Over the past few decades, there have been significant advancements in the scholarship of middle period China (roughly 8th-17th centuries), particularly in the areas of 1) intellectual history, 2) the study of social networks, and 3) local history. Although these approaches have often developed separately and with their own sets of paradigms, connecting them leads to new insights into the patterns of historical change, Professor Peter K. Bol has been a leading figure in the attempt to fuse the historical study of ideas with research on society and culture. His research and teaching has inspired many of his students to rethink the social and intellectual transformations in the middle period. On the occasion of Professor Bol’s sixtieth birthday this conference aimed to bring together these various approaches, delineating how the articulation and promotion of ideas influenced social structures, and how intellectual discourse in turn was shaped by historical and social developments.

The papers presented at this conference focus on the social group called the shi 士, most commonly translated as “the literati”. The term shi was probably first used in Chinese history to refer to the class of military elite in the Shang dynasty. It was later used to denote the lowest stratum of the aristocratic class during the Zhou period. But after the dissolution of Zhou society, the meaning of shi underwent numerous changes and much effort has been devoted to clarifying what shi meant in different periods. Following in the footsteps of Peter Bol’s multifarious contributions, the papers and presentations approach the transformation of the shi as a historical phenomenon by combining intellectual history, the social history of networks and local history.

Conference Organizers:

Michael Puett
Professor of Chinese History, Harvard University
puett@fas.harvard.edu

Hilde De Weerdt
University Lecturer in Chinese History, Oxford University
hilde.deweerdt@pmb.ox.ac.uk

Natasha Heller
Assistant Professor, University of California, Los Angeles
nheller@humnet.ucla.edu

Chen Wen-yi 陳雯怡
Research Assistant, Academic Sinica, Republic of China
wenyi@asihp.net

Chen Song 陳松
Ph.D. Candidate in East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University
songchen@fas.harvard.edu

Ong Chang Woei 王昌偉
Assistant Professor, Department of Chinese Studies, National University of Singapore
chsongcw@nus.edu.sg