



# China Oxford Scholarship Fund

## Scholars' Summer Lunch 2013

Summer 2013

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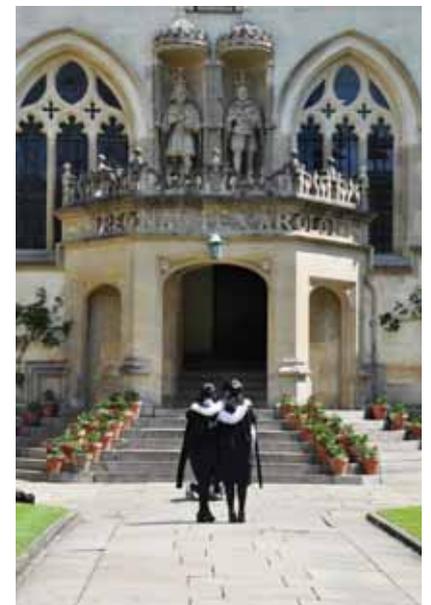


The drizzly British summer weather failed to put a dampener on this year's Scholars' Summer Lunch event which was held on June 16th. The China Oxford Scholarship Fund's International Chairman, Timothy Beardson, and his wife Clair, kindly hosted the gathering at their home near Oxford. The guests included supporters of the Fund, Oxford heads of Colleges and Halls and Oxford academics.

As in the past, the Scholars had the opportunity to meet new and long-time friends of the Fund as well as having the chance to have a respite from their busy academic schedules. The Principal of Somerville College, Dr Alice Prochaska, was the key speaker who delighted the guests with her stories of Somerville's alumnae and the Fund's first patron, the late former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The China Oxford Scholarship Fund Scholar Chun Peng also gave an enjoyable speech about his Oxford experience. His talk was followed by a Q&A session with the guests. A pictorial of the event is featured on pages 7 to 9 and the full text of Chun Peng's speech is on pages 10 to 13. You can also watch Dr Prochaska's and Chun's speeches on Youtube on our "ChinaOxfordVideos" channel.

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# International Chairman's Letter

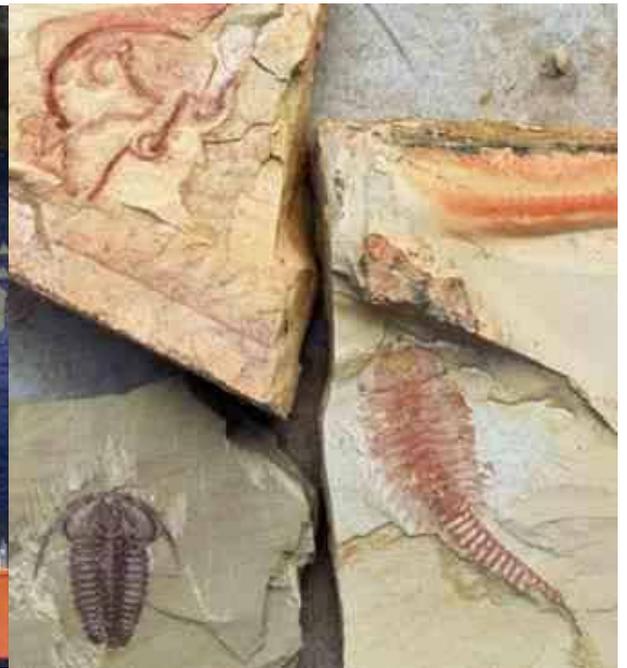
Dear Friends,

- Clair and I are always pleased to see new and long-standing friends of COSF attend the summer lunch event in the United Kingdom. We are also delighted to know that a number of the Scholars were able to meet the Fund's network of supporters. The speeches by Dr Alice Prochaska of Somerville College and Scholar Chun Peng were insightful, colourful and thought-provoking.
- It is exciting to learn about the partnerships between British and Chinese academics and how their work can have very important and meaningful results such as the UNESCO World Heritage Site listing for the Chengjiang Fossil Site. I would like to congratulate Prof. Derek Siveter, Prof. David Siveter, Prof. Richard Aldridge and their Chinese counterparts on all their hard work getting the fossil area recognised as a World Heritage Site.
- It is very rewarding to know that COSF Scholars are leading the way in organising important multi-disciplinary conferences and programmes at the University of Oxford. It is very good to know that Scholars are also keeping COSF updated with their activities so that the Fund can share this with its friends and supporters.
- I am glad to learn that COSF Scholars are invited to participate in events such as the China Skills Recruitment and Networking Event. I hope that more organisations in the United Kingdom and China will engage with COSF and its Scholars.

Timothy Beardson  
International Chairman



# UNESCO Chengjiang World Heritage Site



In mid-May, Yunnan Province officials rolled out the red carpet for University of Oxford Professor Derek Siveter and University of Leicester Professors David Siveter and Richard Aldridge. At an awards ceremony in Yuxi, the trio were honoured for their contribution towards the study of the Chengjiang fossils and their help with China's bid to secure UNESCO World Heritage Site listing for the excavation area. The site is located 40 kilometres from Kunming and was bestowed World Heritage status last year for its outstanding universal value with its unrivalled rich species diversity.

Working with their Chinese counterparts from Yunnan University, in particular with Prof. Hou Xianguang who discovered the biota in 1984, the British palaeontologists were able to help highlight the significance of the discovery of the Chengjiang fossils which are about 525 million years old. 'It's an amazing treasure, it's the Chinese equivalent of the famous Burgess Shale fossils from North America or, put another way, the material is every bit as wondrous palaeontologically as the Terracotta Warriors are archaeologically,' said Prof. Derek Siveter when a special collection of the fossils was exhibited outside of China for the first time at the University Museum of Natural History in 2010. The biota is considered especially significant in the world of palaeobiology as it represents key evidence for one of the most important benchmarks in the history of life—the so-called Cambrian “explosion” event. This represents the period when most of the major animal groups that we know today first appeared in the fossil record.

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Prof. Derek Siveter is a Professor Emeritus at the University Museum of Natural History and the Department of Earth Sciences at the University of Oxford. He is a fellow of St Cross College. He received his DSc from the University of Leicester in July 2012. He is a member of the UK Awards Panel for the China Oxford Scholarship Fund.



### **How long did the campaign take to secure World Heritage Site listing?**

The construction of the application together with the on-site inspection, scientific review, and UNESCO decision-making process, took some 5 years.

### **What were the major challenges in putting together the UNESCO World Heritage bid?**

Perhaps the main challenge was to write the scientific underpinning of the bid, which was absolutely pivotal to the whole application, so as to make the merits of the Chengjiang site complement those of the Burgess Shale site in the Canadian Rockies, and at the same time sufficiently highlight the importance and distinctiveness of the Chinese fossils. Burgess yields Cambrian animals often broadly similar to those of Chengjiang, they are also exceptionally preserved, and Burgess already had World heritage status. However Burgess (which was discovered some 75 years before Chengjiang) is mid-Cambrian in age, whereas Chengjiang is of early Cambrian age, i.e. some 10 million years older. The two should be seen as a continuum in the early history of animal life, each with their own merits, but together they give an unrivalled record of the Cambrian explosion event. The Chinese academic responsible for bringing together the various Chinese contributions for the World Heritage bid, Prof. Liang Yongning (Kunming University of Science), who had overseen several previous such bids for China, was extremely concerned that the existence of Burgess as a World Heritage site would make it very difficult for Chengjiang to gain the same status. Also, and despite today's instant global electronic communication methods, it was often not immediately obvious as to how best to interpret text received from Chinese colleagues, and thus how to advise on the way forward. So, there were dangers of points being, so to speak, 'lost in translation'.

### **What was your first thought when you learned that the bid was successful?**

That the fossils from Chengjiang had been recognised amongst the most significant natural phenomena on Earth, of equal status now to the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, the Terra Cotta Warriors, and the Grand Canyon, etc., and also a sense that much work by English and Chinese colleagues had realised success.

### **Now that the site is listed, do you think tourism might threaten the site's preservation?**

I don't see tourism in the normally envisaged sense of that word being a problem to the site, and in any event the Chinese authorities will have to successfully manage and monitor the ground comprising the Chengjiang site, or else they will be in danger of defaulting on UNESCO World Heritage status. Hopefully the Yunnan authorities will be able to successfully protect and use the site for what should be its prime purpose to make the collections from there available to the professional scientific community for study, and also very importantly, if possible, to educate school, university and lay audiences in Yunnan and beyond in China, to an appreciation of the remarkable Chengjiang fossils and how they help our understanding of the evolution of life at one of the critical benchmark events in its history.

## Scholars' Update



With India and China experiencing rapid economic growth in the past two decades, the global political landscape has changed along with their positions in the world. Along with economic growth are myriad developmental challenges affecting a wide-range of sectors such as the environment, politics, social instability, labour and health issues. These were some of the problems discussed at a one-day symposium in April which was co-organised by China Oxford and Wolfson China Scholar Yuge Ma. The event on April 26 was called "Juxtapose: Challenges of Comparative Research on Contemporary China and India. The event at Wolfson College attracted more than 30 participants who also attended workshops on the day. The break-out discussions were aimed to cultivate future platforms for multi-disciplinary discussions amongst scholars at Oxford and from other universities. Yuge is a DPhil candidate reading Geography and the Environment and her co-organiser was Danielle Karanjeet de Feo-Giet who is a DPhil candidate at Oxford's Oriental Institute. If you'd like more information about the April conference, please go to [www.indiachinaresearch.blogspot.co.uk](http://www.indiachinaresearch.blogspot.co.uk). The conference papers, discussions and related videos are also available online on YouTube on the "JuxtaposeProject" channel. Lastly, we are pleased to inform supporters that an article on China and its role in global governance written by Yuge has been



published on July 11<sup>th</sup> by the People's Daily in China. Well done Yuge!



In the meantime, it's great to see that the COSF Scholars have been organising informal gatherings throughout the academic year. On May 12th, a number of Scholars got together for a Korean meal at the new Bamboo Restaurant in Oxford. The event was organised by Bolton Ka Hung Chau.

## China Skills Recruitment Event



COSF Scholars were invited to attend a China Skills Recruitment and Networking Event in London on June 26th. The event took place in the conference hall at Bloomberg in Finsbury Square and was organised by the Chopsticks Club. The objectives of the event were to support Chinese and British job seekers to secure opportunities in the China market and to support Chinese and British companies to expand their businesses.

Chopsticks Club Directors H-J Colston and Theresa Booth were on hand to welcome university graduates in with China skills to the recruitment event. The companies that participated in the job fair included Huawei, Dyson, China Daily, Air China, Selfridges, Zhong Lun Law Firm, Linklaters, Shell and the international outlet shopping company Value Retail which runs Bicester Village.

The guest speakers for the networking session were the Minister of State for Universities and Science, David Willets MP, and Qiao Fenghe, the First Secretary of the Education Section from the Chinese Embassy in London. In the past decade, the number of people enrolled in universities and colleges in China has quadrupled. In addition, for 2013, nearly 7 million Chinese graduates are expected to enter into the job market in China.

## Scholars' Summer Lunch Pictorial



Timothy Beardson addressed the guests in Mandarin and English.



The lunch was also a chance to welcome new friends to COSF



Scholars Sophie Feifei Deng and Meg Jing Zeng with Derek Wyatt



Dr Alice Prochaska, Sir Edward Garnier and Scholar Robert Jiahe Xi



Clair Beardson and Prof. Paul Madden



Scholar Sean Shuo Xu with Pam and Iain Goddard



Timothy and Clair Beardson have hosted this event since 2005.



Scholar Bolton Ka Hung Chau and Diana Maclellan



Nearly 80 guests attended the lunch event.



Simon Case and Minister Counsellor for Education Shen Yang



Madam Yan Li and Timothy Beardson



Prof. Roger Cashmore, Trustee Xiaodi Bell and Adrian Lloyd



Tony McNally and Cheri Longoria



Prof. Andrew Briggs and Trustee Anne Lindsay



Lianna Liang Xiao and Leslie Bland



Berdine Van den Toren and Prof. Mark Pollard



Scholar Xiao Wan and Prof. Chengde Chen



Dr Jing Yu and Scholar Sean Shuo Xu



Nick Fielding and Scholar Alex Xuan Wang



Prof. Ed Larsen and Anita Siveter



Scholar Ray Ruijiang Liu and Neyla Freeman



Trustee Anne Lindsay, Prof. Roger Cashmore & Trustee Xiaodi Bell



Scholar Suyu Liu and Jessica Fangji Qian



Scholars Xiaou Yi and Zhengyu He

## Chinese Student Life in Oxford: A Reflection by Chun Peng

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good afternoon! My name is Chun Peng, a third year DPhil in Law at St Catherine's College. It is my great honour to be here and share with you some of my reflections about my life as a Chinese student in Oxford.

It is no accident that Socrates and Confucius converge on the importance of self-reflection: "The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being"; "each day I examine myself in three ways". While originally the former is a staunch defense of Socrates against the accusations of "corrupting the youth" and "impiety" and the latter a praise and exaltation of the exemplary deeds of Confucius' favourite disciple Zeng Zi, neither of them are merely normative claims. In fact, both Socrates and Confucius have noticed and demonstrated an unmistakable human feature: the unremitting quest to free oneself of the daily mundane to reflect on the very existence of one's own. This essay constitutes a modest response to the callings of these great sages, East and West.

It is modest in two senses. On the one hand, by no means can my personal experience be representative of about 800 Chinese postgraduates and undergraduates in Oxford today. The sheer diversity in the burgeoning Chinese student body at Oxford is not to be reduced by a short essay as such. On the other hand, as meaningful as it may be, reflection is just a starting point of the probably never-ending journey of self-understanding and it is no guarantee of any definitive answers. That said, there are at least four themes which I perceive are not only present in my own experiences but also ring true to many of my fellow Chinese studying, researching and living at Oxford today.



First of all is the question we long face since high school: generalisation or specialization in our pursuit of knowledge. Those who are familiar with Chinese secondary and higher education systems would know that the rigid separation between arts and sciences starts early in high school and continues well into university. This may have better prepared the majority of Chinese graduates to become specialists in a particular area and to transition more smoothly from school to jobs. But undoubtedly lost is the Confucius' teaching that "the gentleman is not a tool", which can only be put into limited use. I am not saying that the west has perfectly clung onto the notion of "Renaissance Man" in higher education, which indeed seems somewhat antiquated in an age of highly differentiated disciplines and

strong emphasis on the marketability of the graduates. However, it has now become clear to me that at least Oxford is not so easily swayed by fashion after all these 800 years and still holds dear Socrates' advice that "education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel", let alone molding the vessel in a set manner. We need not repeat the "cliché" that the college and tutorial system here is refreshingly efficient despite its medieval religious root in teaching the students to think and learn freely without being shackled by disciplinary boundaries. Compared with the liberal arts education in American universities, Oxford is probably doing something quite similar under the seemingly specialised undergraduate degrees.





Take law for example, while it is not possible to read a minor in engineering or physics or biology alongside, law is not taught at Oxford merely as a closed vocation. On the contrary, students are introduced to the socio-political contexts and philosophical underpinnings of the law from the very beginning, a pedagogy conducive to producing prudent and reflective lawyers or lawyer-statesmen in Anthony Kronman's words—Tony Blair only got a second-class degree in law from Oxford! To me, Oxford represents

an inspiration rarely seen in other places that breadth and depth can be combined and the ideal of Chinese gentleman is not fatalistically lost. Annoyingly there is only so much time to explore, enjoy and absorb this place that truly epitomizes the original meaning of the word "*universitas*"—the whole and the total.

Secondly, when leaving China, we are always urged to quickly adapt to British culture and blend into local life, which is also emphasized by the university. At one level, this is right and necessary as we are expected not to simply copy our past life style in a different country. We need to mingle with foreign friends, speak and read English, and participate more actively in classes. At another level, however, I often



find this idea of adapting and blending as confusing as the popular Chinese slogan that we should "be geared to international standards" (*yu guoji jiegui*). The problem is what is the international? For one reason or another, it has been a long-standing view widely held among Chinese that the "international" is the West. However, anyone from the West would immediately point out that there is no such a West as homogenous and static as many non-westerners have imagined. Even when we zoom in to Britain or England or just Oxford, the diversity and multi-facetedness of the culture, tradition and religion in these places defy to a large extent the project of identifying an essentialised "mainstream" culture or way of life that can be blend into. Therefore, not only is such an attempt disorientating and sometimes causing unnecessary worries to those who find it difficult to really enjoy going to pubs and drinking coffee, probably the two most recognized marks of British culture to most Chinese. It also bears the risk of excluding us from the invaluable opportunities the multicultural and global town of Oxford presents us to establish initial contacts with Africans, Latin Americans and Muslims and so on. More importantly, it might inhibit the cultural creativity and passion



for constructive engagement in us as mere passive receiver, adapter or blender. In fact, living overseas is a great chance for us as Chinese to re-examine and reinvigorate our own cultural repertoire and contribute back to the beautiful cultural dynamism in Oxford. This is why I directed the Spring Festival Gala last year in the Town Hall with my colleagues from the Oxford Chinese Students and Scholars Association, a group of over 60 student volunteers passionate to share Chinese culture.



The third theme I feel common to Chinese students in Oxford is a political one and the reason is simple. We come from so different a system that a minimum level of sensitivity to what's going on in British politics would regularly surprise, puzzle and arouse curiosity in us. A popular impression in China nowadays is that Chinese overseas students, especially those studying in the West, are overall more "liberal" in their political views. By "liberal" it could mean many things from being innovative and reformative to being disobedient and radical. But in general it stands for something divergent from the tradition. In other words, there is an expectation, sometimes fear or worry that the new generation of overseas Chinese students could bring about political changes just as what Zhou Enlai, Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and others did when they went back to China from Europe a century ago. Maybe it is too soon to tell as many Chinese returnees are more than eager to blend themselves seamlessly again into the local

conditions of the home country they left, but this is not the point I want to make here.

It would be regretful if some close-distance observation of British political system only generate a blind confirmation of the old saying that "the foreign moon is rounder than the one at home" plus a simple-minded belief that all indigenous problems can easily be cured by imported medicines. Complicated questions must be approached with sophistication and patience. Clearly this is not to say that complacency of the marvelous achievements in the past three decades is justified, especially when they do bestow a heightened sense of pride and confidence upon many overseas Chinese students of the current generation. Instead, as China sails into uncharted waters of development and reform, I see now is the high time for young Chinese to embrace and engage politics in the sense that we start to seriously ponder, communicate and debate about the outlook and prospect of desirable collective life. Overseas students particularly have the vantage point to experience alternative ways of public life, which shall not be treated as dogmas but as reference points from which a better political China can be imagined and constructed. This leads us to the next and final point.

A hundred years ago, the famous Chinese philosopher and educator Hu Shi, a graduate of Cornell and Columbia himself, provocatively denounced Chinese students studying overseas. It is timely to recapture his argument when many of us in Oxford are facing the choice between going back home or not upon graduation. "It is a great shame on China when Chinese students have to go abroad to study", said Hu Shi, because it represents the tragic stagnation and backwardness of Chinese civilisation and its defeat by western civilisation. While we may not agree with this social Darwinist account, his following warning still holds much water today. Hu Shi observed that to many Chinese at his time studying abroad is just a way of getting degrees and stepping on a fast track to fame and money. An even worse example can be found in *Fortress Besieged*, a satiric novel by the renowned Oxonian Qian Zhongshu where Fang Hongjian, the leading character of the book, who claimed back in China to have an overseas degree he never finished.



These remarks made a long time ago still have to be taken seriously as such careerism and credentialism are far from extinct nowadays. In a world where calculation outweighs contemplation and ideas and skills are more valued than ideals and virtues, it is now all too easy to concentrate solely on how to make a living at the price of working out how best to live and how to be a human, as Socrates and Confucius have taught us. "Studying abroad is not an end in and of itself", Hu Shi suggested, "The purpose of studying abroad is to create new civilization for our country".



This I think is not some high-minded aspiration but a central guiding principle to today's Chinese Oxonians when we make decisions about whether or not returning to China from overseas. This choice informed by this principle will also profoundly influence our attitude and behaviour with regard to the last three points I made: If creation of new civilisation for China is the goal and studying abroad the means, then the acquisition of specialized skills and human capital shall not replace our pursuit of general knowledge and wisdom. Trying to blend into the mainstream culture cannot stop us from being sensitive to and fascinated by cultural diversity and treating our own traditions with respect and appreciation. A first-hand experience of British political system should neither leaves us with mere surprises and puzzles nor deprives us of the ability to make sound judgments about the advantages and disadvantages of a particular political system. Rather, it should spur us to go beyond thinking just about how to live as individuals to working out how we can live together in equality, freedom and harmony.



Several centuries ago, it was a custom that the upper-class European young men embarked on what is called the Grand Tour to travel around Europe and expose themselves to the roots and legacies of the western civilisation. Thanks to the economic growth and technological development of our time, men and women of ordinary backgrounds from China are now able to undertake the modern Grand Tour to places like Oxford. We might not have the leisureliness the European predecessors once had as we are busy with essays, exams, social activities and job seeking; we are not as anxious as our Chinese predecessors were a

century ago about the destiny of our nation during a time of invasion and separation. But today we are in a unique position as the world has come closer and China is trying to embrace the world with dignity and grace. Socrates and Confucius never met each other but they share opinions on many matters. It is for this prospect of mutual understanding that we reflect on our life in Oxford and envisage a better China and world. On this occasion, I must particularly add that it is the extraordinary generosity of all the Trustees of the China Oxford Scholarship Fund that opens this once-in-a-life opportunity to all of us. On behalf of my fellow COSF scholars, I sincerely express our gratitude and wish you a very good afternoon.



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