"Spreading Culture Throughout the Empire": Commercial Woodblock Publishing in Sibao, Fujian, in the Qing Dynasty

Thursday, 14 November 2013
3:30pm, Room 280N,
Second Floor, York Lanes

Cynthia Brokaw, Brown University

Much has been written about the production and circulation of the texts of Chinese high culture. Equally important, however, for an understanding of Chinese society and culture is the publication and sale of ordinary texts such as daily life encyclopedias and "do-it-yourself" medical manuals. Drawing on fieldwork and library research conducted in south China, Brokaw will discuss the workings of an important popular commercial publishing site active from the late seventeenth through the early twentieth centuries. Sibao publisher-booksellers churned out a wide variety of "bestsellers" and sold them throughout most of south China and at all different levels of settlement from provincial capitals to peasant villages, thereby, as they claimed, "spreading culture" to hinterland regions previously distant from the reach of printed texts.

Cynthia Brokaw researches the history of the book in late imperial China. Her *Commerce in Culture: The Sibao Book Trade in the Qing and Republican Periods* (2007) is a study of an important regional publishing industry and its impact on the dissemination of knowledge in south China. Her current project, "Book Culture on the Qing Frontier," examines the development of publishing and the creation of book cultures, both Chinese and Tibetan, on the southwestern frontier of the Qing empire.

This event is part of the Knowledge Production in East Asia seminar series organized by the Critical China Studies Reading Group at YCAR in 2013.2014.

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