



CCCL Distinguished Lecture: What has *Opera* to do with International Law? (27 Mar 2023)

11 April 2023

Katy Ng

In light of a forthcoming book on Histories of International Law in China: All Under Heaven? (edited by Ignacio de la Rasilla, Jiangyu Wang, and Congyan Cai, Oxford University Press 2025), the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law (CCCL), in partnership with Wuhan University Law School and Fudan University Law School, is organizing a massive series of public lectures on the histories of international law from both Chinese and global perspectives. On 27 March 2023, the Centre for Chinese and Comparative Law (CCCL) of the City University of Hong Kong's School of Law hosted the second distinguished lecture to assist students and lawyers in understanding the relationship between legal power and opera. **David Armitage, Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History, Harvard University** was invited as our distinguished speaker.

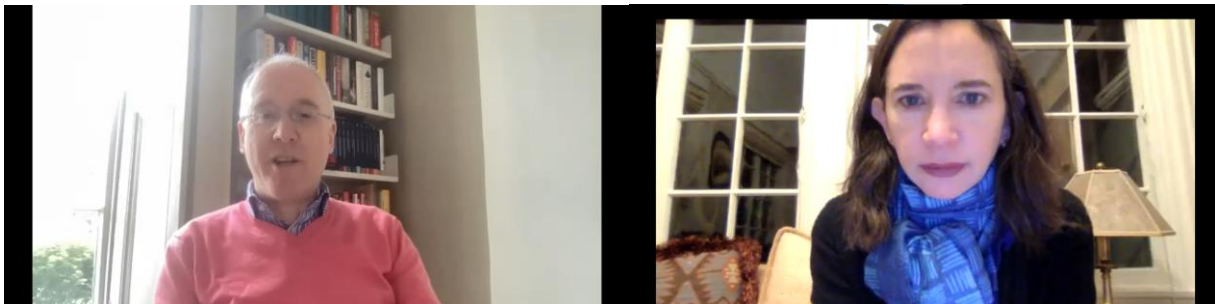
Prof. Wang Jiangyu, the CCCL's Centre Director, delivered a welcome speech to start the public lecture.

David Armitage, MA, PhD, LittD, CorrFRSE, FRHistS, FAHA, MAE, is the Lloyd C. Blankfein Professor of History and former Chair of the Department of History and of the Committee on Degrees in Social Studies at Harvard University, where he teaches intellectual history and international history. He is currently a Senior Scholar of the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, an Affiliated Faculty Member at Harvard Law School, an Affiliated Professor in the Harvard Department of Government, an Honorary Fellow of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, an Honorary Professor of History at Queen's University Belfast and an Honorary Professor of History at the University of Sydney.

He began the lecture by asking what Athens had to do with Jerusalem. Later church fathers argued that Jerusalem had sued Athens, and in doing so they had absorbed it, rendering it, redundant and more than dangerous. Augustine, by contrast, proposed a reapproach between the two traditions, and so Athens again, the classical tradition, more broadly as a predecessor and a supplement to the Christian tradition. Then, he returned to his own topic, "What has Opera to do with International Law?". He called the third response, which he was going to take, as Augustine response. That is, international law call illuminates opera and even be essential to understanding some aspects of operas, and it also opens up the possibility. Then, he had looked

for traces of international law, and indeed, the early modern law of nations which preceded what we think of now as international law in some unexpected places in the corners of operas. Some critics might say that both opera and international law are products of Eurocentric modernity that were spread forcibly across the world from the late 19th century on the wings of financial and cultural capital because such critics might continue to go on they're both esoteric and masticatory, each carrying immense prestige, but only for the benefit of a handful of privileged, leads all that opera and international law have in common is that they should be distrusted and demystified. Such attitudes are the product of the professionalization of routinization of both opera and international law. Since the 19th century, each became settled in the institutional forms that are still recognizable today and those forms were exported, domesticated, and hybridized around the world. In conclusion, as opera became globalized in this way, the opera dramatized legal dilemmas and provided a forum for debating international questions that arose from international law in both private and public. Indeed, opera like Ethel Smyth and Benjamin Britten's Billy Budd, which is only a few examples from the modern operatic repertoire, so we might yet come to see that opera has a great deal to do with international law, if only we know to go where to look for it.

Professor Jennifer Pitts, The University of Chicago led a discussion session following **David Armitage**'s thought-provoking speech, in which they shared their insights. The majority of all those attending took the opportunity to express themselves, and many of them were insightful and imaginative. **Prof. Wang Jiangyu** gave a closing remark in which he thanked all of the attendants for their contributions to the lecture's success.



David Armitage and Jennifer Pitts.



Prof. Wang Jiangyu.