

# Undergraduate Research Symposium May 18, 2012 Mary Gates Hall

## Online Proceedings

### SESSION 2A

#### CULTURAL NARRATIVES

*Session Moderator: Valerie Manusov, Communication*

**Mary Gates Hall 228**

*3:30 PM to 5:00 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

#### **A Story of a Seattle's Chinese American Family in the 1900s**

*Gengwu (Edward) Wang, Junior, Exchange - Engineering*

*Zhe (Alice) Fan, Junior, Exchange - Arts & Sciences*

*Anbang (James) Dai, Junior, Exchange - Arts & Sciences*

*Mentor: Stevan Harrell, Anthropology*

In Wing Luke Asian Museum located in Chinatown Seattle, the Archive collection owns more than two hundred personal letters and five photos of one Chinese American family in Seattle. Some of these letters are from China; others come from other family members in the United States and Canada. A letter from home is a priceless treasure. The recipients of these letters are Huang Shuozhang and Huang Jiren (father and son), who ran a company in Seattle Chinatown, named London Company importing food and materials from China to America during that time. We as volunteers are working on these letters this quarter, translating them into English and using PastPerfect (a museum collection management software) to catalog them. While translating these letters, we have found many sophisticated relationships within this big family, including family members and associated business partners around the United States and Canada. These letters reflect not only the hardship of Chinese Americans at that time, but also a heartfelt story. We intend to collect more primary resources from Wing Luke Asian Museum and Special Collection of the UW library to uncover the story. Meanwhile we will also do some research on the Internet, e.g. we will look for Information of the census and maps of the Seattle Chinatown in that period of time to support our opinions. However, the story of this family as early Chinese American pioneers struggling for their true identities and success in United States should not be forgotten in history.

### SESSION 2C

#### GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY GLOBAL WORLD

*Session Moderator: Judith A Howard, Sociology*

**Mary Gates Hall 234**

*3:30 PM to 5:00 PM*

\* Note: Titles in order of presentation.

#### **Select Stories of Queer Women in Southwest China: Making Difficult Decisions in a Traditional Society**

*Patricia (Patti) Tietgens, Senior, Comparative History of Ideas*

*Mentor: Stevan Harrell, Anthropology*

Living in Southwest China for 15 months, I spent much of my time in lesbian designated establishments and spoke with hundreds of queer women about their lives. Homosexuality has been legal in Mainland China since 1997 and was removed from the list of mental illnesses in 2001, but same-sex unions are not legal and the public often remains ignorant or ambivalent when it comes to same-sex relationships. For most young adults regardless of sexuality, the pressure to marry and have children persists, yet adoption is only available to married heterosexual couples. At the same time, there are hubs in China with relative freedom where being openly gay or lesbian is not stigmatized. It is not uncommon for younger individuals to come out to friends, and not unheard of to be out to at least some family members. Still, I heard stories of heartbreak after either one or both women made the decision to give up on their relationship and suppress their sexuality, often at a great cost. Certainly not all lesbians in China follow this course however, and some are finding unique ways of navigating through or around traditional expectations. Given this general backdrop, my research documents how individual lesbians have responded to these pressures without denying their sexuality. The results demonstrate how different women have employed various degrees of agency in pursuit of options that are unavailable through Chinese social structures and institutions. Rather than attempting to portray lesbians overall, my focus remains on the small handful of women I spoke with in depth in order to convey the complexity of their circumstances. Their perspectives are not commonly known in China or abroad. By sharing their stories, I hope to expand the range of personal narratives to

include the diversity of experiences I encountered among lesbians within Southwest China.

## **POSTER SESSION 3**

**Commons West, Easel 32**

*4:00 PM to 5:30 PM*

### **Social Mobility Narratives of Rural Migrants in Shanghai**

*Kaitlin Emily (Kaitlin) Banfill, Senior, Anthropology*

*Mentor: Stevan Harrell, Anthropology*

The deep-divide between urban residents and rural migrants living in Shanghai has grown increasingly apparent over the last two decades. This so called "dual society" in which rural migrants do not have the same privileges as locals in Chinese cities, is a result of the social disadvantages of the rural people in comparison to urban residents, government policies surrounding migration, and of a broader discourse of modernity in Chinese society that encourages discrimination against the rural population. This study seeks to understand how migrants with different backgrounds and varying experiences have developed strategies for upward mobility (social mobility strategies). The term "social mobility strategies" refers to the various ways that rural migrants attempt to elevate their social status through employment and skill training. This study will examine how these strategies have been shaped by the educational and financial disadvantages, administrative and social barriers and difficult living and working situations that migrants face. My research was conducted over a period of fifteen months in Shanghai, China. During this time, I conducted extended semi-structured and structured interviews with ten migrant workers. This study will describe in detail the migration narratives of four migrants and will analyze their social mobility strategies in the context of their migration process. It will explore each individual's personal background and experiences in relation to their mobility strategies. I also conducted participant observation in rural Anhui province to understand the rural background of migrants. In Shanghai, I attended a hair-styling academy and spent time in a hair salon, to examine how migrants acquire and utilize technical skills. While each story of migration and mobility strategies have common themes with one another, this study shows the personal specificities of each individual's narrative. It then relates these stories to broader issues surrounding migration in China.