

Professor Chris Rea – Visiting Speaker – 25th April 2023

Translation and Transcultural Studies Masterclass ‘What’s Your Problem? Practical Steps for Designing a Research Project’ was given by Prof Christopher Rea (University of British Columbia) at the University of Warwick on 25th April 2023.

Drawing on his book *Where Research Begins: Choosing a Research Project That Matters to You (and the World)*, Prof Rea suggested three main ways to design a meaningful research project. First of all, instead of focusing on the common idea of ‘narrowing down your topic,’ Prof Rea highlighted the significance of asking ‘meaningless’ questions, which were helpful to the discovery of potential research projects. Then Prof Rea invited all the attendees to participate in the ‘Change One Variable’ exercise to pinpoint their underlying research problem. This exercise was composed of five steps: 1) write out the research questions; 2) isolate the key ‘variables;’ 3) change one of these variables; 4) repeat this procedure for at least five more times; 5) rewrite the research questions, incorporating new insights or variables. At the end, Prof Rea encouraged researchers to ‘kill the acronyms’ and be welcoming, especially to those ‘non-professionals,’ for these determine whether a specific research project matters to the world.

The masterclass brought considerable insights to the attendees. Yaqi Xi, a PhD student from Translation and Transcultural Studies, said, ‘Professor Rea’s seminar inspired me to see my research in a new light. Beginning with the ‘Cereal Box Challenge,’ Professor Rea reminded us that every researcher is different and encouraged us to identify in a primary source as many questions as possible but stick to those that truly interest us. There is no hierarchy of ‘importance’ or ‘meaningfulness.’ Further, by running a diagnostic test on my research question through the ‘Change One Variable’ exercise, I learned how to reformulate my question to make it more accurate, relevant, and accessible, and was able to reaffirm my position as a translation researcher in the infinite ‘Topic Land.’ As Professor Rea so succinctly pointed out, my problem is not a topic—it is my pivot.’

Following the masterclass, Prof Rea gave a seminar, ‘Don’t Change Your Husband! and Other Lessons from a New Online Archive of Early Chinese Films,’ on 26th April 2023. This event was held both on-campus and online.

In this seminar, Prof Rea introduced his experience of carrying out a Chinese film classics project and his research discoveries while writing his monograph, *Chinese Film Classics, 1922-1949*. According to Prof Rea, three factors are especially crucial to the creation of a digital archive of early Chinese films—accessibility, outreach, and training. In order to make early Chinese cinema history more accessible to the English-speaking world, more than 35 subtitled films are offered by Prof Rea on <chinesefilmclassics.org> together with a brief introduction of the production and personnel. Similarly, to improve the outreach of early Chinese films, Prof Rea uploaded a large number of film clips, which were subtitled by his collaborators and himself onto Youtube (<https://www.youtube.com/@ModernChineseCulturalStudies>). Furthermore, Prof Rea highlighted the importance of training to the study of Chinese film classics, and he introduced the ways in which he invited students to join his research as well as the free online courses he offered.

In the second half of the seminar, Prof Rea focused on discussing his discoveries and the new direction of his research. Three of his discoveries regarding Chinese filmmaking, global cinema culture, and early twentieth-century Chinese popular culture were explained in detail. Firstly, the international connections of the actress Lim Cho-cho 林楚楚. Secondly, the special effects employed in *The Mighty Hero Gan Fengchi* 大俠甘鳳池 (Daxia Gan Fengchi) and *Cave of the Silken Web* 盤絲洞 (Pansidong). Thirdly, the differences between the Norwegian subtitles and Chinese subtitles of *Cave of the Silken Web* as well as the appearance of the name of Greta Garbo in early Chinese films. As for the new direction of his research, Prof Rea introduced his current study of the representation of 'melon' 瓜 (Gua) in early Chinese films, its socio-cultural implications, as well as its relations to foreign films.

The seminar kindled great interest among the audience, who actively interacted with Prof Rea in the Q&A session. A large range of questions were asked and answered, including the selection of the corpus, the difficulties encountered in the process of translating subtitles, and the cultural implications of several scenes.