

PLEASE DO NOT SCHEDULE ON MONDAY

“Cosmopolitan Science and Medicine in Late Imperial China?”

Panel Organizer, Dr. Carla Nappi, Montana State University

This panel will investigate the possibility of thinking about cosmopolitanism in the context of late imperial China: what might it mean to apply the idea to the 16th-18th centuries, and in what ways might the rubric of cosmopolitanism help reformulate our understanding of science, medicine, and technology in Chinese history? The papers each treat some aspect of the exchange of knowledge and the problematization of boundaries in late imperial China: from the role of language and the recipe form in multilingual medical exchange across central Asia, to the perception of the relationship between “True Confucians” and Western science in the eighteenth century, to the attempt to bridge ancient and contemporary scientific knowledge by “Cosmopolitan Confucians” in the high Qing. We hope collectively to probe what it might mean to posit a “cosmopolitan” ethos in the science and medicine of early modern China.

Discussant for this panel: Professor TJ Hinrichs, Department of History, Cornell University

Individual Paper Abstracts

“Medics in a World of Strangers: Recipes for Exchange in Early Modern Chinese Medicine”

Carla Nappi, Assistant Professor

Department of History and Philosophy, Montana State University

nappi@montana.edu

The Chinese empire was expanding dramatically in the early years of the Qing era (1644-1911). Early modern naturalists attempted to reconcile local knowledge from areas on China’s borderlands with canonical Chinese texts, and natural history and medicine were transformed as a result. New genres focused on locality gained textual authority in the natural history canon. Transliteration and other linguistic technologies were used to bridge epistemological divides. Recipes worked as little empires in microcosm, blending individual ingredients into compound wholes and mapping the results in labeled tables.

My paper examines the media that helped reconfigure natural knowledge in the growing early modern Chinese empire. I am particularly interested in the significance of translation and transliteration to the exchange of medical and natural knowledge across central Asia: how were facts about plants and animals made in polyglot materia medica? How did naturalists use words and recipes to make exotic beings “Chinese,” and how did the epistemic world of natural history transform as a result? My paper engages the idea of cosmopolitanism through the recent work of Kwame Anthony Appiah on ethics and global exchange. Appiah’s notion of cosmopolitanism attempts to create a medial space between relativism and universalism in evaluating the meeting of cultures, with cosmopolitanism resulting in a kind of nexus of common ethical values joining otherwise disparate

communities: in his words, “ethics in a world of strangers.” Can this notion be interpreted to inform the linguistic and textual “cosmopolitanism” of the early modern exchange of natural historical knowledge among China and her neighbors across central Asia?

“The Scientific Identity of the ‘True Confucians’ (*zhenru*): Qian Daxin (1728-1804) and the Question of Western Learning”

Ori Sela, PhD Candidate

Department of East Asian Studies, Princeton University

osela@princeton.edu

During the eighteenth-century, Western scientific traditions were increasingly accommodated into the Chinese scientific discourse, and more up-to-date (even if already dated in the West) scientific knowledge was introduced to China. At the same time, one of the most prominent scholars of that century – Qian Daxin – called into question the very rationale for using Western Learning. In this paper I analyze Qian’s reasons for allowing the use of Western Learning, and his views on the limitations and implications of such use. I argue that for Qian Daxin the nexus of science and Confucian identity was one of utmost important; thus, the use of Western science posed an identity problem to the Confucian scholar. The ‘myth of origination’ (“Western Learning originated in China”), which was by Qian’s time well established, did not appease Qian as he sought to find these ancient Chinese origins in antiquity, and occasionally encountered discrepancies between Western scientific notions and ancient Chinese ones. In this paper I shall demonstrate how Qian coped with such discrepancies, and further examine the epistemological premises on which he based his claims. I also explore how cosmopolitan and parochial notions intertwined in Qian Daxin’s writings.

“Who Became Cosmopolitan Confucians (*tongru*) in High Qing China?”

Minghui Hu, Assistant Professor,

Department of History, University of California - Santa Cruz

mhu@ucsc.edu

I want to clarify a very specific kind of status label, Cosmopolitan Confucians (*tongru*), used by some High Qing literati to address each other as ways of promoting scientific literacy and classical scholarship. I argue that they use this label as a classical model to indicate the new level and conjuncture of scientific literary and classical scholarship they believed they have accomplished. I also argue that, from evidence searchable in various electronic databases, the use of this status label Cosmopolitan Confucians had a fairly abrupt beginning in the eighteenth century, despite the fact the phrase had existed and been used since the Han dynasty, and disappeared by the end of nineteenth century China.