滩校区, E903-904室)

NYU Shanghai (Room E903-904, Qiantan Campus)

探寻中古印度洋历史：从文献到古DNA及其间的一切
Looking for Medieval Indian Ocean Histories:
From Texts to Ancient DNA and Everything In Between

9:30-11:00 伊丽莎白·兰伯恩 (英国德蒙福特大学物质史荣休教授)
Elizabeth Lambourn (Professor Emerita of Material Histories, De
Montfort University, UK)

阅读材料:

- 霍姆斯, 凯瑟琳 & 斯坦登, 娜奥米, 《导论: 走向全球中世纪》, 《过去与现在》, 第238期 (2018年), 第1-44页。

Reading: Holmes, Catherine, and Naomi Standen, "Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages." *Past & Present*, 238 (2018): 1-44.

Field Research

11:30-1:00

讨论环节（由伊丽莎白·兰伯恩与沈丹森主持）

Discussion Session (led by Elizabeth Lambourn and Tansen Sen)

阅读材料：

- 兰伯恩，伊丽莎白·A.，《导论：一份来自印度洋世界的行李清单》，载伊丽莎白·A.·兰伯恩著《亚伯拉罕的行李：中世纪印度洋世界的饮食、日用与旅行技艺》，第1-36页（剑桥：剑桥大学出版社，2018年）。

Reading: Lambourn, Elizabeth A., "Introduction: A List of Luggage from the Indian Ocean World." In Elizabeth A. Lambourn, *Abraham's Luggage: A Social Life of Things in the Indian Ocean World*, 1-36 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

午餐 Lunch

1:00-2:30

穆斯林世界主义、印度洋与世界史的书写
Muslim Cosmopolitanism, the Indian Ocean and
the Writing of World History

2:30-4:00

西玛·阿拉维（阿育王大学历史学教授）

Seema Alavi (Professor of History, Ashoka University)

阅读材料：

- 阿拉维，西玛，《帝国时代的穆斯林世界主义》，剑桥：哈佛大学出版社，2015年（第4章）。

Reading: Alavi, Seema, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015 (Chapter 4).

4:15-5:45

讨论环节（由西玛·阿拉维与穆罕默德·尤努斯·拉菲克主持）

Discussion Session (led by Seema Alavi and Mohammed Yunus Rafiq)

阅读材料：

- 比沙拉，法哈德，《季风航行者：一部印度洋史》，奥克兰：加利福尼亚大学出版社，2025年。（序言与第1章）

Reading: Bishara, Fahad, *Monsoon Voyagers: An Indian Ocean History*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2025. (Prologue and Chapter 1)

晚餐 Dinner at ECNU

6:30-8:00

Day 6

Saturday, 6 June

地点 Location:

上海纽约大学（前滩校区，E903-904室）
NYU Shanghai (Room E903-904, Qiantan Campus)

10:00-10:30 哈佛燕京学社奖学金信息：林希宜
HYI Fellowship Information: Lindsay Strogatz

10:30-5:00 工作坊：研究计划的修订
Workshop: Revising research proposal

晚餐 Dinner at ECNU

6:30-8:00

Day 7

Sunday, 7 June

地点 Location:

上海纽约大学（前滩校区，E903-904室）
NYU Shanghai (Room E903-904, Qiantan Campus)

10:00-12:00 修订后报告展示 Revised Presentations

午餐 Lunch

12:00-1:00

1:00-5:00 修订后报告展示 Revised Presentations

闭幕式 Closing Session

5:00-5:30 证书颁发环节 Certificate Presentation

List of Faculty/Staff

(alphabetical order by surname)



Seema Alavi
Professor of History
Ashoka University



Sangeeta Banerji
Assistant Professor of
Human Geography
NYU Shanghai



Engseng Ho
Professor of
Anthropology and History
Duke University



Elizabeth Lambourn
Professor Emerita of
Material Histories
De Montfort University, UK



Yunus Rafiq Mohamed
Assistant Professor of
Anthropology
NYU Shanghai



Natali Pearson
DECRA Fellow & Senior
Lecturer, Archaeology,
University of Sydney



James Robson
Director
Harvard-Yenching
Institute



Tansen Sen
Professor of History
NYU Shanghai



Lindsay Sloan Strogatz
Program &
Communications Manager
Harvard-Yenching Institute



Eric Tagliacozzo
John Stambaugh
Professor of History
Cornell University



Ka Lee Wong
Assistant Professor of
Global China Studies
NYU Shanghai



Ming Zhu
Professor of
Department of History
East China Normal University

Seema Alavi (Professor, Ashoka University)

Seema Alavi is a professor of history at Ashoka University, India. She specializes in early modern and modern South Asia, with an interest in the transformation of the region's legacy from Indo-Persian to one heavily affected by British colonial rule. She has written books on the military, medical and religious histories of India. Her most recent books are the Albert Hourani Award winner, and the Monsoon Book Award (2025) winner-*Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the age of Empire* from Harvard University Press, USA; and *Sovereigns of the Sea. Omani Ambition in the age of Empire*, Penguin India, 2023.

Alavi earned her PhD from Cambridge University, England. She has twice been a Fulbright Scholar and a Smuts Visiting Fellow at Cambridge and was a visiting scholar at the Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard. In 2010 she was at the Radcliffe institute at Harvard as the William Bentinck-Smith Fellow. She wrote *Sepoys and the Company: Tradition and Transition in Northern India, 1770–1830* (Oxford University Press, 1995) and co-authored with Muzzafar Alam, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I'jaz-i Arsalani (Persian Letters 1773–1779) of Antoine-Louis Henri Polier* (Oxford University Press, 2001). Her book *Eighteenth Century in Indian History* in the Oxford Debates series is a popular reader in India and abroad. In 2009 she wrote *Islam and Healing : Loss and Recovery of an Indo-Muslim Medical Tradition, 1600–1900* (Palgrave Macmillan, UK 2009). She serves on the editorial board of several national and international journals, including *Modern Asian Studies UK*, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History, UK*, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, UK* and *Biblio, New Delhi*.

Sangeeta Banerji (Assistant Professor of Human Geography, NYU Shanghai)

Dr Sangeeta Banerji is Assistant Professor of Human Geography at NYU Shanghai. Her research explores how cities in the Global South are held together through everyday acts of mediation — between bureaucracy and community, technology and care, planning and improvisation. Working at the intersections of urban geography, political ecology, and anthropology, she studies how land governance, digital planning tools, and informal expertise shape environmental and social change in India and China. She also collaborates on research about neighbourhood transformation in China's Greater Bay Area and the evolving infrastructures of port cities across Global Asia.

Ho Engseeng (Professor of Anthropology and History, Duke University)

Engseeng Ho is Professor Anthropology and History at Duke University, USA. He is a leading scholar of transnational anthropology, history and Muslim societies, Arab diasporas, and the Indian Ocean. His research expertise is in Arabia, coastal South Asia and maritime Southeast Asia, and he maintains active collaborations with scholars in these regions. He is co-editor of the Asian Connections book series at Cambridge University Press. He was previously Professor of Anthropology, Harvard University; Senior Scholar, Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies; Country and Profile Writer, the Economist Group; International Economist, Government of Singapore Investment Corporation/Monetary Authority of Singapore; Director, Middle East Institute and Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Visiting Professor of Arabia Asia Studies, National University of Singapore. He was educated at the Penang Free School, Stanford University, and the University of Chicago.

Elizabeth Anne Lambourn (Professor Emerita of Material Histories, De Montfort University, UK)

Elizabeth Lambourn is a historian of the medieval Indian Ocean world, with particular research interests in material culture and mercantile communities. Her work engages equally with texts and 'things,' and with texts as material 'things.' Her research monograph *Abraham's Luggage. A Social Life of Things in the Medieval Indian Ocean World* (CUP, 2018) was supported by a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship; she is also the editor of the volumes *Legal Encounters on the Medieval Globe* (2017) and *A Cultural History of the Sea in the Medieval Age* (2021). In 2023 Lambourn's contribution to the field of Indian Ocean studies was recognised by her election as a Fellow of the British Academy. During Fall 2025 she was Stewart Long-Term Visiting Fellow in the Humanities Council and the Department of History at Princeton University.

Yunus Rafiq Mohamed (Assistant Professor of Anthropology, NYU Shanghai Global Network Assistant Professor, NYU)

M. Yunus Rafiq is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at NYU Shanghai and a Global Network Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at NYU. He is a trained medical anthropologist focusing on public health, region, and communicative practices in Tanzania. Rafiq's research examines how governmental and non-governmental health programs mobilize faith-based religious intermediaries to manifest public health governance and biopolitical agendas. It explores how religion is defined by biomedical programs and the ways these programs transform religion. His research questions how religion and biopolitical programs in the post-colony are re-assembled to create new forms of authority, governance, and power.

Natali Jane Pearson (DECRA Fellow and Senior Lecture in Heritage Studies, Discipline of Archaeology, The University of Sydney)

Dr Natali Pearson is a DECRA Fellow (2025-2027) and Senior Lecturer in Heritage Studies in the Discipline of Archaeology at the University of Sydney, where she teaches into the postgraduate Museum and Heritage Studies Program. Natali's DECRA research focuses on sunken warships and maritime heritage diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Her first book, *Belitung: The Afterlives of a Shipwreck*, is published by University of Hawai'i Press and National University of Singapore Press. She is President of the Indonesia Council, a member of ICOMOS and a Councillor of the Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology. Prior to joining academia, she worked for the Australian Government's Department of Defence in Canberra.

James Robson (Director, Harvard-Yenching Institute James C. Kralik and Yunli Lou Professor, Harvard University, Harvard-Yenching Institute)

James Robson is Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations. He has served as Director of Graduate Studies for the Regional Studies East Asia M.A. program. He teaches East Asian religions, in particular Daoism, Chinese Buddhism, and Zen. Robson received his Ph.D. in Buddhist Studies from Stanford University in 2002, after spending many years doing research in China and Japan. He specializes in the history of medieval Chinese Buddhism and Daoism and is particularly interested in issues of sacred geography, local religious history, talismans, and Chan/Zen Buddhism. He has been engaged in a long-term collaborative research project with the École Française d'Extrême-Orient studying local religious statuary from Hunan province. He is the author of *Power of Place: The Religious Landscape of the Southern Sacred Peak [Nanyue 南嶽] in Medieval China* (Harvard, 2009), which was awarded the Stanislas Julien Prize for 2010 by the French Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres and the 2010 Toshihide Numata Book Prize in Buddhism. Robson is also the author of "Signs of Power: Talismanic Writings in Chinese Buddhism" (*History of Religions* 48:2), "Faith in Museums: On the Confluence of Museums and Religious Sites in Asia" (PMLA, 2010), and "A Tang Dynasty Chan Mummy [*roushen*] and a Modern Case of Furta Sacra? Investigating the Contested Bones of Shitou Xiqian." His current research includes a long term project on the history of the confluence of Buddhist monasteries and mental hospitals in Japan.

Tansen Sen (Professor of History, NYU Shanghai)

Tansen Sen is Professor of history; the Director of the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai; and Associated Full Professor, Department of History, NYU. He is currently the Nalanda Visiting Professor in India–China studies at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400* (2003; 2016) and *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (2017; 2018). He has edited *Buddhism Across Asia* (2014), and co-edited (with Burkhard Schnepel) *Travelling Pasts: The Politics of Cultural Heritage in the Indian Ocean World* (2019) and (with Brian Tsui) *Beyond Pan-Asianism: Connecting China and India, 1840s–1960s* (2021). With Adhira Mangalagiri he has co-edited a special issue of the *International Journal of Asian Studies* (July 2022) on “methods in China-India studies.” He is working on a book about Zheng He’s maritime expeditions in the early fifteenth century, a monograph on Jawaharlal Nehru and China, and co-editing (with Engseng Ho) the *Cambridge History of the Indian Ocean, volume 1*.

He has done extensive research in India, China, Japan, and Singapore with grants from the American Institute of Indian Studies, the Japan Foundation, the American Philosophical Society, the Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (Singapore), and Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton). He was the founding head of the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Center in Singapore and served on the Governing Board of the Nalanda University.

Lindsay Sloan Strogatz (Program & Communications Manager, Harvard-Yenching Institute)

Lindsay Strogatz is the Program & Communications Manager at the Harvard-Yenching Institute. She handles fellowship applications for several programs and also works to publicize the Institute’s activities, publications, news, and events through its website, social media, and newsletters.

Eric Tagliacozzo (John Stambaugh Professor of History, Cornell University)

Eric Tagliacozzo is John Stambaugh Professor of History at Cornell University, where he also serves as Director of the Southeast Asia Program (SEAP) and editor of the journal *INDONESIA*.

Ka Lee Wong

Ka Lee Wong is an Assistant Professor of Global China Studies at NYU Shanghai. Her research explores Chinese languages and cultures in the transnational context, particularly issues concerning the global Chinese diaspora and the ways that “Sinophone”, or sounds of Chinese languages, illuminate the dynamics between media, identities and language politics. One major focus of her work involves the sounds of Cantonese, such as how Cantonese is articulated, listened to, and reimagined in media and literature.

Ming Zhu

Zhu Ming, Professor of Department of History, East China Normal University, Principal Investigator of National Social Science Fund Major Project “Compilation and Research on Historical Materials of Indian Ocean History”, Member of the Professional Committee for Maritime History and Culture Research, Chinese Society of Navigation. His research interests include urban history and global history. In recent years, he has focused on Indian Ocean history, with an emphasis on commercial exchanges, population movements across the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean region.

List of Participants

(alphabetical order by surname)



Joita Das
PhD candidate
National University of
Singapore



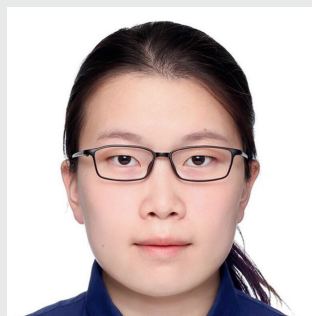
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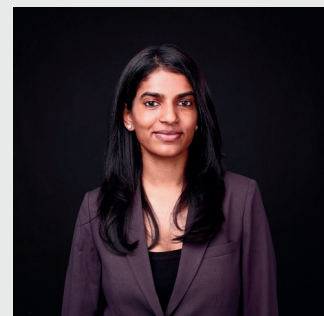
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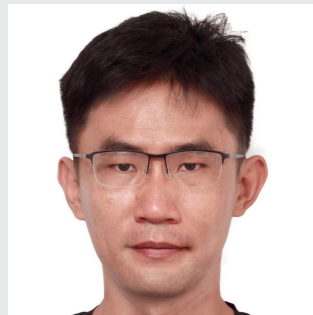
**Jonathan Koshy
Varghese**
Assistant Professor
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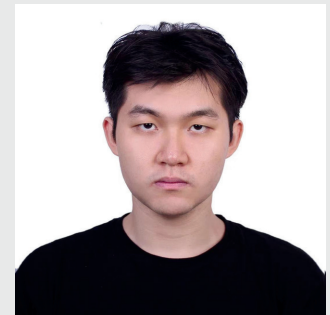
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Joita Das (PhD candidate, University of Singapore)

Tides of (Dis) Connection: Chinese Migration to India (1930-1962) and the Indian-Chinese Community in the Making of China-India Studies

Bio

Joita Das is a PhD candidate in the Comparative Asian Studies Program at the National University of Singapore. Her research explores trends in Chinese migratory history in Asia within the larger framework of inter-Asia Studies and connected histories, with a focus on the Chinese diaspora to Calcutta, India in the 20th century and the Indian-Chinese community in the present. She completed her B.A. (Honors) in Combined Humanities from the Azim Premji University, Bangalore and her M.A. from the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar where she was awarded the President's Gold Medal and the Institute Gold Medal.

Abstract

This paper draws from the field of connected history and attempts to conceptualize Asia as an incredibly mobile and historically interconnected space. It explores maritime Chinese migration to India between 1930 and 1962 foregrounding through five case studies, the movements of students, soldiers, refugees, smugglers, and prisoners from China to India, often via Southeast Asia.

The period between 1930 and 1962 is marked by the disruptions of the Second World War, India's independence, and the Sino-Indian War. As the world in the latter half of the twentieth century transitioned from an age of empire to nation-states, how did patterns of connection adapt to and reshape these emerging geopolitical realities? The paper argues that networks of mobility persisted and fostered cultural, intellectual, and social connections across Asia, even in periods of geopolitical instability. Connections did not disappear but were reconfigured in response to shifting political conditions. Nevertheless, this also demonstrated that the histories of movement and exchange that underpinned connected worlds were often produced through and contingent upon fractures and disjuncture like war and political upheaval. Hence, drawing from recent interventions in China-India Studies, this paper first recognizes that connection and disconnection were co-constitutive processes that shaped Chinese migration to India and then advances '(dis) connection' as a central theoretical framework to explore these linkages.

Methodologically, too, this paper engages with archives 'against the grain.' Even when shaped by the classificatory and surveillance-heavy impulses of the empire, many of the records explored in this paper preserve traces of mobility, exchange and relational worlds that oftentimes exceeded colonial control and at other times were directly enabled by it. Historical records exposed and documented circulations –of contraband, soldiers, smugglers, refugees –and pointed to how transnational dynamics were embedded within national archives.

By highlighting Chinese migration to India as a lens into broader patterns of Asian connection, this paper ultimately aims to rescale Asia Studies and advance the China-India comparative unit as a distinct and analytically significant 'area' within the field.

Wenwen Fu (Lecturer, Ludong University)

"Becoming Standard": The Production and Regional Circulation of Sanitary Knowledge in British India, 1880–1930

Bio

Fu Wenwen is a Lecturer at Ludong University. She received her PhD in History from Shanghai Normal University in June 2024, with a dissertation titled "A Study of Urban Development in Colonial Calcutta, 1803–1920." Her research focuses on the history of the British Empire, the social history of medicine, and urban history, with a sustained interest in the intersections of imperial health governance and colonial spatial politics. Her specific areas of inquiry include cholera epidemics and colonial medical practices in British India, as well as urban planning and imperial spatial politics in Calcutta. She has published two articles in journals such as *Global History Review* and *Urban Cultural Studies*. Her current project investigates how British India transformed from a region passively afflicted by epidemics into an active producer and regional exporter of disease control institutions and sanitary governance, offering new perspectives on both the operation of British informal empire and the connected history of the Indian Ocean world.

Abstract

This study examines how British India, between 1880 and 1930, transformed from a region passively afflicted by epidemics into an active producer and regional exporter of disease control institutions and sanitary governance. It traces the process by which British India integrated its fragmented port quarantine practices and epidemic legislation into a standardized institutional framework, and investigates how this framework—comprising quarantine regulations and port health protocols—was actively exported to the Persian Gulf, the East African coast via imperial administrative networks, trade routes, and personnel circulation. The central argument is that British India was not a passive recipient of imperial health policies, but rather a crucial "regional sub-center"—not merely an executor of rules, but a maker and disseminator of them. By focusing on the local contestations and adaptations encountered by standardized institutions during their transoceanic circulation, this study reveals that early global health governance was not a unidirectional diffusion from Europe, but a multi-nodal, networked process of institutional construction and power projection. It thereby offers a new pathway for understanding both the operation of British informal empire and the connected history of the Indian Ocean world.

Yunxiang Gao (PhD Student, Indiana University Bloomington)

Mediating Empire: Miguel de Arriaga and the Portuguese Opium Trade in Asia

Bio

Yunxiang Gao is a Ph.D. student at Indiana University Bloomington studying the history of drugs, trade, and the Portuguese Empire in Asia. His current research examines the role of the Portuguese in the opium trade in Asia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Abstract

This paper explores Miguel de Arriaga (1776–1824), a Portuguese magistrate who served in Macau for nearly two decades and emerged as the colony’s “little king.” Trained in law at Coimbra and appointed ouvidor in 1802, Arriaga acted as a go-between linking the Portuguese Empire, the Qing world, and the expanding British Asian sphere. He promoted the opium trade as a crucial fiscal resource that sustained Macau’s garrison and administration, while envisioning the enclave as a nodal hub of circulation connecting Goa, Timor, Siam, Aceh, and Madeira. Through these networks of diplomacy, finance, and contraband, Arriaga sought to reposition Portugal within the competitive imperial economy of maritime Asia. By centering both the individual and the city as go-betweens, the paper examines how imperial mediation operated across multiple scales—bureaucratic, commercial, and geopolitical. Yet Arriaga’s vision of a revitalized Portuguese Asia unraveled amid the Napoleonic Wars, British expansion, Qing opium prohibitions, and the liberal revolutions of the 1820s. This paper argues that his downfall formed part of a broader global wave of disconnection that swept across the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Combining biography with global history, the study argues that both Arriaga and Macau embodied the precarious politics of connection and disconnection that defined the Portuguese Empire in Asia.

Siyao Hao (PhD Candidate, University of Chinese Academy of Social Science)

From China's Xizang to the Indian Ocean Outlet: A Study on the Trade Development of the Modern Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor

Bio

Siyao Hao is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (UCASS) in Beijing, China. She has long focused on the history of trade between China and South Asia. For this academic program, her research examines the modern Trans-Himalayan Economic Corridor, exploring connectivity between China's Xizang and Indian Ocean outlets through a maritime perspective. Particular attention is given to how historical trade networks — including the ancient Tea-Horse Road and the Maritime Silk Road — inform contemporary regional integration across the Himalayan-Indian Ocean interface. She is also able to read Tibetan-language scholarly materials.

Abstract

Historically, the Himalayan-Indian Ocean interface was bridged by two parallel networks: the ancient Tea-Horse Road, which linked Xizang to South Asian markets across mountain passes, and the Maritime Silk Road, which connected Indian Ocean ports from Chittagong to Kolkata. While the former was constrained by rugged terrain and the latter by political fragmentation, both prefigured contemporary aspirations for transregional integration.

The modern corridor represents the latest manifestation of this long-standing connectivity. Focusing on South Asian outlets — particularly Chittagong (Bangladesh) and Kolkata (India) — the study evaluates infrastructure readiness, transit costs, and geopolitical constraints. Drawing on historical patterns of mobility and exchange, a maritime perspective complicates land-based frameworks and offers alternative analytical lenses for understanding regional integration across the Himalayan-Indian Ocean interface.

Xianting Huang (PhD student, University of Macau)

Seeds in Circulation: Transplantation, Cultivation, and Acclimatization in the Dutch East India Company's 17-18th Centuries Network

Bio

Huang Xianting is a first-year PhD student at the University of Macau. Her research lies at the intersection of maritime history and the history of knowledge, with particular attention to the materia medica practiced and circulated by Jesuit missionaries and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Abstract

This project investigates the knowledge and environmental order produced through transplantation within the Dutch East India Company (VOC) network in the 17-18th centuries. Drawing on archival references to *tuinhuis zaden* (garden-house seeds) preserved in the Nationaal Archief, this research takes the VOC garden at the Cape of Good Hope as its point of departure, which situated at the geographical periphery while performing central functions of mediation and selection across an interconnected Indian Ocean world. As the key provisioning station, the Cape reshaped the direction and rhythm of circulation, thereby advancing a decentered narrative beyond the movement of seeds as commodities.

The transplantation process thus entailed both ecological adaptation and technical innovation in methods for seed storage, soil preparation, irrigation, and grafting to manage the uncertainties of unfamiliar environments. Rather than constituting a unidirectional transfer of cultivation techniques, acclimatization emerged as a form of experimental knowledge produced through sustained interactions among free burghers and slaves as human labor, climate and edaphic condition. Through repeated trials, failures, and adjustments, environmental conditions functioned not merely as passive background factors but as non-human agents in hybrid agricultural landscapes that reshaped local ecologies and embedded European agronomic assumptions within Asian and African contexts.

By situating transplantation within the broader framework of early forms of botanical globalization, the project argues that, in contexts of sustained colonial settlement, circulation of seeds and cultivation techniques between the Netherlands, the Cape of Good Hope, and Batavia, functioned not only as an agricultural practice but also as an important mechanism integrating agricultural, botanical, and medical knowledge. The cultivation of seeds and plants supported colonial subsistence and refreshment while simultaneously advancing the classification, observation, and medicinal understanding of natural resources, transforming Company gardens into key sites where early modern knowledge production and environmental transformation intersected.

Fangchao Ji (PhD student, Brandeis University)

The Moral Economy of Empire: West Borneo Kongsis and Colonial Discourse in the 1840s

Bio

Fangchao Ji is a sixth-year Ph.D. candidate in history at Brandeis University. His work engages late imperial Chinese history, Southeast Asian history, overseas Chinese history, and Dutch and British imperial formations. His dissertation research analyzes Chinese goldmining kongsis in West Borneo (West Kalimantan), Indonesia, between 1816 and 1854, with a focus on colonial statecraft, knowledge production, and the negotiation of sovereignty between imperial authorities and Chinese political organizations.

Abstract

The 1840s marked a critical turning point in European perceptions of the Chinese kongsis of West Borneo, shaped in part by the rise of James Brooke and the expansion of British influence in Sarawak. During this decade, both British and Dutch narratives underwent significant transformation, as the kongsis became central to broader moral, economic, and imperial debates. This paper, also serving as a part of the fourth chapter of my ongoing dissertation research, examines how kongsis were reconfigured as powerful discursive constructs within colonial knowledge production. European officials increasingly mobilized the concept of the kongsi to advance competing moral arguments concerning trade, monopoly, and the opium economy, portraying these organizations alternately as sources of disorder and as evidence of economic vitality.

By tracing the shifting meanings attached to the term “kongsi” in a chronological framework, this paper demonstrates how colonial discourse simultaneously elevated and destabilized the position of these Chinese political organizations. It argues that the transformation of the kongsi into a moral and imperial symbol both reinforced their regional significance and contributed to their political vulnerability, culminating in the decline of kongsi power in Montrado by 1850.

Dingkun Lei (Assistant Professor, East China Normal University)

Modernity, Mobility and Regional Order: India's Projects of Connectivity and the Historical Remaking of the Indian Ocean

Bio

Dingkun LEI, currently an Associate Professor at the Academy of History and Documentation of Socialism, and a joint appointment in the School of Foreign Languages, East China Normal University, Shanghai, China. He received his PhD in International Relations from Tsinghua University. He was a postdoctoral researcher at St Antony's College, University of Oxford, and a visiting researcher at the Nepal Centre for Contemporary Studies, Kathmandu University. He was a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley, and an alumnus of Jawaharlal Nehru University, India. His research focuses on South Asia, with country expertise in India and Nepal. His main research areas include contemporary Indian government and politics, political institutions, and models of modernization and development, with additional attention to Nepal's border governance and regional issues such as China-India and China-Nepal relations. In recent years, his scholarly interests have gradually expanded to history, particularly the history of British India and the Indian Ocean world. He has so far authored one academic monograph and one translated volume, contributed to the compilation of three Chinese textbooks, and published dozens of academic articles and commentaries in China and abroad.

Abstract

This research project examines how India's modernization initiatives extend beyond the territorial boundaries of the nation-state through projects of connectivity, mobility and security cooperation, and how these processes shape regional order across South Asia and the Indian Ocean. It argues that connectivity should not be understood simply as a contemporary developmental or strategic agenda in pure political senses, but as a historically layered form of order-making in an Indian Ocean world long constituted by circulations of people, goods, ideas and political authority. Against this background, this research project asks how India's contemporary initiatives in infrastructure, transport, energy cooperation and security partnership rework older patterns of circulation while producing new and uneven forms of integration. The central argument is that these modernizing initiatives are not merely instruments of development or influence, but postcolonial projects of regional order shaped by longer histories of mobility, territorialization and imperial governance. Adopting a historically informed comparative approach, the study focuses on India's relations with selected neighbouring states, especially Nepal and Sri Lanka, including the Bay of Bengal corridor where relevant, to show how border infrastructures, labour and energy flows, maritime security and competing claims over sovereignty and regional leadership reveal that the "regional" in South Asia is inseparable from wider oceanic histories. Contemporary connectivity is thus a contested process through which mobility is organized, secured, and unevenly distributed.

Yutong Li (Postdoctoral Fellow, NYU Shanghai)

The Aesthetics of Circulation: Chinese Art Between the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, 1600–1800

Bio

Yutong Li is a Postdoctoral Fellow of Global Asia at NYU Shanghai. She received her B.A. in Philosophy from the University of Virginia, and her M.A. in History of Art and Archaeology of East Asia and Intensive Language (Japanese) from SOAS, University of London, where her thesis won the Frederick Richter Memorial Postgraduate Prize. Before joining NYU Shanghai, she completed her Ph.D. in Art and Archaeology at Princeton University. Her research reconsiders early modern Chinese conceptualizations of ethnicity and gender through visual materials. Her current project, titled “The Aesthetics of Alterity: Imaging Foreignness in and beyond Early Modern China,” focuses on Chinese depictions of Yi 夷 in workshop paintings, illustrated books, and single-sheet prints produced in response to the rise of market economy and increasing global maritime interconnectivity. Pivoting from the analysis of top-down dissemination of statecraft ideology, she argues that the circulation of pictures on the open market actively recalibrated—and at times problematized—Hua-Yi (Sino-Foreign) dynamics perpetuated in official discourses.

Abstract

This project investigates the manifestations of Chinese art, particularly portable objects such as paintings and prints, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean world, shaped by the movements of artists and artworks. Records by European voyagers such as Johan Nieuhof (1618–1672) and Caspar Schmalkalden (1616–1673) recount encounters with Chinese communities in Southeast Asia and their image-making practices. Chinese paintings and prints also circulated to, or were produced in, these trading hubs, some of which eventually reached European countries via the Dutch or English East India Companies. Surviving examples in European collections, including painted compilations such as the Boxer Codex, watercolor and gouache sketches, and single-sheet prints, testify to these transoceanic exchanges. Many originated in maritime border cities such as Canton and Fujian, or within diasporic Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, revealing alternative modes of patronage and artistic practice. To illuminate the nature of these circulations, this project traces the movements of people and artworks through local gazetteers, collector notes, museum archives, and documents of the chartered trading companies, complemented by fieldwork aimed at recovering archival images that remain unidentified or understudied. The project gives particular attention to objects circulating across the Indian Ocean, including works that reached South Asian ports and European collections through routes linking Canton and Fujian to the wider maritime world. Rather than treating these sites as discrete nodes, the project conceptualizes the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean as an interconnected maritime space in which people, objects, and images circulated in multidirectional patterns. This interstitial approach reconstructs artistic production across porous, multilingual, and culturally hybrid contexts, tracing how works moved between communities and were reshaped in transit. In doing so, the project complicates bilateral models of exchange and offers an alternative to Eurocentric narratives of global art history.

Shiang Yii Low (Assistant Professor, Xiamen University)

Troubled Waters in Southeast Asia: Maritime Insecurity, Stateless Communities, and the Politics of Border Governance in the Sulu-Sabah Zone

Negotiating the Commons: The Ocean as a Shared Space of Cultural and Ecological Heritage

Bio

Dr. LOW SHIANG YII is a Malaysian scholar currently serving as an Assistant Professor at the School of International Relations and the Research School for Southeast Asian Studies, Xiamen University (China). She earned her Ph.D. from Peking University, an M.A. from Tianjin University, and a B.A. from Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Her research focuses on cultural anthropology, island and maritime cultural studies, and Austronesian societies. Her work also examines coastal and fisheries communities, maritime cultural heritage, as well as issues related to marine conservation and the governance of maritime borders in the Sulu-Sabah zone. Her primary long-term ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted on Pangkor Island, with ongoing research in Terengganu's marine parks and among stateless maritime communities in Sabah.

Abstract

This article examines how maritime insecurity reshapes everyday coastal life in the eastern Sabah-Sulu zone, a historically connected maritime borderland now frequently framed through piracy, kidnapping for ransom, militant mobility, smuggling, undocumented migration, and border control. While existing studies have largely approached this region through regional security cooperation and state responses, this article shifts attention to the onshore effects of maritime securitization. Based on multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in 2024 in Kota Kinabalu, Sandakan, Tawau, and Semporna, it explores how security logics are translated into coastal routines, market rhythms, residential choices, and everyday perceptions of risk. The article develops the concept of "lived coastal effects" to describe how maritime securitization travels across the shoreline and reorganizes waterfront settlements, jetties, markets, and coastal towns. It argues that eastern Sabah's coast is not simply abandoned under security pressure, but differentially inhabited: while some residents withdraw from waterfront areas, especially after dark, undocumented migrants, mobile traders, and sea-oriented communities continue to depend on these spaces for livelihood and mobility. Through the concepts of contested home and uneven occupation, the article shows how coastal spaces are feared, avoided, governed, reoccupied, and claimed under unequal conditions of legality, and security. Yet, despite the enduring unevenness and instability that shape the maritime borderland, different communities continue to inhabit the coast, where *senses of home* and *belonging* is continually negotiated and sustained through everyday practices, social relations, and ongoing mobility.

Asif Mehmood (Postdoctoral Fellow, NYU Shanghai)

US and Chinese collaborations and class formation in the Pakistani coastal cities

Bio

Asif Mehmood is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for Global Asia, NYU Shanghai. He completed his doctoral degree in Environmental [Social] Sciences at the State University of New York (SUNY-ESF), Syracuse, NY, USA. He has a master's degree in public policy from National University of Singapore (NUS). His doctoral work ethnographically explored state formation vis-à-vis China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects couched within the environmental resource governance. He is interested in questions of urban political ecology, land, infrastructure, nonhuman ecologies, urban governance, and environmental humanities. His research appeared in journals like South Asia Research, Cultural Studies, Antipode, Political Geography, Human Geography, EPD: Society and Space, EPC: Politics and Space and Anthropology Today. His work has been supported by SUNY-ESF, IJURR Foundation, and American Institute of Pakistan Studies.

Abstract

In this work, I take a historical approach and juxtapose United States-Pakistan collaborations in the 1950s and the China-Pakistan engagements under the Chinese Belt-and-Road-Initiative (BRI) since 2015 in Karachi and Gwadar vis-à-vis infrastructure, technologies, and trade. I show how the US-Pakistan interventions in Karachi strengthened the civil-military state institutions and the ruling elite of the “overdeveloped state structure” vis-à-vis other social groups. On the other hand, while China-Pakistan collaborations also mobilizes the BRI infrastructural capital and aspirations of the business classes, its engagement with the low-income groups in the technological education in Gwadar, the port city in Balochistan (and elsewhere in Pakistan) offer a contrasting view of the class-centric BRI. In this work, I plan to historicize and examine class relations in the two port cities in Pakistan in the context of US-Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations around technologies, infrastructure, and trade. I seek to explore the actors, networks, outcomes, and what these dynamics entail in these transactions.

Kalyani Madhura Ramachandran (Postdoctoral Fellow, NYU Shanghai)

Limestone Landscapes: Buddhism and Stonework in the Early Indian Ocean World

Bio

Kalyani Madhura Ramachandran is an art historian of premodern South Asia. Her work focuses on early Buddhist art in the Deccan and its transmissions across the eastern Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia. She has further interests in colonial, contemporary, and curatorial approaches to premodern South Asian stonework. Her writing has been published by *Ars Orientalis*, *Oxford Bibliographies*, and the *Yale Center for British Art*. Kalyani completed a PhD at Columbia University; an MPhil at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar; and a B.A. at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, where she won the Department of History Prize. She previously served as a Research Assistant at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she worked on five exhibitions including *Tree and Serpent: Early Buddhist Art in India, 200 BCE-400 CE*. Kalyani is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at NYU Shanghai where she is working on her first book.

Abstract

Premodern South Asia is home to one of the oldest and most continuous histories of stonework. The development of this artistic tradition is intertwined with the spread of Buddhism in the region, as evidenced by art, architecture, inscriptions, and chronicles by pilgrims, monks, and travellers, including Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing. Yet, the scholarship over the last century has concentrated on northern and central regions of premodern South Asia despite evidence of over a hundred contemporaneous sites in ancient Āndhradeśa (modern-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Karnataka states) located in the Deccan, or the south.

Limestone Landscapes focuses on one such site: the early Buddhist monastery at Phaṇigiri. Located on a granite hill, and bounded by the Kriṣṇa and Godāvārī River systems, this recently excavated site has yielded an extraordinary though little understood architectural and sculptural corpus dating from at least the first through the fourth centuries CE. The early evolution of this complex coincides with the extraordinary proliferation of stone construction in the Deccan and predates its famous Hindu monuments and Islamic structures by several centuries. The site's later development corresponds with the enigmatic decline of active construction of ancient Buddhist complexes and the rise of institutional Brahmanism in the region—the scholarship on which is limited by the “Deccan gap,” or absence of authoritative textual sources.

Based on extensive fieldwork, *Limestone Landscapes* shows that an attention to the art on site can productively overcome the issue. It demonstrates that the architectural program of Phaṇigiri was transformed by a long history of donation made for lithic construction, expansion, and repair. The vitality of the growing site is further reflected in carved bas-reliefs and free-standing sculpture, both of which innovatively drew upon, but reinterpreted, canonical artistic traditions of Amarāvātī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa (capitals of the Sātavāhana and Ikṣvāku dynasties respectively), and demonstrated affinities with contemporaneous Sri Lanka. The material basis of this corpus was a system of patronage characterized by non-royal and female donors, reflecting both local ideologies and broader cross-cultural concerns, and thereby challenging the applicability of dynastic labels, such as “Ikṣvāku,” typically used to describe the site. Ultimately, the distinctive art at Phaṇigiri was mobilized by an active network of production—comprising itinerant supervisors and sculptors—along the interlacing rivers of Āndhradeśa as they flowed into the eastern Indian Ocean.

The major intervention of *Limestone Landscapes* is that it extends beyond iconography and style to deliberate upon the striking interrelatedness between the notion of ephemerality, central to the Buddhist vision, and the use of the permanent medium of stone. To apprehend this development, the book engages with contemporaneous objects, artistic technologies, and ideological conceptions circulating within the Deccan as well as transregionally across the eastern Indian Ocean network. Thus, through an engagement with the site despite—and through—its material fragmentation, *Limestone Landscapes* highlights the relationship between the early Buddhist site and stonework, and shows that Phaṇigiri was a dynamic local idiom of the Deccan school of early Buddhist art at the moment of its transmission across the eastern Indian Ocean and in Southeast Asia.

Zhijian Sun (Lecturer, Queensland University of Technology)

China's Two Tropics: Climate, Infrastructural Reconstruction, and Thermal Socialism in Decolonizing Dar es Salaam and Maoist Canton

Bio

Zhijian Sun has completed his PhD in architectural history in 2025 at National University of Singapore, and is starting his new post in May 2026 as a Lecturer at Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. He holds a Master of Science from Columbia University, and a Bachelor of Architecture from Southeast University. In 2024, he was a visiting scholar at Oxford University History Faculty. His research on techno-politics of China's infrastructural reconstruction in Maoist Canton and socialist Dar es Salaam has been published in *History and Technology*, *Journal of Architecture*, *Political Geography*, and *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography (SJTG)*, and been presented at 2026 AAS Annual Conference, 2025 Oxford Global History Seminar and Cambridge World History Workshop. His recent papers have won the SJTG's 2023 Best Paper Prize and CUHK 2025 Lingnan Culture Studies Paper Award.

Abstract

In the 1950s, China's overseas aid in the decolonizing tropics was never a smooth process, in which Chinese professionals were challenged by building problems caused by their unfamiliar hot climates. These endeavours almost coincided with their domestic effort in coping with heat and humidity in subtropical Guangdong for the Great Leap Forward. Drawing on sources from China, Tanzania and Britain, ranging from government documents, technical manuals, local newspapers to workers' oral histories, this research links together trajectories of Chinese infrastructural investment in these two tropics across the Indian Ocean that were previously unconnected, with a particular focus on China's technical aid in postcolonial Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and its domestic subtropical construction in Maoist Canton. Through in-depth case studies of sample light industries, i.e. Canton Ramie Textile Factory (1956-8) and Tanzania-China Friendship Textile Mill (1966-8), it answers two overarching questions: How did transnational interactions between China's two tropics take place? How did Chinese tropicality from within work in socialist Tanzania as an alternative to the British Empire and socialist North? Drawing on theories of Science, Technology and Society (STS), it develops the notion of "thermal regime" to capture the neglected interdependence between infrastructure's climatic management and exercise of socio-political power. By undoing the standard knowledge transfer from the West to South, it reveals how the globally-circulated climatic knowledge, thermal comfort norms, cooling techniques and architectural expertise transcending Cold-War rivalries were marshalled by Chinese and Tanzanian actors, driven by their common desire for socialist industrialization, towards a technocratic control of environmental elements and human labour. When facing the Anthropogenic climate change, this techno-political history of Sino-African collaboration across the Indian Ocean offers us a genealogy of how our current predicaments of comfort, development and sustainability were deeply rooted in the history.

Nier, Wu (Lecturer, Minzu University of China)

Dates, Empire, and Connectivity: British Colonial Control and the Transformation of Date Networks in the Indian Ocean World

Bio

This project examines the historical transformation of the date trade in the Indian Ocean world, focusing on a uniquely significant crop and commodity that bridges environmental, economic, and cultural spheres. Adopting a long-term perspective across a very longue durée, the study integrates commodity history, imperial governance, technology, and cultural circulation to trace the evolution of date networks from the premodern era through the period of British colonial expansion. The research first reconstructs premodern Indian Ocean date networks, emphasizing indigenous maritime technologies, shipbuilding techniques, navigational knowledge, and longstanding trade practices that connected Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and South Asia. It then analyzes the role of British imperial governance—culminating in the Mandate in Iraq—in restructuring date production, circulation, and commercialization through new regimes of infrastructure, logistics, port facilities, and economic control. Beyond these technological and economic transformations, the project explores the cultural and social dimensions of date circulation, including mobility, religious exchange, and the formation of diasporic communities across the oceanic rim. Finally, it situates the date trade within broader historiographical debates on globalization, empire, and environmental history, demonstrating how a single commodity can illuminate larger questions of connectivity, power, and ecological change in maritime contexts.

Abstract

This project examines the historical transformation of the date trade in the Indian Ocean world, with particular attention to the role of British imperial expansion in reshaping regional networks of production, exchange, and mobility. As a crop indigenous to the Middle East yet widely circulated across the Indian Ocean littoral, dates offer a productive lens through which to analyse the intersection of environment, empire, and connectivity.

Prior to the consolidation of British authority in the Middle East, date production and circulation were embedded in decentralized, regionally integrated systems linking Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, East Africa, and South Asia. These networks were sustained through premodern maritime technologies, indigenous navigational knowledge, and long-standing commercial and cultural linkages. However, the expansion of British imperial power—culminating in the establishment of the Mandate in Iraq—reconfigured these systems through new regimes of governance, infrastructure, and economic control.

Try to explore how did British colonial intervention transform the date trade from a regionally embedded system into a globally integrated commodity network, and what were the technological, environmental, and cultural consequences of this transformation

Jonathan Koshy Varghese (Assistant Professor, Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi)

Priests, Police, Petitioners: A Suriyani World Between Empires

Bio

Jonathan Koshy Varghese is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Lady Shri Ram College, University of Delhi. He holds a PhD from the Department of History and Civilizations at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), Paris, and is an Associate Researcher at the Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH), the French national research centre based in New Delhi.

His research examines colonial surveillance, ecclesiastical discourse, and legal reasoning as technologies connecting the Indian subcontinent and the Ottoman Empire, with particular attention to the Suriyani Christians and the documentary practices through which authority and identity travelled across the Indian Ocean. He writes on aesthetics and visual culture for *The Hindu* and is a practicing portraitist.

Abstract

Indian Ocean studies have been principally organised around trade, merchant networks, and commodity circulation. While they have developed frameworks that studied the economic schematic of a connected world, such studies have rendered invisible historical actors who did not belong to the scheme. In this regard, Sanjay Subrahmanyam's concept of connected histories opened a more capacious path, focused as it was, on the circulation of people, texts, and political imaginaries and demonstrating the ocean as a corridor of cultural and intellectual exchange as much as commercial traffic. This project takes this further and attempts to reconstruct the historical connections of actors that have not been featured in such research.

At the centre of this project is the contention that the Suriyani Christians, an ancient Christian community rooted in the southwestern coast of India, are a community whose archival presence makes visible an oceanic corridor of interaction between the subcontinent and Ottoman world that existing historiography has left unmapped. Absent from both Global South studies and Indian Ocean studies, they appear in the archive as litigants, witnesses, and writers negotiating with imperial powers across the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Three overlapping regimes of authority organise the research: the Ottoman ecclesiastical order, Travancore sovereignty, and British colonial-state. The research unfolds through specific archival episodes, including visa requests by Russian Orthodox priests seeking passage through Travancore, the incarceration of Turkish subjects within the princely state, and the larger espionage frameworks employed by colonial administrators isolated particular individuals for scrutiny. Each episode shows how transoceanic mobility provoked colonial suspicion, deliberations on religious liminality and native social frameworks. The organising concept is papereality: routinized procedures through which writing constitutes the social world, rather than merely recording what it purports to describe. The project draws on archival history and examines petitions as dialogic narratives, reading them alongside, and sometimes, against legal narrative. What such a reading uncovers is a community that appropriated writerly conventions legitimized by the imperial order. The history of the Suriyani, therefore, suggests that a religious minority could realise a transoceanic world through the protocols of petition, ecclesiastical conventions, and the surveillance categories imposed upon them by colonial administration.

Chaoqun Wang (PhD student, Harbin Institute of Technology (Shenzhen))

Analysis of Spatial Morphology Characteristics and Mechanisms of Colonial Port Cities in the Early Modern Era

Bio

My name is Chaoqun Wang, a third-year PhD student at the School of Architecture, Harbin Institute of Technology, Shenzhen, China. I am undertaking a one-year exchange program as a visiting doctoral student at the University of Bologna.

My research focuses on spatial humanities, urban cultural heritage, and related fields. My doctoral dissertation aims to undertake a study in the field of global history, focusing on colonial geography between the 16th and 19th centuries (the early modern era). In addition, I have research experience in urban geography, historical geography and literary cartography, and am proficient in techniques such as knowledge graphs, spatial econometrics, and social network analysis. In my most recent work, I am keen to explore the application of multimodal large-scale models to the analysis of historical maps.

Abstract

This study investigates colonial port cities during the early modern period from the perspectives of global trade networks and urban spatial morphology. Based on historical archives and maps, it establishes a geographic database of colonial port cities and applies complex network analysis to characterize the structure and nodal positions of the transoceanic trade system. It further extracts and compares spatial indicators such as street layouts, functional zoning, and fortifications to measure inter-city spatial similarities. Using the Mantel test and correlation modeling, this study explores the relationship between urban network position and internal spatial form. The findings are expected to uncover the propagation mechanism of colonial spatial structures along trade routes and propose an integrated analytical framework for colonial port city research.

Xiangxiang Xie (PhD student, East China Normal University)

Naval Surveying of the British East India Company in the Indian Ocean in the Nineteenth Century

Bio

Xie Xiangxiang is a first-year doctoral student in World History at East China Normal University. Her research interests lie in British imperial history and Indian Ocean history, with a dissertation project focusing on the hydrographic and cartographic activities of the British East India Company in the Indian Ocean. Her seminar papers include "The Royal Navy's Hydrographic Survey of the Red Sea (1829–1831)" and "The Royal Geographical Society and the Production of Knowledge on the Red Sea," drawing on sources such as the Journal of the Royal Geographical Society and naval survey reports. Her work approaches these questions primarily from the perspective of the history of knowledge, examining how British imperial power operated and interacted in the Red Sea region

Abstract

Since the nineteenth century, as Britain expanded its trading networks and strategic routes across the Indian Ocean, accurate and systematic knowledge of maritime geography became increasingly central to imperial governance. In this context, the British East India Company, drawing on the resources of the Indian Navy, carried out sustained hydrographic surveys and navigational investigations in key regions of the Indian Ocean, including the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and the western coast of India. By combining astronomical observation, depth sounding, and coastal surveys—and through ongoing interaction with local sailors and coastal communities—the navy gradually built up a more coherent body of maritime geographical knowledge. The results of these efforts were reflected not only in the steady publication of charts, sailing directions, and scholarly papers, but also in improved navigational safety and the reorganization of shipping routes, laying important groundwork for the age of steam navigation. At the same time, this process transformed scattered seafaring experience into a standardized and transferable body of knowledge, reshaping Britain's overall understanding of the Indian Ocean as a spatial whole. More broadly, the East India Company's naval surveying functioned both as a practical instrument of imperial expansion and regional control, and as a key step in the transition of hydrography from experiential practice to a more formalized scientific discipline.

Xinghan Xiong (Associate Professor, Fudan Development Institute, Fudan University)

Material Flows and Institutional Change in Indian Ocean Island States since the Late Nineteenth Century: A Comparative Study of Madagascar and Mauritius

Bio

Xinghan Xiong is Associate Professor at the Fudan Development Institute, Fudan University. He received his PhD in Political Science from Tsinghua University's PhD Program in Developing Country Studies. His research focuses on African history, Indian Ocean studies, and comparative historical analysis, with particular interest in Madagascar, Mauritius, and the broader Indian Ocean world.

Abstract

This research examines why Madagascar and Mauritius, two island societies located in the southwestern Indian Ocean and both deeply incorporated into global networks of trade, labor, capital, and empire, have followed sharply divergent institutional trajectories since the late nineteenth century. Existing studies often explain such divergence either through geography, colonial legacies, or institutional design alone. By contrast, this project places material flows at the center of the analysis and asks how the circulation, allocation, transformation, and consumption of goods, people, and capital have interacted with evolving institutional arrangements.

Using a comparative historical approach, the study analyzes four major dimensions: port and transport systems, land and fiscal regimes, labor and migration, and trade dependence and external economic linkages. It argues that material flows do not simply pass through island spaces. Rather, they are filtered, reorganized, and redistributed through specific institutional mechanisms, including taxation, labor regulation, property arrangements, commercial networks, and administrative capacity. In this process, Madagascar gradually developed a more fragmented and extractive pattern of governance, while Mauritius moved toward a denser and more coordinated institutional order.

Drawing on multilingual archival and published sources in English and French, including colonial administrative reports, legal texts, trade statistics, port records, and secondary scholarship, the project seeks to reconstruct the long-term interaction between circulation and governance. More broadly, it aims to contribute to Indian Ocean history, African island studies, and comparative historical research on how global connectivity produces different developmental and institutional outcomes in small but strategically significant spaces.

Congcong Yao (PhD Student, Department of Urban Planning, School of Architecture, Southeast University)

A Study on the Promoting Effect of Cotton and Textile products' Trade from the Indian Ocean Region on Globalization in Early Modern Period

Bio

Congcong Yao, he is a PhD candidate with a focus on the urban planning history and heritage conservation for the historic cities along the maritime silk road. His dissertation research examines the development of regional trade systems involving multiple political entities and ethnic groups, the urban structure of key port cities, and the impact of maritime trade on diasporic communities, including the spread of religious, architectural, and artistic practices. He has a BA in Urban Planning and Design from Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (2017-2019 studied at University of Liverpool, Urban Regeneration and Planning) and an MSc in Built Environment: Sustainable Heritage from University College London.

Abstract

The navigation activities during the early modern period (circa 1500–1800) marked the onset of a global economy. However, the significance of Indian Ocean cotton and textile trade in this era has often been overlooked in favour of narratives focusing on spice trade and precious metal flows. This study examines the role of cotton and textile products from the Indian Ocean region in driving early modern globalization. By analysing historical trade records and existing scholarship, the paper explores the impact of Indian cotton production, distribution, and consumption on the development of a global market for manufactured consumer goods.

By synthesizing quantitative trade data, qualitative historical accounts, and material culture analysis, this study illustrates three key mechanisms of globalization. Initially, the port cities of the Indian Ocean served as crucial hubs linking African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian markets well before significant European involvement. Subsequently, the substantial European demand for printed cotton textiles from the 17th century onwards fundamentally reorganized global trade networks, shifting silver flow from the Americas and Japan to Asia, thus establishing the initial enduring system of intercontinental commodity trading. Lastly, the spread of Indian textile designs, dyeing techniques, and manufacturing processes prompted technological imitation and transformed consumer cultures, setting the material groundwork for the Industrial Revolution.

The study concludes that the cotton and textile trade in the Indian Ocean region actively promoted early modern globalization rather than passively benefiting from it. This trade facilitated cross-cultural exchanges, standardized commercial practices, and established the initial mass market for a manufactured product, consequently restructuring global economic and social dynamics. Acknowledging this pivotal role provides a more comprehensive, Asia-inclusive perspective on the emergence of globalization.

Jinchao Zhao (Assistant Professor, Tongji University)

Reconceiving Buddhist Stupa Worship in Sixth- and Seventh-Century China in Light of the Indian Ocean World

Bio

Dr. Jinchao ZHAO is currently Assistant Professor of Art History at the School of Humanities, Tongji University. She holds an M.A. in Comparative Literature from Peking University and a Ph.D. in Art and Architectural history from the University of Virginia. Before joining Tongji, she completed a joint-postdoctoral fellowship in Asian studies at NYU Shanghai and Fudan University. Jinchao was a visiting scholar at École Pratique des Hautes Études in December 2023, and at the Institute of Chinese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in Spring 2025. Jinchao's research focuses on medieval Chinese Buddhist art, early Indian Buddhist art, and 20th-century overseas Chinese schools in India. Her works has been published in journals and edited volumes including *Asian Studies*, *Religions*, and *Eurasian Studies*, among others.

Abstract

The veneration of the stūpa—the quintessential Buddhist monument and the foci of Buddhist rituals and monastic life—continues to be one of the enduring legacies of Buddhism in its early dissemination in China between the third and the sixth century CE. In this study, I provide a comprehensive examination of surviving archaic stūpa imagery in sixth-century China and reveal a complex history of localization and a variegated range of interpretations. Images of the domed stūpa proliferated across the north and the south since the early sixth century in major cave-temple sites and on steles and statues. Its association with the twin Buddhas and Maitreya imagery in the fifth century suggests an early attempt of incorporating the form in devotional Buddhist. In the early sixth century, a new pictorial scheme that features a stūpa image at the top of the almond-shaped mandorla of a statue starts to spread in the north, representing a new symbolic reference to paradisiacal realms of either of Maitreya or Amitābha.

While this study is grounded in stylistic and iconographical analysis of stūpa-related visual material, alongside close reading of relevant textual sources including historical records, Buddhist scriptures, and epigraphical texts, I incorporate recent archaeological discoveries of stūpas in South and Southeast Asia to account for the sudden flourishing of multiple new stūpa styles in sixth-century China. By situating this analysis within recent scholarly dialogue on Gupta influence on Chinese Buddhist statuary via the maritime route, my focus extends to a broader picture in which the veneration of stūpas, images, and relics all underwent significant transition. I argue that the florescence of stūpa images in the sixth century demonstrates not only the emergence of a new visual form, but also a new perception of the stūpa in separation from the monumental buildings that were erected across the landscape. These stūpa images are neither models nor replicas of immediately available buildings; rather, they are imaginative representations of sacred spaces as shaped by conceptual understandings recorded in texts, described by contemporary actors, or perhaps mediated by portable objects and paintings.

Yirun Zhao (PhD candidate, Shanghai academy of social sciences)

Disappearance and Reappearance: Identity Formation among Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia and the Changing Power Dynamics of Euro-Asian Encounters, 1800–1900

Bio

I am a PhD student in World China Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, specialising in Southeast Asian studies. My research interests include identity formation, ethnic discourse, maritime exchange, and cross-cultural encounters in Southeast Asia. My current research examines how the identity formation of Eurasian communities in Southeast Asian port cities reflects changing power dynamics in Euro-Asian encounters, c.1800–1900.

Abstract

It is necessary to take the mixed-race communities of Southeast Asia as an object of inquiry. By examining the processes through which their identities were formed, the study seeks to reveal the active role of local Asian orders in Euro-Asian interactions, a role long obscured beneath European racial domination and colonial discourse. It will discuss the formation of mixed-race identities in order to illuminate the nature of interaction between colonial regimes and local powers, as well as the ways in which these mixed-race communities challenged the colonial order, including whether they developed any particular mechanisms for doing so. The study pays particular attention to the “mobility” or “transnationality” of mixed-race communities, that is, to the ways in which transoceanic geographical and cultural movement shaped the construction of identity.