



Australian
National
University

Workshop

Pierre Ryckmans (Simon Leys, 1935-2014), Humanities and the Migrant Scholar

Pierre Ryckmans is one of the most esteemed intellectuals to have worked in Australia. His many writings as an art historian, essayist, literary critic, novelist, translator and political analyst address Francophone and Anglophone readers, connecting them to Sinophone and other worlds.

Presented by the Humanities Research Centre at the Australian National University (ANU) in association with the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne, and the Australian Centre on China in the World, ANU.



Image: Gab Carpay, Dr Pierre Ryckmans, lecturer in Chinese, ANU, with painting by Su Renshan (1814-1849), 1971. ANU University Archives, ANUA 225-1089.

Date

24-25 November 2022

Location

ANU, Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), Building #188, Fellows Lane, Seminar Room

Organising committee

Susette Cooke (University of Sydney), Anne McLaren (University of Melbourne), Claire Roberts (University of Melbourne), Yujie Zhu (Australian National University)

Program

Thursday 24 November, 2.30 – 5.00 pm

ANU, Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), Building #188, Fellows Lane, Seminar Room

- 2.30-3.00** Arrival and afternoon tea and coffee (CIW Tea Room)
- 3.00-3.15** Welcome
Kylie Message, Director, Humanities Research Centre, ANU (online)
Ben Hillman, Director, Australian Centre on China in the World, ANU
- 3.15-3.30** Introduction
Claire Roberts

Session 1 Morality/ethics/ritual

Moderator: Susette Cooke

- 3.30-3.50** Jocelyn Chey
Morality in Government: Ryckmans on Confucius and the Rites
- 3.50-4.10** Jeremy Clarke
"A gentleman is not a pot': Musings about the Influence of Pierre Ryckmans' Catholic Heritage and the Writings of Simon Leys".
- 4.10-4.30** Yujie Zhu
How Heritage Practices Shape the Chinese Past: Continuity in Change
- 4.30-5.00** Discussion
- Evening** Self-funded dinner

Friday 25 November, 9.30-5.00 pm

ANU, Australian Centre on China in the World (CIW), Building #188, Fellows Lane, Seminar Room

- 9.30-9.40** Welcome and housekeeping
Yujie Zhu

Session 2 Creativity and the intellectual/humanistic arts/boundary crossing

Moderator: Mark Strange

- 9.40-10.00** Anne McLaren (online)
Sketching Trees in Winter: The Scholar as Creative Intellectual
- 10.00-10.20** Timothy Cheek (online)
"Poetry & Politics": How Simon Leys Taught Me to Read the Poetry of *People's Daily* editor, Deng Tuo

- 10.20-10.50 Morning tea/ coffee (CIW Tea Room)
- 10.50-11.10 Susette Cooke
Navigating with Chinese Shadows
- 11.10-11.30 Claire Roberts
'Book fragrance': Ryckmans, Art and Intellectual creation
- 11.30-12.00 Discussion
- 12.00 – 1.00 Lunch

Session 3 Translation/note-taking/storytelling

- Moderator: Craig Smith (online)
- 1.00-1.20 Annie Ren
'Notes on *Notes from the Hall of Uselessness*'
- 1.20-1.40 Nicholas Jose
'The sea washes away the evils of men'
- 1.40-2.00 Jeanne Ryckmans
On Pierre: A Daughter's Reminiscences
- 2.00-2.30 Discussion
- 2.30-3.00 Afternoon tea/ coffee (CIW Tea Room)

Session 4 Public intellectual/humanistic education/the university

- Moderator: Nicholas Jose
- 3.00-3.20 Yayun Zhu
Reading Simon Leys' "Roland Barthes in China"
- 3.20-3.40 Shirley Chan
Ryckmans as a Defender of Humanistic Education
- 3.40-4.00 Benjamin Madden
Ryckmans on the University
- 4.00-5.00 Discussion and wrap up

Abstracts and biographies (in order of program)

Jocelyn Chey

Abstract: Pierre Ryckmans' translation of the *Analects of Confucius* (NY: Norton 1997) should not be read simply as an example of his skill as a translator. In his introduction and footnotes he reflects on cultural differences between Chinese and Western thought and applies the findings to contemporary politics, ethics, education and culture.

For instance, his first footnote to Chapter 12 of the *Analects*, he observes that Confucius' emphasis on the importance of the Rites 禮 illustrated how in every society laws and regulations increased in proportion to the loss of ethical standards in society at large.

Clearly, Ryckmans regretted recent trends to govern by regulation rather than by eliminating the causes of conflict and dissension.

The footnote in question applies to the *Lun Yu* 12.1

顏淵： 顏淵問仁。子曰：「克己復禮為仁。一日克己復禮，天下歸仁焉。為仁由己，而由人乎哉？」

Ryckmans' translation (p. 55) reads:

Yan Hui asked about humanity. The Master said: "The practice of humanity comes down to this: tame the self and restore the rites. Tame the self and restore the rites for but one day and the whole world will rally to your humanity. The practice of humanity comes from the self, not from anyone else."

His footnote (pp. 175-176) reads (in part):

The notion of "rites" or "ritual", which occurs constantly in the *Analects*, is of central importance to Confucian thought.... Rites play in civilized society the role that is devolved to laws in a social environment where morality has broken down. In this respect, the inflation of legal codification and the multiplication of judicial activity are really a paradoxical measure of the brutalization and moral lawlessness of a society.

Biography: Jocelyn Chey is Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney and Adjunct Professor at Western Sydney University and UTS. Her career with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade spanned thirty years from the 1970s to 90s, including two postings in Beijing and as Consul General to Hong Kong and Macau 1992-5. She was awarded the Medal of Australia (AM) in 2009.

Jeremy Clarke

Abstract: "While it is more than possible to study the writings of Simon Leys without reference to his lifelong Catholicism, it is also true that one gains a deeper appreciation of Professor Ryckmans' work if one considers how his intellectual and moral formation was significantly influenced by it. In this way, for instance, the notes and commentary of *The Analects* - which very quickly contain a sub-heading 'The Analects and the Gospels' - take on greater significance if Ryckmans' scholarship is viewed through this lens. In this paper I will reference *The Analects* and essays from *The Hall of Uselessness*."

Biography: Dr Jeremy Clarke completed his doctorate in Chinese history at the ANU, working with Professor Geremie Barmé. He explored the emergence of Chinese Catholic identities, in the context of a modernising China, and did so through artistic images. After graduation Jeremy taught history for a number of years at Boston College, before returning to run Jesuit Mission Australia, an international charity. After Jeremy left the priesthood he started a China consulting and touring company, and now runs a wine bar and bookstore in Boorowa, NSW. He is Director of Sino-Immersion Pty Ltd.

Yujie Zhu

Abstract: Inspired by Pierre Ryckmans' seminal work 'The Chinese attitude towards the Past', this talk examines how heritage practices shape the Chinese past, contributing to a process of continuity in change. Emperors inherited and collected sacred bronzes and vessels from previous dynasties to legitimise the continuity of their power. Literati studied antiquities in search of China's glorious past. Material destruction facilitated the ritualistic practice of forgetting that served as the renewal of Chinese civilisation. These examples, among others, show how heritage practices can contribute to meaning-making as associated with self-cultivation, knowledge transmission, political legitimisation, and the pursuit of eternity. Each of these concepts has deep roots in Chinese thought – the relationship between body, mind and object, for instance – and reflect a history of spiritual and moral affirmation in a changing China.

Biography: Yujie Zhu is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, the Australian National University, Australia. His research mainly focuses on the role of cultural pasts in shaping nationalism and the state-society relationship in China. His recent books include *Heritage Tourism* (Cambridge, 2021), *Heritage Politics in China* (Routledge, 2020, with Christina Maags) and *Heritage and Romantic Consumption in China* (Amsterdam, 2018). He served as the vice-president of the International Association of Critical Heritage Studies (2014-2020).

Anne McLaren

Abstract: In Chinese painting the student artist is told to sketch the trees in winter, because “without the seductive yet confused and blurry effect of their leafy masses, through their stark nudity they can best reveal their inner structure and specific character” (Simon Leys, 1976). Simon Leys, the pen-name of Pierre Ryckmans, was a scholar who brought a rare creative intensity to his work and to his life experience. A man who belonged to the constellation of intellectual giants in Europe, he strangely found himself residing in a place remote and often indifferent to the intellectual currents and artistic concerns that drove Ryckmans the scholar and his alter ego, Simon Leys. This presentation will draw on essays in *The Burning Forest* and *The View from the Bridge*.

Biography: Anne McLaren is Professorial Fellow at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne. A graduate of the Australian National University, she is a specialist in Chinese traditional fiction, Chinese popular culture, and the role of women in Chinese performance culture. She is the author of *Memory Making in Folk Epics of China* (2022), *Performing Grief: Bridal Laments in Rural China* (2008), *Chinese Popular Culture and Ming Chantefables* (1998), a memoir, *Slow Train to Democracy* (2000) a number of edited volumes and other studies.

Timothy Cheek

Abstract: Dr. Ryckmans was my honours supervisor back in 1977, and he put me on to Wang Shiwei and the Yan'an Rectification Movement – during which he lived out his intellectual tolerance for honest disagreement (I saw Wang as less of a democrat that he did). While he set me on my topic – China's intellectuals and the Communist Party – it is his cultural writings as Simon Leys that have continued to inspire my research as well as my teaching, particularly his essay from *Burning Forest*, "Poetry and Painting." This essay shows the cultural technology of literati expression in public life. Through this and similar writings, Dr. Ryckmans taught me that the humanistic/literati arts were key to understanding the first generation of CCP literati officials in the new PRC. This approach has since been dubbed New Sinology 後漢學 by his most notable student, Geremie Barmé, for its dedication to competence in traditional Chinese language and culture as a ground from which to make sense of contemporary China. Indeed, I consider Dr. Ryckmans as the progenitor of this New Sinology.

Biography: Timothy Cheek is Professor and Louis Cha Chair in Chinese Research at the Institute of Asian Research in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs and Department of History at The University of British Columbia. His research, teaching and translating focus on the recent history of China, especially the role of Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century and the history of the Chinese Communist Party. His books include *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (2015), *Living with Reform: China Since 1989* (2006), *Mao Zedong and China's Revolutions* (2002) and *Propaganda and Culture in Mao's China* (1997), as well as edited volumes, *The Chinese Communist Party: A Century in Ten Lives* (2021) with Klaus Mühlhahn and Hans van de Ven, *Voices from the Chinese Century: Public Intellectual Debate in Contemporary China* (2020) with David Ownby and Joshua Fogel, *Mao's Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings, 1912-1949*, Vol. VIII (2015) with Stuart R. Schram, *The Cambridge Critical Introduction to Mao* (2010), *New Perspectives on State Socialism in China* (1997), with Tony Saich, *The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao* (1989) translated and edited with Roderick MacFarquhar and Eugene Wu, and *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (1986), edited with Carol Lee Hamrin. In recent years Cheek has been working with some Chinese intellectuals to explore avenues of collaborative research and translation.

Susette Cooke

Abstract: How does one move across 'worlds' in the early stages of new cultural encounters? Based on his 1972 experiences, Simon Leys' *Chinese Shadows*, published in 1977, offered a humanist lens as a way to navigate post-Mao China, a landscape that had not entirely changed by 1978 when some of us went there as foreign students. Then and now, his perspective confirmed the validity of human meaning and purpose, concerns and values in the investigation of not yet familiar societies.

Biography: Susette Cooke was a student of Pierre Ryckmans at the Australian National University, then studied at Peking University 1978-80. She has held teaching and research positions at the University of Technology Sydney 2004-13 and the University of Sydney 2013-16. Her research focuses on historical and contemporary ethnic minority-state relations in Northwest China; social, cultural and economic change under the Great Western Development project; and state administration of religion in China. She is now an Honorary Associate in the School of Languages and Cultures and the China Studies Centre at the University of Sydney.

Claire Roberts

Abstract: Pierre Ryckmans used the phrase ‘book fragrance’ to convey the quality Chinese connoisseurs appreciated in Pu Xinyu’s paintings which, he wrote, were ‘endowed with an incomparable calligraphic fluency’ (1974). Pu Xinyu (Aisin Gioro Puru, 1896-1963), the first cousin of Aisin Gioro Puyi the last Manchu-Qing Emperor, taught Ryckmans painting in Taiwan. A committed artist from an early age, Ryckmans discovered the world of Chinese brush-and-ink painting and calligraphy during a trip to China as a student in 1955. The ‘creative dynamism’ he felt on that trip motivated his study of China and art and never left him. This presentation will consider Ryckmans’ writings on art and his own artistic practice as integral aspects of his intellectual formation.

Biography: Claire Roberts is an art historian and curator with an interest in modern and contemporary Chinese art, and the cultural flows between Australia and Asia. She is Associate Professor of Art History and Curatorship in the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. Her current research explores the international context of modern and contemporary Chinese art. Claire’s most recent books are *Fairweather and China* (2021), *Ian Fairweather: A Life in Letters*, edited with John Thompson (2019), *Photography and China* (2013) and *Friendship in Art: Fou Lei and Huang Binhong* (2010).

Annie Ren

Abstract: Simon Leys’ *Notes from the Hall of Uselessness* is one of the thirty or so booklets published under the *Cahiers Series* edited by Dan Gunn. The aim of the series is to make available ‘new explorations in writing, in translating, and in the areas linking these two activities’. The first part of Leys’ *Notes* consists of his observations on a wide range of topics including travel and tourism; the deadness of perfection and aliveness of imperfection; how a Chinese poet from 1200 years ago is treated as a contemporary; and how musical geniuses gain insights from vacuum cleaners. The second part of *Notes* includes an essay on ‘The Experience of Literary Translation’ translated from French by Gunn. My presentation explores the two side of Simon Leys as presented in his *Notes*, first as a practitioner of the traditional art of Chinese note-writing 筆記; and second as one of the greatest readers of our time, following Leys’ observation that translation is the ‘supreme form of reading’.

Biography: Annie Ren 任路漫 is a postdoctoral fellow at the Australian Centre on China in the World and an associate editor of *The China Story*. Annie is also a literary translator, her latest translation is a memoir jointly written by the retired Harvard professor Leo Lee Ou-fan and his wife Esther Yuk-ying Lee entitled *Ordinary Days: A Memoir in Six Chapters*.

Nicholas Jose

Abstract: *The Wreck of the Batavia: Anatomy of a Massacre* is a short prose work published in English in 2005 offering a compact account, under the name of Simon Leys, of one of the grimmest stories in nautical history – the wreck of a proud Dutch East India Company ship off the coast of Western Australia in 1629 and its grisly aftermath. ‘The book that was not,’ Leys calls it, quoting Victor Segalen, because he has given up on the book he has long contemplated on this seductive subject and offers these ‘notes’. What did Leys find so compelling and yet unwritable in this material? Perhaps the Greek verse with which the work begins and ends provides a clue.

Biography: Nicholas Jose has published seven novels, including *Paper Nautilus*, *The Custodians*, *The Red Thread* and *Original Face*, and three collections of short stories. His non-fiction includes *Chinese Whispers*, *Cultural Essays* and a memoir, *Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola*. He is an Adjunct Professor in the Writing and Society Research Centre, Western Sydney University and Emeritus Professor of English and Creative Writing at The University of Adelaide.

Jeanne Ryckmans

Biography: Jeanne Ryckmans has worked for two decades in Australian publishing. A literary agent with Cameron's Management, she is a former senior publisher at Random House and HarperCollins Australia. Prior to joining the publishing world, Jeanne worked in arts television (France 2 and SBS Television) as an on-air presenter and documentary producer. She is the author of two books and directed the Canberra Writers Festival from 2020-2022.

Yayun Zhu

Abstract: From 11 April to 4 May 1974, Roland Barthes (1915–1980) went to China with a small group of distinguished French literary figures from the avant-garde magazine *Tel Quel*. Their trip took place in the height of the campaign against Lin Biao and Confucius. In his three notebooks, Barthes vividly captured the events of everyday life during their “guided” journey, as well as his emotions, ennui and desire. He noted, “I realise that if I were to publish them as they are, it would be exactly a piece of Antonioni.” Simon Leys criticised Barthes for ignoring the social reality, showing a political aphasia, and committing “uncommon indecency”. I discuss Leys’ views on the role of public intellectuals at a time of turbulence.

Biography: Yayun Zhu is a PhD candidate in Australian Centre on China in the World, Australian National University. He is writing his dissertation on a cultural and literary history of the city of Nanjing during the Ming–Qing dynastic transition.

Shirley Chan

Abstract: Pierre Ryckmans was a defender of humanistic education. What was his idea of education? He quoted a saying of the 3rd century BCE Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi, on the usefulness of the useless (人皆知有用之用。而莫知無用之用也) to highlight the paradox between what in life might seem impractical to people but in fact was absolutely essential in humanity. The discussion on the subject of education will be based on Ryckmans’ *The Hall of Uselessness* (2011).

Biography: Shirley Chan is Associate Professor and Director in Chinese Studies in the Department of Media, Communications, Creative Arts, Language and Literature at Macquarie University, Sydney. She graduated from the University of Sydney where she studied classical Chinese and Chinese history under Pierre Ryckmans and Derek D. Herforth. She has broad research interests in Chinese culture, Chinese philosophy, history and textual studies. Dr. Chan has served as President of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia (CSAA) and member of several editorial boards for international journals. She is a member of the Macquarie University Research Centre for Cultural Heritage and Environment.

Benjamin Madden

Abstract: In his 1996 Boyer Lectures, *The View from the Bridge: Aspects of Culture*, Pierre Ryckmans remarks on the state of the university in terms that should make any academic despond: “The main problem is not so much that the University as Western civilization knew it, is now virtually dead, but that *its death has hardly registered in the consciousness of the public, and even of a majority of academics themselves*” (12). Ryckmans’s text offers us a point of comparison against which to measure contemporary realities, and poses several questions: Is the neoliberalism already well entrenched by the 1990s the only, or even the main, explanation for our predicament? Is Ryckmans’s exacting vision of the University the only viable one? And might his heterodox revaluations of culture and exoticism help us to formulate a different account of what the University should be?

Biography: Dr. Benjamin Madden is a lecturer in the Department of English, Creative Writing and Film at the University of Adelaide. His PhD, on literary modernism, was conferred by the University of York, and he has lectured at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. His work has appeared in *Notes and Queries*, *Modern Philology*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *The James Joyce Quarterly*, and others. In 2021, Giramondo published *Antipodean China*, coedited with Nicholas Jose, and featuring an essay by him on Pierre Ryckmans.

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