

**“Ethics of Sight: the Visual as Mediation in China’s
Early Modern Science Education”**

Panel Organizer and Discussant: Xinmin Liu, University of Pittsburgh
xinmin@pitt.edu

This panel focuses on the visual and the production of visibility as the mediating ground for interacting between disparate and sometimes conflicting views of *Science* in late Qing and early Republican China. Panelists will collectively seek to explore not only how expatriate scientists educated China’s public in the use of science in modernizing life qualities through imported films and image prints in newspapers and journals, but how they engaged in the public discourses of “seeking truth” as a way to embed modern notions of civil, social and moral authorities. However, in their effort to introduce West-inspired values and salvage cultural heritages, they unwittingly adapted from and reverted to core ideas of Chinese philosophy and cosmology, a tendency which intensely alleviated the impact of Western empiricism and scientism. Such a process of mediation is best illustrated through the myriad dialogues and debates engaged in at the level of ethical, teleological and societal progress in the modern age of scientific popularization.

Individual Paper Abstracts

“Western Eyes for Chinese Minds:
Visual Presentation of John Fryer's *Gezhi Huibian* (1876-1892)”

Liangyu Fu

Department of Communication, University of Pittsburgh

fuliangyu@gmail.com

The wave of West-East knowledge transmission occurring in the late nineteenth century witnessed Euro-American missionaries’ activities of popularizing modern scientific knowledge in China. Their translating and publishing work promoted the sensibility of Chinese civil society towards modern science. In order to understand how Western scientific knowledge was made accessible to Chinese culture through formats of publication, I will explore the earliest magazine that aimed at disseminating Western science and technology--*Gezhi Huibian* (Chinese Scientific and Industrial Magazine, 1876-1892) edited by John Fryer (1839-1928).

Instead of studying the pure text, I will mainly focus on *GH*'s illustrations as another threshold of interpretation of the visual scientific discourse mediated through innovative selecting, designing, and presenting. I will argue that even though we rarely see the images purely designed for Chinese readers in the *GH*, missionary-scientists' conscious effort still endowed the visual presentation with more Chinese traces and accommodations with Chinese visual heritage and traditional print culture. I will research those scientific images from two perspectives. On the one hand, I will examine the transmission comparing with the original images and visual effect achieved by special page layout. On the other, I will pay particular attention to the text-image relationship, which reflected John Fryer's individual endeavor of creativity and adaptation. Finally, I will trace the social reception of those illustrations in order to examine their function in promoting a civil gaze of science.

“Desire to See Truth:
Modern World in Lithographic Pictorials (1884-1898)”

Haixia Wang
Anhui University, China
wanghx@ustc.edu

In the late 19th-century China, increasing changes in the traditional society brought about by Western science and technology intensified the desire of the Chinese public to see the modern world. With the introduction of lithographic printing, the image competed directly with the word as a tool of communication, by which the popularization of visual materials facilitated the desire to see and be seen, the desire to embrace, adapt and mediate modern conditions. Among the available visual materials such as maps, book illustrations, periodicals and advertising materials, the pictorials deserved to be emphasized because of its timely images with popular interests.

To demonstrate a keen desire to see the modern world, this paper focuses on *Dianshizhai Huabao* (Lithographic Pictorials, 1884-1898), an influential pictorial with commercial success, as a case study. Aimed at surprise and entertainment by way of transformation of new urban life, the pictorials provided a record of the keen curiosity of a Chinese readership to see the modern world. Many real or imagined illustrations, like images of balloons, trains, submarine and flying machines, introduced readers to what modern conditions looked like and how modern world could be grasped. By analyzing selected illustrations, I will explore why and how the visual functioned as a mediation

between the desire of modern world and the ideals of Chinese traditions; why and how the visual serves as the medium of communication while providing access to scientific knowledge.

“Beginning Revisited:
Cultural Dialogue and Confrontation around the First Chinese Movie”

Xin Ning, Asian Studies Department
Sewanee, the University of the South

xining@sewanee.edu

Cinema was introduced into China in 1896 but the first Chinese movie was only shot about ten years later: in 1905, Ren Jingfeng, the boss of Taifeng Photo Studio in Beijing and his camera man Liu Zhonglun made the movie Ding jun shan (Ding jun Mountain), starred by the eminent Beijing Opera actor Tan Xinpei. The copy of the movie has been lost but the memory of this “beginning” of Chinese cinema was well maintained and constantly revisited by film makers, critics and scholars of later generation. In 2000, Chinese American director Ann Hu retold the story of the first Chinese movie in her film “Shadow magic.” This paper aims to make a case study of Ann Hu’s film to examine both the conflict between modern technology and traditional Chinese culture in the early 20th century and today’s film makers’ reflection and reinterpretation of this historical event.

In early modern China, film, together with photography, served as a prominent icon of both modern technology, which is supposed to be universal and objective, and of the presence of western civilization, which is in constant struggle with China and Chinese people. The two sides, however, can hardly be separated from each other, and science and technology can be conveniently turned into a discursive weapon in the cultural confrontation to privilege the west. As a popular form of mass entertainment, cinema enjoyed a steadily growing audience among ordinary Chinese and helped to change their idea of the west as well as their self-image. On the other hand, the same audience may also be shot into the film by the camera and become subjects to a western gaze and “orientalized.” In its reflection of history, Ann Hu’s film partly discloses this ‘shot and reverse shot’ discursive game behind the making of the first Chinese movie, yet her film is also criticized for its own Orientalist defects by some critics ---the game that began one century ago has never come to an end.