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China Centre Conversation



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How to understand sincerity and authenticity in premodern Chinese literature, intellectual history and manuscript culture?

A conversation with Xiaofei Tian, Antje Richter and Christopher Foster

hosted by the China Centre

Thursday 19 May, 17:00 BST

Hybrid: China Centre, Kin-ku Cheng Lecture Theatre (lower ground floor) and Zoom webinar
(To attend the talk online, via Zoom, [please register here](#))

Authenticity and sincerity are complex questions with many ramifications depending on the matter in question, be that literary representation, intellectual history, manuscript culture and so on. How, during the Han, did conditions arise for anxieties over textual 'inauthenticity' and, in parallel, a space to interrogate authorial 'sincerity'? Are authenticity and sincerity requisite principles for literary creation? Does authenticity in literature mean quite the same thing as 'truth'? How is sincerity achieved through formulaic expressions? What are the differences between sincerity and authenticity? Do understandings of authenticity and sincerity evolve over different time periods? Please join us as we engage in a conversation with three scholars of premodern Chinese literature and culture – Xiaofei Tian, Antje Richter and Christopher Foster – to explore how to gauge authenticity and sincerity in premodern Chinese traditions, and how this can contribute to our understanding of those two critical concepts.

Xiaofei Tian is a professor of Chinese literature at Harvard University. Her main research field is medieval Chinese literature and cultural history, from the first through thirteenth century; she has also published widely on late imperial, modern and contemporary literature. She is serving as Editor of the journal *Early Medieval China* and a co-editor of *Nanyang Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture*. She is currently working on a book about writing empire and self in early medieval China and a project on slaves, things and artificial humans in Tang dynasty China.

Antje Richter is an associate professor of Chinese literature at the University of Colorado, Boulder. She studies the culture of early and early medieval China, with particular interests in literature, religion, art history and medicine. She has published widely on aspects of Chinese literature, medicine and art. Currently she is working on a book about narratives of illness and healing in early medieval Chinese literature. Antje is the Editor for East Asia at the *Journal of the American Oriental Society* and the president of *Early Medieval China Group*.

Christopher Foster is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at SOAS. He specializes in the intellectual history and manuscript culture of premodern China, focusing primarily on canonization processes and primary education. He has published on the authentication of recently acquired collections of bamboo-strip manuscripts, and is completing his first book, *From Scribes to Literati*, which details the spread of scribal literacy and its consequences during the Han dynasty. Together with Dr Anke Hein (Oxford), he co-hosts the 'Understanding Authenticity in China's Cultural Heritage' series.

Robert Chard, Associate Professor of Classical Chinese at Oxford, will serve as the chair.