

**Conference report on “Representing China: from the Jesuits to Zhang Yimou” held in Manchester, 18-20 May 2011.**

Following the discovery of the extremely rare “Qianlong Emperor’s Europeans Palaces in the *Yuan Ming Yuan*” [圆明园西洋楼铜版画], a set of twenty or rather twenty-one images, in August 2010 and after consulting CCS colleagues, the Centre for Chinese Studies called for the above titled conference in December 2010. The Call for Papers brought in 48 abstracts from around the world and the Shortlist Committee ranked them and selected 20 of them for presentation at the conference.

In order to maximise the “impact” this conference could generate and celebrate the Centre for Chinese Studies, CCS decided to hold the keynote speech as a public event in the Historical Reading Room in the John Rylands Library Deansgate where the newly discovered album and other rare Chinese books and images found in the Chinese collection could be displayed for the first time. We managed to secure Professor Benjamin Elman, Head of East Asian Studies at Princeton University, to deliver the keynote titled “Re-thinking the Image of China in Global History”, and Mr. Hugh Davies, Senior British Diplomat to Hong Kong and China, to chair the keynote session. With the help of Confucius Institute, the keynote public event went extremely well. Xinhua News Agency came to report on the discovery and the event was broadcasted in China on the day.

The 2-day conference that followed saw 21 presentations in 7 panels. They came from as far as Tasmania (1), Australia (1), Canada (1), the United States (3), Hong Kong (1) and Taiwan (1) and as close as Poland (1), Austria (1), Finland (1), Oxford (1) and Manchester (9). 9 of the presenters are graduate students, 4 from our own pool of PhD student in Manchester. Clearly the conference benefited Manchester PG students and faculty members. Thanks to a generous grant from Jean Monnet Centre for Excellence, CCS is able to bring in scholars from Europe. The conference gathered not just paper presenters but also undergraduate and postgraduate students from Manchester and Italy, scholars from Leeds, Sheffield and Liverpool.

The 7 panels featured different and yet similar themes: from “The China the Jesuits invented”, and “American perception of the Middle Kingdom” to “Ethnic and unofficial China” and “From Linguistics and visual to Exposition” during the first day. The second day featured 3 panels: from “Despotic and revolutionary China” to “Missionaries and their ‘rice Christians” and “Staging China in the international arena”. The 2-day conference saw heated discussion and vigorous debate which were often carried over into tea and lunch sessions, even over drinks and dinners.

The 7 panels were chaired by professors Joseph Bergin (History), Peter Gatrell (History), Sharon Macdonlad (Social Science), Brian Ward (American Studies) from Manchester – lead scholars in their own fields. Drs. Adam Chau and Qing Cao were brought in from Cambridge and Liverpool due to their perspective expertise on the subject matter. Our own Jeesoon Hong chaired the last panel.

The intellectual conversation impressed not just the participants themselves but also Professor Ben Elman who, along with Professor Joseph Bergin, summed up the key points/themes at the end of the conference. Ben Elman was particularly impressed by what he called the “home team” – CCS colleagues who gave papers and participated in the often heated debate. He met with CCS members on Saturday before he left, giving us advice about our papers, the presentation of our PhD students, and more importantly future collaboration between CCS and the East Asian Studies Department at Princeton. I am in the process of selecting papers and drafting a proposal for the resultant journal or book volume with the hope that I can submit to either *Modern Asian Studies* or a university press for publication in the summer.

Draft by Zheng Yangwen

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