

Seminar – Lent 2026

A Dialogue through Time: Revisiting the Cambridge Seven in Contemporary China

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Abstract: History is a dialogue between the subjects and the interpreters, shaped over time as new evidence, circumstances and perspectives emerge. One hundred and forty years ago, seven young men associated with Cambridge set sail for China, “Never before,” *The Nonconformist* effused, “probably, in the history of missions has so unique a band set out to labour in the foreign field...” This moment coincided with the height of the Western missionary movement and the British Empire, when China’s so-called “open century” came at the cost of Chinese sovereignty. The China of a century and a half ago is almost unrecognisable from the China of today. This paper offers a reflective dialogue with the Cambridge Seven, grounded in personal experience and informed by historical and missiological analysis, comparing and contrasting contemporary China with the China of the late Qing, early Republic and Warlord Era.



Dr John Usher teaches at the International School of Qingdao, China. He is the author of *Cecil Polhill: Missionary, Gentleman and Revivalist Vol.1, 1860-1914* (Brill, 2020), and the forthcoming *Cecil Polhill: Missionary, Gentleman and Revivalist Vol.2, 1914-1938*. His research combines historical and missiological analysis with reflective engagement shaped by long-term experience in contemporary China.