

# DAS INSTITUT FÜR OSTASIENWISSENSCHAFTEN/ SINOLOGIE

Die *Sinologie* des Instituts für Ostasienwissenschaften freut sich, Sie zu folgendem  
**ONLINE-Gastvortrag** einladen zu dürfen:



**Prof. Dr. Margaret Hillenbrand**  
*University of Oxford*

## The Art of the Unsayable in Contemporary China

In the early years of this century, Chinese artist Zhang Dali carried out an extended archival project entitled *A Second History* (2003-6). In this work, Zhang curated a series of paired images, one original, the other manipulated, to show how the Chinese Communist Party repeatedly doctored the photographic record of the Revolution in its secret photo labs. The photographs range from official portraits of Mao Zedong to snapshots of ordinary citizens as they experienced the revolution. The targets for the airbrush also vary: sometimes people are wiped entirely from the frame, on other occasions a portrait of Mao is added to a bare wall, a slogan is re-written, or trees in the backdrop switch miraculously from barren to blossoming. The motives for manipulation, meanwhile, oscillate from the strategic to the faintly absurd. All the images, though, are instructive on matters of the clandestine. In one sense, the installation takes some of the most iconic photographs of China's revolution and exposes their hidden secrets. Yet in another sense, the series also explores secrecy as something out in the open – the notion that viewers of these images sometimes understood all too well that they were faked. In this talk, I discuss what Zhang's work tells us about regimes of secrecy and misinformation in China, and about how the pressures of "knowing what not to know" have structured the processing of the nation's troubled twentieth-century past.

**Margaret Hillenbrand** is Associate Professor of Modern Chinese Literature and Culture at the University of Oxford. Her research and publications to date have focused on literary and visual culture in twentieth-century China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan, and her latest book, *Negative Exposures: Knowing What Not to Know in Contemporary China*, appeared with Duke University Press in 2020. She is now working on a new project about the impact of precarity on cultural practices in post-millennial China.

**Datum:** Mittwoch, 05.05.2021  
**Zeit:** 16:00 Uhr  
**Ort:** ONLINE

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