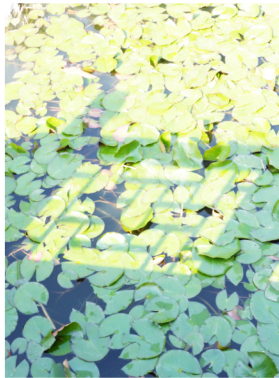


The



Oxford

China



Group

News-
letter



FROM THE EDITOR :

Welcome back to a sunny Trinity term here in Oxford. As the term begins to gather pace, we are pleased to bring you the new and improved Oxford China Group newsletter, bringing together a wide range of perspectives on China spanning politics, philosophy, film, art, and student life.

This issue includes a philosophical reflection on faith and perseverance during the Long March, alongside a review of Millennium Mambo and its portrayal of youth and uncertainty in early-2000s Taipei. Our exhibition feature explores women's art and identity in Beijing's 798 Art District, while the news section turns to recent developments in trade, diplomacy, and energy politics.

Alongside these pieces, the cohort pages highlight recent student activities, from trips across Jiangxi to performances at Peking University, reflecting the breadth of experiences that shape the study of China at Oxford beyond the classroom.

Earlier this week, the Oxford China Group collaborated with the Oxford Venture Capital Network to host Adam Knight at the China Centre for a presentation and Q&A. Knight co-founded two industry-leading providers of brand and retail services: TONG, a cross-cultural consultancy and agency responsible for launching over 120 brands across a wide range of sectors, and YASO, a VC-backed tech-enabled solution helping ambitious brands sell directly to Chinese consumers through social commerce. It was a pleasure to host Adam and to see so many of you there.

Taken together, this newsletter reflects what the Oxford China Group aims to encourage: thoughtful engagement with China across disciplines, perspectives, and forms of expression. Thank you to everyone who contributed to this edition, and a special thank you to Oliwia, who put the newsletter together and curated it into a cohesive and visually engaging final publication. We hope you enjoy reading it!

- Ismay



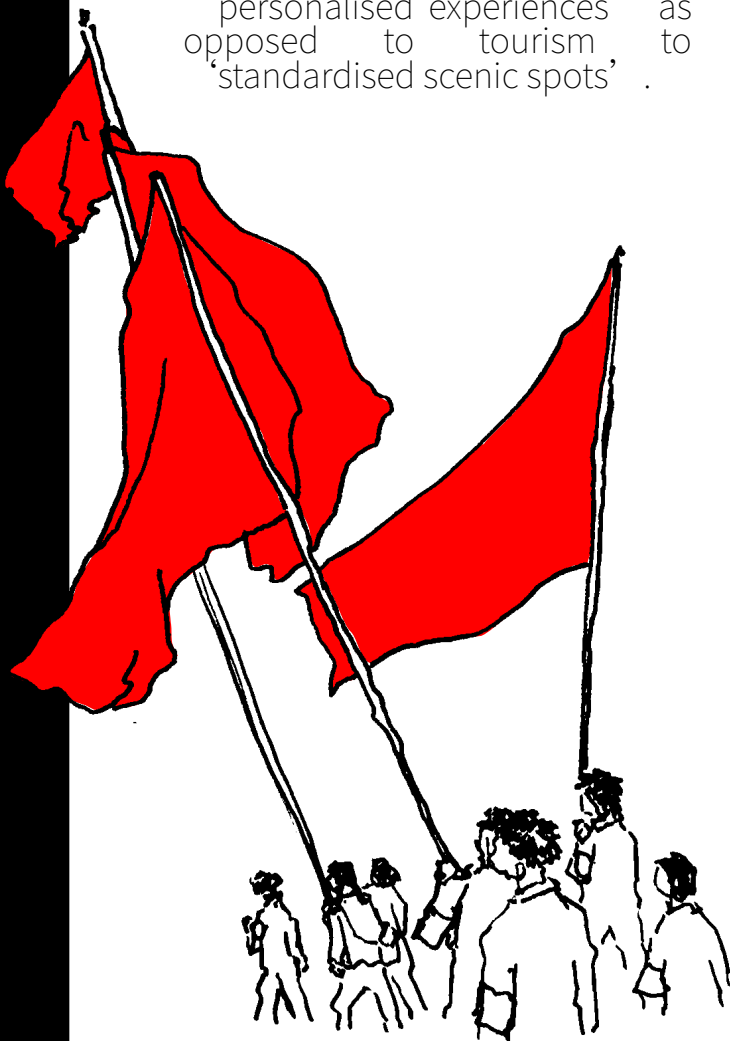
THIS WEEK IN BEIJING

4/05/2026 - 10/05/2026

This week in Beijing saw the conclusion of May Day, the labour festival-turned consumer's paradise that saw over 18 million domestic visitors to Beijing this year. A focus on the variety of consumption seen over the holiday has been highlighted in domestic news channels, including a new focus on 'cultural tourism' and 'personalised experiences' as opposed to tourism to 'standardised scenic spots'.



Tensions continue to rise in the capital as Beijing prepare for Trump's first visit to China since returning to office against the backdrop of trade tensions, enflamed by the war in Iran. Despite a temporary trade-truce between Washington and Beijing, tariffs imposed by Trump on certain Chinese refineries accused of buying Iranian oil have been refuted by Beijing, invoking anti-sanctions laws to protect domestic companies. Despite China's deep oil reserves allowing them to weather a large portion of the energy crisis sparked by the war, the Iranian chokehold on the strait of Hormuz has placed great tension on shipping to and from China, explaining Beijing's emphasis on mediation and calling for a re-opening of the strait. Of course, the meeting between Trump and Xi will have echoing implications for Europe and the UK, trade through the Strait of Hormuz and tensions surrounding Hong Kong and Taiwan all points at stake.



Written by Dillon G.



THE CHINA CENTRE

The 2nd year cohort recently went on a trip to Nanchang, Jiangxi, touring around the 'Hero City' with students from Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics to accompany them! Presented with local specialties, including many delicious varieties of sticky rice, to fuel them, the group found themselves climbing the narrow un-airconditioned staircases of Wanshou Palace, rewarded with views of the vast Gan River.

Followed by visits to the premier Asparagus Farm of Jiangxi, an exemplar of ingenuity in grassroots economic development within village communities in China, as well as a tour of the premier car factory of the province, the students really got a taste of just how exciting economic development can be.

A final visit to the Jiangxi Province Museum as well as the Nanchang Han Dynasty Museum served merely to whet the appetite of these young students, providing some insight into the deep history of the province and its position within China as a whole. Of course, besides from these trips there was plenty of space for exploration within the cohort, each student applying themselves eagerly to the pursuit of new and exciting places to engage with traditional Chinese activities, such as perusing beautiful night markets, buying tasty streetside pancakes and stinky tofu, and consuming alcohol.

Written by Dillon C.



A few students from the 2nd year cohort recently participated in Peking University's '汉语大赛' (Chinese Language Competition), showcasing their acting, singing and poetic talent in front of the combined cohort of the Chinese as a Foreign Language department! Particularly notable were the achievements of Marius and Dash, both winning rewards for their performances within their respective groups. Talk about gaining face!



poem of the fortnight

千山鸟飞绝
 万径人踪灭
 孤舟蓑笠翁
 独钓寒江雪

Through vast stretching hills, no birds afloat.
 Traces of countless wanderers extinguished by snow.
 An old man, clad in straw hat and coat,
 fishes among the frost on a lonely boat.



In early February, the XYZ gallery in the 798 Art District in Beijing hosted its fourth annual women's art exhibition. The annual exhibition aims to allow women to depict their relationship with the world and themselves through art. This year the exhibition titled 'Inner Wilderness' focused on social identity and women's role in the public sphere.

The foreword of the exhibition emphasised how, throughout the narrative of art history, women have long been excluded from the public sphere. Inspired by Virginia Woolf's 'A Room of One's Own' (1929), an essay that dissects the societal conventions restricting women's artistic freedom, the exhibition was curated to create 'room' for each of the 20 female Chinese artists. It provided the artists with space to explore their relationship with womanhood whilst allowing the viewer to fully engage with each artist's work. This is demonstrated by the ease in which the exhibition moves from bright collaged tapestries to monochrome portraits, to large installations. Each work of art felt unique and distinct, even to the untrained eye. One of the most intriguing installations of the exhibition was 曹新宇 (Cao Xinyu's) large wheat field that lay at the centre of the exhibition. Nature plays a significant role throughout the exhibition,



Photos By Iona _ , credit: XYZ Art Gallery

acknowledging not only its maternal and nurturing qualities but also its harsh and uncontrollable elements. The chaos of the wilderness represents the confusion many women feel regarding their identity particularly when placed within the public sphere.

Despite the empowering and thought-provoking tone of the exhibition, many visitors' engagement with the exhibition felt inauthentic and performative. Most visitors seemed more interested in taking the 'aesthetic' and 'social media worthy' photos than genuinely engaging with the artist's works. When speaking with members of staff at the exhibition, this observation was confirmed, as they explained that many visitors come solely to take photos. This almost undermines the exhibition's message,

reinforcing the historical narrative of female artists not being taken seriously, with their works often reduced to visual aesthetics rather than recognised as meaningful works addressing important social and political issues. Ultimately, the exhibition not only creates space for female artists to explore identity and womanhood but also reveals the tension between the exhibition's serious themes and the way many visitors chose to engage with it, often reducing complex and politically charged works to aesthetic backdrops for photographs.



Inner Wilderness

Written by Iona G.

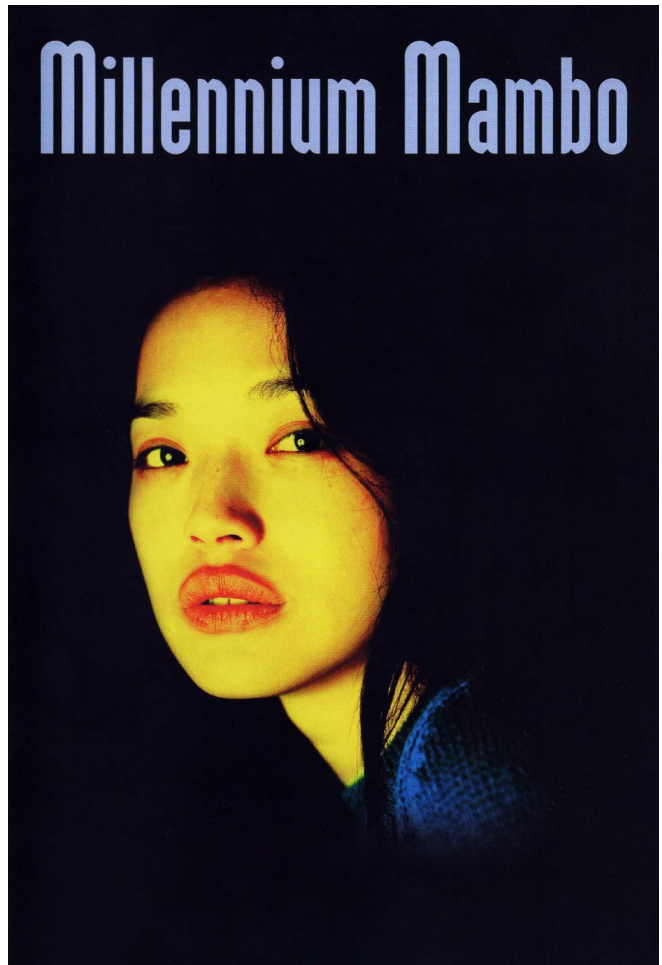
MILLENNIUM ☆ MAMBO

Written by Nancy R.

Hou Hsiao-Hsien (2001)

Taiwan's Hou Hsiao-Hsien provides a window into the youth of early 2000s Taipei through the struggles of heroine Vicky. Shu Qi, who plays Vicky, narrates the movie, recalling her tragic twenties spent flitting between different bars and clubs. Her life is predominately ruled by her tumultuous and unhealthy relationship with selfish, bad-boy DJ Hao-Hao. When the warm-hearted but slightly sleezy, Jack, enters the picture, Vicky finds herself trapped between the two men, as she still cannot seem to fully liberate herself from the painful inertia that is her relationship with Hao-Hao. Hou shoots this story beautifully, highlighting the vivacity of Taiwanese nightlife, which he fully immersed himself in whilst working on this film, even apparently to the point of using some of the illegal drugs pictured in Millennium Mambo.

He switches between cool, calm blues in places where Vicky is more at peace, and warm tones, for example in the suffocating apartment she shares with Hao-Hao, highlighting the inner conflict she deals with. Her struggles with the uncertainties of adulthood, are framed by the background of Taiwan at the turn of the millennium. Taiwanese society was also changing, in 2000 the KMT was voted out as ruling party for the first time, in wake of the DPP, and, triggered by the entrance into a new era, questions about the future were raised not just in Taiwan, but globally. Hou hence uses Vicky as a symbol to not only represent the youth, but also for them to relate to, and, in



some ways find comfort in as, due to the film being narrated by Vicky a decade after its events, viewers could find solace in the fact that these turbulent times with eventually pass. The film was well received after release in 2001, with it even being nominated for a Palm D' Or at the Cannes Film Festival, where it made its debut.

Film still from Millenium Mambo



If you want to watch this film, it can be found on Chinese streaming service Bilibili, YouTube, and other paid services.

RUDOLPH BOSSHARDT

Written By Dillon C.

In 1935, the British-Swiss missionary Rudolf Alfred Bosshardt found himself marching across the mountains of Guizhou with the Chinese Red Army. Sent to do work in Zunyi in the 1920s he had witnessed famine, epidemic and poverty sweep through the region, supported only by his unwavering faith. What surprised him most as he was captured and held ransom by the Red Army wasn't the difficulties they were forced to persevere, but that he saw his faith reflected in them. Held for 560 days, Bosshardt travelled thousands of miles throughout China. Often marching 25 miles a day through mountains and forests, usually at night to avoid detection, simultaneously evading pursuit from the rear and blockades established by Chiang Kai Shek in front of them, through constant torrential rain, a lack of food and clothes, as well as frequent ambushes by warlords and bandits. Bosshardt survived the Long March through an unwavering faith in God, singing hymns and reciting verses whenever he could, describing that God would speak to him whenever he felt particularly dejected. This faith, the backbone of Bosshardt's perseverance, he saw reflected in the eyes of Red soldiers when they

described Communism. Most soldiers, of course, being peasants, could not describe Communism through the lens of economic policy or function of the state; for these soldiers, Communism was a great faith. A faith in the idea of liberation, that they might be free from oppression and

day, that equality might exist in China. Many people were uplifted by faith in Communism, even understanding very little about it theoretically, and that faith was the backbone of the inhuman perseverance of the Red Army throughout the Long March. That, once lifted out of their past lives, this faith made the idea of Communism so blindingly obvious; one could live and die in its pursuit. Just like Bosshardt's Christian faith, Red soldiers would discuss their ideas on Communism, sharing stories, and even singing their own hymns. This faith never truly left the dogma of Chinese Communism, the freedom and equality ensured through Communism described as "higher than the sky". Every social system operates on such shared faith; contemporarily, that meritocracy exists, hard work ensures a position in society, that the market will regulate itself and ensure equality, that the money held in our banks is really our own, that our paper currency is and will continue to be meaningful. What the story of Rudolf Bosshardt, and what he saw in the Red Army soldiers, uplifted and supported by their faith and ideals, is testament to how far simple belief can drive us. Perhaps faith, in whatever form it takes, is indivisible from perseverance.

"LIGHT FROM
LAMPS IS NO
LIGHT

COMPARED
TO THE BRIGHTNESS
OF THE SUN;

FATHERS
AND MOTHERS
ARE DEAR

BUT THE COMMUNIST
PARTY IS DEARER.*

*Hymn sung by Cadre Wang, a woman freed from an arranged marriage who joined the 1st Red Army during the Long March.

so too their entire country, that they might eat pork, that they might not live at the whim of a landlord to whom they owe a debt of 200 kilos of rice, that women might not be forced into arranged marriages, that they might taste salt every

Sanguinary Sunday

Written by Mari-May O.

August 15th 1937

We haven't slept soundly in 30 hours. First the fear had kept us up, and now sleep is far out of sight. How could we rest, with ears still ringing from the impact, noses burning from the smog, eyes watery from dust. We've been spared the worst of the damage, yet leaving is still the obvious choice – really, the only choice. Relocate or die seems to be the only definitive amongst the confusion, even if the where is still open-ended. Sweat sticks to my skin as it does every summer in Shanghai, but now the heat is suffocating. The cotton of my qipao clings to my back, the short sleeves to my arms, the hem darkened by dust from broken brick. The bundle of clothes in my arm houses two others, and a few pairs of undergarments that I barely recall grabbing from my drawer. I regret not bringing my second pair of cloth flats. After only an hour walking, groggy and aimless, the thin soles of the pair I'm wearing provide no reprieve to my already aching feet. Hopefully the numbness will settle in soon. Zhabei lies north of Suzhou Creek, still a short distance from the path we carve southward, yet even here the sky blooms with black puffs from anti-aircraft fire. Fighting had stretched until the early hours of the morn, until the bleak sun of the afternoon, and still now as the sky started to darken impossibly more.

My father insisted on bringing the newspapers with us, despite my lamenting to him how much I loathe to see the photos from Zhabei. They peak out from the top of the bedrolls he carries tied on his back. 'Bloody Saturday' reads the block print at the top of the paper, though the actual information is scarce. My father is sure they are Japanese bombs. My mother hasn't spoken since we left the house. Her eyes are glazed over, body on autopilot. Perhaps she thinks the question of who is trivial – Chinese bombs, Japanese bombs, either way we'd be on the move. Three more refugees in a city drowning in them. But I don't share her sentiment. It's only been two days since the fighting began, and already hundreds of us have been reduced to debris. in them. But I don't share her sentiment. It's only been two days since the fighting began, and already hundreds of us have been reduced to debris. The electric tram lines we walk alongside are out of use, the neon advertisements on the street either broken or flickering hopelessly under layers of grime. The tea shops, the sweet shops, my tailor, all boarded up with salvaged cardboard and nails. Everything I recognised as home now only exists in memory. How could I not despise them? The Japanese, with their warships anchored in the Huangpu, their marines stationed nearby, their arrogance, their brutality. Their presence had never fully left since 1932, nor had the memory of that day in January. We survived once before, but who is to say we will survive again? We join the river of people flowing east along North Sichuan Road before turning southward toward the bridges that cross Suzhou Creek. The crowd thickens near the Garden Bridge. Rickshaws lie abandoned where their pullers have fled, their shafts resting

crookedly against the pavement like broken limbs. A tram sits frozen mid-track, windows shattered, metal frame scorched, its overhead wire

sagging uselessly above it. Someone has scrawled characters across its side in charcoal. I cannot tell whether they curse the Japanese or begging some god for mercy. The heat presses down continually with a damp insistence, trapping the smoke close to the ground. It clings to our throats, making my tongue taste of soot. The bundle in my arms grows heavier with every step, as though the dust itself is settling into the cloth.

We trudge for a few minutes more when the smell hits us, before the sight does; acrid and metallic, with something sweeter beneath it that I do not allow myself to name. A warehouse near the water's edge smoulders stubbornly, its brick walls peeled open like fruit, wooden beams exposed and blackened. Crates lie split apart across the quay, spilling rice into the mud. The grains are already trampled into paste by passing feet. A woman kneels in the street, shaking a man whose face is grey beneath the dust. His head lolls unnaturally when she lifts it. She calls his name again and again, her voice hoarse but strangely calm, as if she is only trying to wake him from a nap. No one stops. We cannot afford to. Father does not look in her direction. Mother stares straight ahead.

"Keep moving," he says, not unkindly, but without room for argument.

We press toward the bridge.

The approach to Garden Bridge is choked with carts and bedrolls. A bicycle lies crushed beneath a pile of belongings: cooking pots, a bamboo mat, a framed ancestral tablet wrapped hastily in cloth. The river beneath us smells thick and sour, disturbed by ash drifting down from the north bank. As we step onto the span over Suzhou Creek, the iron beneath my feet vibrates faintly with the movement of so many bodies. I glance north despite myself. Smoke devours Zhabei entirely now, swallowing rooftops, swallowing entire streets. It looks unreal - like a sketch smudged by careless hands. Somewhere within that haze is the road to my primary school, the litters of people walking back from the Great World. I think of the photographs splashed on the newspaper Father carries. Tomorrow they will print more.. More bodies. More proof. Proof that the war has truly arrived, that it has stepped off the ships in the Huangpu and planted itself in our streets.



Flame of Spring:

A Celebration of the Year of the Fire Horse

Green Templeton College

Graduate Common Room
(1st floor of the Radcliffe Observatory)

Date: Sunday, May 17, 2026

Time: 5:30 PM

- General Admission –
Early Bird (to May 12):
£5 Adults
- General Admission
(Starting May 13):
£8 Adults

Doors open: 5:00 PM

Performance Time: 5:30 PM

Wine & Cheese Reception: 6:45 PM

The Year of the Fire Horse brings passion, progress, and independence, and invites us to break free from old patterns and to pursue a life of freedom and purpose. Join us as we celebrate a springtime filled with transformative change!

Participants:

Yiming Chen, *guzheng* (pre-recorded)
Shihong Bai, *Chinese art song* soloist
Dan Wu, *Kun opera* performer
Mo Abu-Bakra, *poet*
Jiahang Yu, *rhapsode & interpreter*
Esme Harper, *pianist*
Clé Holly, *host*

Artist Credit:
Weimin He
IG: @weimin_he



 Green Templeton College | 43 Woodstock Road, Oxford, OX2 6HG

Adam Knight: From Chinese Studies to Entrepreneurship

Back in Oxford yesterday evening to speak to students from the Chinese Studies and VC societies about my slightly strange career path from studying Chinese to building companies over the last decade.

On the train there, I thought about some of the similarities between learning languages and starting businesses.

Both require an unusually high tolerance for embarrassment. You spend a long time sounding stupid, misunderstanding things, making mistakes publicly, and generally feeling behind everyone else. Progress is often invisible for months or years, until suddenly something clicks.

Both also teach you that translation is about far more than language. Almost everything I've done professionally has consisted of translating between different worlds - China and Europe, technology and society, investors and operators, ideas and execution. Learning Chinese was a good first lesson that concepts, assumptions and systems rarely map neatly across these divides. And perhaps most importantly, both reward curiosity and familiarity over certainty.

Translator Opportunity | Chinese-English Speakers Wanted

A Shandong-based hair and wig company currently visiting the UK is seeking a fluent Chinese-English translator to assist with business promotion, communication, and meetings with local clients and retailers.

The company specialises in premium wig and hair products aimed primarily at Western female consumers and plans to make regular business visits to the UK throughout the year.

They are particularly interested in working with:

- * Native or fluent English speakers
- * Students or graduates with strong Chinese language ability
- * Candidates interested in translation, business, marketing, or China-facing work

Female candidates are especially encouraged to apply due to the nature of the client base.

The role would involve:

- * Translation and interpreting support
- * Assisting with meetings and outreach
- * Helping bridge communication between the company and local businesses

If interested, please email ismay.lewis@wadham.ox.ac.uk and I will pass your details along to Koko.

Nothing has taught me more about China than simply going back repeatedly over many years, watching how quickly things change, and learning to pay attention to what people are actually doing rather than what outsiders assume is happening.

When I graduated, China was still largely discussed as a market for foreign companies. Increasingly, it feels more important to understand China because it is shaping the direction of competition itself - from social commerce and consumer behaviour to EVs, manufacturing and AI.

You don't need to work in China to be affected by what happens there.

Thanks very much to Jack for the invitation back - it's nice to have the opportunity to reminisce once in a while.

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