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Cover photo
Xujiahui district in Shanghai, China (Sourced from Wikimedia Commons)
WEAI Launches the Tibetan Culture at Columbia Website

The Weatherhead East Asian Institute is pleased to announce the launch of the Tibetan Culture at Columbia University website. The website, supported by WEAI and the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at Columbia University, is the product of over a decade of student projects.

The site features student projects from the Tibetan Civilization course that is offered once each year. Students wrote object biographies telling the story of Tibetan artifacts through careful analysis of objects and engagement with Tibetan material history. Students also completed final projects exploring aspects of Tibetan culture ranging from music, movies and art to explorations of Tibet in New York City (food, museums, meditation centers). Outstanding projects from the last several years (many utilizing the CTL’s Mediathread tool) are posted on the site. Additional sites were generated by entire classes working together over the course of a semester or even across several years, mostly using Wikischolar websites. These include many timelines (chronologies of biographical writing, travel in Tibet, interactions with China, etc.) as well as several fascinating mapping projects.

Please visit the website at: www.tibetanculture.weai.columbia.edu.

Website Credits: Heidi Neilson, website design; Tucker Harding and Andre Laboy, technical support through the Center for Teaching and Learning.

Eugenia Lean Awarded National Endowment for the Humanities Grant

We congratulate Eugenia Lean, the Director of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute (on leave this academic year) and Associate Professor of Chinese History at Columbia University, who has been awarded a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). The NEH grant, announced in December 2017, will support the next six months of Professor Lean’s work on the book project “A Chinese Man-of-Letters in an Age of Industrial Capitalism: Chen Diexian (1879-1940),” which examines the cultural and intellectual dimensions of industrialization by focusing on the practices and writings of polymath Chen Diexian, a professional writer/editor, science enthusiast, and pharmaceutical industrialist. Professor Lean is currently developing the project as a 2017-18 member of the Institute for Advanced Study’s School of Historical Studies.

Theodore Hughes Awarded 2018-19 Heyman Center Fellowship

We are pleased to announce that Theodore Hughes, the Korea Foundation Professor of Korean Studies in the Humanities and the Director of the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University, has received a Heyman Center Fellowship for the 2018-2019 academic year. Funded by the Office of the Executive Vice-President of the Arts & Sciences at Columbia University, the Heyman Center Fellowships provide four junior and four senior Columbia faculty with course relief during the academic year. These fellowships allow faculty to reduce their teaching loads to one course per semester during the award year in order to conduct research and to participate in a regular weekly seminar. During the fellowship year, Professor Hughes will complete the revision of his book project, The Continuous War: Cultures of Division in Korea.
September 21
Japan’s New Foreign Minister: A Conversation with Columbia Students About Diplomacy

His Excellency Taro Kono, Foreign Minister of Japan, addressed diplomatic issues concerning North Korea, China, the United States, and the Middle East.

September 26
Luminous Memories: Bei Dao in Conversation with Eliot Weinberger

Poet Bei Dao discussed his book *City Gate, Open Up*, a lyrical memoir of his childhood and adolescence in Beijing, with essayist and translator Eliot Weinberger. Lydia H. Liu, Wun Tsun Tam Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University, introduced the event.
October 18
The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao


October 23
The Future of Asia: Voices of the Next Generation

What experiences led you to study urban planning—particularly, urban planning in China?

I grew up in China, and earned both my Bachelor of Engineering degree in architecture and a Master of Engineering degree in urban planning at the Tsinghua University in Beijing. The choice to major in architecture was accidental—well, actually not quite, as it was the choice of my parents who were both civil engineers and aspiring architects at the time. After five years of architectural studies in the undergraduate program, I came to appreciate the grounded analysis of socioeconomic and political conditions far more than designing the built environment itself. Architecture and urban planning are often academic neighbors, so the transition happened naturally. Around the time of my doctoral studies, urbanization took off in China, with astonishing pace and unprecedented scope. That urban transformation has been the main subject of my work ever since.

Can you tell us about your recent book The Chinese City and explain how Chinese cities may not necessarily conform to conventional urbanization theories?

My recent book, The Chinese City, has allowed my research to reach a wider public audience. Chinese cities now clearly push the limits of contemporary urban theories. Many large cities in China have transformed from relatively compact, low-rise places to sprawling metropolises surrounded by suburban-style developments with mega-malls as in the American model. Continued preference for the downtown has left a social-spatial pattern similar to what we see in European cities. China’s hybrid trajectory and landscape make studying urban China intriguing and a challenging undertaking. It also calls for robust analyses to give synthetic overviews and highlight the particularities of Chinese cities.

What challenges are Chinese cities currently facing as urbanization continues to increase?

The strong guidance of a developmental state accompanied by competition among entrepreneurial local governments has produced spectacular results in Chinese urban development—if judging the physicality of transformation alone. Nonetheless, unforeseen or irreconcilable consequences of the processes of urbanization have arisen. Urban transformation and its socio-spatial manifestations have created a set of conditions that complicate the path to a more inclusive and sustainable urban future. First, while the built environment and urban economy have been modernized, in no small part due to the contribution of migrant workers, the majority of the workers are not integrated into the urban society, and are experiencing incomplete urbanization. Second, uncoordinated and fragmented growth of urban areas has intensified the depletion of arable land, water, and other resources. At the same time, land lease practices have become intertwined with means of municipal finance. Third, urban inhabitants, encouraged by a multitude of factors including rising income and the disappearance of work unit-based job-housing balance, have left behind sustainable modes of habitation and...
transport. And lastly, the urban built environment increasingly manifests social and economic inequalities and bifurcates space and exchange, thereby, marginalizing significant portions of the population.

As the President of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning as well as the Director of the Urban Planning Program at Columbia GSAPP, how would you like to influence the study of urban planning at Columbia and around the world? Are there certain questions or concerns that you would like today’s urban planning programs to better address?

My commitment, both here in Columbia’s Urban Planning Program and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning, is to elevate and connect our understandings of urban complexities in the context of globalization and technological change. I want to advance dialogue on the creation and management of equitable and sustainable cities. By expanding educational opportunities about (re)emerging forms of urbanism such as sharing cities and circular economy, we can expand the exploration of (re)building and (re)designing urban communities committed to healthy and sustainable living, social representation and inclusion, and environmental stewardship. This broadened knowledge base will prepare students for work in a large range of settings, such as the corporate sector, multilateral organizations, and countries with nascent planning cultures.

What are your current research projects?

A key impetus for my work has always been to understand in a comparative context how the changing character and complexity of cities is intertwined with larger societal and external forces, and how research can inform professionals in both the public and corporate sectors by bridging theory and practice. My ongoing research is in two areas: shifting socio-spatial relations and transition to urbanism within resettled rural communities, and infrastructure financing strategies for cities in China and other emerging economies with particular attention to the role of private participation and investment. In an effort to raise the visibility of urbanization issues in China Studies and in a multidisciplinary context, I am also completing a large collaboration project on a handbook that investigates how we can best study China, and explores future directions for China Studies.

What courses are you planning to teach at Columbia in the coming semesters?

Every year in the Fall I teach a graduate seminar on Chinese Urbanism in Global Context, in which we explore institutional settings, policy interventions, and urban realities. Each semester we focus on a somewhat different set of broad topic clusters and explicitly compare with practices in other countries; this year they included urbanization paths and growth patterns, migration and socio-spatial inequalities, land management and financing urban development, and the role and practice of planning. In Spring 2018, I will teach an Urban Planning Studio, titled “Hong Kong as a Palimpsest: Transit-Induced Redevelopment.” We will travel to Hong Kong and collaborate with the Chinese University of Hong Kong, to study a community called To Kwai Wan that is slated to house a new station along the new transit line Shatin to Central Link. We will try to prepare a more inclusive vision of redevelopment.
How did you initially become interested in animal studies—particularly the representation of animals in literature and popular culture?

My interest in animals from an academic standpoint came out of a conference paper I wrote for a translation theory seminar I took as a master’s student at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. In that paper, I explored the politics of rabbit language and communication in Richard Adams’s classic novel *Watership Down*, and what implications such forms of fictional language held in store for translation studies. The experience of working on that project opened a floodgate of interest in the symbolic animal in my primary field of Japanese literature.

What kinds of animal representations—and what you call animal “(mis)representations”—do you focus on in Japanese culture?

Although animals—and perhaps animality more broadly—have figured significantly in Japanese literature since its earliest creation myths, much of my doctoral work focused on literature published since Japan’s so-called “pet boom,” and therefore on the special characteristics of human-pet relationships as represented in those texts. I leave these open to being called misrepresentations only because pets are often used to uphold an idealized humanity rather than as agents for on-the-ground social change.

For example, the many books about guide dogs have produced very little in the way of policy-related or infrastructural amendment in service of the blind in Japan, despite the sweeping national interest in the subject borne of such books. I should be clear, too, that I use the term “misrepresentations” neither disparagingly nor as a moral flag, but rather as a tie-in to my theoretical idea of “productive error,” by which I mean to stress the necessity of intellectual emergencies as catalysts for change.

Can you tell us about Japan’s “pet boom” and what you think led to its occurrence?

Sociologists tend to locate the origins of the pet boom in the early 2000s, when the number of cats and dogs being kept as pets in Japan exceeded the number of children. It therefore has strong links to ongoing anxieties about falling birth rates and rising elderly populations in need of care. I, however, see the pet boom as a fundamentally literary (and therefore also social) problem, when pet-themed literature began flooding the Japanese popular market in the mid-1990s. In a culture where they were historically subservient, animals were now being welcomed into the home as equals. A more likely explanation for this, then, comes from feminist scholar Ueno Chizuko, whose work on what she calls “family identity” shows how in the late 20th century the very notion of family opened itself to nontraditional cohabitations. Pets are a natural extension of this work, which looks at the malleability of what (and who) constitutes a viable domestic arrangement.
In addition to your scholarly writing, you have translated over a dozen works of Japanese fiction into English. What do you enjoy—and what challenges do you encounter—when you are translating fiction?

The challenges, in fact, are a large part of what I enjoy most about translation. Tasking myself with making certain cultural and/or linguistic concepts palatable to another audience is fulfilling, to say the least. Of those challenges, I would say the biggest is finding cultural substitutions or other creative strategies to make certain concepts understandable to an English-speaking reader. If, for instance, a popular reference or idiom in the original would make no sense to anyone who hasn't grown up in Japan, I am compelled to replace it with an equivalent that will. I also enjoy translation simply because it is the deepest form of reading that I know. I come out the other end of a new project feeling like I understand the novel in question inside and out. A little piece of everything I translate stays with me. Practically speaking, however, translation also humbles me with its never-ending complexity and difficulty. No translation I have done is perfect, and the mistakes I make along the way are a constant reminder that there is always more to learn, refine, and improve.

How has your experience translating Japanese literature informed your own scholarship about Japanese literature?

The two are intimately connected, especially as I become increasingly interested in the literature I translate from a scholarly viewpoint. I am, for example, now polishing an article about a recent translation I did of Kitano Yosaku's speculative masterpiece, Mr. Turtle. Science fiction especially raises questions similar to those I have invoked in my own work around the fluidity of subjectivity, human/animal/machine distinctions, and moral ambiguity.

You also are a longtime Jazz critic. Why do you find that music genre so appealing and how might your interests in Jazz and music intersect with your scholarly pursuits?

I have presented some conference papers on music, and often think of my ideas in musical terms, so that interest occasionally merges with my academic activities wherever appropriate. Beyond that, however, writing about music has made me a more effective scholar, and vice versa.

Music writing allows me to flex my creative muscles more openly and, to the chagrin of some readers, hyperbolically—something that I cannot usually get away with in academic writing without sacrificing clarity. By the same token, being an academic makes me realize the value of direct, expository expression when talking about something as ephemeral as music. These two realms reinforce each other. Above all, writing about music has given me the discipline to be empathetic to scholarship that I may not agree with, but that I still value for forcing me to sharpen my own opinions in tandem. In other words, it has emphasized the value of open dialogue and improvisation (and what is jazz if not those very things?) in scholarly life.

Can you tell us about the courses you are teaching at Columbia this academic year?

For the Fall 2017 semester, I taught “Disability in East Asia and Beyond,” which looked at social, popular, and legal definitions of disability in Japan, China, North and South Korea, and the United States. This multimedia course is framed in feminist theory and culminated in a mini-conference in which students presented their work in an open forum. My Spring 2018 course, called “Remaking Japan,” will invite students to examine selected Japanese films and their Hollywood remakes as a means of intellectualizing and critiquing processes of cultural translation, representation, and commoditization.
The Global Scholars Program “Media Practices in India and China,” organized by the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, the Office of Global Programs, and Columbia Global Centers, ran from May 22 to June 30, 2017. Established in 2012, the Columbia Global Scholars Program Summer Research Workshop gives Columbia faculty and students the opportunity to travel the globe and conduct comparative research in real-world settings.

Ying Qian, assistant professor of East Asian Languages and Cultures, and Debashree Mukherjee, assistant professor of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African Studies, led twelve undergraduates on a six-week exploration of contemporary media practices in Mumbai and Beijing. The program, split equally between India and China, utilized the resources of both Columbia Global Centers in Mumbai and Beijing.

The film industries in China and India are among the oldest and largest in the world. With visits to sites of media production, exhibition, and consumption, and meetings with a wide array of media practitioners, including independent documentary filmmakers, minority media activists, media corporations, and state institutions for media regulation and creation, the students and faculty explored media in relation to postcolonial conditions, authoritarianism, politics, urbanization, and globalization.

“Both Ying and I are committed to building greater academic visibility for non-Western cinemas and media forms,” Professor Mukherjee said. “We wanted to practice and teach comparative ways of thinking, especially in a world of digital proliferation that is strangely making us more and more insular in terms of what we choose to see or engage with. Taking students to both Mumbai and Beijing seemed like a wonderful opportunity for them to gain a first-hand exposure to unfamiliar images and alternative image-making conventions.”
Scholars Program: India & China

Professor Qian, who is a Weatherhead East Asian Institute faculty member, initially designed a proposal for Hong Kong and Beijing. "Debashree independently developed a proposal for Mumbai at the same time," Professor Qian said. "Both our proposals stressed the need for inculcating non-Western media perspectives and tried to take cinema out of the fictional realm, into the social realm. And as it turned out, China and India were a natural match – both new, postcolonial nations with a history of ethnic violence and close regional political ties. This was an amazing opportunity for us to work together."

"What was truly unique about this opportunity was to be able to situate yourself in a different country," said Kelvin Ng, a Columbia College student. For Alexander McNab, another Columbia undergraduate, what set the program apart was the opportunity to learn from on-site experiences. "I've done a study abroad program before but that was taught entirely in the classroom," he said. "This program brought the outside in and took the classroom out into the city as well."

Supported by the staff of the Columbia Global Centers in Beijing and Mumbai, Professor Mukherjee and Professor Qian planned daily lectures and readings, organized visits by local media practitioners and theorists, and scheduled regular field trips. "Each day and week was planned in this manner, to give students a sense of both historical and contemporary practices, using a method of showing rather than simply telling," Professor Mukherjee said.

This article was adapted from the text "Cultivating Asian Media Perspectives," published by the Columbia Global Centers.
New Publications from the

The Chinese Typewriter: A History
Thomas S. Mullaney
The MIT Press, 2017

“The Chinese Typewriter is a fascinating book: in the light of new developments in computer science, Thomas Mullaney brings us a completely different interpretation of nonalphabetic Chinese and the modern fate of Chinese culture through the historical lens of the Chinese typewriter. This is a rich book that encompasses different resources, historical insights, and intriguing storytelling from long and broad perspectives.”

— Wang Hui, Tsinghua University

The End of Japanese Cinema: Industrial Genres, National Times, and Media Ecologies
Alexander Zahlten
Duke University Press, 2017

“Alexander Zahlten emphasizes a constellation of cinematic attributes that have rarely been considered so seriously in Japanese film and media studies: industry and industrial structures, distribution infrastructures, and viewing spaces. Demonstrating a special command of industry history, Zahlten facilitates fruitful dialogue between text and context that will change how people talk about Japanese cinema. A great read.”

— Miryam Sas, University of California, Berkeley

Mobilizing Without the Masses: Control and Contention in China
Diana Fu
Cambridge University Press, 2017

“Based on remarkable participant-observation field work, Diana Fu provides a rare and revealing look inside the otherwise opaque world of China’s labor NGOs. These activist organizations, operating in innovative ways to evade state detection and repression, indicate a more robust Chinese civil society than we usually assume. Mobilizing Without the Masses is a must-read, not only for those studying contemporary China but for anyone interested in the possibilities for social mobilization and social justice in authoritarian regimes.”

— Elizabeth J. Perry, Harvard University
Studies of the WEAI Series

Forgotten Disease: Illnesses Transformed in Chinese Medicine

Hilary A. Smith
Stanford University Press, 2017

“This fascinating, meticulous study of the unstable concept of foot qi provides a welcome perspective on Chinese medical thought and highlights the pitfalls of retrospective diagnosis. It is a valuable contribution to the nuanced and deeper understanding of Asian medical traditions with broader lessons for all medical historians.”

— William C. Summers, Yale University

Youth for Nation: Culture and Protest in Cold War South Korea

Charles R. Kim
University of Hawaii Press, 2017

“Eight years before the worldwide protests of 1968, students and intellectuals overthrew the South Korean government. Positioning the event as part of Korea’s transition from the colonial to the postcolonial, Charles Kim offers a wide-ranging and entertaining analysis of the unruly youth culture that drove the events of this April Revolution, the successes and failures of which presaged the tumultuous decades of democratic struggle to come. Kim’s Youth for Nation is a fascinating whirlwind of a book for anyone interested in South Korean politics or protest culture in general.”

— Andre Schmid, University of Toronto

Making Time: Astronomical Time Management in Tokugawa Japan

Yulia Frumer
University of Chicago Press, 2018

“Brace yourself for a most thought-provoking journey through time in premodern Japan. This book forces historians of science and technology to think more deeply about what they think they already know about modernity and time practices before and while the global system of commerce and exchange tightened its grip in the nineteenth century. Historically brilliant and beautifully written, Frumer unfolds how and why astronomical time-space relationships came to matter in Tokugawa and Meiji scientific minds and public life.”

— Dagmar Schäfer, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science
With my Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund award, I conducted archival research in Manila for my M.A. thesis in World and International History. I investigated how the Philippine Commonwealth Government under Presidents Quezon and Osmeña domesticated the notion of conservation for the Philippine public in the 1930s and 40s, and examined the motivations and incentives for adapting the American national park ideal in the Philippines.

In Manila, I visited many archives pivotal for my research, including the American Historical Collection in Rizal Library at the Ateneo de Manila University, the Special Collections of the University of the Philippines, and the Quezon and Osmeña papers at the National Library. I also visited the UP Los Baños College of Forestry, just outside Manila, which was one of the first schools established by the American colonial administration to institute a utilitarian notion of conservation. Los Baños also houses Makiling National Park—the country’s first national park which doubles as a testing ground for the students of College of Forestry.

My archival research led me to a better understanding of what the term “national park” means in the context of the Philippines. The notion of pure, untouched nature devoid of any vestige of human activity has little bearing on how national parks operate in the Philippines, simply because many of these natural spaces were, and continue to be, populated by local communities and indigenous groups. Being in Manila and talking to people who work in the field of conservation allowed me to become more familiar with the different national parks in the country.

Through this research, I’ve formulated a preliminary hypothesis: conservation, in the sense of the preservation of pristine nature was not, and could not have been, the main consideration in the creation of national parks in the Philippines. This is partly because a concept of utilitarian conservation would have alienated local and indigenous populations, on whose acceptance the success of conservation projects ultimately rested. Also, the Philippine government considered some national parks as important components in the construction of a historical narrative—one that would promote a sense of cultural unity. My research, as such, is situated in the wider context of studying the Commonwealth Government’s nation-building efforts in the 1930s and 40s.
With my Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund award, I traveled to Japan and China to conduct cross-cultural research on music performance traditions of East Asia and to collect material for a multimedia project on smog pollution in China for my M.F.A. studies in Sound Arts.

In Japan I researched Shomyo, a style of Japanese Buddhist chant. An oral tradition with origins and histories in Korea, China, and India, Shomyo has developed in Japan for over a thousand years. Different sects of Japanese Buddhism have independently developed distinct vocal styles and graphic notation systems. For the project, I interviewed Buddhist monks from the Shingon and Tendai sects around the Kyoto area and in Koyasan, as well as an ethnomusicology professor from Tokyo who specializes in Shomyo. I am interested in the history of Shomyo, in the differences and similarities between its different styles (vocal and in notation), in the communication between different sects, and in the future of the practice. With another Sound Arts M.F.A. student, Ethan Edwards, I collected scores, books, CDs, field recordings, and took lessons with priests. At the end of this trip, in Tokyo, I performed a piece inspired by my research.

In Xiamen, China, I interviewed a Buddhist monk in Nanputuosi, who is a famous singer-songwriter, about 20th-century Chinese Buddhist music. I then travelled to three Kam villages in Guizhou, to research the endangered tradition of Kam music. The Kam are an ethnic minority living in the southwest of China, who, for hundreds of years, did not have a written language. Instead, history, religion, social rules, and moral values were passed down in songs. Communal singing was a main social event in which everyone was engaged. I observed the singing, conducted interviews with old song masters, young performers, and villagers, and took lessons with two old masters. I have become fascinated with the social function of this singing and how political, economic, and technological changes in 20th century China have drastically impacted the practice.
Would you like to network with current students and alumni?  
Market an internship or career opportunity to students?

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[http://weai.columbia.edu](http://weai.columbia.edu)