University of BRISTOL

re:search

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Batting for China

Made in China

Picturing China

re: search editorial

The Centre for East Asian Studies

One of the biggest challenges we face today is the emergence of East Asia on to the world stage: its economies and its politics, its security tensions and its environmental issues. The challenge, therefore, for Europe, for Britain, and for the University of Bristol, is to understand East Asia, engage with it, and prepare for a century in which Asia will be a leading player. The Centre for East Asian Studies (CEAS) was designed to equip the University with the expertise to play a prominent role in that project. It draws together CEAS staff with other specialists from across the University to provide a core of interdisciplinary expertise that will undertake world-class research into contemporary East Asia and its historical foundations. The establishment of CEAS forms part of the University's wider Research Strategy, which aims to further consolidate Bristol's position in the top tier of universities, nationally and internationally.

Central to the initiative is a distinctive research and teaching programme that builds on the University's proven track record in contemporary policy engagement, as well as its existing research expertise and institutional links. It takes as its key themes the EU–East Asia relationship, historical and contemporary perspectives on globalisation, and the growing importance of East Asia in the global economy.

Since its launch in September 2005, CEAS has already made significant advances in its teaching and research activities. The MSc in East Asian Studies has attracted growing numbers of students from a wide range of countries and two new Masters programmes are about to be introduced. It has a thriving doctoral programme and also offers undergraduates the opportunity to gain a good knowledge of East Asian societies, with open units available on contemporary China and Japan. CEAS is also a partner in the prestigious British Inter-University China Centre (with Oxford and Manchester Universities) – one of five new national collaborative centres funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, among others.

With a firm teaching and research foundation in place, the second phase in the development of CEAS will prioritise internal collaboration with other departments in the University and strengthen external links with key institutions in East Asia. CEAS also intends to broaden its skills and expertise, particularly in relation to Japan and South Korea. The funding of a new permanent lectureship in Contemporary Japanese Society, with an initial five-year grant from the Nippon-Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation, already represents a significant step in that direction.

This issue highlights some of the studies ongoing in CEAS, as well as others from the wider University that also focus on East Asia.

Ray Forrest
Acting Director

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Articles about research at Bristol University are welcome. Please contact the editor.

Editor
Cherry Lewis
Research Communications Manager
Communications and Marketing Services
University of Bristol
Senate House
Tyndall Avenue
Bristol BS8 1TH
email re-search@bristol.ac.uk
tel +44 (0)117 928 8086

Head of Public Relations Office
Jill Cartwright

Communications and Marketing Director
Barry Taylor

Design, print and production
cw-design.co.uk

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Cover image:
Studio portrait of the actress Liang Caizhu, 1936. Unknown photographer. From *Picturing China 1870-1950*. Fu Bingchang collection.

pre: view

Garden of thinking

Traditional Chinese academies, comparable to Greek philosophic schools, were neo-Confucian institutes, often located in reclusive mountains. The Chinese term for academy, *shuyuan*, literally means 'the courtyard of books', and activities in academies were mainly based on textual knowledge – discussion, lectures, book collection, publication, annotation, and reprinting. In their thousand-year history, academies enabled literati to accumulate, disseminate and revitalise Confucian thinking, despite social turmoil and political upheavals. Nowadays, academies are the subject of a large spectrum of research, mainly focusing on philosophical development and institutional structure.

Xin Wu, in the History of Art Department, takes landscape and garden as the departure point to examine methods of teaching in the traditional academies. Focusing on the Yuelu Academy, one of China's Four Grand Academies, she explores the relationship between scholarly activities and academy landscapes and gardens, in order to unveil the sophisticated entanglements between experiences of natural scenes and philosophic thinking, between the concrete and the metaphysical, between the spiritual and the bodily, between 'investigating things' and 'extending knowledge'.

Teaching and learning were conducted in parallel with studying the classic texts and touring the landscape and gardens. The landscape and gardens of the academy, therefore, are distinctive from commonplace landscape and gardens. The academy landscape is meaningful, not just because it provides a readable textbook, but because it stimulates the reciprocity between nature and the self, anchored in the succession of scholars, providing the catalyst for assimilating and regenerating neo-Confucian philosophy. The academy garden is the garden of thinking.

Closely related to these studies on academies is a pair of conferences jointly organised by the renowned Garden and Landscape Studies programme at Dumbarton Oaks and the newly established Institute of Garden and Landscape History at University of Bristol. The first of these, *Leaping the Fence: Transitions between Garden and Landscape in the Chinese and European Tradition*, will take place at Burwalls Conference Centre, Bristol, from 18 - 20 April 2008. *Interlacing of words and things in gardens and landscapes: beyond nature and culture*, will be held at Dumbarton Oaks, Harvard University, USA, in May 2009. ■

www.bicc.ac.uk/Conferences/LeapingtheFence/tabid/491/Default.aspx

Batting for China

Gareth Jones, Professor of Biological Sciences, works on the ecology and behaviour of bats. He has been visiting China for seven years, during which time he has seen a staggering change occur in Chinese science.

It all started in 2001 when I was awarded a grant from the Royal Society, matched with funding from the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Back then, my collaborator in the Institute of Zoology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing, Professor Zhang Shuyi, was working in a small office with basic equipment. Today when I visit him at the East China Normal University in Shanghai, Professor Zhang runs a research group of 25 people using state-of-the-art technology, and the Institute of Zoology in Beijing has relocated to a modern building overlooking the Beijing Olympic Stadium – nicknamed the Bird's Nest due to its remarkable architecture – where another ten research students are based.

Professor Zhang's group has published 24 papers in the past year, many in quality journals. The laboratories are equipped with top-quality equipment and there are few bureaucratic obstacles that stand in the way of research. Professor Zhang has recently accepted a further position at a university for national minorities in Beijing. His latest lab is fitted with rows of PCR (polymerase chain reaction) machines which amplify tiny amounts of DNA, and a gene sequencer – all funded by the Government. Can you imagine that happening in Britain? I don't think so. My last trip to Shanghai was one of the most stimulating scientific visits I have ever experienced.

dormitories, a kitchen and dining room, experimental rooms, bat-housing facilities and a large flight area containing a colony of fishing bats. The entrance hall contains a small museum with a large window at the end. It's amazing to sit at the window around dusk and watch the bats fly down to a pond to catch fish with their large feet. They will feature in a forthcoming BBC series entitled *Wild China*.

We have discovered a new species of bat that is similar to the rare barbastelle bat of Europe

My Chinese colleagues and I have worked in the field in many areas of China, and with funding from the Darwin Initiative – a programme that aims to promote biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of resources around the world – we have built a research centre (The Darwin Initiative Centre for Bat Research) near Beijing and are developing an education centre. The research centre has a display area,

So what have we learnt in the seven years that I have worked in China? We have already published 12 papers on a wide range of topics that include studies describing the echolocation and foraging behaviour of a bat species found only in China. It is based at a roost in a Buddhist temple – one of the oldest wooden buildings in the world. We have also studied the behaviour of bats that live in the stems of bamboos and have begun to resolve complicated taxonomic issues surrounding the 100 or so Chinese bat species, by comparing gene sequences among species. As a consequence of this work, we have discovered a new species of bat that is similar in appearance to the rare barbastelle bat of Europe, but is genetically very different. We are about to lobby for the protection of roosting sites used by this bat, which is currently only known from around Beijing. The co-evolution between bats and the SARS-like coronoviruses they host has also proved a fruitful area of research. My favourite work, however, involved a study of molecular evolution – evolution at the scale of DNA, RNA and proteins – and I have been privileged to work with some very gifted Chinese students who have grasped complex genetic techniques and methods for evolutionary analyses very competently, largely by reading material, in English, on the internet.

ZHANG SHUYI

Barbastella beijingensis.

GARETH JONES

Shanghai.

Take the *FOXP2* gene, for example – often simplistically dubbed the 'speech and language gene'. It has been implicated in the evolution of human language, first because mutations in the gene have been shown to cause speech defects, and second because we know the gene underwent changes around the time that language developed. More recently, however, patterns of gene expression in birds, humans and rodents have suggested a wider role for the *FOXP2* gene in producing the sounds animals make. Numerous reports have established that *FOXP2* shows very little genetic variation across even distantly related vertebrates – from reptiles to mammals – suggesting that the gene is strongly conserved and hence mutations that may affect its standard function are not selected.

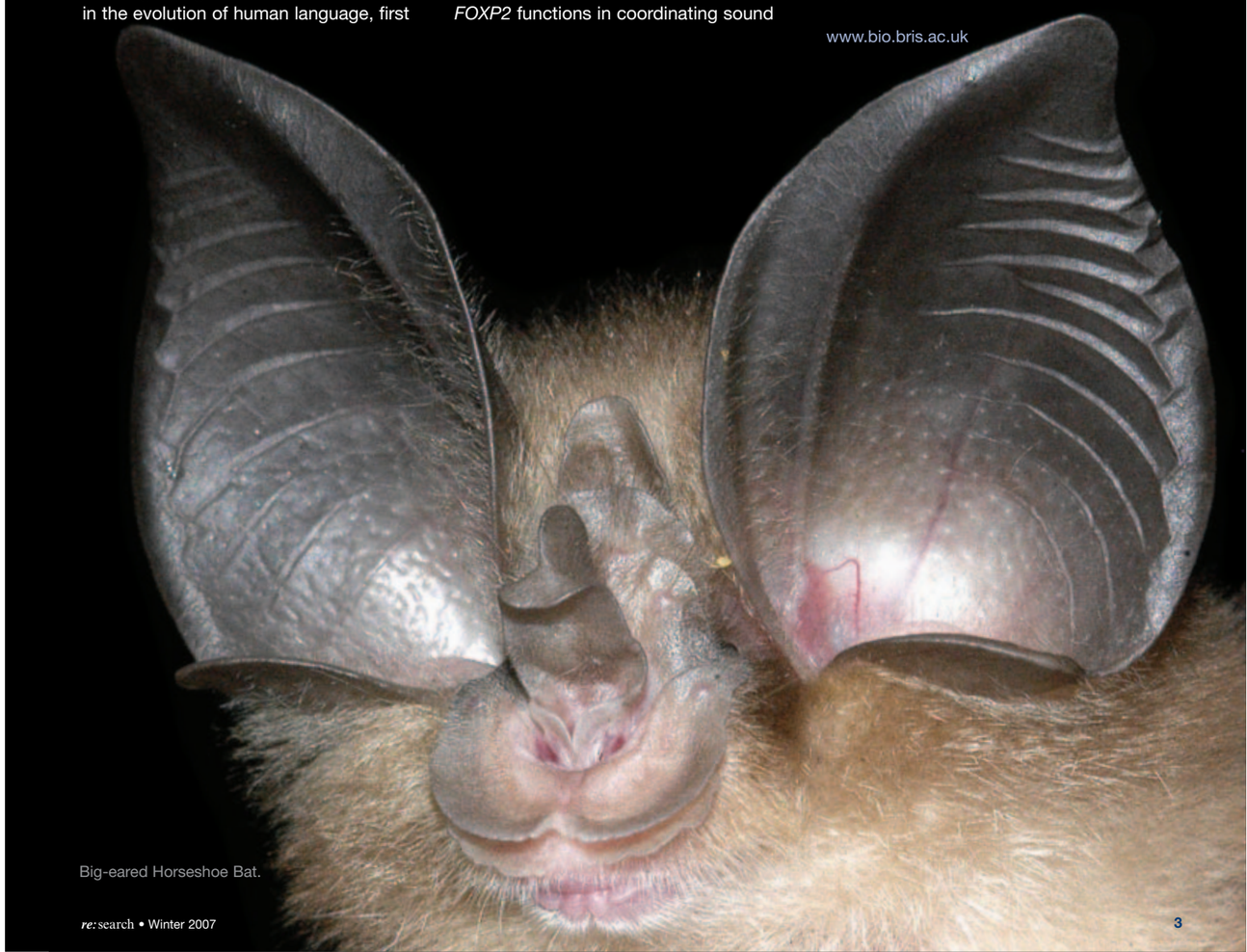
When we show small bats to children, they say 'Yes, we have eaten those'

In echolocating bats, on the other hand, our work has found that this gene shows unparalleled variation and that *FOXP2* mutations among bat lineages correspond well to contrasting forms of echolocation. Like speech in humans, bat echolocation involves producing complex vocal signals via sophisticated coordination of the mouth and face. The involvement of *FOXP2* in the evolution of echolocation adds weighty support to the theory that *FOXP2* functions in coordinating sound production and associated patterns of movements, not only in bats but also in humans and other vertebrates.

Visiting China has been a fantastic experience. In collaboration with my Chinese partners, I can get research done quickly and in return I provide ideas and contribute to the writing of papers, so both sides benefit. But my last visit a few months ago highlighted some of China's paradoxes – it's a country where state control mixes with rampant free enterprise, and where huge investment in science sits alongside some of the world's most pressing issues regarding pollution and wildlife conservation.

Although I can visit labs that are among the best-equipped in the world, I have never seen the sun in Beijing because of the thick smog. We can drive for days at a time and see hardly any birds, and when we show small bats to children, asking if they know what they are, they answer 'Yes, we have eaten those'. Nevertheless, for me it has been a great privilege contributing to capacity-building for research in China. I am eager to write the next grant proposal so that more Chinese students can visit my lab in Bristol, and my work in China can continue. ■

www.bio.bris.ac.uk



Big-eared Horseshoe Bat.

MADE IN CHINA

Drastic social and economic transformations in post-Mao China have spawned a massive migration of rural labourers into cities and towns, forming a new working class. Professor Ka Ho Mok, Director of the Centre for East Asian Studies, explored the ensuing changes in social stratification and mobility, and whether these new workers are asserting themselves to protect their labour rights.

Prior to the 1970s strict limits had been imposed on ordinary Chinese citizens, making it hard for them to change their permanent place of residence. But beginning with the reform period in the late 1970s and accelerating during the late 1990s, national and local authorities relaxed restrictions on obtaining urban residence permits. While these moves are a step forward, recent reforms often include high income and strict housing requirements that work against rural migrants seeing to move to China's cities. Migrants who do not meet these requirements usually cannot obtain public services such as health care and schooling for their children on an equal basis with other residents. These uneven reforms discriminate against poor migrant workers in favour of the wealthy and educated, having replaced the restrictions on changes in permanent residence with a barrier preventing some of China's most vulnerable citizens from receiving public services.

In 2002 the number of peasant workers employed in the industrial and service sectors in China reached 92 million

Despite these disadvantages, in 2002 the number of peasant workers employed in the industrial and service sectors in China reached 92 million, exceeding the number of employees in state and collectively owned enterprises (87 million). The number has subsequently risen to around 120 million, accounting for 16 per cent of the entire labour force in China. Among them, 80 per cent work in the industrial, construction, catering and service industries. These figures indicate that peasant workers have become the mainstream of the Chinese industrial working class.

The focus of this study was Dongguan, chosen because it is a key industrial city in the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong Province, southern China, which hosts over two million peasant workers who come from adjacent provinces to engage primarily in industrial manufacturing. A number of peasant workers were asked, through focus groups and face-to-face interviews, what they thought about their new social status and whether they felt part of a new urban citizenship. Interestingly, while a large majority (93 per cent) believed that they had benefited from the economic reforms, as many as 25 per cent considered that no major change had occurred in their social status. Of these, 80 per cent chose to go back to their rural homes after finishing work rather than stay in the city, and even amongst those who did consider that their social status had improved, the majority (67 per cent) still preferred to go back home after working in the city. This clearly demonstrates that few peasant workers have so far developed any strong sense of belonging to their new communities – indeed, only 30 per cent believed they would become 'New Dongguan citizens' in urban China. This idea appears to have found little resonance among these workers, particularly since they have not seen any concrete policy measures which – in terms of social protection or welfare entitlements – would guarantee them treatment equal to that enjoyed by locally born residents.

However, having made contributions to local economic and social developments, some of these workers have now begun to show interest in having their social rights protected. Although they have not yet organised themselves into a force strong enough to demand better social protection, they do expect the government to enforce laws to make sure their employers pay them regularly, and there is a growing expectation that the government should provide better education opportunities for their children, as well as social housing, medicare and other social welfare services.

While most of the participants in the study knew of the existence of a trade union in their firms, less than ten per cent were active members of a union and less than 20 per cent felt a trade union would be helpful to them. More interestingly, only eight per cent chose to reply to questions about whether they would participate in sit-ins or strikes to negotiate with their employers, and no respondents would reply to questions regarding demonstrations or other relatively radical means of settling labour-related issues. So for the moment it appears that workers prefer internal channels within the companies to resolve most of their labour disputes.

But with the shortage of labour in the Guangdong area, local governments should take peasant workers' social welfare concerns very seriously, especially since many found the notion of 'New Dongguan citizens' an empty one. In particular, a growing number of workers have been deceived by employers who fail to pay their salaries regularly or even cut salaries without reasonable grounds, so if the workers were to become more organised in the future, it would have significant social and political consequences. The government would therefore be well advised not to ignore the growing complexity of relations between the state, employers and peasant workers. ■

Workers have been deceived by employers who fail to pay their salaries regularly

www.bristol.ac.uk/ceas

This research was funded by The British Academy.

LIZ MCCLELLAND

LIZ MCCLELLAND

Top: Sampans at Wuchang (Wuhan), c.1906-07. G. W. Swire collection, SOAS.
Below left: Hong Kong, c.1909. Hedgeland collection, SOAS.
Below right: Near Shanghai, c.1920. Peck collection.

PICTURING CHINA

During the 1966-69 Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, private individuals in China destroyed dangerous and 'easily misunderstood' records of their past, such as photographs. Today, fed by a nostalgia for the lost world represented in those photographs, China is undergoing an 'old photographs' fever.

Between 1842 and 1954 tens of thousands of Britons visited or lived in China, and many bought, commissioned, or took photographs while they were there. Discovered hidden away in attics and cupboards, these photographs provide a record of a colonial life-style now long gone, and a China that is rapidly vanishing. Such images are of immense interest.

The Historical Photographs of China Project, led by Professor Robert Bickers in the Department of Historical Studies, aims to track down such photographs held outside China that are either in private hands, or are locked away in libraries and archives which do not have the capacity to make them available. So far, over 8,000 photographs have been digitised and are available for educational, reference and research purposes.

The photographs come from the collections of a Chinese diplomat, foreign businessmen, staff of the administrations in the Chinese treaty ports, missionaries, and officials of the Chinese Maritime Customs Service. They shed light on political events such as the *May Thirtieth Incident* in 1925, in which a nationwide series of strikes and demonstrations was precipitated by the killing of 13 labour demonstrators by British police in Shanghai. They also offer insights into working and social life, architecture, commercial history, dress and fashion, industrialisation, crime and punishment, foreigners in China and the Chinese abroad, and of course the history of photography in China. They were taken by talented amateur photographers, foreigners 'snapping' their trip, professional studio photographers and many others.

In the spring and summer of 2008 an exhibition of the images will be shown at the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath, and the Oriental Museum at Durham University. A book *Picturing China 1870-1950* accompanies the exhibition.

They offer insights into working and social life, architecture, commercial history, dress and fashion

Funding for the project was provided by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, John Swire and Sons, and the University's Centre for East Asian Studies. The team's work has recently been awarded Academy Research Project status by the British Academy. The Academy awards this status to the 'very best academic research' of this type. ■

To view the digitised collection go to: http://chp.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr

Min Chin posing with a camera at Northern Hot Springs in Sichuan province, 1940. Fu Bingchang collection.

Professors Simon Hiscock and Xia Bing.

Over the past 20 years or so, there has been a revolution in the plant world. If you are a gardener you may have noticed that some plants are no longer where they used to be in the guide books because they have been moved into different families. As Professor Simon Hiscock, Director of the Botanic Garden, explains, the reason is 'molecular phylogenetics'.

The tree of flowering plants

Molecular phylogenetics uses the sequences of an organism's genes to gain a better understanding about its evolutionary relationships with other related organisms. Previously plants were classified largely according to their morphological characters, i.e. the outward appearance of their vegetative and reproductive structures, such as leaves and flowers, respectively. Today, the taxonomic classification of plants is largely based on DNA sequences, in combination with morphological characters. This new classification has had a major impact on all groups of organisms, but particularly the angiosperms – flowering plants. DNA sequencing has adjusted many plant relationships and in the process the more ancient lineages have become evident.

Some time before 140 million years ago, the angiosperms diverged from the gymnosperms – non-flowering seed plants such as pine trees and other evergreens – but since fossil gymnosperms go back at least 350 million years, the birth of flowering plants could have occurred anytime between 350 and 140 million years ago. Botanists and evolutionary biologists are keen to narrow that gap.

Among today's flowering plants, the earliest, or 'basal' angiosperm lineages are now quite well understood and it appears that water lilies are one of the closest living relatives to the first flowering plants. Their extinct ancestors were once terrestrial, but at some point these became adapted to an aquatic lifestyle that has given water lilies an advantage to survive all these millions of years. The most basal angiosperm, however, is now recognised as a plant called *Amborella trichopoda*, which is only found on New Caledonia, a small tropical island in the Pacific. *Amborella trichopoda* is the only remaining species of a lineage that first appeared on Earth more than 140 million years ago, while dinosaurs still ruled the planet.

SANGTAE KIM, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

Female flowers of *Amborella trichopoda*.

CHERRY LEWIS

Lily pads at the Botanic Garden.

This orchid (*Stanhopea Wardii*) flowered for the first time in ten years at the University's Botanic Garden. It is pollinated by the sweat bee, and its natural growing range is from Mexico to Panama.

CHERRY LEWIS

There's only one species in the genus *Amborella*; there's only one genus in the family Amborellaceae; and there's only one family in the order Amborellales. *Amborella* is the closest living relative of the ancestor that gave rise to all modern day flowering plants, which now number over 350,000 different species. *Amborella* and water lilies are the first two branches on the family tree of flowering plants, and the University's Botanic Garden is one of the first in Britain to acquire an *Amborella*. It was collected in New Caledonia by Hiscock and French colleagues last March.

Bristol University's Botanic Garden is the first in the UK to lay out a garden so people can walk along the 'family tree' of angiosperms

Previously, all flowering plants were split into two main groups; monocotyledons (monocots) and dicotyledons (dicots), but pollen morphological research, combined with the DNA data, has completely removed that divide. Now, two main lineages of flowering plants emerge from the basal angiosperms (or basal monocolpates), which together contain about 90 per cent of all flowering plant diversity. These two lineages are the true dicots, which we now call the eudicots (roses, daisies, and many other familiar flowers) and the monocots (plants like grasses, lilies and orchids).

When Hiscock arrived at the University in 2001, plans to relocate the University's botanical collections to a new site were being discussed and it appeared that the Botanic Garden would be moved for the fourth time in its 120-year history. This was a golden opportunity to create a modern Botanic Garden and present the new classification of flowering plants as a unique display – one of the things Hiscock was most keen to do. Previously, botanic gardens had their family beds, but now you never quite know how the plants they contain relate to one another. Here was a chance to show a simplified version of the phylogentic tree in the form of paths, so people could actually walk along the evolutionary 'family tree' of angiosperms.

Five years down the road, Bristol's Botanic Garden at the Holmes was the first in the UK to lay out a garden in this way. The recent visit of a Chinese delegation, which included Professor He Shanan, Director of the network of botanic gardens in China and Professor Xia Bing, Director of the Nanjing Botanical Garden, provided an opportunity to show off the results of years of hard work. The Chinese had heard about Bristol's display and were seeking inspiration and advice for the angiosperm phylogeny display they are planning in Nanjing. During their visit Professor Xia Bing planted a sacred bamboo at the moongate, a traditional Chinese front entrance to the Chinese medicinal herb collection in the garden. Previously He Shanan had kindly donated a magnificent collection of Sacred Lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) varieties and cultivars to the Bristol garden – probably the best collection of Sacred Lotus in the UK. Thanks to this visit a partnership has been established between the University of Bristol Botanic Garden and Nanjing Botanic Garden which will ensure future collaborative projects and plant exchange.

As well as enhancing the teaching of plant sciences within the University, the Bristol Botanic Garden provides a unique teaching resource for local schools and a new cultural attraction for the City of Bristol. The gardens are open to the public most days. ■

www.bristol.ac.uk/Depts/BotanicGardens

Since 2000, Adam Crewe and Wendy Daniell from the Earthquake Engineering Research Centre have been running an international competition for students to design models of earthquake-resistant buildings.

THE IDEERS PROJECT

Earthquakes have a significant effect on society, causing loss of life and damage to infrastructure. Furthermore, there is a lack of public understanding about the way that earthquakes affect structures and the preventative measures that can be taken to design safer buildings. If more people were aware of the factors affecting the performance of structures and the importance of good design and construction, this might reduce the likelihood that inappropriate structures are built where there is a risk of earthquakes.

In order to increase public understanding of earthquake engineering and inspire children – some of whom who may become the engineers of the future – the IDEERS project (Introducing and Demonstrating Earthquake Engineering Research in Schools) was created to promote understanding of the value and process of earthquake engineering activities.

The use of cheap materials and the ability to destroy the models on a typical shaking-table, drove much of the design development, thus the key requirements for the models were based on the following criteria:

- Models must be representative of real structures.
- The competition rules must be flexible enough to allow a large number of different designs.
- It must be possible to test and destroy models using a typical shaking-table so students can observe failure modes and compare the ultimate performance of their models.
- Materials for models must be cheap and readily available to schools.
- No special equipment must be needed to construct the models.
- The model-making skills needed must suit the target age group.

Since the start of IDEERS, over a thousand students between the ages of 12 and 25 have built and tested their models to destruction on earthquake simulators around the world. Although originally designed to run as a national competition for school children in the UK, it was so successful that the British Council invited Adam Crewe and Wendy Daniell to run IDEERS in Taiwan for university students at the National Centre for Research in Earthquake Engineering. In 2003 the competition was held for the first time in Japan at the Kajima Research Laboratory in Tokyo.

In Taiwan, the competition is held on the anniversary of the 921 Chi-Chi earthquake that occurred on September 21 (hence 921) 1999, which is still fresh in people's memory. It is run as a single-day event but in advance of the competition, competitors can make use of a specially designed web site to research some of the techniques used to make earthquake-resistant buildings, and to plan their designs. On the day of the competition the students build their models, which are then tested to destruction at the end of the day. The competition has generated significant press and publicity, including a one-hour TV programme aired on National Taiwan Day. The programme combined the excitement of the competition with a more serious discussion about how earthquakes cause damage to structures, thereby helping to educate the general public about the need for good engineering solutions to meet the challenge of earthquake-resistant design.

Earthquakes have a significant effect on society, causing loss of life and damage to infrastructure

In Taiwan parallel competitions are run for high school and university students from all over the country, which has resulted in intense competition. The laboratory is open to the public during the competition and young children very much enjoy the destruction during the shaking-table testing – many expressing a desire to take part in the competition when they are old enough. By displaying all the models before testing starts, there is an opportunity for high school students to learn from the more complex designs of the university students. Another effect of the intense competition has been the development of a much more comprehensive set of failure criteria, with the reasoning behind each one being clearly set out.

Over the years, a great number of different designs have been produced. Of particular interest are the contrasting design styles of the three countries and the very different ways in which the models fail. The main differences in design probably stem from the different types of construction that the students see around them every day. For example, most models made by UK students have strong floors and relatively weak columns, because earthquake loading is not normally a key design case in the UK. The models made by the Japanese and Taiwanese students, however, follow standard earthquake engineering practice, with strong columns and weaker floors. Another obvious difference is the way Taiwanese students use a great deal of string to wrap their columns and beam joints to enhance their strength. This is very different to UK students who rarely use string in their models.

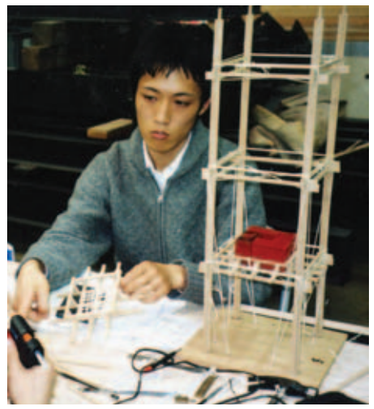
The competition has generated significant press and publicity, including a TV programme

The different forms of construction result in different failure modes, and all the failure modes typical of real structures, following real earthquakes, have been observed in the students' models. To best explain the failures seen during the tests, consulting engineers working in structural dynamics are used as judges wherever possible, as well as researchers from the universities and research laboratories. After each test the judges talk about the failure modes observed during the tests. This has helped to educate the students and it is noticeable that students who then take part in subsequent years have significantly improved their models by taking into account what they learnt about failure modes.

The IDEERS competitions have generated a significant amount of interest worldwide and it is hoped that the project will continue to inspire and educate some of our future engineers about the importance of earthquake engineering activities. The activities have been valuable for society at large and the competition has also resulted in the creation of an academic link to foster collaborative research between Taiwan's National Centre for Research in Earthquake Engineering and the University of Bristol. Since it is becoming increasingly important for academics to be involved in public awareness activities, competitions like this can provide an enjoyable way for researchers to engage with the public while developing links with similar organisations around the world. ■

www.ideers.bris.ac.uk

Financial support for developing this project was provided by the EPSRC.



Paul Williams is Professor of Indian and Tibetan Philosophy, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. When I suggested I interview him about his work on Madhyamaka philosophy, he replied that it was so appallingly tedious that no-one would want to read about it, so why didn't I talk to him instead about his latest book – a translation from Tibetan of the erotic poetry of the Sixth Dalai Lama. It was an invitation I couldn't resist.

CHERRY LEWIS TALKED TO PAUL WILLIAMS ABOUT HIS BOOK ON

THE SIXTH DALAI LAMA

Sonam Gyatso became, in the same moment, both the First and the Third Dalai Lama. The title was bestowed on him by the Mongolian ruler Altan Khan in 1578 when Sonam Gyatso, the most revered and scholarly monk of the Drepung monastery in Tibet, converted Altan Khan to the Geluk tradition of Buddhism. "You are so learned," said Altan Khan to Sonam Gyatso, "to me you are like an ocean."

> Mighty serpent-demon –
> He's behind. But who cares!
> The sweet apple's in front.
> Yes, I think I shall pluck.

Dalai means *ocean* in Mongolian, and *Lama* is the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit word *guru*.

By the 13th century, the leading hierarchs of the different Buddhist traditions in Tibet had already instituted the idea of succession by reincarnation. The tradition probably evolved as a way of securing succession among monastic groups where, of course, they are supposed to be celibate and not have children. An advanced Buddhist practitioner would know how to control his own rebirth, which would provide clues as to how the reincarnation could be discovered. He would take on rebirth out of a compassion for others, thereby carrying on the Buddhist ethos of helping people. So when the title of Dalai Lama was bestowed on Sonam Gyatso he actually became the Third Dali Lama – even though it was the first time anyone had held the title – because he was already recognised as being the third descendant in a series of reincarnations. This meant, of course, that the First and Second never knew they had been Dalai Lamas.

> Dead – the mirror of deeds,
> Held by the King of Hell.
> Here it's just not been right;
> Once there, please make it so.

The Fourth Dalai Lama was a Mongol, and the Fifth, a Tibetan, was the first to be put in control, by the Mongols, of the whole of Tibet. By the standards of autocratic rulers, he was relatively tolerant and benign – he employed members of other Buddhist schools in his government, was a strong personality who brought stability to Tibet, and was much admired by the Chinese emperor because he controlled the Mongols for them. The period of his rule is often thought of as being a golden age for Tibet. As a consequence, Ngawang Lozang Gyatso became known as the Great Fifth Dalai Lama.

By the time of the Great Fifth, a Dalai Lama was effectively thought to be a direct manifestation of a Buddhist divinity on Earth. To establish himself in this role, Ngawang Lozang Gyatso commenced building the Potala Palace in Lhasa, named after the sacred site said to be in India where the divine being lived.

Potala Palace, Lhasa.

Unfortunately, he died before it was complete. His Regent, fearing that if he let it be known the Dalai Lama had died the palace wouldn't be finished, the Dalai Lama would not be properly established as a divinity on Earth, and instability would occur, gave out that Ngawang Lozang Gyatso had gone into retreat – and kept his death a secret for 15 years.

Tsangyang Gyatso, the child eventually recognised as the reincarnation of the Great Fifth, was born in 1683 in the far south of Tibet. When he was two years and eight months old, he and his parents were taken away from their village and kept in squalid conditions while he was subjected to tests and examinations that, it was hoped, would confirm he was indeed the reincarnation. This situation lasted till he was 13, thus his childhood was effectively one of imprisonment, hunger, abuse and, initially, a very real fear that he would be killed. Not one conducive to producing a wise and just ruler.

Eventually the secret of the Great Fifth's death got out and Tsangyang Gyatso, now in his early teens, was ordained as a novice monk and in 1697 enthroned in Lhasa as the Sixth Dalai Lama. But four years later, when he was expected to take his full monk's vows, it became clear that things were not going to plan. Not only did he refuse to take full monastic vows, but he returned the novice vows he had already taken. From now on, he decided, the Dalai Lama would be a layman. And have fun.

Tsangyang Gyatso dressed flamboyantly, roamed the streets and brothels, drank alcohol publicly, engaged in archery competitions and enjoyed pranks with his friends. He even wrote erotic poetry. Could the Sixth Dalai Lama *really* be a reincarnation of the Great Fifth? It seems many felt he wasn't, and Tsangyang

> First, better not to see –
> Falling in love's senseless.
> Second, better not to know –
> Misery's senseless too.

Gyatso was soon deposed. As the Mongols led him away under arrest, monks from the Drepung monastery came to his rescue, believing he was the genuine reincarnation, but when the monastery was attacked Tsangyang Gyatso gave himself up to prevent bloodshed. As he was being taken to China, the Sixth Dalai Lama fell ill and – according to Chinese and Mongol sources – died in a remote part of Tibet in 1706. He was only 23 and to this day there is a suspicion that he was murdered. His is the only body of a Dalai Lama not to be buried in Lhasa.

Tsangyang Gyatso had little interest in his role as the Dalai Lama and no interest whatsoever in the murky world of Tibetan politics. But he left behind verses in which he shows he was really torn between the life of religion and his love affairs. Sadly, he fails to offer a critique of the system that wished to incarcerate him in its religion and politics – and that is what makes his case so poignant. To him, it was all just so unfair. ■

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Paul Williams' book, *Songs of love, poems of sadness: the erotic verse of the sixth Dalai Lama*, is published by IB Tauris.

> Folk gossip about me.
> Sorry – yes, I'm to blame!
> A lad's three tiptoe steps –
> Oh – I've reached the brothel!

Left: The Drepung monastery.
Right: The 6th Dalai Lama as a young man.

The housing generations

Rising rates of home ownership, volatile property markets, increasingly deregulated financial systems, and changing social norms have combined to produce important new ingredients in the shaping of advantage and opportunity in contemporary societies. Ray Forrest, Misa Izuhara and Xiaouhui Zhong from the Centre for East Asian Studies and the School for Policy Studies are exploring these processes in three East Asian regions – Japan, China and Hong Kong.

More and more people own their homes; financial deregulation has made it easier to borrow, property values have risen rapidly and patterns of social behaviour have changed. Government policies have also favoured some groups more than others. The combination of these factors has created winners and losers across a number of social groups.

The re-emergence of China has seen a new, and typically younger, group of the housing-equity-rich

Some generations are considerably more asset-rich than others, and within generations housing wealth is very unevenly distributed. For most households the dwelling, or the land on which it sits, is their main store of wealth. This wealth creates a platform of opportunity and advantage which can be deployed in various ways within and across generations.

Such growth of home ownership, and the potential wealth accumulation associated with it, have been particularly important factors in the social transformations that have occurred in East Asia over the past decades. The pace of economic development has often produced extraordinary rates of house price inflation in many of its major cities. While the Asian financial crisis saw a widespread slump in property values and a slow and uneven recovery, certain cohorts had already accumulated substantial equity. Others, particularly in countries such as Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong, found themselves the victims of bad timing in terms of property purchase. The re-emergence of China onto the world stage and its rapid urban development has seen the emergence of a new, and typically younger, group of the housing-equity-rich. This process has added to social tensions within Chinese cities and the marked divisions between rural and urban areas.

This research aims to break away from a view of housing wealth in terms of atomised individuals or households, and will examine how its distribution affects relationships and opportunities within families. The underlying assumption is that in different societies this wealth is demographically distributed in different ways. Stated simply, in Japan it is the older generation that has benefited the most; in Hong Kong it is the later baby boomers; and in mainland China it is more likely to be the thirty-somethings. This reflects different patterns of economic and social change, and it will affect the nature of financial and other forms of assistance within families across the generations. In Japan, the flow of assistance is more likely to be from old to young; in China from young to old; and in Hong Kong, the asset-rich may sit between an older and younger generation that have experienced very different social and economic environments. These assumptions and their implications are being tested in the research currently being undertaken in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo. It is challenging and intensive work which requires detailed interviews with members of three generations within the same family. Results from this phase of the project will emerge in the middle of 2008. ■

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LIZ MCCLELLAND

TAKING THE **LONG VIEW**

The Bristol-Mekong Project, which comes under the auspices of the Governance Research Centre in the Department of Politics, stands at the interface between academia, business and policy-makers. Its focus is on the states associated with the Mekong River, which includes parts of Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Burma and south-west China, and its aim is to provide a focal point for cutting-edge research into this region. Its director, Professor Martin Gainsborough, talks about his vision for the project.

I am very clear that the in-depth and detailed academic research I do is in order to help understand the world better, so that we might respond appropriately when faced with real situations. Take what happened in Burma recently. When this latest uprising occurred, I felt unhappy with aspects of the way in which the country was being covered in the media. So, as I explained in *The Guardian* at the time, if we really want to help the Burmese people, we need to do better than to characterise the country in the usual way, as one run by an undifferentiated military opposed by a citizenry united in its hatred of the regime. As quickly became apparent in Iraq, where it was mistakenly thought that citizens would pour out on to the streets to welcome their 'liberators', relations between authoritarian regimes and their citizens are far more complex. For every brave person willing to demonstrate, there will be many more who are ambivalent about change, and others who will see their interests served by the military continuing in power. A subtle analysis of the changes which have occurred in Burmese society since the 1988 uprising – which are many – is crucial if outsiders are to offer appropriate and well-targeted interventions.

As a consequence, I now have an invitation to attend a meeting on Burma at Chatham House, Europe's leading foreign policy think-tank. Chatham House brings together people from government, politics, business, NGOs, academia and the media, and this is precisely what I feel the Bristol-Mekong Project should be doing – making the link between academic research and policy.

For every brave person willing to demonstrate, there will be many more who are ambivalent about change

MARTIN GAINSBOROUGH

MARTIN GAINSBOROUGH

But my own particular research interest lies with Vietnam where I lived and worked for a number of years, and where I still have close research links. Part of the Bristol-Mekong Project's remit is to offer a consultancy service which includes high-quality research and analysis tailored to the needs of international business and the donor community. Thus the Department for International Development, which is a leading aid donor in Vietnam, asked me to write a report on the governance reform options for Vietnam from now to 2020, drawing on the experience of other Asian countries.

The report was written in the aftermath of having done a year's research in Vietnam working in the international aid community, based in the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, a government think-tank. So while much of my research time was spent reading comparative literature on other Asian countries, I also did a lot of work looking at newspapers. Although the Vietnamese press is state-controlled, there is a lot of richness and diversity buried deep within the articles, from which you can learn a great deal. Sometimes I would conduct formal interviews, but more often than not I would just have informal conversations over coffee or a beer. I was constantly meeting people, talking to people, whether they were journalists or others in the Asian community, and that's the way I do my research – it's very qualitative.

When it was complete, I presented the report to an international audience at the Academy of Social Sciences in Vietnam earlier this year, which included people who are advising Vietnamese ministers and politicians. The report was not solely about issues of governance, it was also a reflection on where I felt the debates were. It was about understanding the political context in which the Vietnamese government is approaching these issues, and being aware of the great sensitivities that surround any notion of political reform and the development of a civil society. Inevitably such reform is going to be a flawed process, but my view is that it's better that we encourage a flawed process that will lead on to something more substantive, than suggest things which are so unrealistic they will be rejected. Our input is but a small contribution to the extremely complex process that ultimately leads to policy, but if it is one that encourages the Vietnamese to go the next step in terms of civil society development, and doesn't scare them off, it gives meaning to all our research. ■

It's better we encourage a flawed process that will lead to something more substantive, than suggest things so unrealistic, they will be rejected

Back in 1986, Vietnam embarked on a process of economic reforms, known locally as *doi moi*, which is usually translated as 'renovation'. Our study took a strategic look at Vietnam's governance options from now until 2020, in response not only to the economic and social changes which are occurring domestically in the light of *doi moi*, but also as a result of changes in the global environment dating back to the liberalisation of trade and capital flows from the 1970s.

In order to build on the reforms Vietnam has already undertaken, I believe that the idea of a 'mixed approach' to governance, whereby traditional and modern democratic practice are combined in order to build a firm and broad basis for state legitimacy – the state's right to govern – has much to recommend it. As long as the Communist Party delivers rising living standards, its legitimacy will continue, but dangers arise when economic downturns occur. The 'mixed approach' to governance has the advantage that it would move Vietnam away from legitimacy being overly dependent on economic performance, while simultaneously reaching out to a new generation that is travelling more, is studying abroad, and is reading the international media. This is a generation much more influenced by liberal ideas about democracy, and one which is likely to be more concerned about 'having their say' than the older generation.

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Public Relations Office
Communications and Marketing Services
University of Bristol
Senate House
Tyndall Avenue
Bristol BS8 1TH

www.bristol.ac.uk
Email: re-search@bristol.ac.uk

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