

# Remapping the cultural and linguistic landscape of the Chinese in Britain

Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
Pavilion, University of Westminster  
115 New Cavendish Street  
London W1W 6UW

The Chinese in Britain is a small but one of the fastest growing communities. According to Office for National Statistics, the number of Chinese in Britain has increased from 247,000 in 1991 to 400,000 in 2011, and it is estimated the total number of Chinese has reached 500,000 by 2015. Approximately two-thirds of Chinese in Britain were born outside UK, with the majority coming from Hong Kong, China and Southeast Asia. The past two decades has witnessed a steady rise in the number of people from mainland China, including professionals, skilled workers, investors and young people who come to study in UK's schools and universities. The existing literature on the Chinese in Britain has predominately focused on the Cantonese-speaking communities from Hong Kong and to a lesser extent Southeast Asian countries. There is an urgent need to document and conceptualise this important demographic and cultural shift, not only for a better understanding of the new development of Chinese communities in the UK but also for the benefit of Britain whose future is increasingly built upon its understanding of and relations with the rest of the world including China.

This conference is aimed at addressing this gap by bringing together researchers, Chinese language teachers, community leaders and policy makers to identify and examine the changing linguistic and cultural landscape of the Chinese in Britain. It seeks to (1) unveil the ways in which the Chinese in Britain have changed into an unprecedentedly diverse and dynamic society in the dual contexts of China's global rise and multicultural Britain; (2) explore new features and dis/continuity in the transformation of the British Chinese communities, mediated by (sub) ethnicity, linguistic identity, class, gender and generation; (3) discuss the extent to which this demographic and cultural change is shaped by and shaping the relationship between global China and post-Brexit Britain.

This conference is organised by Cangbai Wang and hosted by HOMELandS in collaboration with the Contemporary China Centre of University of Westminster. It is funded by Language Acts and World Making Small Grant Scheme, AHRC Open World Research Initiative (OWRI).

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## Conference Programme

### **9: 30 Arrival and Tea/Coffee**

#### **10:00 to 10:05 Welcome**

Cangbai Wang (Conference organiser, University of Westminster)

#### **10:05 to 10:15 Opening Address**

Gerda Wielander (Professor of Chinese and Deputy Head of College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, University of Westminster)

#### **10:15 to 11:15 Keynote speech 1**

*Chinese London: Conceptualising ethnicities and urban space in a mobile world*

Caroline Knowles (Professor of Sociology, Goldsmiths, University of London)

#### **11:15 to 12:15 Keynote speech 2**

*Multilingualism in the Chinese community in Britain: Diversities from within*

Li Wei (Professor and Chair of Applied Linguistics and Director of the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University College London)

### **12:15 to 13:15 Lunch Break**

#### **13:15 to 14: 15 Session 1: Negotiating and articulating Chineseness in a changing Britain**

Chair: Anne Witchard (University of Westminster)

*Becoming British East Asian: Anti-racism, Chineseness and the crafting of new political communities*

Diana Yeh (City University of London)

*The talking of objects: migratory experiences and subjectivities of British Chinese women in contemporary Britain*

Denise Kwan (University of Westminster)

*The online construction and representation of cultural identity-A study of British Chinese community on YouTube*

Chen Yang (University of Westminster)

**14:15 to 15:15 Session 2: Speaking Chinese in multilingual London**

Chair: Paul Kendall (University of Westminster)

*Walking in two Chinatowns: Spatial narrations of urban change*

Jackie Jia Lou (Birkbeck, University of London)

*An ethnographic study on the family language choice of Cantonese-speaking mothers in multilingual London*

Maggie Hoi Lam Wong (King College London)

*Heritage language learners on the move: The transnational process of managing and learning Chinese in a Mandarin complementary school*

Lini Xiao (University of Cambridge)

**15:15 to 15:30 Tea/Coffee Break**

**15:30 to 16:30 Session 3: British Chinese as a Transnational Subject**

Chair: How Wee Ng (University of Westminster)

*One Chinese dream, many varied interpretations: How British Chinese community perceives the rise of China*

Yan Wu, Richard Thomas and Yakun Yu (University of Swansea)

*Redefining the 'ethnic enclave': Political economy and ethnic identities in the British Chinese diaspora*

Jing Huang (University of Bath)

*Below the Lion Rock – Hong Kong Chinese identities and hospitality in post-devolution Scotland*

Eona Bell (University of Cambridge)

**16:30 to 17:30 Session 4: Theorising and doing British Chinese heritage**

Chair: Giulio Verdini (University of Westminster)

*Sharing Chinatown Stories: a practical overview of projects based in London's Chinatown to capture, curate and celebrate stories of this iconic part of the capital*

Freya Aitken-Turff and Xiao Ma (China Exchange)

*Exploring the multiple meanings and spaces of Manchester's Chinatown*

Natalie Vujasin (University of Sheffield)

*Soul Relics Museum: identity, culture and mental wellbeing of the Chinese in London*

Vanessa Yim (University of Oxford)

### **17:30 to 18:00 Conclusion**

Cangbai Wang and Harriet Evans (University of Westminster)

### **18:00 to 19:00 Reception**

## **Speakers' Bios**

**Caroline Knowles** is director of the Urban Infrastructures of Well-Being Programme at the British Academy, Professor of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London, and a fellow of Academy of Social Sciences and the Royal Geographical Society. She currently holds a Major Leverhulme Fellowship, *Serious Money: walking plutocratic London*. She is the author of many books and papers on urbanism, ethnicity, race, wealth, visual research methods, circulations of people (as migrants), and of objects composing contemporary globalization. Her recent books include *Flip-Flop: A Journey through Globalisation's Backroads*, published by Pluto Press, 2014, [www.flipfloptrail.com](http://www.flipfloptrail.com); *Hong Kong: Migrant Lives, Landscapes and Journeys*, with Douglas Harper, published by the University of Chicago Press, 2009; *Making Race Matter*, with Claire Alexander, published by Palgrave, 2005; *Picturing the Social Landscape: Visual Methods and the Sociological Imagination*, with Paul Sweetman, published by Routledge, 2004; *Race and Social Analysis*, published by Sage, 2003; and *Bedlam on the Streets*, published by Routledge, 2000.

**Li Wei** is Chair of Applied Linguistics at the UCL Institute of Education, University College London, where he heads up the ESRC Doctoral Training Partnership of UCL,

Bloomsbury and East London (UBEL). He has researched and published widely on issues of multilingualism. Two of his books *The Blackwell Guide to Research Methods in Bilingualism and Multilingualism* (with Melissa Moyer) and *Translanguaging: Language, Bilingualism and Education* (with Ofelia Garcia) won the British Association of Applied Linguistics Book Prize. He is Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, and Editor of the *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* and *Applied Linguistics Review*.

**Diana Yeh** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Culture and the Creative Industries at City, University of London. She works on race and racisms, migration, diaspora and cultural politics, especially contestations of British Chinese and East Asian identities. She is co-editor of *Contesting British Chinese Culture* (Palgrave 2018), author of *The Happy Hsiungs: Performing China and the Struggle for Modernity* (Hong Kong University Press, 2014), and Principal Investigator of the British Academy/Leverhulme project, *Becoming East Asian: Race, Ethnicity and the Politics of Belonging*.

**Denise Kwan** is an artist, lecturer and researcher. She is interested in the role of material culture and art in the lives of migrant women. She has recently obtained her PhD degree from University of Westminster where she used socially engaged art practice and material culture to explore the lives of British Chinese women. As a lecturer, she has taught in UK and European institutions including Wimbledon College of Arts UAL, University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Copenhagen Art School.

**Chen Yang** is a third Year PhD student in The Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), University of Westminster. She obtained her undergraduate degree in China in Media and Communication and finished her master's degree in Film Studies from University College London. Her current research is about the online representation of British Chinese and how they construct their cultural identity on social media platforms.

**Jackie Jia Lou** is Lecturer in Sociolinguistics at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research focuses on the relationship between language, space, and place, particularly through the empirical lens of linguistic landscape. Her work about Washington, DC's Chinatown has been published in several journal articles, a research monograph, and featured in community newspaper and on public radio. Her current research project 'Navigating the linguistic landscapes of London Chinatown: Spatial narrations of urban change' examines intergenerational perceptions of Chinatown through walking interviews.

**Maggie Hoi Lam Wong** studied her BEd in Language Education in Chinese at University of Hong Kong then studied her MA in Language and Cultural Diversity at King's College London. In between the 3-year gap of her BEd and MA, Maggie worked as, and she still is, a Mandarin and Cantonese teacher in London and Hong

Kong. She has worked extensively with non-Chinese-speaking children with different backgrounds. She had been awarded the Jack Petchey Achievement Award and Leader Award in 2016 and 2017 respectively because of her contribution in promoting Chinese learning in the community of Tower Hamlets. Her research interests include teaching Chinese as a foreign language, linguistic repertoires, language and cultural identity.

**Lini Xiao** is a PhD candidate and Cambridge Trust scholar in the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, language and migration, and language education policy. She is particularly interested in understanding the social nature of and social implications for language learning in contexts of migration. Lini's PhD project explores how contemporary heritage language learning is constructed by and constructing transnational mobility among immigrant-origin children.

**Yan Wu** lectures in Media and Communications Department, Swansea University, UK. Her research interests focus on the digital media in China and China's media diplomacy. Her publications appear in journals such as *New Media and Society*, *Global Media and China*, *International Journal of Digital Television* and as book chapters in *Media and Public Sphere* (2007), *Climate Change and Mass Media* (2008), and *Migration and the Media* (2012).

**Jing Huang** holds a MA in Applied Linguistics from the University of Warwick (UK), and a PhD in Education from the University of Birmingham (UK). She currently works as a research associate in the Department of Education at the University of Bath, UK. The project she works for is an ESRC-funded multi-level investigation on transnational migration and language policy, which looks at how social mobility impacts UK multilingualism at the national, community, and family levels. Prior to her academic career, Jing has taught English and Chinese for general purposes in China and the UK for years. Jing's research interests lie in the fields of sociolinguistics and multilingualism in education. She uses ethnography to research multilingual practices of individuals, families, schools, and communities, particularly in relations to ideology, identity, and education.

**Eona Bell** is Affiliated Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. She has a PhD (2012) in Social Anthropology from the LSE, for research on cultural transmission among Hong Kong Chinese families in Scotland. She was co-author of an award-winning (2011) report for the Chinese in Britain Forum on the needs of new Chinese migrants in London and subsequently conducted further ethnographic research within a Chinese community centre in north London. She contributed a chapter on the history of Chinese migration to Scotland in the 2018 book, *New Scots: Scotland's Immigrants to Scotland since 1945* edited by Tom Devine and Angela McCarthy.

**Freya Aitken-Turff** has been the CEO of Chinatown charity, China Exchange since 2015. In 2017, she received a Fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to research how Chinatowns around the world are responding to change. With a background in communications, she worked in public policy and communications before making her passion for China the centre of her working life.

**Xiao Ma** is Cultural Projects Manager & Researcher at China Exchange. She has a passion for promoting cultural understanding and has experience with cross cultural facilitation in different fields. As a former London-based journalist, she had been writing about UK arts and culture for a Chinese audience for two years before exploring the art market with work experience at Christie's and leading British Asian art dealers. She later joined China Exchange where she enjoys sharing the vibrant Chinese culture, both old and new, in engaging ways. Freya and Xiao are co-authoring a book, *Chinatown Stories* published by Unbound.

**Natalie Vujasin** is Human Geography graduate, and her interests lie in the relations and interactions afforded by urban spaces and how material and spatial processes intertwine to produce such spaces. This specific research on Chinatown and its processes involved working with the Confucius Institute in Manchester, and the hua foundation and Chinatown Today in Vancouver. This work was submitted as part of her degree with the University of Sheffield, where other research interests and work centred on urban foodscapes, tourism and counter tourism and creative research methods.

**Vanessa Yim** is currently a doctoral Trainee Clinical Psychologist at University of Oxford. She has an interest in migration, Chinese mental health as well as art and mental wellbeing. Over the last 2 years, she has conducted mental health awareness workshops at different Chinese community centres in London. She founded Soul Relics Museum, an object-based storytelling platform relating to mental wellbeing and has organised several pop-up exhibitions in clinics and community venues across the UK.

## **Chairs' Bios**

**Anne Witchard** is Reader in English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Westminster. Her research interests are in China Studies and Modernism. Recent publications include the edited collection *British Modernism and Chinoiserie* (EUP 2015), *England's Yellow Peril: Sinophobia and The Great War* (Penguin 2014), and *Lao She in London* (HKUP 2012) which situates the Chinese writer Lao She as a central figure of transcultural modernity, influenced by the collision of Chinese and British literary traditions. She is currently working on an edited collection, *Chiang Yee and his London Circle*, and a paper on the modern dancer Si-lan Chen.

**Paul Kendall** is a Senior Lecturer in Chinese cultural studies at the University of

Westminster. Most of his published research to date has drawn on ethnographic and textual data to explore the relationship between place promotion, built environment, leisure, sound and ethnicity in the production of urban Chinese space. He is the author of *The Sounds of Social Space: Branding, Built Environment, and Leisure in Urban China* (University of Hawai'i Press 2019). He is currently working on memories and representations of Third Front factories in southwest China.

**How Wee Ng** is Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Westminster. Research interests range from issues of censorship in Sinophone cinema and television and the exclusionary politics of representation. Selected publications include monograph *Drama Box and the Social Theater of Singapore: Cultural Intervention and Artistic Autonomy* (2011), book chapter "Rethinking Censorship in China: The Case of 'Snail House' (Woju)" (2015), and forthcoming journal articles on the Taipei Golden Horse Awards and Sinophone intercultural theatre collaboration.

**Giulio Verdini** is Reader at the School of Architecture and Cities of the University of Westminster. Prior to that, he was Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Research Institute of Urbanisation at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in Suzhou. Over the last ten years he has conducted research on the urbanization process of China, looking in particular at urban-rural linkages and culture-led rural regeneration, and regularly advising UNESCO on these issues. He has moreover studied Chinese communities in Southern Europe. He is the Editor of the Routledge Book Series 'Planning, Heritage and Sustainability'. He holds a degree in Architecture and a PhD in Urban and Regional Development from the University of Ferrara.

**Cangbai Wang** is Reader in Chinese Studies at University of Westminster and the co-leader of HOMELandS (Hub on Migration, Exiles, Languages and Spaces). He specialises in the study of transnational migration to and from China and migration-related cultural heritage studies. He has published widely in peer reviewed journals including *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, *China Information* and *Modern China*. He is currently working on a book project on the Overseas Chinese museums in the PRC and an edited volume (with Terry Lamb) on 'Negotiating Multicultural Identities and Belongings among Migrant Communities in Global London'.

**Harriet Evans** is Emeritus Professor of Chinese Cultural Studies University of Westminster and Visiting Professor in Anthropology (LSE) has written extensively on the politics of gender and sexuality in China, and on political posters and visual culture of the Mao era. Her third monograph, *Beijing from Below: Stories of Marginal Lives in the Capital's Center* (Duke University Press) will appear in May 2020. She is currently working on an edited volume based on a research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, on 'Conflicts in Culture: Localities and Heritage in Southwest China'.