



UNIVERSITY OF  
SAN FRANCISCO

CHANGE THE WORLD FROM HERE

ASIA PACIFIC

# perspectives

*a publication of the Center for Asia Pacific Studies*

Volume 17, Number 1 (2021)



# ASIA PACIFIC perspectives

Volume 17, Number 1 (2021)

## CENTER FOR ASIA PACIFIC STUDIES

**Melissa S. Dale**  
Editor, Executive Director

**Serena Calcagno**  
Editorial Assistant

## EDITORIAL BOARD

**Miriam Gross**, University of Oklahoma

**ann-elise lewallen**, University of California, Santa Barbara

**John Nelson**, University of San Francisco

**Ryoko Yamamoto**, SUNY Westbury

## CONTENTS

### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

Dr. Melissa Dale ..... 4

### ARTICLE

*From Sanitation to Soybeans: Kitchen Hygiene and Nutritional Nationalism in Republican China, 1911-1945*  
Sarah Xia Yu ..... 6

### THINK PIECES

*The Digital, The Local and The Mundane: Three Areas of Potential Change for Research on Asia*  
Radu Leca ..... 38

*Demystifying Remote Research in Anthropology and Area Studies*  
Kaitlyn Ugoretz ..... 52

*Is it Possible to Think of a "Chinese Pacific" in the Making? Decolonizing Anthropology in the Asia-Pacific Region*  
Rodolfo Maggio ..... 72

### BOOK REVIEWS

Wayne Soon. *Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History*  
Carles Brasó Broggi ..... 87

Susan Burns. *Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan*  
Kristin Roebuck ..... 90

## Editor's Introduction

by Melissa S. Dale, Executive Director and Associate Professor, USF Center for Asia Pacific Studies

We are pleased to announce the publication of the **latest issue of *Asia Pacific Perspectives* (vol. 17, no. 1)**. This issue showcases the resilience and creativity of scholars doing research and writing about the Asia Pacific during the COVID-19 pandemic. These scholars, like others in the humanities and social sciences, have not only found ways to continue their scholarship during these trying times but to even re-image how to go about doing research moving forward.

This issue was intended to be one entirely focused on the inventive ways that scholars in the social sciences and humanities are exploring issues related to transnational health in East Asia both historically and today. Ironically, it was in large part due to a transnational health issue, namely the pandemic, that we decided to change our focus midway through the publication process. With the pandemic raging, we decided to pivot and add a series of think pieces focused on how scholars were re-envisioning research during these challenging times.

In our feature article for this issue, **Sarah Xia Yu** (University of Pennsylvania) provides a fascinating account of how public health initiatives aimed to combat disease from the kitchen during the 20th century. In *From Sanitation to Soybeans: Kitchen Hygiene and Nutritional Nationalism in Republican China, 1911-1945*, Yu examines how the Chinese kitchen underwent hygienic reform in an effort to reduce the transmission of diseases such as tuberculosis, beriberi, and cholera. Yu reveals how China became an active participant in the transnational dietary science movement and encouraged its citizens to take on the responsibility of improving sanitation and their individual health. Yu's work sheds light on important themes such as the intersection of healthcare campaigns with modernity, state-building, and citizenship.

Our two book reviews in this issue continue the theme of transnational health. **Carles Brasó Broggi** (Universitat Oberta De Catalunya) reads Wayne Soon's *Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History* and argues that modern Chinese medicine cannot be understood without studying the contributions of Overseas Chinese medical personnel. In our second book review, **Kristin Roebuck** (Cornell University) reviews *Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan*, by Susan Burns, and finds it to be a must read for scholars of transnational history of medicine, public hygiene, disability, and discrimination, and historians of Japan.

This issue also presents **three think pieces** by scholars in the social sciences and humanities who are reimagining the practice of research on the Asia Pacific during a time of global pandemic which involves social distancing, archive closures, and travel restrictions.

Under these circumstances, scholars have had to rethink how they do research and consider questions such as: (1) How can we do fieldwork at a distance? (2) How can we engage in remote research such as surveys, ethnography, archival work, oral histories, etc? (3) Moreover, what's at stake in terms of the implications for IRBs and human research? As these pieces show, remote/online research is more than just a temporary necessity but a valuable mode of research.

In *The Digital, The Local and The Mundane: Three Areas of Potential Change for Research on Asia*, **Radu Leca** (Heidelberg University) considers how our "dependence on online access" and digital technology has changed how we do research. Leca offers suggestions on how scholars might "update" the "where," the "what" and the "how" of research on the Asia Pacific region.

While for many, the practice of remote research is a new pandemic-related consequence, for scholars like **Kaitlyn Ugoretz** (University Of California, Santa Barbara), it has and continues to be her primary research modality. Ugoretz's experiences as a digital anthropologist studying transnational online Shinto communities reveal the misconceptions and anxieties that accompany online research as well as the rewards.

For anthropologists who rely on the collection of first hand data to research indigenous perspectives, COVID-19 related travel restrictions have prompted the need to reconceptualize the tools scholars use to study China in the Pacific. Adopting a decolonial methodology, **Rodolfo Maggio** (University of Turin) seeks to incorporate a plurality of Pacific voices in his research, ultimately to provide insight into the interactions between Pacific Islanders and Chinese actors in the region.

We hope these pieces will prompt our readers to reflect on how their own research has changed over the course of the last year and a half. As always, our goal is to publish articles that will stimulate further discussion and research in the humanities and social sciences in the Asia Pacific region and promote positive change. We appreciate the help and guidance of the journal's **editorial board** in bringing this issue to publication. Special thanks to **Prof. John Nelson** for his many years of support of the journal. We wish him much happiness and many new adventures in his retirement. Thank you to **Serena Calcagno**, our editorial assistant, for her excellent work communicating with scholars and for always looking for ways to better organize and streamline our production process. We appreciate our production team, **Kevin Zaragoza** (print) and **Tiffany Nguyen** and **Isabella Cruz** (web), for their professionalism, attention to detail and design, and positive attitude. Last, we thank our **authors** for their perseverance and dedication to ensuring that research and writing continued despite the challenges of the ongoing pandemic.

**Melissa S. Dale, Editor**

## From Sanitation to Soybeans: Kitchen Hygiene and Nutritional Nationalism in Republican China, 1911-1945

*Sarah Xia Yu, PhD Candidate, Department of History, University of Pennsylvania*

### Abstract

This article investigates evolving expectations for Chinese individuals to clean, cook, eat, and nourish in their private kitchens, and how certain diseases became urgent touchstones for the change in public health priorities. Reformists promoted personal responsibility and popular interest in kitchen and dietary hygiene, which increased as Chinese audiences became exposed to globally-circulating ideas of sanitation and nutrition in individual homes. Furthermore, this occurred in tandem with increased institutionalized government developments for improved infrastructure. This article also highlights Chinese participation in the transnational dietary science movement of the early twentieth century, as reformists developed methods for beriberi and tuberculosis prevention that drew on both “traditional wisdom” and “modern science.” By the 1940s, nutrition had become the corporeal counterpart of kitchen hygiene, and the pursuit of kitchen hygiene had become a way in which every individual could easily and patriotically participate in progress.



**Key words:** China, hygiene, nutrition, public health, 20<sup>th</sup> century

The city of Fuzhou in June 1920 was the site of an epic battle between Mr. Cholera and Mr. Health. The former, a sickly-looking eight-foot-tall bamboo puppet that had a permanent following of “flies and odors” cackled as he was pushed through the streets on a float.

Mr. Health, a plumper figure with rosy cheeks, swooped in to save the people of the city. As he fought, he communicated remedies and hygiene advice, voiced by students with megaphones.<sup>1</sup> The event was an anti-cholera parade, held as a collaboration between the YMCA, its affiliated Council on Health Education, the Fuzhou municipal government, and corporate donors. News reports after the event recorded that more than 330,000 people came to see the parade.<sup>2</sup>

This article focuses on the “kitchen” as a space—both literal and symbolic—that underwent hygienic reform in Republican China. The kitchen referred to not only spaces in which food was stored and prepared, but also served, eaten, and shared. “Kitchen hygiene” education began as innovative methods to facilitate cholera prevention in Chinese cities such as Fuzhou through the reform of food preparation and kitchen sanitation habits. Based on a globally-circulating, scientifically-, politically-, and popularly-defined ideal vision of the hygienic kitchen, provincial, municipal, and individual entities mediated their interpretations and realizations of these clean spaces. Their efforts emphasized the ease and practicality with which individual households could keep their cooking and dining spaces free of microbes and disease vectors. With these efforts came a proliferation of cleaning guides, recipes, and advertisements that championed clean and whole foods and cooking methods that maintained the natural “food value” integrity of ingredients.<sup>3</sup> Over the next decades, concurrent with a global clean-eating movement, nutritional science advancements, popularization of New Life Movement (1934 onwards) virtues, and the start of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), hygiene reformists in China then turned their attention towards the prevention of tuberculosis and beriberi. As full-blown war with Japan began, Chinese authorities needed to quickly vaccinate and disinfect water sources to prevent cholera yet again, and public campaigns for kitchen hygiene saw a resurgence. However, this time, such efforts were accompanied by nutrition advocacy, the content of which had become particularly Chinese and patriotic. In the ideal Chinese kitchen, nutrition thus became the corporeal counterpart of what began as an environmental hygiene movement, and the pursuit of kitchen and dietary hygiene a way in which every individual could easily and patriotically participate in scientific progress.

The conceptual framework of kitchen hygiene, much like the term “hygiene” itself, underwent a transformation that made it increasingly more encompassing, more “scientific,” and instructive for both private life and expectations for modern citizenry. As Ruth Rogaski has examined, *weisheng* 衛生 encompassed much more than just “hygiene,” but rather “hygienic modernity.”<sup>4</sup> Reformists certainly intended for kitchen and dietary hygiene reforms to foster a sense of personal responsibility, but the reforms’ contributions to public health

---

<sup>1</sup> “Pictures of Foochow Anti-Cholera Campaign,” [undated]. Yale University Medical Library Special Collections (henceforth “Yale”), New Haven, CT.

<sup>2</sup> J. E. Gossard, “Anti-Cholera Campaign in Foochow,” *China Medical Journal* 34 (1920): 667.

<sup>3</sup> “How to Cook Vegetables,” *Health* 1, no. 2, (June 1924): 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

were perhaps more diffuse than those to the development of meanings of the “self” and its place within a strong, modern nation. The modernity of a public health system, writes Tom Crook, “resides in its complexity,” “a shifting assemblage of interacting parts and practices” of those doing the would-be modernizing reforms and the initiatives themselves.<sup>5</sup> Kitchen hygiene reformists included, but were more diverse than, Rogaski’s Tianjin elites—they were also medical missionaries, publishers of hygiene journals, advertisers, teachers, students, and women. The scope of their reforms was also not unique; for example, kitchen hygiene mirrored the development of “domestic management” as a life science and academic endeavor for women, as Helen Schneider has examined. Chinese women intellectuals who designed and promoted home economics programs were aware of similar global trends and set out to “find practical solutions to help Chinese women meet the responsibilities of domestic management” not only at home; their new skills had wider implications in society—women who studied “cafeteria management and nutrition... [would be prepared for] work in hospitals, in school dining rooms, or in restaurants as managers.”<sup>6</sup> Later, with the establishment of the New Life Movement women’s organizations in the 1930s and 1940s, kitchen hygiene and domestic management initiatives often coalesced into defining the “markers of a civilized society” and the ways in which individuals could align themselves with wartime production.<sup>7</sup>

## **Cholera Prevention Before the Kitchen**

Of all infectious diseases that could reach epidemic proportions, the one most closely associated with the kitchen was cholera. The idea that cholera prevention could be linked to food preparation or eating habits had staying power even after the discovery of the waterborne cholera bacillus and the development of a prophylactic vaccine by the late nineteenth century. European colonial governance and “Christian activism” in Asia and Africa linked cholera susceptibility to natives’ “culture”—the lack of “cleanliness, airiness, [and] good food.”<sup>8</sup> Medical professionals in China at the turn of the century certainly blamed transmission on the “dirty individual.” Hamstrung by the costs of building new infrastructure and alarmed by the lack of progress with native populations, colonials and missionaries turned to protecting themselves. “What could be done, like the boiling of water, had to be done by the people themselves.”<sup>9</sup> Reports about a cholera outbreak in 1926 Shanghai highlighted the stark contrast between the “few foreigners” affected in the French Concession and International Settlement and the several thousand cases, with hundreds of deaths, in the Chinese section—“dependent upon the Chinese-owned and controlled water

---

<sup>5</sup> Tom Crook, *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Schneider, *Keeping the Nation’s House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 14, 109.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hamlin, *Cholera: The Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73

<sup>9</sup> Hamlin, *Cholera*, 234.



works company.”<sup>10</sup> Even if the Chinese were not biologically weaker in the face of cholera, it seemed that their living habits were certainly putting them at risk. Foreign residents could, and did, protect themselves in their own enclaves by maintaining their own hygienic kitchen and bathroom spaces and avoiding Chinese food at social events, on ships sailing down the Yangtze River, and even in hospital wards.<sup>11</sup>

Authorities around China before the 1920s had chosen to tackle cholera outbreaks in several different ways, including constructing seasonal hospitals and small-scale water sanitation projects. Cholera was familiar to Chinese society, but its prevention was sparse, ad hoc, and hardly institutionalized. It was in this context that reformists, along with local governments, promoted the kitchen as a desirable hygienic space and taught the individual to exercise agency. By all measures, the 1920 parade seemed to make an impact. Follow-up investigations showed that “even in the homes on small streets there is a decided difference in the cleanliness of all food used,” and “one seldom sees water-soaked fruits being sold on the street.”<sup>12</sup> “[M]elon and meal dealers” all around Fuzhou began to use screens to keep out flies from their shopfronts and cover their merchandise.<sup>13</sup> Similar initiatives also drew positive feedback. In Ningbo, the doctor in charge of treatment for more than 9,000 cholera patients was presented with a “silver-plated shield with complimentary characters on it” by the local elite as a gesture of gratitude.<sup>14</sup>

A few years later, William Wesley Peter, the Shanghai-based head of the Council for Health Education and director of the Fuzhou parade repertoire, published an overview of the campaign. With a focus on “broadcasting health” rather than “curing” (as in a clinical setting) or “controlling” (as with strict quarantines) disease, Peter signaled a new way for medical personnel to disseminate information to a larger audience and “enable” them to make progress. The Fuzhou parade was indeed a spectacle, but its innovative intention was actually to target smaller, more private aspects of everyday life. Each float in the parade used common household objects to demonstrate what an ordinary family could do to keep their food safe, accompanied by voiceover explanations in easy-to-remember slogans. 300,000 pieces of “illustrated cholera literature” were distributed so that participants could bring written reminders—“boil your water and cook your food. Eat it hot from clean dishes...”—back to their homes.<sup>15</sup> The Fuzhou municipality sourced and paid for vaccinations, but the focus was on assigning personal responsibility for the hygiene of each individual kitchen, restaurant, food stand, market stall, and dining area.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> “Cholera and China’s Susceptibilities,” *The China Weekly Review*, 28 August 1926.

<sup>11</sup> J. A. G. Roberts, *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 82–83; Memorandum on Hospital economics/charges, 30 November 1937. Rockefeller Archive Center (henceforth “RAC”)/CMB Inc/FA065/Box 68/Folder 483, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

<sup>12</sup> Gossard, “Anti-Cholera Campaign in Foochow,” 668.

<sup>13</sup> “President Hsu and Family Interested in Health Films,” *The China Press*, 20 September 1921.

<sup>14</sup> “Report of the Hwa Mai Hospital, Ningpo, 1919,” *China Medical Journal* 34 (1920): 674.

<sup>15</sup> Peter, *Broadcasting Health in China*, 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

The shift by hygiene reformists to focus on personal responsibility in food preparation and consumption could thus be interpreted as the next step of a racialized, colonial, civilizing mission, especially as it was led by missionary boards and the YMCA. Alternatively, it was a stopgap for the failure of Chinese and treaty port authorities to safely upgrade hygiene infrastructure or enforce sanitary laws. As Chieko Nakajima writes, Shanghai elites launched mass educational hygiene campaigns to mitigate the damage of city administrators' inability to build new infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> But commercial- and print-driven interest in hygiene and individual education actually grew in tandem with, and not in spite of, state-run initiatives: laboratory research for cholera prevention and therapies, the establishment of infectious disease hospitals, and the increased manufacturing and distribution of vaccines. As Chinese citizens' expectations for government services increased, so did their own consciousness about personal hygiene and responsibility.

### **"The Tiger is Coming"**

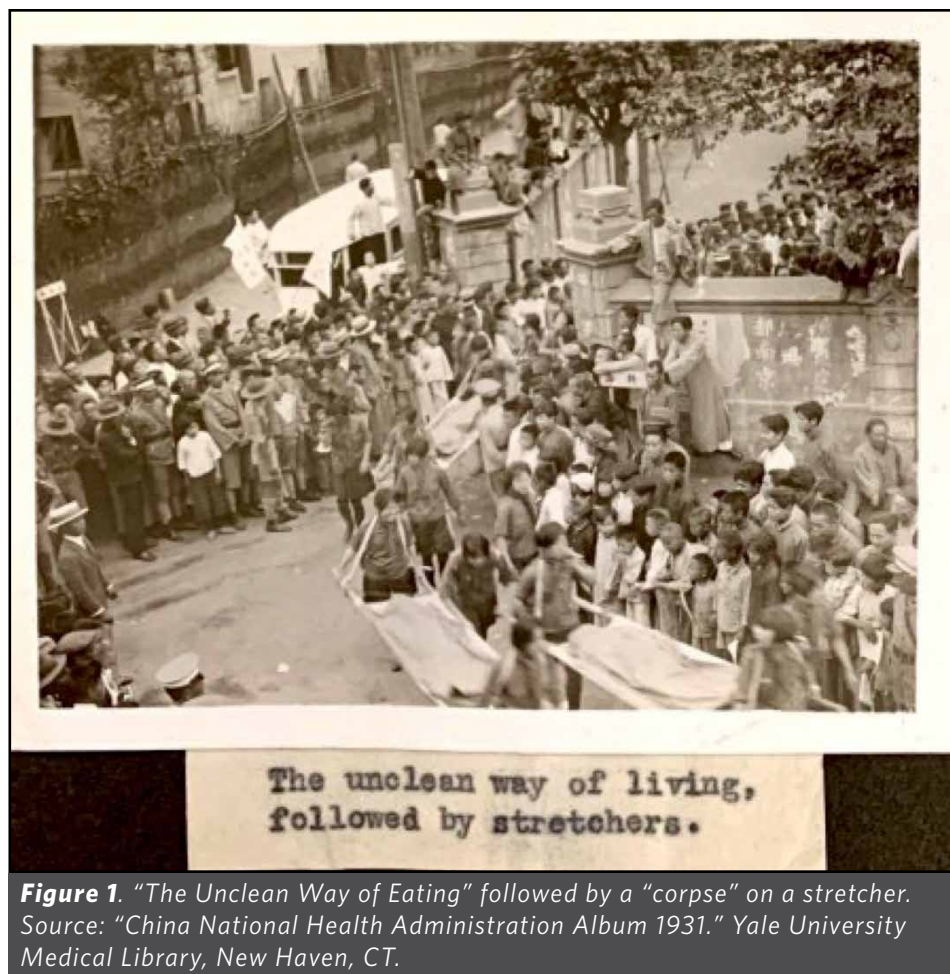
Following the Fuzhou success, large-scale cholera prevention campaigns continued in Chinese cities. Shanghai's International Settlement, French Concession, and the Chinese municipality collaborated on a 1931 parade. They used sensationalist methods—dozens of stretchers with "dead bodies" with giant models of flies swarming around them carried through the streets—to indicate what would happen when the health advice was not taken.<sup>18</sup> The parade was an admonishment of Shanghai residents' dereliction in their hygienic duties and a demonstration of how everyone could and should take personal responsibility, using simple methods, in their own homes. Having observed the models of the "right" and "wrong" way, the public was now also expected to point out and correct bad behavior. Overall, an estimated 625,000 people were in attendance, and this became one of the largest hygiene education public events to date. On a smaller scale, Jiangxi's 1935 summer cholera campaign, an initiative of a local New Life Corps or Schools Hygiene Team (*xuexiao weisheng dui* 學校衛生隊) during the New Life Movement's popularization, featured radio broadcasts, theatrical performances, and a citizen cleaning initiative.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Chieko Nakajima, *Body, Society, and the Modern State: The Creation of Public Health and Urban Culture in Shanghai* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 130.

<sup>18</sup> "China National Health Administration Album 1931," Yale.

<sup>19</sup> S.M. Hillier and J. A. Jewell, *Health Care and Traditional Medicine in China 1800–1982* (London: Routledge, 1983), 41. Federica Ferlanti, "The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938," *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (September 2010): 982.



Written promotional materials instructed that people could not allow social niceties or carelessness to prevent them from following proper hygiene advice when the "scary summer [comes] back" with cholera in tow.<sup>20</sup> The Council on Health Education's companion pamphlets for their travelling lectures tackle the "agents" of cholera—flies, raw water, sick people, and uncovered food—in a series titled "Health-Picture Talks," (*weisheng tushuo* 衛生圖說). Illustrated panels are accompanied by narrative descriptions and catchy rhyming couplets to help readers remember the advice. A picture of several men socializing in a tea house is captioned: "on the surface everything looks orderly, but think about this teacup, this smoking pipe: how many people will drink from it? How many people will smoke from it? One cannot be sure that every person is healthy."<sup>21</sup> A first-hand account by a Shanghai resident, written after a visit to a literature professor friend's house, described alarm at the stubbornness of Shanghai's elite to disregard public health advice and insist on keeping their

<sup>20</sup> Shi Cui, "Tantan xialing de yinshi 談談夏令的飲食" [A discussion about diet in the summer], *Weisheng yue kan* 衛生月刊 19 (June 1934): 16.

<sup>21</sup> "Weisheng tu hua" 衛生圖話 [Health picture talks], *Zhonghua weisheng jiaoyuhui xiao congshu zhi sanshier* 中華衛生教育會小叢書之三十二 [Council on Health Education Reference Books], no. 32 (Shanghai: No 4. Kunshan Road, [undated]). See Figure 1.

bathrooms close to their kitchens “for visitors’ convenience.”<sup>22</sup> Hangzhou’s residents were also asked to refrain from visiting the sick or mourning the deceased in homes that were likely contaminated.<sup>23</sup>

For restaurants and other food services, the Ministry of the Interior released a series of cleanliness guidelines in 1928 in its government bulletin. Chefs were expected to cut their hair and nails regularly, wash hands after using the bathroom or scratching their noses, and refrain from “coughing or yelling towards pots and bowls while cooking or carrying food.”<sup>24</sup> The kitchens themselves also needed to conform to using screens and traps for flies and rodents and a daily floor cleaning. The water used to boil rice and vegetables should be sold for pig feed, not be dumped onto the ground.<sup>25</sup> The National Health Administration’s public road health stations (*weisheng gonglu zhan* 衛生公路站) developed a set of investigation forms for grading the environmental hygiene of restaurants, public wells, and other facilities in each jurisdiction.<sup>26</sup> A restaurant in Shantou that failed to provide fly traps, white-colored uniforms for all staff, or spittoons for customers, among other requirements, would be fined up to ten *yuan* for each offence.<sup>27</sup> From 1930, any restaurant in Nanjing could be subject to a hygiene inspection at any time.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Bi Yun, “Shanghai de cesuo yu chufang” 上海的廁所與廚房 [Toilets and kitchens in Shanghai], *Weisheng yue kan* 19: 26–27.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Health, City of Hangchow, “Hu lai le” 虎來了 [The tiger is coming: Methods for preventing cholera], 1927.

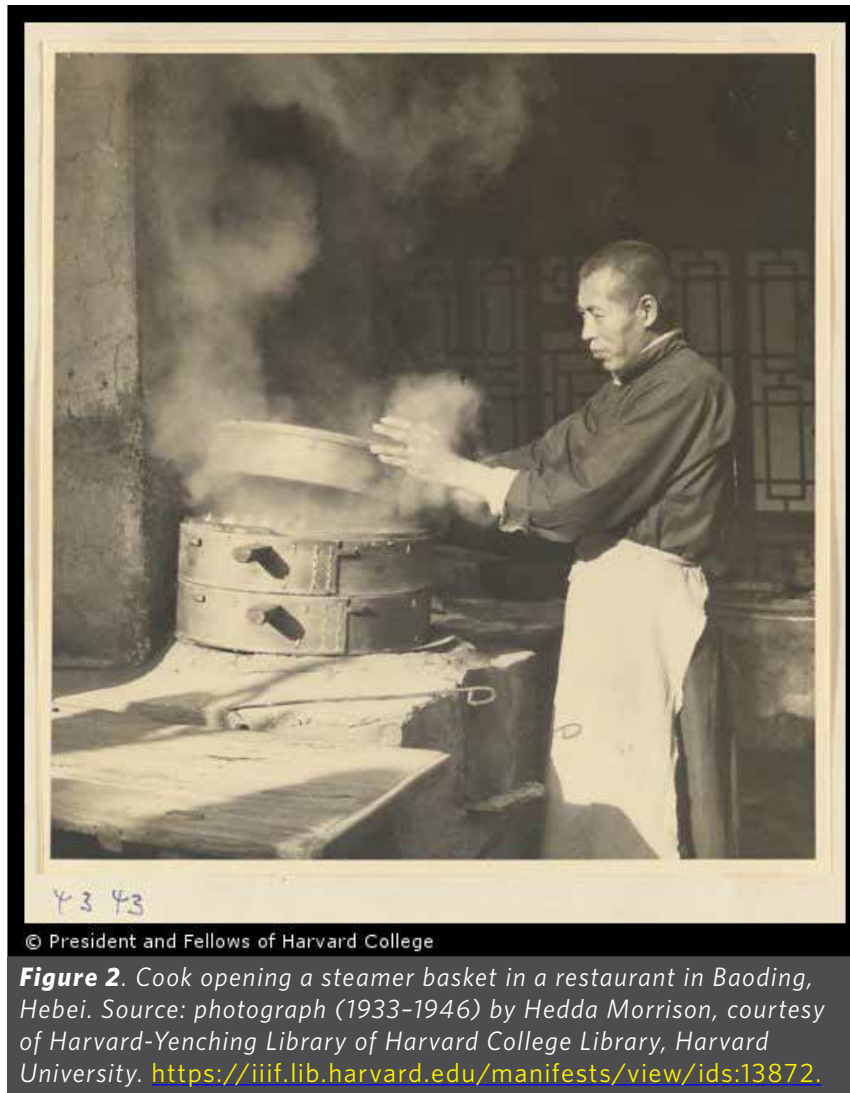
<sup>24</sup> “Guomin zhengfu neizhengbu chufu ying shou guize” 國民政府內政部廚夫應守規則 [Regulations that chefs should abide by from the National Government Ministry of the Interior], Announcement no. 178, *Neizheng gongbao* 內政公報 [Ministry of the Interior Bulletin] 1, no. 2 (May 1928): 110.

<sup>25</sup> “Guomin zhengfu neizhengbu chufu ying shou guize,” 111.

<sup>26</sup> “Weisheng shu weisheng gongluzhan gezhong diaocha jilubiao” 衛生署衛生公路站各種調查紀錄報 [Various information and investigation forms for the national health administration highway health station], 1931. Kuomintang Party Archives (henceforth “KMT Archives”) 502/26, Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>27</sup> “Weisheng: Bugao: Shantou shizhengfu guanli jiulou fandan chaju weisheng guize” 衛生：佈告：汕頭市政府管理酒樓飯店茶居衛生規則 [Notice: Shantou government regulations for hygiene of restaurants and teahouses], *Shantou shi shizheng gongbao* 汕頭市政公報 [Shantou municipal bulletin] 65, 1931.

<sup>28</sup> “Weisheng xiaoxi: Chacan lvguan fandan weisheng” 衛生消息：查參旅館飯店衛生 [Hygiene news: Inspection of hotel and restaurant hygiene], *Shoudu shizheng gongbao* 首都市政公報 [Governance bulletin of the capital city] 53, 1930.



Often, descriptions of cholera recalled the frightening puppets that were the stars of the Fuzhou parade. A pamphlet from the Hangzhou government warned “esteemed readers” that “cholera will soon become another uninvited guest to the Hangzhou area, and just thinking about last year’s situation is so painful.”<sup>29</sup> Cholera was an “invader,” and could sneakily lead one to “sink into a trap” if not careful.<sup>30</sup> The apt phonetic transliteration of the word “cholera” as “tiger plague” or “tiger fierce pull” (*hu yi* 虎疫, or *hu lie la* 虎烈拉), referred to its speed and violence that executed its victims within a few hours; it also perfectly aligned with its more popular, traditionally-derived name, “sudden turmoil” (*huoluan* 霍亂).<sup>31</sup> In a graphic description of the suffering of a cholera victim, the “tiger plague” was personified as “an enemy of the people.”<sup>32</sup> Its special agent, the common fly, was an

<sup>29</sup> “Hu lai Le.”

<sup>30</sup> Shi, “Tantan xialing de yinshi,” 16.

<sup>31</sup> Marta Hanson, *Speaking of Epidemics in Chinese Medicine: Disease and the Geographic Imagination in Late Imperial China* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 136.

<sup>32</sup> Qiu Chuanfang, “Huoluan ‘hu lie la’ qian shuo” 霍亂“虎來了”前說 [Cholera Briefing], *Weisheng yue kan* 19: 19.

intentional agent of destruction, and a “murderer”: “green-bellied, red-headed, often clothed in filth; contaminated with bacteria from food, transmitting sickness as fast as the wind blows.”<sup>33</sup> In a poster produced by the Council on Health Education, a child eats his dinner while a fly of equal size feeds from the other side of the bowl.<sup>34</sup> According to a Rockefeller Foundation report, “there is reason to believe that gastro-intestinal diseases in China cause at least 5 deaths per 1,000 population per year and that most of this is fly-borne.”<sup>35</sup>

Fortunately, prevention against this malicious disease and its vectors was achievable. “To sanitize our cooking utensils,” wrote Shi Cui in an editorial, “we simply need to boil them.”<sup>36</sup> Primary school students’ efforts to sanitize drinking water in Xinhe, Jiangsu, were documented in a series of lantern slides that showed easy, step-by-step instructions in images and accompanied narrations.<sup>37</sup> A Hangzhou resident who received a “The Tiger is Coming” pamphlet could provide a necessary public service by simply reading, memorizing, and “showing [this] to others, or reading it to them if they are illiterate.”<sup>38</sup> Participating in a fly elimination campaign was arguably the best way for an individual to prevent cholera, “maintain public morality[,] and serve the society.”<sup>39</sup> Fly and mosquito control had in fact been a significant undertaking for many Chinese city governments. Beginning in 1922, the Nanjing government detailed 5,000 dollars and two dozen policemen to the health bureau for fly larvae elimination in public water sources and latrines every summer.<sup>40</sup> The city of Hangzhou called on its residents to “do their duty” and “actively reduce flies: use swatters, water traps, and covers to prevent flies from getting near food.”<sup>41</sup> After killing flies, one should “simply throw bodies into the fire or drown them to eliminate the germs.”<sup>42</sup> Armed with fly swatters and clenched fists, the students and faculty of a school in Shandong posed for a photo with the caption, “Notice is hereby given that any fly who appears . . . does so at his own risk . . . by order of the FLY ELIMINATION CAMPAIGN.”<sup>43</sup>

Contemporary commentators marveled at the impact of intentional fly-killing. The Rockefeller Foundation reported that the kitchen fly traps made by a Mr. Yang at South-Eastern University were so effective that “there were practically no flies” during a particularly

---

<sup>33</sup> “Weisheng tu hua,” 3.

<sup>34</sup> Peter, *Broadcasting Health in China*, figure 27, 39.

<sup>35</sup> John B. Grant, “Fly and Mosquito Control in Nanjing,” 19 January 1924. RAC/International Health Division/RG4/Series 601/FA 115/Box 55/Folder 348.

<sup>36</sup> Shi, “Tantan xialing de yinshi,” 17.

<sup>37</sup> *Jiangsu shengli Zhenjiang minzhong jiaoyu guan: Yinshui weisheng yingpian shuxue fangan* 江蘇省立鎮江民眾教育館：飲水衛生影片數學方案 [Jiangsu Province Zhenjiang People’s Education Center: Arrangements on how to create the drinking water hygiene slideshow], 1930. Shanxi Provincial Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Taiyuan, China.

<sup>38</sup> “Hu lai le.”

<sup>39</sup> *Jiangsu shengli Zhenjiang minzhong jiaoyu guan*.

<sup>40</sup> Grant, “Fly and Mosquito Control in Nanjing.”

<sup>41</sup> “Hu lai le.”

<sup>42</sup> “Shimin de shuguang: Weisheng: Chufang nei zhi qingjie fa, mie sheng zhe zhuyi” 市民的曙光：衛生：廚房內之清潔法，滅繩者注意 [Dawn of the city resident column: Hygiene: Methods for kitchen hygiene, focus on fly elimination], *Guangzhou shi shizheng gongbao* [Guangzhou City Public Bulletin] 82 (1932): 14.

<sup>43</sup> *Health* 1, no. 1, March 1924.

hot summer.<sup>44</sup> The Beijing Municipal Department of Public Safety hosted an anti-fly campaign in 1930, in which participants were awarded a copper coin for every ten flies caught—"a total of 12,134,010 flies were caught in the city during the summer at a cost of \$2,018.68."<sup>45</sup> Each student at a Chongqing middle school was reportedly able to catch and kill at least twenty flies each evening.<sup>46</sup> Guangzhou's public bulletin declared its fly elimination work a success, claiming that "the waves from last year's fly elimination work have gradually spread everywhere, to villages and to the old and young."<sup>47</sup>

The story of Qiaotou Elementary School, just outside of Shanghai, was even written into an issue of the popular Commercial Press book series for primary school readers, titled "Campaign to Eliminate Mosquitos and Flies" (*quchu wencang yundong* 驅除蚊蒼運動). The student government organization decided to start a fly killing campaign to help local residents feel safe from disease. The student-led team instructed their peers and elders to use simple fly swatters and traps to kill the flies, which could then be used to feed poultry to keep them plump.<sup>48</sup> The report of this fly elimination campaign showed that an entire community was apparently enlightened and emboldened through the experience. By the end of the campaign, no villager could deny that flies were dangerous enemies.<sup>49</sup> In all these cases, the successes were said to be due to the work of "one or two teams that led the charge and many others followed." Just as a single student could start a campaign that would change the minds of hundreds in Qiaotou, every Chinese person could start from killing a few flies to make progress.

## From Clean Kitchens, to Clean Food, to Clean Eating

Advice for what the common Chinese person should do with his or her kitchen soon extended beyond mere cleaning. With the mass publication of special interest magazines for public consumption, advertisements, news of health-related progress, cleaning advice, and recipes all found a home. Journals such as Shanghai's *Weisheng yue kan* (Health monthly magazine 衛生月刊) published both medical progress news and advice for the general reader, while other publications ran regular columns for recipes and "hygiene common knowledge." Recipe guides until the mid-1930s were educational eye-openers for those who were able and willing to broaden their dietary interests and make creative, cosmopolitan

---

<sup>44</sup> Grant, "Fly and Mosquito Control in Nanjing."

<sup>45</sup> "Report of the Peking First Health Station for 1930," 30 September 1930. RAC/CMB Inc/FA065/Box 67/Folder 471.

<sup>46</sup> "Guoli Di Ershier Zhongxue xiao ben bu ji yi er liang fenxiao zhengjie shishi qingxing" 國立第二十二中學校本部及一二兩分校整潔實施情形 [Cleanliness of the 22nd Public Middle School and two affiliate schools], March 1943. SHAC 5/1927 (2).

<sup>47</sup> "Shimin de shuguang," 14.

<sup>48</sup> *Quchu wencang yundong* 驅除蚊蒼運動 [Fly elimination campaign], (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1934), 15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

changes to their routines. They were perhaps aspirational to many but went hand-in-hand with the proliferation of advertisements for food and nutritional products in the print media. To understand the transition of the kitchen from a place that simply needed to be free of germs and flies to one that could positively foster wonderful health benefits, we must necessarily discuss nutritional hygiene and food science at the global level in the early twentieth century. In *The Pasteurization of France*, Bruno Latour describes the teachings of French “hygienists” in the *Revue Scientifique* journals in the 1880s as an “accumulation”: “advice, precautions, recipes, opinions, statistics, remedies . . .” in attempts to launch “all-round combat” on diseases.<sup>50</sup> Unlike research bacteriologists, who may have considered disease to be caused only by specific microbes, the hygienists considered any and all factors as possible causes. China’s authors for cleaning, cooking, and recipe advice followed a similar all-encompassing framework, and moreover, showed that the hygienist mode of understanding health—the absence of not only disease but also other undesirable elements—held firm even well into the twentieth century, after the medical community’s acceptance of germ theory and the popularization of targeted therapies.

Eliminating microbes to reach a hygienic ideal also required setting up entire ecosystems that contributed to a more general abundance of healthfulness. It was thus not sufficient, according to kitchen cleanliness guides, to merely clean and sanitize cooking equipment, but the entire kitchen needed to be shielded from even dust.<sup>51</sup> The “whole suspect outer world” needed to be controlled not only for ultimate elimination of microbes, but also for more “transcendental” goals—“asepsis,” or “complete isolation” from any pollution.<sup>52</sup> The term “dietary hygiene” (*yinshi weisheng* 飲食衛生) emerged to encompass cleanliness guidelines for kitchens, cooks, diners, dining rooms, the food itself, and the surroundings in which it was served. Meals also needed to achieve aesthetic standards. *Health’s* “table for housewives to clip out and post in the kitchen” was a short guide for teaching cooks at home to “save food value as well as appearance of flavor,” indicating that appealing-looking vegetables were more likely to be eaten.<sup>53</sup> “Regardless of whether one uses gold, china, or bamboo [to serve], all equipment should be clean and neat.” Food should be arranged beautifully, and at the correct proportions between serving vessel and amount of food.<sup>54</sup>

Readers were also encouraged to broaden their horizons and improve the variety of their diets. After explaining necessary nutritional content—iron, protein, carbohydrates, etc.—for health and in which foods to find them, an article in *Weisheng yue kan* ends with a “motto for three daily meals”: “Every day I will eat: one pound of milk, one egg, one item of fish or soybeans, one item of potatoes, large amount of vegetables, unhusked wheat bread or

---

<sup>50</sup> Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France*, trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 19–20.

<sup>51</sup> “Shimin de shuguang.”

<sup>52</sup> Virginia Smith, *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 299–300.

<sup>53</sup> “Correct Ways to Cook Vegetables,” *Health* 1, no. 2 (June 1924): 32.

<sup>54</sup> Hu Huafeng, *Jiachang weisheng pengtiao zhinan* 家常衛生烹調指南 [Home hygienic cooking guide] (Commercial Press: 1932), 3.



coarse grains, and one item of fruit.”<sup>55</sup> A “Home Hygienic Cooking Guide” (*Jiachang weisheng pengtiao zhinan* 家常衛生烹調指南) published in 1932 by the Commercial Press, part of the “Family Reference Book” (*Jiating congshu* 家庭叢書) series, deemed itself the quintessential guide for anyone unfamiliar with cooking, as well as a well-rounded guide to disinfecting cookware and safe food preparation techniques.<sup>56</sup> While the recipes included are elaborate and often lengthy, including an entry for “roast goose,” both parts of the book—the hygiene guide and the recipe collection—were created specifically for the use of the individual at home. Moreover, the provision of appropriate and sanitary kitchen equipment would not only ameliorate a family’s health, but also protect and lessen the workload for the “housewife,” (*zhufu* 主婦) the undisputed manager of the kitchen.<sup>57</sup> Exploring new recipes could also help bring families closer together: “this book should be interesting to many, especially women, but families can make use of the book to read together.”<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, a global movement towards clean eating and natural foods emerged. New Deal food writing in the 1930s, according to historian Camille Bégin, reacted to the rise of mass-produced industrial food and took moral stances around the “dichotomy between real and fake, good and bad food” that persist even to today.<sup>59</sup> Frozen vegetables and refrigerated meat, considered more “pure” compared to processed or packaged foods, became available to those who could afford them. In the global natural food movement of the early twentieth century, Chinese food experts declared their distinct advantage. Overseas Chinese restaurateurs in the United States, to combat pervasive racialized discrimination of Chinese food as dirty, cheap, and lower class, drew upon the “traditional” wisdom of their ancestors in published cookbooks from as early as the fourteenth century. These were written with an “emphasis on food as a means to maintain the health of the individual” and also to strengthen his relationship with society.<sup>60</sup> Traditional recipe books, such as the eighteenth century *Record of Xing Garden* with its collections of meals of “coarse foods, like vegetables and stews,” became models for writers in the early twentieth century.<sup>61</sup> Chinese American restaurant owners and cookbook writers would often evoke the concept of “nourishing life” (*yangsheng* 養生) in their own publications around the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> “Jieshao kuangyan lei he duzhe jianmian” 介紹礦岩類和讀者見面 [Introducing readers to minerals], *Weisheng banyue kan* 5, no 5 (May 1935): 265.

<sup>56</sup> Hu, *Jiachang weisheng pengtiao zhinan*, 1.

<sup>57</sup> “Jiating weisheng: Chufang shebei” 家庭衛生：廚房設備 [Household hygiene: Kitchen facilities], *Xinghua* 31, no. 25 (1934): 17.

<sup>58</sup> Zhang Enting, *Yinshi yu jiankang* 飲食與健康 [Food and health] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936), 2.

<sup>59</sup> Camille Bégin, *Taste of the Nation: The New Deal Search for America’s Food* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016), 158.

<sup>60</sup> Yong Chen, *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 157.

<sup>61</sup> Mark Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Culinary Experience in Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 136.

<sup>62</sup> Chen, *Chop Suey*, 157.

American audiences took notice of Chinese ingredients such as soybeans and vegetables as nourishing additions to a frugal, Protestant diet.<sup>63</sup> Chinese methods of cooking—such as using a steamer as to not overcook or damage the structural and nutritional integrity of vegetables—were particularly lauded, with one writer proudly announcing that the longtime staple Chinese steamer pot had only recently been introduced to Western countries. Furthermore, the Chinese tendency to eat a variety of animals' internal organs, which are high in iron and other minerals, was also just beginning to gain popularity in the United States, validating the longstanding practice.<sup>64</sup> Mark Swislocki writes that the increased interest in nutrition allowed Shanghaier to connect with new values emerging in a cosmopolitan place and time but also to maintain their Chineseness at the same time. Reformists in China urged cooks to welcome natural, plant-, and animal-derived diets to receive the best nutritional benefits from their food. Aside from improving the health of Chinese people, this would also have a more grandiose effect—Chinese home cooks could thus have an important and leading role in the improvement of nutrition for people all over the world. After all, "Confucius," wrote Shui Wong Chan in 1917, "taught [us] how to eat scientifically."<sup>65</sup>

Once intricate, varied, natural, and carefully prepared food was served, diners would also need to follow certain guidelines while they were eating. The National Anti-Tuberculosis Association, established in 1933 by influential Chinese medical professionals, began to consider whether a particularly Chinese dining characteristic had caused the dizzying numbers of tuberculosis infections, even among wealthier, younger people—that of "communal eating" (*gong shi* 共食).<sup>66</sup> The Association called for government support to ban this "communistic salivary exchange," eating from a "common dish into which the diners indiscriminately plunge their chopsticks or spoons as they convey successive portions to their mouths."<sup>67</sup> Its leaders proposed several dining reforms: diners could serve themselves from shared dishes on a moving tabletop with designated serving utensils, carry two sets of utensils (one for eating, and the other "hygienic chopsticks" for serving) or eat only from individual servings that were portioned before each meal.<sup>68</sup> It did not seem to concern members of the Association that tuberculosis was widely understood by this time to be an airborne disease for which people were infected through their lungs, nor that their contemporaries voiced doubts about whether communal eating was really so dangerous.<sup>69</sup> Lu Lihua, celebrated among the first generation of female Chinese doctors, expressed her reluctance to adopt "hygienic chopsticks." Moreover, portioning out all food before the start

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 160–161.

<sup>64</sup> Zhang, *Yinshi yu jiankang*, 185.

<sup>65</sup> Shiu Wong Chan, *The Chinese Cook Book* (1917), in Chen, *Chop Suey*, 167.

<sup>66</sup> Sean Hsiang-lin Lei, "Habituating Individuality: The Framing of Tuberculosis and Its Material Solutions in Republican China," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 84, no. 2. (Summer 2010): 248–279, 263.

<sup>67</sup> "The Fight Against Tuberculosis," *The China Press*, 12 November 1936, 10.

<sup>68</sup> Wu Lien-teh, "A Hygiene Chinese Dining Table," *National Medical Journal of China* 1, no. 1 (1915), 7–8. Lei, "Habituating Individuality," 264.

<sup>69</sup> Lei, "Habituating Individuality," 266.

of a meal would inconvenience those who were overly polite or late, and would actually undermine the beauty of Chinese cuisine, in which each dish was to be enjoyed separately!<sup>70</sup>



**Figure 3.** “If a healthy person and an infected person eat together, there is a danger of germ transmission.” Source: *Health-Picture Talks*, Picture 10.

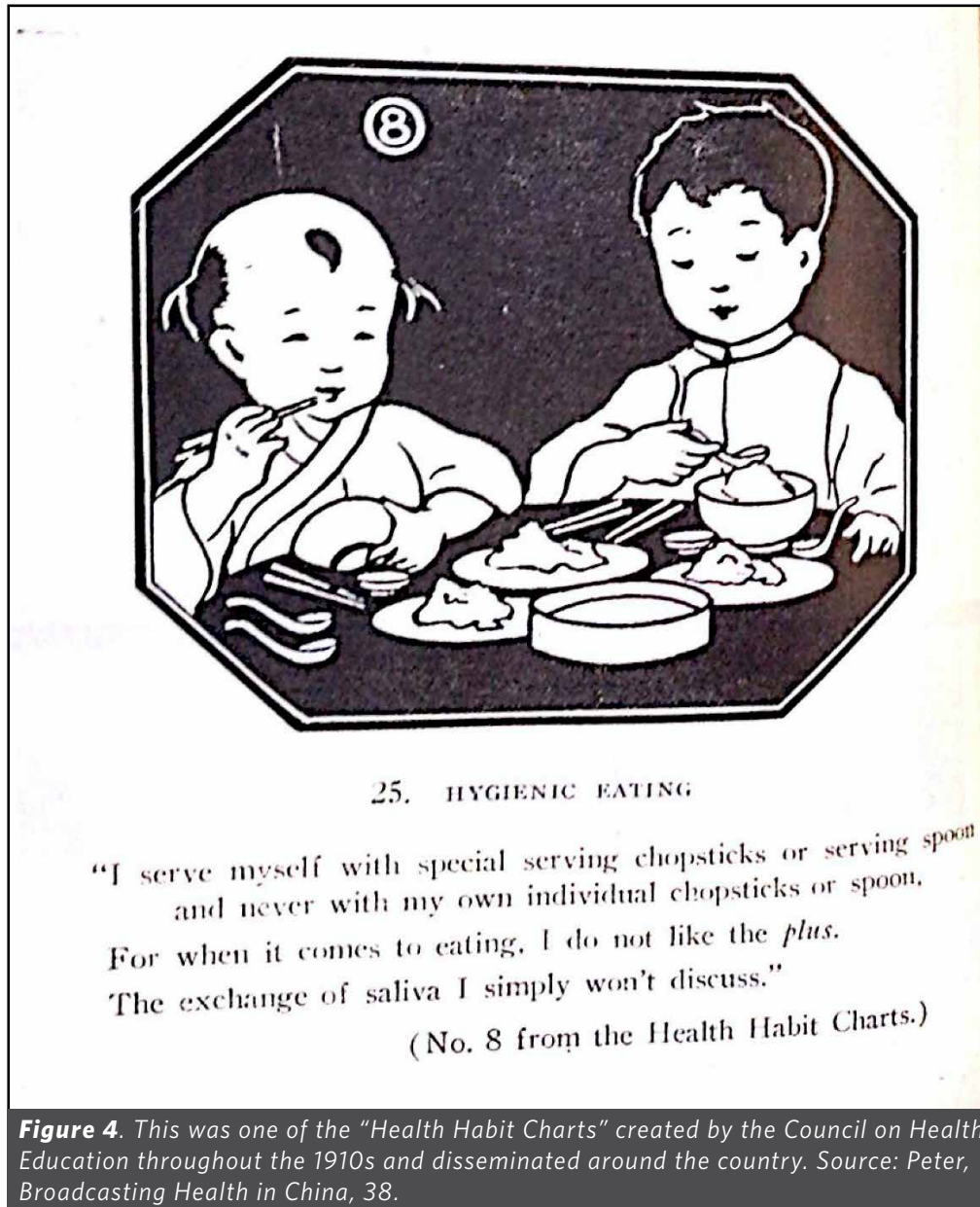
Nevertheless, the Anti-Tuberculosis Association was now sufficiently emboldened by central government developments such as the New Life Movement and support from important scientific and political figures to make these bold claims. Lu’s editorial, despite its ambivalence, concluded that China needed a temporary hygienic chopsticks solution to curb rising tuberculosis infection numbers, but it would not diminish the “strong social and family structures of Chinese culture.”<sup>71</sup> Columnist Wang Zude presented case studies of Nankai and Tsinghua Universities, exemplary in both education and social norms, where students all carry two sets of utensils for serving and eating respectively.<sup>72</sup> Even if not every family

<sup>70</sup> Lu Liuhua, “Tantan weisheng kuai de libi” 談談衛生筷的利弊 [Discussing the advantages and disadvantages of hygienic chopsticks], *Weisheng yue kan* (June 1934): 22-23.

<sup>71</sup> Lu, “Tantan weisheng kuai de libi.”

<sup>72</sup> Wang Zude, “Weisheng changshi: Gongshi zhi e’xi” 衛生常識：共食之惡習 [The evil custom of communal eating], *Xinshenghuo zhou kan* [新生活週刊 [New life weekly] 1, no. 14 (1934): 12.

could afford to refashion their dining tables to spin, the range of proposed kitchen food and hygiene reforms were once again stressed as the most convenient, easy, and cost-effective ways to prevent the spread of tuberculosis. The inclusion of designated serving utensils in virtually every dietary hygiene guide throughout the 1930s was testament to their perceived potential. Chinese people could establish this simple, humane solution that would require neither infrastructure-building nor persecution.



### Berberi, the New Life Movement, and the Patriotic Soybean

While specific events such as the Fuzhou and Shanghai cholera parades may have had missionary and colonial origins, and dietary hygiene was gaining its popularity globally as a new life science, the basic act of managing nutritional and hygiene habits in the kitchen

to prevent disease had its Chinese roots. After all, the Chinese had their own longstanding dietary taboos—excessive drinking, gluttony, and the ultimate “processed food,” polished white rice. The idea that individual behavior as a main cause of disease had long existed in Chinese conceptions of wellness. The disease caused by thiamine (Vitamin B) deficiency known as beriberi, which caused swelling and numbness of the legs and feet, was one such example. It first made regular appearances as *jiaoqi* 腳氣 (foot *qi*) in Chinese physicians’ notes as a disease caused by the humid and hot climate of southern China. By the thirteenth century, physicians also considered the causes to be sufferer’s “habits, not their constitution or their environment” after examining some northern Chinese cases.<sup>73</sup> These early epidemiologists bolstered their arguments with invocations of the political divisions between north and south China, reflected in people’s diets, wealth, and bodily strength. As Hilary Smith explains, the distinction between northern and southern versions of *jiaoqi* and the differentiation in their respective causes and cures began to fade as China became “newly unified.”<sup>74</sup> By the early twentieth century, the integration of all existing understandings into one, scientifically-defined disease “beriberi” was similarly a product of both scientific progress and the political climate at the time: medical researchers were considering that microbes were not the only necessary causes of disease, vitamin synthesis was becoming common around the world, and China faced a looming threat from the rise of militaristic nationalism from Japan, for which beriberi posed a threat.<sup>75</sup> Instead of vaccinations, antibiotics, and sanitation, the prevention and cure of the deficiency required dietary and habitual changes for all Chinese.

Fortunately, medical advice reassured general readers, the cure for both the disease and bad dietary habits could also easily be found domestically, and traditionally. Chinese doctors had identified its dietary correlations in the Tang Dynasty, eight centuries before European records.<sup>76</sup> Even elite Japanese doctors had only recently accepted that beriberi was a diet-related disease in 1926, after decades of searching for a microbial cause.<sup>77</sup> Its causes of dietary deficiency matched nicely with traditional Chinese medical concepts that designated behavioral attributes for certain ailments, and thus it is neither surprising that *jiaoqi* and beriberi coalesced into a common nutrition-related disease, nor that reformists agreed that the easiest cures were located in each individual’s kitchen. As Rogaski writes, Chinese medicine proponents by the 1930s had brought “an indigenous form of *weisheng* . . . into the ‘outer arena’ of race and nation” as wisdom that “resided within . . . Chinese people themselves.”<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Hilary Smith, *Forgotten Disease: Illnesses Transformed in Chinese Medicine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 87.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 116–7.

<sup>76</sup> “Jiaoqi Beriberi” 腳氣, *Qiba qi kan* 汽巴期刊 [Ciba quarterly journal] 5 (1936): 248.

<sup>77</sup> Alexander R. Bay, *Beriberi in Modern Japan: The Making of a National Disease* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>78</sup> Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity*, 253.

Chinese wisdom dictated that preventing and curing beriberi required the individual to adopt humble, clean, and frugal practices in their dietary habits. Doctors in 1915 found that where rice was “grown, husked, and pounded locally” without steam milling and polishing, beriberi cases were nonexistent, even as towns a hundred miles away experienced epidemics.<sup>79</sup> “Curing *jiaoqi* is not difficult,” wrote Jiang Tiyuan in 1935, “people who have the disease should not eat rice that is too white, and instead substitute with soy, wheat, or eggs, which are higher in Vitamin B.”<sup>80</sup> As *jiaoqi* had been a disease associated with progress and decadent lifestyles, prevention methods were even more approachable. The cookbook *Yinshi yu jiankang* 飲食與健康 (Food and health) blamed recent civilization for people’s inability to fight off germs and viruses—“cars and horses have decreased our exercise opportunities, and food has become more intricately processed which disrupts the nutrition we should have.”<sup>81</sup> In fact, nutritional researchers found that urban Shanghai workers who preferred “polished rice” had worse nutrition than farmers and embodied how prosperity “corrupted traditional customs.” They argued that “it was time for the city to learn from the country.”<sup>82</sup>

*Yinshi yu jiankang* urged its readers to shift their goals away from achieving financial wealth and instead towards maintaining health. Communities around the country were lauded for efforts to eat and promote modest diets. At Yenching University, domestic management students’ experimentations with low-cost diets “heeded the demands of their discipline and their country as they . . . acted in practical ways to translate scientific ideas of nutrition to Chinese conditions.”<sup>83</sup> An article on student nutrition criticized the dietary habits in wealthy southern towns (eating polished rice, “unthinkingly” filling up on rice porridge) for rendering *jiaoqi* affliction inevitable, and encouraged them to add coarse grains, soybeans, and eggs. The article even brought back the north-south divide over differences in dietary preference and nutrition, reiterating that beriberi’s causes had long been understood.<sup>84</sup> The “ancient art” of Chinese nutrition offered the answers, even as the rest of the world had only recently begun to recognize the importance of vitamins.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, being prompted to recover from *jiaoqi* could, and should, also push the sufferer to make some additional lifestyle changes for better hygiene overall. If the individual could afford the expense, he or she should “relocate to recuperate” to a dwelling with dry air and good ventilation and sunlight.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, to address the various different understandings of *jiaoqi* by readers who were perhaps perplexed about how exactly to combat the disease, answers in *Weisheng yue kan*’s regular column “Hygiene Q and A” (*Weisheng wenda* 衛生問

---

<sup>79</sup> “China Medical Missionary Conference,” *The British Medical Journal* (1915): 809.

<sup>80</sup> Jiang Tiyuan, “Jiaoqi bing de zhengzhuang zhiliao ji qi yufang fangfa” 腳氣病的症狀治療及其預防方法 [Symptoms, treatment, and prevention methods of *jiaoqi*], *Weisheng yue kan* 5, no 12 (December 1935): 38.

<sup>81</sup> Zhang, *Yinshi yu jiankang*, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Swislocki, *Culinary Nostalgia*, 187.

<sup>83</sup> Schneider, *Keeping the Nation’s House*, 138.

<sup>84</sup> Wang Chengfa, “Xuesheng yingyang weisheng wenti” 學生營養衛生問題 [The problem of nutritional hygiene for students], *Shiyan weisheng qi kan* 實驗衛生期刊 [Experimental hygiene quarterly journal] 1, no. 3–4 (1943): 19.

<sup>85</sup> Jia-Chen Fu, *The Other Milk: Reinventing Soy in Republican China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018), 47.

<sup>86</sup> Jiang, “Jiaoqi Bing de zhengzhuang zhiliao ji qi yufang fangfa,” 38.

答) reassured readers that regardless of what type of *jiaoqi* they had encountered or were trying to prevent (dry, wet, acute, malignant), their target diet should contain soy, vegetables, and lemons, their housing should be clean, sunny, and ventilated, and they should “avoid physical and psychological labor.”<sup>87</sup> Should individuals in charge of public spaces such as schools or prisons find a *jiaoqi* patient, wrote Jiang, they should immediately improve the communal diet, and replace white rice with soy and wheat products to prevent further instances, while improving overall sanitation of the facilities.<sup>88</sup> These written discussions about such a disease explained away common fears with attainable hygienic solutions and underscored the ease of behavioral change.

Thus, change for better *jiaoqi* prevention would come from within. This encouragement perfectly aligned with the launch of Chiang Kai-shek’s New Life Movement in 1934, for which Chinese citizens were expected to embrace ancient virtues of propriety and righteousness in every aspect of their lives.<sup>89</sup> Above other tenets, the Movement’s teachings’ resonance with contemporary currents in Chinese society was loudest with the kitchen hygiene reformists. Chiang’s “Guidelines of the New Life Movement,” published in newspapers around the country in May 1934, advised readers that “eating utensils should be clean and food should be washed; one should eat local produce.”<sup>90</sup> A series of cartoon panels in the *New Life Movement Weekly* magazine (*Xinshenghuo zhou kan* 新生活週刊) neatly summed up the teachings of kitchen hygiene to date: “do not drink raw water, do not eat unclean fruit in the summer, do not eat junk food.”<sup>91</sup> Cleanliness, frugality, and rationality for kitchen hygiene were united under the banner of New Life with government endorsement.

Women were both the architects and targets of New Life kitchen hygiene efforts. As an extension of the New Life Movement’s socially-driven grassroots mobilization efforts, the New Life Movement Women Service Committee of Nanjing trained 4,500 women and girls from middle school students to government employees to become kitchen hygiene trainers at recruitment agencies for domestic staff.<sup>92</sup> New Life women’s organizations’ work in kitchen hygiene improvement also capitalized on their foundational professional and disciplinary training in domestic management. Guidelines produced by the organizations

---

<sup>87</sup> “Weisheng wenda” 衛生問答 [Hygiene Q and A], *Weisheng yue kan* 1934: 18.

<sup>88</sup> Jiang, “Jiaoqi bing de zhengzhuang zhiliao ji qi yufang fangfa,” 39.

<sup>89</sup> See Federica Ferlanti’s studies of the importance and success of the Movement’s lasting impact on Chinese society and its institutions as crucial for wartime mobilization. Federica Ferlanti, “The New Life Movement at War: Wartime Mobilisation and State Control in Chongqing and Chengdu, 1938-1942,” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 11 (2012): 187-212. Federica Ferlanti, “The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934-1938,” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5 (2010): 961-1000.

<sup>90</sup> Chiang Kai-shek, “Xinshenghuo guize” 新生活規則 [Guidelines of the New Life Movement], *Shanxi gongbao* 山西公報 [Public Bulletin of Shanxi], 1934.

<sup>91</sup> “Xinshenghuo yundong tu jie” 新生活運動圖解 [Pictorial explanations of the New Life Movement], *Xinshenghuo zhou kan* 新生活週刊 [New life weekly] 1, no. 10 (1934): 1.

<sup>92</sup> “Amah-Education Nanjing Plan,” *The China Press*, 17 July 1936. Even within Jiangxi, the New Life Corps were “independently established organizations.” While all mandated to spread New Life ideas, there were variations and different adaptations. Ferlanti, “The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province,” 975.

from the late 1930s and early 1940s defined “cleanliness” as more than just washing one’s own body or cleaning public places, and more reminiscent of the Pasteurian hygienists’ all-round combat against impropriety. As kitchen hygiene experts, women could monitor the work of others. As domestic management educators, they could publish textbooks for general consumption. And, as housewives, women were expected to not only provide and prepare nourishing foods for their families, but also understand how to leverage the foods’ nutritional values to suit the needs of their family members’, and by extension, the needs of the nation.<sup>93</sup>

The perfect food that conformed to the ideals of the New Life Movement was the humble soybean. The soybean (and the economic potential of its industrialized production) had been a steadfast companion of China’s modernization, praised and even coveted by those in the West as a technologically-advanced innovation by the 1910s.<sup>94</sup> Abundantly produced in China, the superfood was locally sourced and higher in calories, protein, and fats than the imported potato.<sup>95</sup> Testing in the laboratories at the Peking Union Medical College throughout the 1910s and 1920s confirmed that soy milk could be exclusively used to feed infants, an excellent alternative to cows’ milk. Thus, the production of soybean milk and the improvement of nutrition for orphans and refugee children became something for which China could also take a global lead.<sup>96</sup>

While soy’s versatility and its links to Chinese innovation and pride were made clear, especially by the 1930s, it was the fact that soybeans were inexpensive that really made them popular to dietary hygiene reformists as a key food source. As early as 1905, Li Shizeng, a Chinese scientist and tofu entrepreneur in Paris, argued that soy milk would be the great class equalizer for nutrition. Poorer drinkers of soy milk would be able to receive all its nutritional benefits without having to pay the premium for cow’s milk, for which higher costs



**Figure 5.** “Mother, this soy bean milk, that the nurse gives me [sic] tastes good.” Source: Photographs from the Peking First Health Station, Rockefeller Archive Center. Sleepy Hollow, NY.

<sup>93</sup> Schneider, *Keeping the Nation’s House*, 42–44.

<sup>94</sup> Fu, *The Other Milk*, 33.

<sup>95</sup> Ying Ming, “Huangdou de yingyang jiazhi” 黃豆的營養價值 [The nutritional value of soybeans], *Weisheng zazhi* 衛生雜誌 [Health magazine] 4, no. 2 (1936): 25.

<sup>96</sup> Julean Arnold, “The Soybean ‘Cow’ – of China,” *The China Press*, 9 March 1940.



were attributed to sourcing and processing.<sup>97</sup> The price of a quart of soy milk and two “bean dreg cakes,” enough nutrition for one day for an adult, “would cost about the equivalent of a 2 cent American postage stamp.”<sup>98</sup> Soy milk, more uniformly produced in factories, was in fact more hygienic than cow’s milk, which needed to be carefully pasteurized.<sup>99</sup> Chinese children had been drinking soy milk for thousands of years, one writer claimed, and as a result, rickets, rampant among foreign children, was hardly seen in China.<sup>100</sup> Some newspaper editorials even suggested that it was a good alternative to breast milk.<sup>101</sup> Foreign doctors in China, on furlough back home in the United States, hosted information sessions about the “complete protein food” that “sustains growth” to captive housewife audiences.<sup>102</sup> An overseas Chinese man in Malaya who sold bean sprouts to his fellow compatriots attracted the attention of British authorities, and won acclaim for developing a product that was clean, affordable, and nutritious.<sup>103</sup> Not only important to Chinese people within national borders, the soybean in fact began to connect Chinese around the world, and elevated the status of the entire race as creative and humane food technologists. Soybean products became intricately linked to Chinese innovation, scientific progress, and nationalistic welfare.

By the mid-1930s, kitchen hygiene reformists, nutrition advocates, soybean entrepreneurs, and the New Life Movement met at an intersection, symbiotically promoting the themes of frugality, cleanliness, devotion to the nation, and bodily strength. Initiatives from the 1920s gained national legitimization under the New Life Movement. In fact, according to contemporary writers, it was imperative that communal eating norms be dismantled in favor of splitting food into individual portions or enforcing the use of hygienic chopsticks. If not, picky Chinese diners would not get enough diverse nutritional hygiene and the nation would also generate more food waste, directly contradicting Chiang’s stated New Life directive that eating should be “to sustain life.”<sup>104</sup> In other words, kitchen and food hygiene reforms over the past decades built the foundations on which the New Life Movement was even possible. Cholera, tuberculosis, and beriberi could all be defeated through the proscribed tangible and ideologically coherent methods.

## Wartime Nutrition as the Tiger Returns

As the Japanese military occupied large areas along China’s east coast starting in 1937, massive inland migration led to crowding and difficulties in the supply chain for food.

---

<sup>97</sup> Ying, “Huangdou de Yingyang Jiazhi.”

<sup>98</sup> Arnold, “The Soybean ‘Cow.’”

<sup>99</sup> Fu, *The Other Milk*, 36.

<sup>100</sup> Xiao Dongfeng, “Doujiang bi niuru hao” 豆漿比牛乳好 [Soy milk is better than cow’s milk], *Funv jie* 婦女界 [Women’s world] 2, no. 10 (1941): 8.

<sup>101</sup> “Doujiang ke dai rennai” 豆漿可代人奶 [Soy milk can replace human milk], *Xinghua* 32, no. 20 (1935): 19–20. “Na doujiang lai dai renru” 拿豆漿代替人乳 [Use soy milk as a replacement for human milk], *Jiaoyu duanbo* 教育短報 [Short newspaper of education] 27 (1935): 18.

<sup>102</sup> “Women Told Food Value of Soybean: Dr. Webber Says It Excels Milk, Meat,” *The China Press*, 20 January 1937.

<sup>103</sup> Ying, “Huangdou de yingyang jiazhi.”

<sup>104</sup> Wang, “Weisheng changshi: Gongshi zhi e’xi,” 12.

While China's interior was able to begin producing a range of crops as the government and entire cities moved west and southwest, certain imported and coastally-produced foods became difficult to source.<sup>105</sup> The government stepped in to curb grain price increases and to ensure that troops and government personnel were fed, but changes had to be made in the compositions of their diets.<sup>106</sup> Cholera, typhoid, other gastrointestinal diseases, and nutritional deficiencies once again posed tremendous threats.

Large-scale vaccination drives and sanitation efforts were established early on. After an outbreak of cholera in July 1939 killed around two hundred people near Hualong Bridge in Chongqing, the wartime capital city, epidemic prevention teams rushed to set up provisional cholera hospitals and emergency treatment stations in the area, and set disinfection squads to the river to make sure the drinking water was properly sanitized.<sup>107</sup> Chongqing authorized a number of institutions to act as quarantine stations and enforcement agencies, and to issue certificates to people and vehicles once they were cleared. The staff—one doctor, one to three nurses, two to four assistants, and one support worker—were given vaccines, supplies, and diagnostic instructions to differentiate between infectious disease and food poisoning cases. Workers on ferries, cars, and public transportation were required to be checked for disease and instructed to examine their passengers and check for quarantine clearance certificates. Every water source used for public consumption was to have a sanitation team of one or two people who would add chlorine at least once a day and eliminate any fly larvae.<sup>108</sup> In addition, authorities understood the necessity of vaccinating widely, and early. Fortunately, Chongqing's cholera numbers during the war years were kept mostly low—in 1941, only seven cases were reported after the city vaccinated 150,000 people. By 1944 the Chongqing government could no longer meet all its vaccination targets because of wartime limitations, but the initial rapid efforts “averted disaster.”<sup>109</sup>

Preventive infrastructural efforts and vaccination drives had not been enough to curb cholera completely in the 1910s, and were definitely insufficient in the 1940s. Even the aforementioned government guidelines urged that to successfully and practically target both military and civilian populations, a concerted promotion effort must be made based on the “central themes” of food hygiene: “how to kill germs in food, simple ways to prevent flies, drink boiled water,” and others. Local governments were encouraged to launch “cholera prevention” and “hygiene campaign” weeks in collaboration with various local organizations,

---

<sup>105</sup> “The Wartime Food-Supply Situation in China,” *Foreign Agriculture* 8, no. 5 (1943): 102.

<sup>106</sup> Jin Pusen, “To Feed a Country at War: China's Supply and Consumption of Grain During the War of Resistance,” in *China in the Anti-Japanese War 1937-1945: Politics, Culture and Society*, ed. David P. Barrett and Larry N. Shyu (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 157-69.

<sup>107</sup> “Chongqing shi weisheng ji fangyi” 重慶市衛生及防疫 [Hygiene and disease prevention in Chongqing], July 1939. KMT Archives/003/0240.

<sup>108</sup> National Health Administration Guidelines, “Fangzhi huoluan shishi banfa” 防治霍亂實施辦法 [Practical methods for cholera prevention], 1940. AH028/3162A.

<sup>109</sup> Nicole Barnes and John Watt, “The Influence of War on China's Modern Health Systems,” in *Medical Transitions in Twentieth-Century China*, ed. Bridie Andrews and Mary Brown Bullock (Bloomington: Indiana University press, 2014), 237.

including medical bodies, New Life Movement chapters, and military organizations.<sup>110</sup> The Eight Route Army, in the Communist Party's base area in Shaanxi, set up its own army medical department which directed the digging of deep latrines and outfitting all kitchen windows with fly screens.<sup>111</sup> Telegrams in Chiang Kai-shek's own name were sent to military commanders around the country to remind "soldiers and officers to not drink or use raw water to prevent cholera."<sup>112</sup>

The collaboration of a variety of agencies was especially important; in 1942, the Ministry of Social Affairs released an urgent memo regarding "society's non-cooperation" with its business affairs administration, denouncing Kuomintang party members' employment of gang-related criminal methods in the purchase and distribution of cholera vaccinations. Because of vaccine shortages (due to production, distribution, and corruption issues), it was thus even more important for groups and individuals to know about how to prevent cholera for themselves. The Ministry, along with the Health Administration, urged "groups" to disinfect drinking water, educate cooks on disinfection methods, and provide serving chopsticks for group meals. Individuals also had the responsibility to get vaccinated, not allow flies near food, and boil water before drinking.<sup>113</sup>

The central government sought to ensure that knowledge about the dangers of an outbreak of a disease like cholera, in addition to constant reminders of warfare, was top of mind. May 25, 1943 was designated as a city-wide cleaning campaign day. In the spirit of the Fuzhou and Shanghai cholera parades, the health bureau of Chongqing prepared posters, coordinated promotional teams equipped with loudspeakers, and vaccination vans. This campaign required active participation from all residents to reach certain cleaning goals.<sup>114</sup> A key goal of the event, according to the host organization the Ministry of Education, was so that "promotion and real life need to be closely aligned," such that participation in hygiene competitions must be seen as a form of wartime service itself. For mass vaccinations and promotional materials to have their maximum impact for "increasing wartime strength," hygiene promotion needed to be practical.<sup>115</sup>

Mass-participation cleaning campaigns were common in wartime China in a variety of different public spaces, as refugees, schools, government apparatuses, and intellectual resources moved westward. For all such campaigns, multi-media promotional materials were widely encouraged by sponsoring government bodies. Songs, posters, lectures, and news articles were all valuable resources. Based on the National Health Administration guidelines,

---

<sup>110</sup> "Fangzhi huoluan shishi banfa."

<sup>111</sup> John R. Watt, *Saving Lives in Wartime China: How Medical Reformers Built Modern Healthcare Systems Amid War and Epidemics, 1928-1945* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 264.

<sup>112</sup> "Jiang Shongzheng dian Yan Xishan qianfang zhanxian guanbing yanjin yong shengliang zhi shui" 蔣中正電閻錫山前方官兵嚴禁用生涼之水 [Chiang Kai-shek's Telegram to Yan Xishan that front line soldiers and officers are prohibited from using cold raw water], 4 October 1937. AH116/135A/004.

<sup>113</sup> "Fangzhi huoluan shishi banfa."

<sup>114</sup> "Chongqing xialing weisheng yundong" 重慶下令衛生運動 [Summer hygiene campaign in Chongqing], 27 May 1943. SHAC 5/1925 (3).

<sup>115</sup> "Chongqing xialing weisheng yundong."

“Each central theme can be expressed through variations of different slogans . . . they can be posted to dining places, public transport stations, and other appropriate sites.”<sup>116</sup> Posters educating the public about the dangers of cholera appeared around Chongqing. One poster shows a fly with a Japanese Rising Sun emblem, with slogans on the side reading “We need to prevent cholera and kill flies: and if you want to survive, kill the Japanese soldiers . . . If you don’t kill it, it will kill you.”<sup>117</sup> In another image, a fly is depicted as a fighter jet that drops bombs labeled “cholera” onto a crowd of people. Numerous other flies are lined up behind the first.<sup>118</sup> A picture of two missiles heading towards a populated Chongqing was captioned, “Air raids are scary, cholera is scarier!”<sup>119</sup>

Was the sudden resurgence of cholera in crowded wartime environments, and government reaction through mass vaccination and education campaigns, proof that not enough had been done to prepare the Chinese public in their daily lives? If the number of cholera cases in a major city like Chongqing had really dropped to seven in the entire year of 1941, perhaps the joint efforts of vaccination, sanitation, and increased public awareness were really making a difference.<sup>120</sup> The mass



© 2018 Historical Photographs of China

**Figure 6.** “If you do not kill it, it will kill you.” Source: Historical Photographs of China, University of Bristol, <https://www.hpcbristol.net/visual/bi-s165>.

<sup>116</sup> “Fangzhi huoluan shishi banfa.”

<sup>117</sup> “Anti-Japanese Public Hygiene Banner,” circa 1938. University of Bristol – Historical Photographs of China collection/Bi-s165. <https://www.hpcbristol.net/visual/bi-s165>

<sup>118</sup> “Weishengshu yifang bibao” 衛生署醫防壁報 [National Health Administration posters about medicine and defence]. KMT Archives 502/90.

<sup>119</sup> “Jiaoyubu guanyu gaohao qingjie weisheng fangfan huoluan shanghan he fenfa yimiao yaopin yu geji xuexiao wanglai wenshu” 教育部關於搞好清潔衛生防範霍亂傷寒和分發疫苗藥品與各級學校往來文書 [Ministry of Education communications with various schools regarding sending cholera and typhoid medications and hygiene work], 1943. SHAC 5/1925(1).

<sup>120</sup> Mary Augusta Brazelton’s monograph on mass vaccination in 20th century China discusses mass vaccination as a unique wartime feature of China’s public health infrastructure, but concedes that it was strict quarantine, not new pharmaceuticals, that was most effective at curbing cholera. Mary Augusta Brazelton, *Mass Vaccination: Citizens’ Bodies and State Power in Modern China* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 23.

migration into internal China brought refugees and crowding, but also educated personnel from China's cities. The "émigré intellectuals" at the National Southwestern Associated University, a provisional wartime campus in Kunming incorporating students and staff of several Beijing-area universities, launched their own crusade for "local betterment" through a fly extermination campaign when they realized that their local business proprietors did not hold their restaurants to the same high levels of hygiene standards.<sup>121</sup>

While the government's public campaigns began a renewed effort for public sanitation and cholera-prevention, they could not be separated from continued calls to pay attention to both nutrition and frugality in the kitchen, all neatly all falling under the "dietary hygiene" umbrella. The municipal health bureau of Chongqing established its "nutritional hygiene consultation station" at the site of the capital post office, which administered advice and grain provisions as well as health check-ups and vaccinations.<sup>122</sup> The Chongqing Health Bureau held a series of "Nutrition Advancement Movement" exhibitions in 1941, collaborating with local universities and factories, and the local New Life Movement model district. Attendees could watch plays, attend lectures, see farming displays from universities, and participate in mass performances of songs written for the occasion. The motto of the longest campaign held from May 5 to 8 was clearly influenced by wartime messaging: "we must spend little money and eat well" (*huaqian yao shao, chi de yao hao* 花錢要少, 吃的要好). "To nourish bodies and maintain health we do not need expensive foods. Rather, there are many excellent common [modest] foods, which are also nourishing." Suggestions for substituting tofu and peanut oil for animal products were made into catchy rhymes and became part of the promotional material. If



Figure 7. "Special Issue on Nutrition; Nutritional Song." Source: Academia Historical Archives, Taipei, Taiwan.

<sup>121</sup> John Israel, *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), Chapter 3.

<sup>122</sup> "Ben shu yingyang gongzuo baogao'an" 本署營養工作報告案 [Nutritional work report of the National Health Administration], 1941. AH028/3166A.

participants followed the Movement's guidelines for making "bean dregs pancakes," they could also achieve something unheard of during wartime—helping their children become "plump."<sup>123</sup>

After the success of the May events, the National Hygiene Laboratory also announced its training of dietary managers (*shanshi guanli yuan* 善食管理員) in nutrition basics, environmental hygiene, kitchen sanitation, food management, and other topics for respective workplaces, reinstated during wartime. In keeping with the National Health Administration's recommendation to promote "common foods" (*tongsu shipin* 通俗食品) and a do-it-yourself attitude during wartime, the Ministry of Agriculture's experimental department produced a booklet of simple recipes of "everyday foods" (*richang shipin* 日常食品) with categories for "beans," "vegetables," and "pickles," among others.<sup>124</sup> Chiang Kai-shek's own simple diet—"mostly made up of vegetables with very little fish and meat"—was held up as a patriotic example at the celebrations for the seventh anniversary of the launch of the New Life Movement in 1941; the same event also featured an agricultural produce competition in which university and school teams showcased how they could easily mill flour or process soy sauce and sugar.<sup>125</sup> In Guangzhou, the YWCA organized a weeklong "Nutritional Cafeteria" (*yingyang shitang* 營養食堂) in February 1943, an exhibition and educational campaign demonstrating the innovation and the nutritional and monetary value of soybeans as a valuable food source.<sup>126</sup>

Wartime conditions required an overhaul of recipe and cooking guides that had been circulating in Chinese society. The commercial abundance of health products, supplements, and luxury food items of previous decades helped to instill and foster awareness of nutrition, but it is doubtful that the products advertised in various health publications were used widely, especially after supply lines were disrupted. Government agencies, charities, and other institutions became sources for nutritional advice; a father of a five-year-old with nutritional deficiencies wrote to ask the Chongqing Bureau of Health if there were any cheaper alternatives to fish liver oil, as it was too expensive to consume during wartime.<sup>127</sup> More than sixty thousand pamphlets were produced by the National Health Administration to be distributed around Chongqing, including twenty thousand copies of "Methods to make up for nutritional deficiencies in soldiers during wartime."<sup>128</sup> The emphasis in food and cooking guides changed from glorifying variety to underscoring frugality.

---

<sup>123</sup> "Yingyang gaijin yundong dahui Jiemu" 營養改進運動大會節目 [Program of the Nutritional Advancement Movement meeting], 1941. AH/028/3170A/Youguan yingyang wenti shijian'an 有關營養問題事件案 [Documents regarding nutrition issue].

<sup>124</sup> "Shiwu yingyang an" 食物營養案 [Documents on food nutrition], 1944. AH028/3173A.

<sup>125</sup> "Xinshenghuo yundong qizhounian jinian: Jinian shouce" 新生活運動七週年紀念：紀念手冊 [7th Anniversary of the New Life Movement Program Booklet], 1941. AH017/21763A.

<sup>126</sup> "Shi huangdou yundong" 食黃豆運動 [Eating Soybeans Movement], *Qianxian ribao* 前線日報 [Front lines daily], 26 February 1943.

<sup>127</sup> "Youguan yingyang wenti shijian an."

<sup>128</sup> "Weishengshu yingyang gongzuo baogao" 衛生署營養工作報告 [Report on nutrition work of the National Health Administration], 1941. AH028/3166A.

Innovation in food and dietary advice also fostered rational interest in personal health and its implications for the national war effort. Like American and British counterparts, the Chinese Ministry of Food turned to innovation to produce dehydrated food products—“soup powder, crystallized soy sauce . . . corn bricks, wheat bricks”—for both army and general population use.<sup>129</sup> The Refugee Children’s Committee, a private organization formed in 1937 to provide nutrition relief in Shanghai, adapted its recipes for soy milk and “bean dregs cakes” to be used in individual homes. Spurred by the influx of refugees into Shanghai after 1937, the Committee and its successor, the national China Nutritional Aid Council, “scientifically” transformed soybeans from a cheap ingredient to the best source of both nutrition and a tool for hygiene education.<sup>130</sup> By 1940, the Council had expanded its operations to six distribution centers in the Chinese interior, with financial aid from the international charity organizations as well as the Chinese government.<sup>131</sup>

To a large extent, the promotion and popularization of soy milk and other “common foods” during and at the start of the New Life Movement both helped, and was made possible by, charitable work to provide food for China’s refugees. But despite clear plans and sufficient support for such work, Chinese “nutritional activists” during wartime still found themselves facing issues of supply. While soybeans, vegetables, and other cheaper foodstuffs had been promoted widely, wartime shortages made the provision of some products often unsustainable. Arthur N. Young of the China Nutritional Aid Council wrote to the food administration in Chongqing and the Council’s plans for producing “soy milk powder” hit a barrier when its flour provision by the government was suddenly cut in half.<sup>132</sup> The Ministry of Food, established in 1940 to facilitate food distribution during the war, received petitions from Chongqing’s Chin Tong Street Municipal Hospital, the Chongqing Food Supply Office, and the Association for the Advancement of Children’s Nutrition for bags of flour to mix with the soy bean powder they already had.<sup>133</sup> Nutritional reformists acted now on two fronts—charity to make up for nutritional deficiencies for the most vulnerable members of society, and also continuing their public education initiatives to ensure that Chinese families could replicate “scientific nutrition” in their own households. While independent organizations and reformists took leading roles in nutrition-related projects as the war continued, and the central government seemed to refocus its efforts on epidemic prevention, both sets of efforts largely went hand in hand. The government-sponsored nutrition campaigns, in addition, were clear signs that the individual kitchen became simultaneously a space for sanitation, nutrition, war effort contributions, and general

---

<sup>129</sup> Diana Lary, *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 123.

<sup>130</sup> Fu, *The Other Milk*, 150-1.

<sup>131</sup> “Soy Milk to Improve Physique of Chinese Race,” *The China Press*, 7 June 1940.

<sup>132</sup> Arthur N Young to Hsu Kan, “Zhongguo yingyang cujin hui liang juan” 中國營養促進糧卷 [Grain provision for China Nutritional Aid Council], March 1944. AH119/8052A.

<sup>133</sup> Zhongguo ertong yingyang cujin hui 中國兒童營養促進會 [Chinese Association for the Improvement of Children’s Nutrition] to Ministry of Food, May 1942. AH119/1780A.

progress. The war had accelerated the urgency for implementing more kitchen hygiene and nutrition developments, but the infrastructure, interest, and popular and commercial activities were already abundant.

## Conclusion

In late 1945 and early 1946, representatives from China were invited to join the advisory council of the Sussex-based International Nutrition Institute and to send a delegation to a food technology conference at the New York-based Institute for Food Technologies. The central government also responded quickly to requests from the League of Nations to share food and agricultural production information.<sup>134</sup> China was now a recognized and important participant in nutritional hygiene and dietary technological innovation, not to mention a respected member of the victorious Allies. In addition, cholera prevention and treatment methods seemed to become efficiently streamlined, and overall cases diminished. In this immediate postwar period, new guides published for dietary hygiene reflected possibilities for a new type of scientific and cosmopolitan ideal kitchen in peacetime. In 1946, the Commercial Press translated a dietary guide intended for “achieving the urban, middle-class and above experience.” The author chastised the previous generation of nutrition experts, who, fearful that industrial advances would take away foods’ precious natural value, “bitterly” directed everyone to return to unprocessed, “ancient foods” (*yuanshi shipin* 原始食品). Doing so, the author wrote, “would bring us to dismiss all of our development and return to barbarism.” With vitamin synthesis, the author argued that human progress need not be confined to nor hindered by rigid dietary restrictions but should allow for flexibility and experimentation.<sup>135</sup> A faculty member from the National Central University chemistry department and experienced nutrition columnist wrote that instead of using specific products as emergency supplements for unhealthy persons, the pursuit of nutrition should be part of everyday life, three meals a day.<sup>136</sup> A product like soy milk would now need to find a place within everyday Chinese diets as a healthy addition to prevent “endemic nutritional deficiencies.”<sup>137</sup>

In much the same way, the practices of drinking hot, boiled water and using fly screens became basic household habits, the former a particular source of cultural distinction and pride even in modern-day China, where vacuum-sealed thermoses are ubiquitous. Today, cholera is neither top of mind nor politically relevant. The most common explanation about why the Chinese drink boiled water is that they have been doing it for 4,000 years, with hardly any mention about the quality of the available water in Chinese households, disease prevention, or socio-political implications. In spite of the absence of public historical

---

<sup>134</sup> Institute of Food Technologists to Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, September 1945. International Nutrition Institute to Chinese Embassy (London), August 1946. AH028/3174A.

<sup>135</sup> Inoue Kaneo and Zhu Jianxia (trans.), *Yangsheng xue yaolun* 養生學要論 [Essentials of Health] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1946).

<sup>136</sup> Zheng, *Shiyong yingyang xue*, 3-4.

<sup>137</sup> Fu, *The Other Milk*, 180.



knowledge about the practice's recent history, the universal drinking of boiled water has become an example of national virtue-signaling and expectations of Chinese citizenry, in many ways similar to how soybeans were to be consumed in the 1930s. With this uniform practice, China had continued to take the lead on kitchen hygiene innovation through mythologizing and appropriating supposed ancient, yet "scientific," wisdom. The path to victory of the Chinese over its long-standing enemies: cholera, *jiaoqi*, tuberculosis, and the Japanese, was self-evident, cost efficient, and would increase national strength in the face of adversity. More importantly, it allowed each individual to become part of scientific innovation through pursuing a hygienic and nutritious kitchen space.

### **Author Bio**

Sarah Yu is a PhD Candidate in History at the University of Pennsylvania, completing a dissertation titled "Hygiene and Daily Life in Republican China, 1911-1945." Her research and teaching interests are in 20<sup>th</sup> century China and the Chinese diaspora, public health, hygiene, migration, and global-local partnerships. She was the recipient for the Hopkinson Fellowship for Excellence from the University of Pennsylvania in 2018, the Association of Asian Studies Best Graduate Student Paper Prize from the China and Inner Asia Council in 2019, and the Penn Communication Within the Curriculum Critical Speaking Fellowship for 2021-2022.

She obtained an MPhil in History from the University of Hong Kong and a BA in History and International Relations from Brown University. Follow Sarah: Twitter @SarahXiaYu and blog [www.hygienicchinahistory.wordpress.com](http://www.hygienicchinahistory.wordpress.com).

### **Bibliography**

Andrews, Bridie and Mary Brown Bullock, eds. *Medical Transitions in Twentieth-Century China*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Barrett, David P. and Larry N. Shyu, eds. *China in the Anti-Japanese War 1937-1945: Politics, Culture and Society*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Bay, Alexander R. *Beriberi in Modern Japan: The Making of a National Disease*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012.

Bégin, Camille. *Taste of the Nation: The New Deal Search for America's Food*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Brazelton, Mary Augusta. *Mass Vaccination: Citizens' Bodies and State Power in Modern China*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019.

Chen, Yong. *Chop Suey, USA: The Story of Chinese Food in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

*China Medical Journal* (Shanghai), 1917–1920. *The China Press* (Shanghai), 1921–1940.

Council on Health Education. “Weisheng tu hua” 衛生圖話 [Health picture talks]. *Zhonghua weisheng jiaoyuhui xiao congshu zhi sanshier m m* [Council on Health Education reference books no. 32]. Shanghai: YMCA Press at No 4. Kunshan Road, [undated].

Crook, Tom. *Governing Systems: Modernity and the Making of Public Health in England, 1830–1910*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016.

Ferlanti, Federica. “The New Life Movement at War: Wartime Mobilisation and State Control in Chongqing and Chengdu, 1938–1942.” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 11. 2012): 187–212. DOI: 10.1163/15700615-20121104.

---. “The New Life Movement in Jiangxi Province, 1934–1938.” *Modern Asian Studies* 44, no. 5. 2010): 961–1000. DOI: 10.1017/S0026749X0999028X.

Fu, Jia-Chen. *The Other Milk: Reinventing Soy in Republican China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2018.

*Funv Jie* 婦女界 [Women’s world], 1941.

Hamlin, Christopher. *Cholera: The Biography*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Hanson, Marta. *Speaking of Epidemics in Chinese Medicine: Disease and the Geographic Imagination in Late Imperial China*. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012.

Hay, William Howard. *Health via Food: Sun-Diet way to Health*. East Aurora: Sun-Diet Health Foundation. 1933.

*Health* (Shanghai), 1924–1926.

Hillier, S. M. and J. A. Jewell, *Health Care and Traditional Medicine in China 1800–1982*. London: Routledge, 1983.

Hu Huafeng. *Jiachang weisheng pengtiao zhinan* 家常衛生烹調指南 [Home Hygienic Cooking Guide]. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1932.

- Inoue Kaneo. *Yangsheng xue yao lun* 養生學要論 [Essentials of health]. Trans. Zhu Jianxia. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1946.
- Israel, John. *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Jackson, Isabella. *Shaping Modern Shanghai: Colonialism in China's Global City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Latour, Bruno. *The Pasteurization of France*. Trans. Alan Sheridan and John Law. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Lary, Diana. *The Chinese People at War: Human Suffering and Social Transformation, 1937-1945*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Lei, Sean Hsiang-lin. "Habituating Individuality: The Framing of Tuberculosis and Its Material Solutions in Republican China." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 84, no. 2. Summer 2010: 248-279. DOI: 10.1353/bhm.0.0351.
- Nakajima, Chieko. *Body, Society, and the Modern State: The Creation of Public Health and Urban Culture in Shanghai*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018.
- Neizheng gongbao* 內政公報 [Ministry of the Interior Bulletin] (Nanjing), 1928-1937.
- Peter, William Wesley. *Broadcasting Health in China: The Field and Methods of Public Health Work in the Missionary Enterprise*. Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1926.
- Roberts, J.A.G. *China to Chinatown: Chinese Food in the West*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.
- Rogaski, Ruth. *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.
- Quchu wencang yundong* 驅除蚊蒼運動 [Fly elimination campaign]. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1934.
- Schneider, Helen. *Keeping the Nation's House: Domestic Management and the Making of Modern China*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011.

*Shiyan Weisheng Qi Kan* 實驗衛生期刊 [Experimental hygiene quarterly journal] (Kunming), 1943.

Smith, Hilary. *Forgotten Disease: Illnesses Transformed in Chinese Medicine*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017.

Smith, Virginia. *Clean: A History of Personal Hygiene and Purity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Sutphen, Mary P. "Not What, but Where: Bubonic Plague and the Reception of Germ Theories in Hong Kong and Calcutta, 1894-1897." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 51, no. 1. (Jan 1997): 81-133. DOI: 10.1093/jhmas/52.1.81.

Swislocki, Mark. *Culinary Nostalgia: Regional Food Culture and the Culinary Experience in Shanghai*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009.

Watt, John R. *Saving Lives in Wartime China: How Medical Reformers Built Modern Healthcare Systems Amid War and Epidemics, 1928-1945*. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

*Weisheng yue kan* 衛生月刊 [Health monthly] (Shanghai), 1934-1936.

*Xinshenghuo zhou kan* 新生活週刊 [New life weekly], 1934.

*Xing hua* 興華 [Chinese Christian advocate], 1934.

Zhang Enting, *Yin shi yu jiankang* 飲食與健康 [Food and health]. Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1936.

Zheng Ji, *Shiyong yingyang xue* 實用營養學 [Practical nutrition studies]. Nanjing: Zhengzhong Shuju: 1947).

## Archives Consulted

Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, NY.

China Medical Board Inc, FA065.

Rockefeller Foundation Records, China Medica Board Records, RG4.

International Health Division, RG4/Series 601.

International Health Division, RG 5/Series 601

Second Historical Archive of the People's Republic of China, Nanjing, China.  
Ministry of Interior files, 1001.  
Ministry of Education files, 5/1925, 5/1927.

Academia Historica, Taipei, Taiwan.  
Archives of Yan Xishan, 116.  
Executive Yuan, National Health Administration, 028.  
Ministry of Education, 019.  
Ministry of Transport, 017.  
Ministry of Food, 119.

Kuomintang Party Archives, Taipei, Taiwan

"Weisheng shu weisheng gongluzhan gezhong diaocha jilubiao" 衛生署衛生公路站各種調查紀錄報 [Various information and investigation forms for the National Health Administration Highway Health Station]. 1931. 502/26.

"Chongqing shi weisheng ji fangyi" 重慶市衛生及防疫 [Hygiene and disease prevention in Chongqing]. July 1939. 003/0240.

"Weishengshu yifang bibao" 衛生署醫防壁報 [National Health Administration posters about medicine and defense]. 502/90.

Rare Books and Manuscripts, Medical Historical Library, Yale University, New Haven, CT.  
"Album of Photographs Illustrating the Work of the National Health Administration, Nanking, China." 1931  
Koh, Z.W. "The Tiger Is Coming: Methods for Preventing Cholera." 1927.  
Charles-Edward Amory Winslow Papers, MS749.

Shanxi Provincial Library Rare Books and Special Collections, Taiyuan, China.

Historical Photographs of China, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK. [www.hpcbristol.net](http://www.hpcbristol.net).  
"Anti-Japanese public hygiene banner." circa 1938.



## THINK PIECE: The Digital, The Local and The Mundane: Three Areas of Potential Change for Research on Asia

By Radu Leca, Heidelberg University

### Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a game-changer for academic research because it has affected all of its aspects, starting from the “where,” which influences the “what” and the “how.” Given these changes, I would like to suggest a few possibilities for updating the “where,” the “what,” and the “how” of research on the Asia Pacific region. I will illustrate these possibilities with some of my own strategies developed or reinforced during the pandemic, as a historian of the art and culture of early modern Japan. Three dimensions of the changes guide my suggestions: the digital, the local and the mundane.

**Keywords:** digital, early modern, Japan, pedagogy, self-ethnography, performative, blended learning, blended research

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a game-changer for academic research because it has affected all of its aspects, starting from the “where,” which influences the “what” and the “how.” Increasing dependence on online access means that the researcher themselves needs to be astute in digital technology and proactive in orchestrating their own online presence. Additionally, the shift to working from home also affects researchers—the main advantage of their affiliation to an academic institution is now the access to online databases. On the other hand, when going beyond reference works, the “what” of research is inversely affected—direct access to remote sources can no longer be taken for granted. The same goes for the “how” of research—exhaustive research of a topic is arguably impossible, favoring eclectic studies on smaller topics closer to home.

Given these changes, I would like to suggest a few possibilities for updating the “where,” the “what,” and the “how” of research on the Asia Pacific region. I will illustrate these possibilities with some of my own strategies developed or reinforced during the pandemic, as a historian of the art and culture of early modern Japan. Three dimensions of the changes guide my suggestions: the digital, the local and the mundane.

## Digital Goes Mainstream

While geographic mobility has been limited by the pandemic, a silver lining is that the resulting situation has leveled access to digitized primary sources.<sup>1</sup> I fondly remember my experience of consulting the many volumes of *Nihon Kokugo Daijiten* 日本国語大辞典 [Great Dictionary of the Japanese Language] and the new series of *Shin Nihon Koten Bungaku Zenshu* 新日本古典文学全集 [Collection of Premodern Japanese Classics] on the shelves of the History of Literature research room in Kanazawa University. However, those same works, along with many other such voluminous series, are now available digitally from JapanKnowledge through the CrossAsia service offered by Berlin State Library. Moreover, leading institutions such as the National Diet Library and the Art Research Center at Ritsumeikan University are making an increasing number of visual and bibliographic sources available online.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to international standards such as IIIF and Linked Open Data, it is now possible to display images from different databases as well as from normal websites within one interface. Searching by image or by keyword can lead to unexpected results, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Mattia Foschi et al., “The Impact of COVID-19 on Researchers,” in *Emerging from Uncertainty: International Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on University Research* (London: Springer Nature, November 2020), 6.

<sup>2</sup> In December 2020, the Council for Cultural Affairs (文化審議会) of the Agency for Cultural Affairs (文化庁) in Japan invited public comments to its Interim Report of the Review of the Regulations on Library Rights Restrictions. The majority of the comments stressed the need for greater online access to digitized resources. For an overview of the comments and the final report see National Diet Library Staff. «Toshokan kankei no kenri seigen kitei no minaoshi (dejitaru nettowāku taiō) ni kansuru chūkan matome» e no pabburikku komento no jisshi kekka ga kōhyō sareru 「図書館関係の権利制限規定の見直し (デジタル・ネットワーク対応) に関する中間まとめ」へのパブリックコメントの実施結果が公表される [Announcement of Public Comments on Review of Library-Related Rights Restrictions (Digital Network Support) Interim Summary] *Current Awareness Portal*. January 26, 2021. <https://current.ndl.go.jp/node/43085>.

this will be only accelerated by the implementation of advancing AI algorithms as it has on search engines like Google.

The present challenge is to diversify the format of artifact viewers. In their current shape, image viewers are implicitly modeled after an iconographic approach to the history of art, epitomized by the former practice of showing two projector slides side by side in art history courses. The field of art history is moving beyond such approaches to stress the embodied experience enabled by the artifact. In this sense, there is plenty of potential in applying 3D visualization and VR techniques to reconstructing the life world of which the artifacts were once a part.

However, this leveled access does not necessarily translate to the democratization of access. Paywalls are a lingering issue for research databases such as JSTOR as well as reference databases such as CrossAsia. Research funding needs to address the growing importance of digital research by allocating funds specifically for database access. In countries such as Romania, the Japan Foundation has been providing book donations to Japanese studies departments. Equally, if not more mutually beneficial for such burgeoning research centers would be financial assistance in accessing major reference databases such as JapanKnowledge.

Alongside access to primary sources, online access to research results also needs to be prioritized. The pandemic has accelerated the mainstreaming of open access knowledge.<sup>3</sup> This should reduce the stigma of working with sources accessed only online, which still lingers in the field of art history. This does not diminish the importance of acquiring direct knowledge of the material properties of the artifacts under study, and I will elaborate more on solutions to this in the fourth section of this paper. What it does mean, though, is that the importance of being proficient in digital research skills has increased exponentially, becoming at least as crucial as analog research skills. Again, funding schemes need to adapt to this necessity.<sup>4</sup>

The increasing centrality of the digital also applies to the researcher's role as a communicator. The pandemic has exposed the preexisting fact that a successful academic career also hinges upon enhanced digital visibility. More than ever, researchers need to put themselves and their work in the digital medium. When doing so, it is no longer sufficient to replicate analog forms of academic visibility. The increased possibilities of the digital medium contain the potential to rethink our "scholarly apparatus" through, for example,

---

<sup>3</sup> Silvia Gomez Recio and Chiara Colella, *The World of Higher Education after COVID-19* (Brussels: Yerun, 2020), 33; Mattia Fosci et al., "Ensuring Access to Research Information during the Pandemic," in *Emerging*, 15-16; Mattia Fosci et al., "Conclusions," in *Emerging*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Mattia Fosci et al., "Doing Research during the Pandemic," in *Emerging*, 12; Mattia Fosci et al., "Research Collaborations," in *Emerging*, 8.



“small-gauge” scholarship disseminated on blogs and podcasts.<sup>5</sup> The digital also encourages us to be open-sourced about our research processes.<sup>6</sup>

For my part, the pandemic has made me reconsider the relevance of self-ethnography. As a scholar of Japonisme, I am interested in the inflections of Japanese culture and media in other cultures. I have recently been inspired by the proliferation of art memes on social media, especially Instagram, which was accelerated by the pandemic. It is not only a visual but also a performative phenomenon: during 2020, the act of recreating classic artworks by dressing up with household objects went viral. For example, the hashtag #betweenartandquarantine has been used more than fifty thousand times. The popularity of artwork impersonation stems arguably from its invitation to participatory responses to works of art at a time when physical access to the artworks is temporarily restricted.



**Figure 1.** Toshusai Sharaku, Actor Iwai Hanshirō as the Wet Nurse Shigenoi, 1794, “Marcel Duchamp and Japanese Art” exhibition version, and author’s impersonation. From the author’s Instagram account.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Kredell, “Small-Gauge Scholarship: An Introduction,” *Mediapolis* 3, no. 1 (2016), accessed January 6, 2021, <https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/2016/06/small-gauge-scholarship-introduction/>.

<sup>6</sup> A recent example of a publication that exposes the research process is a manga researcher’s compilation of Instagram posts on his research in Tokyo. See Ryan Holmberg, *The Translator Without Talent* (Richmond: Bubbles Zine Publications, 2020).

I chose to take part in this phenomenon by impersonating a uniquely multilayered image from early modern Japan and posting it on my Instagram account (see fig. 1). The initial state of this image is a lavish woodblock print with mica and bright colors, showing the profile of an obscure kabuki actor who specialized in female roles (*onnagata* 女形). It was an instant hit in the meteoric career of Sharaku, who was only active during the years 1794 to 1795. His popularity increased among Western collectors and scholars, culminating in a volume dedicated to him by the German scholar Julius Kurth.<sup>7</sup> Sharaku's style was unapologetically realistic to the extent that the illusion of femininity aimed at by female impersonators is dispelled. This was one of the reasons why I chose to impersonate one of Sharaku's images: it is technically less demanding because the conceit of a man impersonating a woman is already highlighted in the initial image. Another reason for choosing this particular image was its inclusion in a Japanese addendum to a retrospective exhibition of Marcel Duchamp at Tokyo National Museum in 2018. As a souvenir, a file folder was produced with a mustache superimposed on Sharaku's initial image, an homage to Duchamp's readymade L.H.O.O.Q., which consisted of a postcard of the Mona Lisa on which Duchamp drew a moustache, goatee and the subversive initials.<sup>8</sup>

For the impersonation, I grew out my facial hair, water colored sheets of toilet paper to simulate the layers of the kimono, used a balloon to simulate the sash that covered the shaved area of a man's head, and used a banana to imitate the comb. The process may be dismissed as irrelevant to actual scholarship, but the more than two hours needed to produce the shot provided plenty of food for thought: I now understand better the challenges of donning a multi-layered robe, as well as the specific framing choices made by the artist. There is also multilayering in terms of gender: I impersonate a man impersonating a woman who is again masculinized by facial hair. In terms of ethnicity, the interpretive effort of a non-Japanese impersonating a Japanese man parallels the interpretive effort of a modern non-Japanese researching early modern Japanese visual culture.

Impersonation and parody are certainly not new phenomena, and three distinct strategies overlap in this image: the first is the performative impersonation of the feminine character by the actor; the second, Duchamp's gesture of defacing a celebrated work of art, which has become one of the strategies for producing shock value in contemporary art; and the third, impersonation as practiced by performance artists such as Cindy Sherman and Yasumasa Morimura. What is significant about that last strategy is that it is now democratized: anybody can achieve it and instantly post it to a worldwide audience. The iconic nature of images is amplified by social media. DIY culture intersects with high art, leveling previous hierarchies.

---

<sup>7</sup> Julius Kurth, *Sharaku* (München: Piper, 1910).

<sup>8</sup> The spelling of the initials is homophonous with the words "elle a chaud au cul," which would roughly translate as "she has a hot ass." It has been convincingly argued by Rhonda Roland Shearer that Duchamp superimposed his own face over that of Mona Lisa, adding another layer to the image. See Barry Cipra, "Duchamp and Poincaré Renew an Old Acquaintance," *Science* 286, no. 5445 (November 26, 1999): 1668-69, doi: 10.1126/science.286.5445.1668.

The paradigm of appreciating art is thus becoming an interactive experience. Some museums are acknowledging this, such as the Amsterdam Rijksmuseum with its online digital database contest that openly called for modifications to the artifacts in their collections. Many of the winning entries featured the direct involvement of their authors. The takeaway for researchers is that the digital medium offers new possibilities of doing and acting out research through performative involvement, which has the potential of transforming research practices as well as increasing the impact of research on the wider society.

## The Potential of Local Networks

The merging of global and local dynamics is often described with the term “glocal,” which originated in the late ‘80s Japanese business speak term *dochakuka*.<sup>9</sup> In a connected world, local elements are those that can make a difference. This is especially true in a pandemic situation in which digital nomads are turning into digital residents. Again, the switch to digital learning and work meeting platforms means increased access for researchers outside Asia to, for instance, research seminars at local Japanese universities.<sup>10</sup> The digital medium enables a collaborative research environment where all participants, irrespective of location, can, for example, read and annotate an ancient text together by sharing screens.<sup>11</sup>

Another relevant response to the restriction of travel is to reframe one’s research to one’s surrounding environment. This requires a skill set not provided by area studies, a discipline that focuses on a distant object of inquiry. Researching local phenomena will also be incentivized by increased pressure for university communities to connect with the societal needs of non-academic communities.<sup>12</sup> At a time when spontaneous networking has become almost impossible due to restricted travel and the characteristics of the online conferencing medium, this reorientation towards local actors holds the potential for new research partnerships.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of research topics, I expect there will be a boom in studies of Orientalism and Japonisme, as researchers start to look for elements in their immediate surroundings that contain cultural elements of Asian origin. This, however, needs to be accompanied by a willingness to step out of the national boundaries of area studies and engage with the particular cultural context of one’s home, in which the Asian origin of cultural elements might not be necessarily of prime relevance.<sup>14</sup> For example, in Romania, my parents’ generation perceived premodern Japan through the mediation of a British novel—James Clavell’s *Shōgun*—and its US-produced TV adaptation. However, as a researcher it is difficult

---

<sup>9</sup> Victor Roudometof, *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2–3; Drew Martin and Arch G. Woodside, “Dochakuka,” *Journal of Global Marketing* 21.1 (2008): 19–32. doi: 10.1300/J042v21n01\_03.

<sup>10</sup> Mattia Fosci et al., “Research Collaborations,” in *Emerging*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> Gomez Recio and Colella, *The World of Higher Education*, 28, 33.

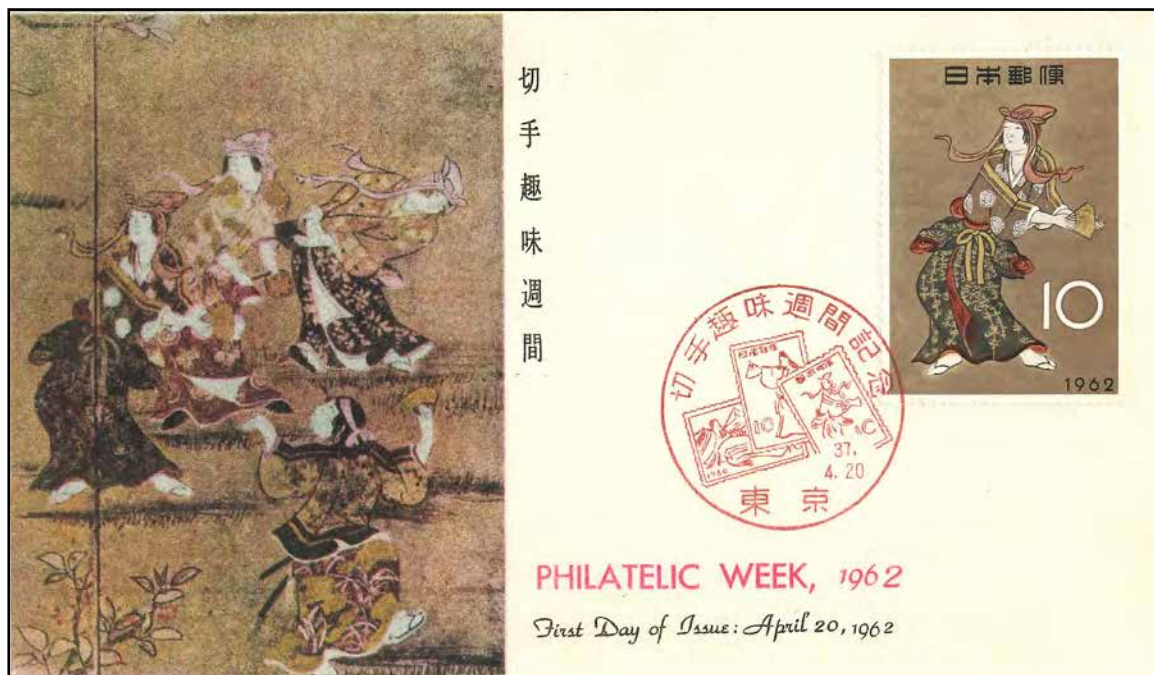
<sup>12</sup> Gomez Recio and Colella, *The World of Higher Education*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Mattia Fosci et al., “Research Collaborations,” in *Emerging*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> On the need for interdisciplinarity see Gomez Recio and Colella, *The World of Higher Education*, 33.

to apply for funding from Japan to study the influence of such ideas about Japan in Central and Eastern Europe. Although Japanese studies in this geographical area is identified as being of strategic interest by the Japan Foundation, funding is restricted to topics with direct Japanese geographical or ethnic origin, the implicit assumption being that only topics with an authentic Japanese pedigree are worth studying. However, if research on Asia is to maintain relevance, it needs to stop insisting on the intrinsic value of studying exceptionalized “Asian” topics. Instead, we need to include within our research scope phenomena characterized by hybridity and flow at work both in the contemporary world and in the past.

While digital connections have maintained and intensified the flow of information and ideas between distant localities, another mode of informational infrastructure often taken for granted in maintaining local-to-local connections is the postal service. Postal infrastructure predates extensive air travel and digital connections, and it is particularly good at maintaining a physical connection through the mediation of objects: gifts, merchandise, letters, and postcards. This infrastructure can be enlisted for research purposes. The cost of buying and posting research materials is minute compared to that of traveling for direct consultation. The money saved from travel costs can be redeployed for the acquisition of primary and secondary sources. This has the additional incentive of reducing the carbon footprint of fieldwork—an objective which is already being embraced by large corporations.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2.** Japan Post Philatelic Week Commemorative Stamp, April 20, 1962. Author's collection.

<sup>15</sup> Belinda Wade and Saphira Rekker, “Research Can (and Should) Support Corporate Decarbonization,” *Nature Climate Change* 10 (December 2020): 1064–65, doi: 10.1038/s41558-020-00936-0.

Granted, not all primary sources are amenable to postal transfer. This is where we need to be flexible in the “what” of our research. Personally, the pandemic has made me reassess the potential of stamps and postcards for studying the visual and material culture of Japan.<sup>16</sup> I took another look at a 1962 art-themed stamp I had bought on Amazon from a Tokyo collector (see fig. 2). It features a detail of a female dancer from an early-seventeenth-century folding screen designated as National Treasure: “Merrymaking Under the Cherry Blossoms” by Kano Naganobu. For a First Day Cover edition, a custom envelope was prepared, featuring a printed reproduction of a photograph of the corresponding detail from the original screen. The stamp was then pasted onto the envelope, and a cancellation was impressed in red ink with a custom handstamp showing the outline of the same dancer. This material assembly problematizes two main issues: on the one hand, the mechanisms of art canon formation and perpetuation as they intersected with the institutional objectives of the Japan Post occurred at a time of enhanced national sentiment. Another issue is the often-undiscussed material dimension of these phenomena: the practice of stamp collecting involved complex processes of reproduction of works of art that complicate ideas of copy and original. The latter is particularly relevant in the context of the East Asian tradition of copying. Such collector’s items encapsulate the overlapping materiality of printed media in contemporary Japan, instigate fresh views on the initial materiality of the source image in early modern Japan, and prefigure the interplay between authenticity and simulation in the digital age.

The example above exposes another potential practice for all researchers during the pandemic: that of reviewing and consolidating previously gathered research material. All researchers have folders with unfinished article ideas, or book projects that are only assemblies of ideas and sources on a given theme. This is the time to go back to those folders and craft them into compelling studies. This opportunity to reflect on previously gathered sources can be channeled towards more synthetic and critically aware studies. This is especially the case in early modern Japanese studies, where comparatively few are methodologically adventurous.

Paradoxically, while it seems that restricted access hinders comprehensive studies, it can actually encourage a process analogous to the defragmentation of memory drives on a computer: sorting, grouping, consolidating material already archived. This does not have to be in established formats: for example, a recent report lists the “embedding of preprints in publication workflows ” as one of the strategies for a sustainable model of open science.<sup>17</sup> Another possible format is that of “reading notes” proposed by Carla Nappi.<sup>18</sup> And at Kyoto

---

<sup>16</sup> An inspiring example of an online database featuring such primary sources is Paul D. Barclay, *East Asia Image Collection* (Easton : Lafayette College), accessed May 10, 2021, <http://digital.lafayette.edu/collections/eastasia>.

<sup>17</sup> Mattia Foschi et al., “Ensuring Access to Research Information during the Pandemic,” in *Emerging*, 16, 20, 38.

<sup>18</sup> Carla Nappi, “Reading Notes: The Intertwining: The Chiasm,” Carla Nappi’s Center for Historical Pataphysics, posted Summer 2015, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://carlanappi.com/reading-notes-the-intertwining-the-chiasm/>.

University, Björn-Ole Kamm is investigating the potential of Live-action role-play (LARP) for educational and research methodologies.<sup>19</sup>

## Mundane Authenticity

There is a deep, unspoken assumption that the validity of research in art and archaeology rests upon authenticity. By this I mean that the researcher is expected to focus their attention on the actual objects from the time and place under their scrutiny. Replicas and reproductions, whether analog or digital, are frowned upon—the emphasis is still on “primary” sources with a corresponding pedigree. But since Latour deconstructed the visual practices of science, we are much more aware of the subjective and narrative aspects of all research.<sup>20</sup>

When I was dressing up as one of Sharaku’s subjects, my expertise in the history of Japanese art might have made my reconstruction more accurate, but not more authentic. And yet, through impersonation I came to better understand the sartorial culture of the period and the specific choices made by Sharaku in the image. Indeed, the pandemic has given us an increased historical sensitivity: our material culture and knowledge-making practices cannot be taken for granted anymore. This sensitivity can be applied to study the past, just as we now watch video materials shot before Coronavirus times and wonder at the physical closeness of protagonists. While historians are already attuned to this, it makes it easier to appeal to a shared defamiliarizing experience when drafting our research papers for a wider audience.

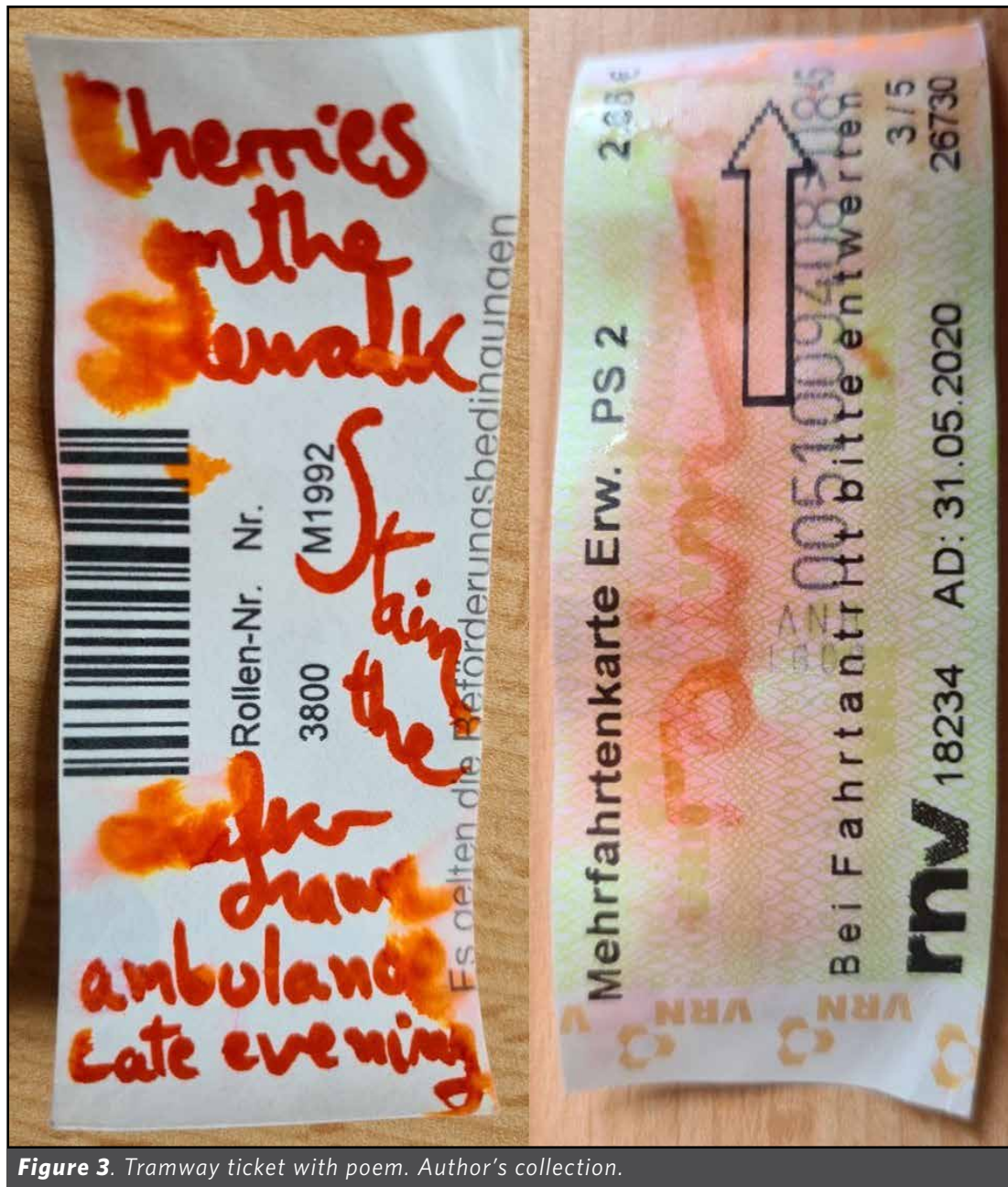
There remains, of course, a lack of direct contact with primary sources, which is especially crucial in a discipline such as art history. The memory and knowledge of the material properties of the objects central to art historical inquiry should be actively maintained. One method I found useful originated in the swift transition of university courses to online teaching due to the pandemic. I was scheduled to teach a class on the material culture of entertainment media in seventeenth-century Japan. I had planned to bring certain objects to class and to encourage the students to talk about their materials, function and meaning. Most were not original objects: a Russian Matrioshka doll, a dinosaur-shaped tea bag, a coaster with a print of an oil painting of Paris. But they raised the same questions posed by seventeenth-century Japanese sources: the creation process and the material properties of the objects, or the status of manuscript culture versus print culture. When the course had to switch fully online, I thought of our shared experience: as we avoided public spaces and contact with other people, our proximity and use of objects in our homes increased. I took this as an opportunity to encourage critical thoughts on the very objects

---

<sup>19</sup> As part of the research project *Transcultural Learning through Simulated Co-Presence: How to Realize Other Cultures and Life-Worlds*, Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Kaken number 19KT0028, accessed May 10, 2021, <https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-19KT0028/>.

<sup>20</sup> Bruno Latour, “Drawing Things Together,” in *Representation in Scientific Practice*, eds. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar (Cambridge : MIT Press, 1990), 19–68.

that my students found themselves in confinement with. I asked students to choose an object from their home whose characteristics paralleled those of each week's lecture theme, write two hundred words about it, and submit it along with a photo.



**Figure 3.** Tramway ticket with poem. Author's collection.

Their responses were enthusiastic, and I also joined in with my own chosen objects. Some of these were not just found, but actively produced: for example, for the session on poetry making in late-seventeenth-century Japan, I wrote a poem on a tram ticket with a water-soluble ink, intentionally bled out (see fig. 3). This recalled the juice of cherries oozing into children's chalk drawings on an alley floor, as well as the ongoing killings of

African Americans in the US and racist crimes everywhere. The latter is also evoked by the ambulance, one of the few ways out of our confined lives in the cages of our homes. The last word of the poem, "rain," did not fit with the rest, but a knowledgeable reader would look for the seventeenth syllable and find it on verso, bled out to blend in with the company logos.

At the end of the course, students chose their favorite "object journals" that we edited into an "objectzine"—material evidence of an otherwise virtual learning experience. While this is an example of blended learning, we can also imagine blended research that melds online resources with insights gleaned from mundane sources available locally. In this sense, the need to structure my material more thoroughly and ahead of time for online delivery resulted in a "repository of reusable educational content" that can also be reused as research output.<sup>21</sup> The material was so rich and the organization of the course so persuasive, that I can see the seed of a monograph project in it. So thinking with mundane materials such as postcards or bus tickets can result in a study on broader themes that bypass the exceptionalism of "Asian" topics.

## Conclusion

To sum up, this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reassess and transform our research practices. The "what," the "where," and the "how" of research were affected along three potential-filled factors: the digital, the local, and the mundane. All these aspects impact another important parameter of research: that of the "who." In a digitally connected world, anyone can post and publish, eroding the rhetorical authority of the academic researcher. Rather, academic researchers need to engage with current knowledge-making practices with a more collaborative and open-access mindset. This also means connecting more to colleagues worldwide and participating in more collaborative platforms and forms of knowledge-making.<sup>22</sup> In this process, researchers also need to be more directly and openly involved in the framing and shaping of their objects of inquiry, whether it is "Asia," "Japan," or "religion." In this sense, we need to take seriously the call within performance studies for performance-as-research by involving our bodies and biographies in the research process.<sup>23</sup> This necessity for a change of perspective also applies to funding schemes that need to adjust their concept of a researcher as on the one hand a non-biased and non-privileged actor, and on the other hand someone who needs to travel physically to do research. Rather, research funding can be directed toward enabling digital infrastructure for sharing sources and research results outside national boundaries and logocentric publication media. For example, German funds could support researchers in Japan that collect data then shared online with researchers based at German universities. Moreover, we should not fence in our

---

<sup>21</sup> Gomez Recio and Colella, *The World of Higher Education*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> The same suggestion is made by Philippe Peycam, "Imagining the University in the Post-COVID World," *IIAS Newsletter* 88 (Spring 2021), 3, accessed March 23, 2021, <https://www.iias.asia/the-newsletter/article/imagining-university-post-covid-world>.

<sup>23</sup> Simon Jones, "The Courage of Complementarity," *Practice as Research in Performance National Conference* (September 2003), accessed May 10, 2021, <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/jones.htm>.



topics to deal only with “authentic” artifacts: they can include objects from everyday life, discussed in the same terms and reflecting back on the understanding of the “authentic” artifacts. The aim is to melt the dichotomy between mundane and “authentic” objects that relies on the assumption of spatial and temporal unity of the object of study. More than ever, our research should reflect the fluid and hybrid nature of our identities and circumstances.

## Acknowledgements

This paper emerged from research undertaken within the Collaborative Research Centre 933 “Material Text Cultures. Materiality and Presence of Writing in Non-Typographic Societies.” The CRC 933 is financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). I am grateful to Alex Mustăţea for constructive comments on an earlier draft.

## Author Bio

Radu Leca is a research associate of the Institute of East Asian History at Heidelberg University, where he is a member of the Collaborative Research Cluster “Material Text Cultures” funded by the German Research Foundation. Leca holds a BA in History of Japanese Literature from Kanazawa University, and a MA and PhD in History of Art from SOAS, University of London. His research has been funded by the Japan Society for Promotion of Science, the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures and the International Institute for Asian Studies. Areas of interest are the history of early modern material culture, transcultural exchanges and cartography, with a focus on Japan. Soon to be published from Brill is a co-edited volume entitled *Enduring Encounters: Maps of Japan from Leiden University Libraries*.

## Bibliography

Barclay, Paul D. *East Asia Image Collection*. Easton: Lafayette College. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://dss.lafayette.edu/collections/east-asia-image-collection/>.

Cipra, Barry. “Duchamp and Poincaré Renew an Old Acquaintance.” *Science* 286, no. 5445 (November 26, 1999): 1668–69. doi: 10.1126/science.286.5445.1668.

Fosci, Mattia, Lucia Loffreda, Andrea Chiarelli, Dan King, Rob Johnson, Ian Carter, Mark Hochman. *Emerging from Uncertainty: International Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on University Research*. London: Springer Nature, November 2020. doi: 10.6084/m9.figshare.13130063.

Gomez Recio, Silvia and Chiara Colella. *The World of Higher Education after COVID-19*. Brussels: Yerun, 2020. Accessed January 6, 2021. <https://www.yerun.eu/2020/07/yerun-publishes-reflection-paper-on-the-world-higher-education-after-covid-19>.

Holmberg, Ryan. *The Translator without Talent*. Richmond: Bubbles Zine Publications, 2020.

Jones, Simon. "The Courage of Complementarity." *Practice as Research in Performance National Conference* (September 2003). Accessed May 10, 2021. <http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/jones.htm>.

Kamm, Bjorn Ole. *Transcultural Learning through Simulated Co-Presence: How to Realize Other Cultures and Life-Worlds*. Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Kaken number 19KT0028. Accessed January 6, 2021. <https://kaken.nii.ac.jp/grant/KAKENHI-PROJECT-19KT0028/>.

Kredell, Bernard. "Small-Gauge Scholarship: An Introduction." *Mediapolis* 3, no. 1 (2016). Accessed January 6, 2021. <https://www.mediapolisjournal.com/2016/06/small-gauge-scholarship-introduction/>.

Kurth, Julius. *Sharaku*. München: Piper, 1910.

Latour, Bruno. "Drawing Things Together." In *Representation in Scientific Practice*, eds. Michael Lynch and Steve Woolgar, 19–68. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990.

Martin, Drew and Arch G. Woodside. "Dochakuka." *Journal of Global Marketing* 21.1 (2008): 19–32. doi: 10.1300/J042v21n01\_03.

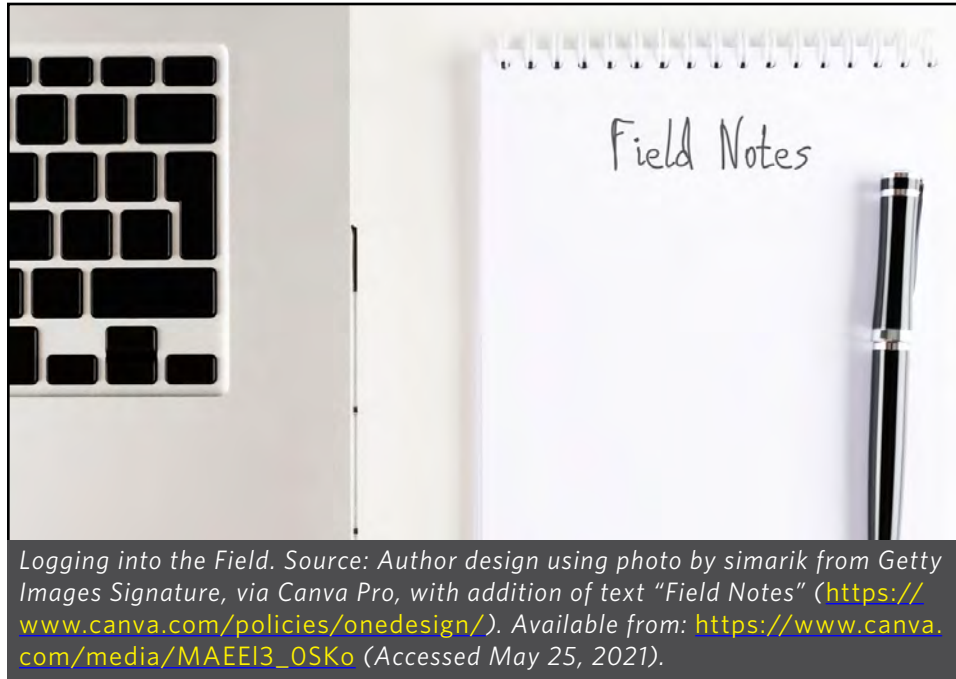
Nappi, Carla. "Reading Notes: The Intertwining: The Chiasm." Carla Nappi's Center for Historical Pataphysics. Posted summer 2015. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://carlanappi.com/reading-notes-the-intertwining-the-chiasm/>.

National Diet Library Staff. "«Toshokan kankei no kenri seigen kitei no minaoshi (dejitaru nettowāku taiō) ni kansuru chūkan matome» e no pabburikku komento no jisshi kekka ga kōhyō sareru 「図書館関係の権利制限規定の見直し (デジタル・ネットワーク対応) に関する中間まとめ」へのパブリックコメントの実施結果が公表される." *Current Awareness Portal*. January 26, 2021. <https://current.ndl.go.jp/node/43085>.

Peycam, Philippe. "Imagining the University in the Post-COVID World." *IIAS Newsletter* 88 (Spring 2021), 3. Accessed March 23, 2021. <https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/imagining-university-post-covid-world>.

Roudometof, Victor. *Glocalization: A Critical Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Wade, Belinda and Saphira Rekker. "Research Can (and should) Support Corporate Decarbonization." *Nature Climate Change* 10 (December 2020), 104-65. doi: 10.1038/s41558-020-00936-0.



*Logging into the Field. Source: Author design using photo by simarik from Getty Images Signature, via Canva Pro, with addition of text "Field Notes" (<https://www.canva.com/policies/onedesign/>). Available from: [https://www.canva.com/media/MAEEI3\\_OSKo](https://www.canva.com/media/MAEEI3_OSKo) (Accessed May 25, 2021).*

## THINK PIECE: Demystifying Remote Research in Anthropology and Area Studies

By [Kaitlyn Ugoretz](#), Ph.D Candidate at the University of California, Santa Barbara

### Abstract

Physically cut off from locations and archives central to our work due to restrictions in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, area studies scholars must reimagine what constitutes rigorous and responsible research in their respective disciplines. The practice of remote research, however, is not a new one. Digital ethnography, an admittedly niche subdiscipline of anthropology, has long been grappling with the issues of how to value and conduct remote research. This essay explores a number of misconceptions regarding digital and remote research that may aid in contextualizing and coming to terms with the anxieties the broader scholarly community faces. I suggest that we strive in this moment not simply to adapt and adopt remote research as a temporary fix until we can resume business as usual, but to integrate it into our disciplinary frameworks as a legitimate and valuable mode of research.

**Keywords:** digital ethnography; anthropology; remote research; fieldwork; COVID-19

A year or two ago, I routinely fought back a wave of anxiety whenever a colleague inquired about my field of research. I would reply with something to the effect of: “I am a digital anthropologist studying transnational online Shinto communities.” My elevator pitch was often met with a mix of fascination, confusion, or outright skepticism. Colleagues would ask me things like: “‘Transnational online Shinto’—is that really a thing? How does that work? You’ll still conduct fieldwork in Japan to earn your chops, right? How will you explain yourself to funding organizations and hiring committees? Are you sure you’re not secretly an Americanist?” These questions, though well-meaning in most cases, never failed to hit a number of disciplinary nerves. Since the hoary origins of traditional anthropological fieldwork when Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) set sail for the Trobriand Islands,<sup>1</sup> practitioners have prided themselves on “being there” in the hallowed fieldsite,<sup>2</sup> physically and psychically embedded in the everyday lives of one’s research subjects for an extended period of time.<sup>3</sup> What sort of proper anthropologist of all things Japan could I be, sitting in any location with my laptop propped up somewhere, presumably surfing the web and Facebook-stalking strangers?

Since the global COVID-19 pandemic disrupted virtually every aspect of our personal and professional lives in early 2020, responses to my work have changed dramatically. Colleagues now make wistful comments, tinged with discouragement and sometimes a bit of jealousy: “You are so lucky to be studying the Internet. Your work must be largely unaffected by the pandemic. How does that work? I don’t know where to start.” Regrettably, I must admit to not having a magic bullet methodology to share with my friends who are historians and literary scholars. Digital anthropology in many respects remains quite a niche subdiscipline. However, in reflecting on my own experiences and comparing notes with my colleagues, I’ve found that the anxieties that digital ethnographers have wrestled with as a fundamental part of our brand of research are not so unique. These questions, misgivings, and scholars’ strategic responses highlight a number of implicit and essential assumptions that I believe we all have internalized to some degree,<sup>4</sup> namely that remote research is: 1) either too recent a phenomenon or a relic of academia’s antediluvian past; 2) not sufficiently rigorous; and 3) does not produce valuable knowledge in and of itself.<sup>5</sup>

If you find the proposition of adopting remote research methods daunting, unsettling, overwhelming, or even objectionable, you are in good company. But in order to decide if, when, and how we ought to go about research at a distance, we must begin by naming,

---

<sup>1</sup> Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1922).

<sup>2</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1-24.

<sup>3</sup> George Marcus, “Introduction: Notes toward an Ethnographic Memoir of Supervising Graduate Research through Anthropology’s Decades of Transformation,” in *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used To Be: Learning Anthropology’s Method in a Time of Transition*, ed. James Faubion and George Marcus (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Gabriele de Seta, “Three Lies of Digital Ethnography,” *Journal of Digital Social Research* 2, no. 1 (February 2020): 77-97, 80.

<sup>5</sup> John Postill, “Remote Ethnography: Studying Culture from Afar,” in *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, ed. Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway, and Genevieve Bell (New York: Routledge, 2017), 61-69.

contextualizing, and confronting what it is that makes us uncomfortable with the theory and practice of remote research. To this end, in this essay I will explore anthropology's founding mythos and a few key debates within the discipline concerning our orientation toward remote research. I will demonstrate that remote research is neither new nor necessarily outdated. Moreover, I will make the case that remote research can be rigorous and valuable to the project of producing knowledge. I will conclude by suggesting that we should strive in this moment not simply to adapt and adopt remote research as a temporary fix until we can resume business as usual, but to integrate it into our disciplinary frameworks as a legitimate and valuable mode of research.

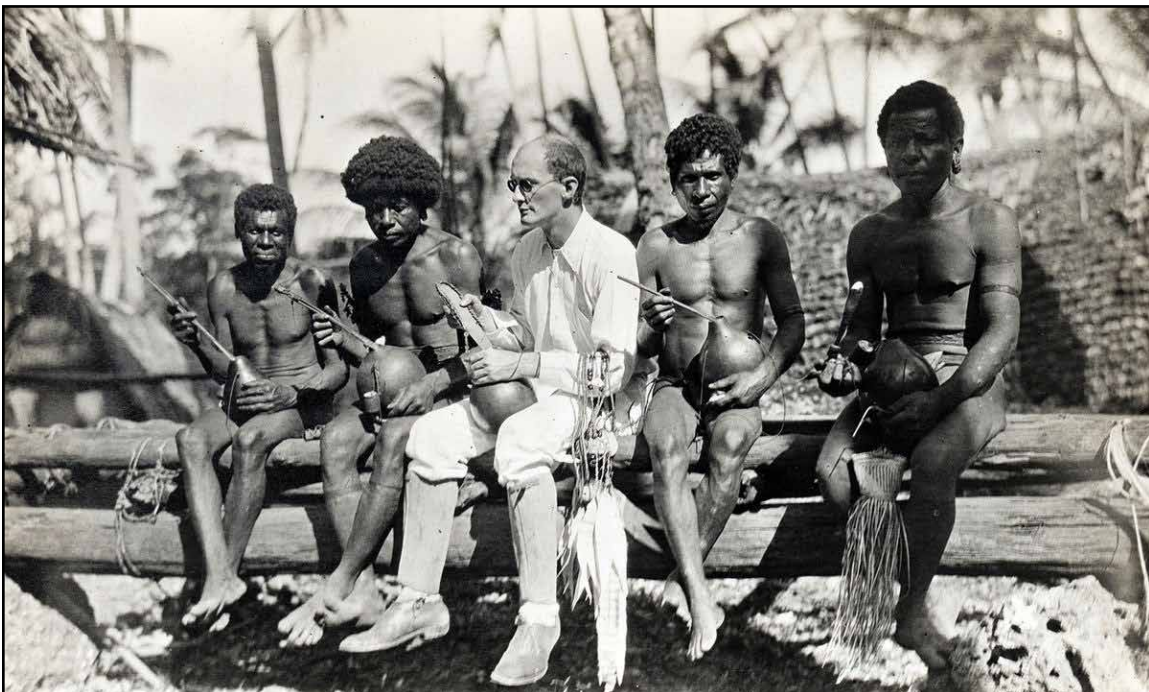
## **Remote Research Past and Present**

Modern anthropology can be said to have begun with a kind of remote research as its primary method. But the discipline's founding mythology relies upon a triumphant narrative of linear progression away from remote methods and toward *in situ* fieldwork exemplified by the ethnographic method *par excellence*, participant observation. The tale begins in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the practice dismissively referenced as "armchair anthropology." Founding figures such as E. B. Tylor (1832-1917) and James G. Frazer (1854-1941) did not travel to collect data firsthand, but rather drew upon a range of available texts and secondary sources such as reports from missionaries, colonial officers, merchants, and explorers. After a few decades, enterprising anthropologists shifted closer to the localities and cultures they wished to study by observing events and collecting informants' accounts from a safe, comfortable distance on "the veranda" of a local Western host. Malinowski paints a vivid picture of this sort of researcher in his manifesto for a revolution in anthropological methods, which is worth quoting at length:

As regards anthropological field-work, we are obviously demanding a new method of collecting evidence. The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the verandah of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter's bungalow, where, armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect statements from informants, write down stories, and fill out sheets of paper with savage texts. He must go out into the villages, and see the natives at work in gardens, on the beach, in the jungle; he must sail with them to distant sandbanks and to foreign tribes, and observe them in fishing, trading, and ceremonial overseas expeditions. Information must come to him full-flavoured from his own observations of native life, and not be squeezed out of reluctant informants as a trickle of talk. Field-work can be done first-or second-hand even among savages, in the middle of pile-dwellings, not far from actual cannibalism and head-hunting. Open-air anthropology, as opposed to hearsay note-taking, is hard work, but it is also

great fun. Only such anthropology can give us the all-round vision of primitive man and of primitive culture.<sup>6</sup>

Who better to spark this research revolution than Malinowski himself? In one of the formative and most heavily mythologized moments in the history of anthropological methods in the early twentieth century, Malinowski distinguished himself from the previous generation by championing direct ethnographic fieldwork, centered on the new practice of participant observation. It is at this point that the fieldsite became the consecrated ground for the discipline's most sacred rite of passage: ethnographic fieldwork. According to Clifford Geertz, it is through the experience of "be[ing] there" in the field for an extended period of time, the process of fashioning oneself into an instrument of social science data collection, and the performative reenactment of one's deep engagement with the field in ethnographic writing that anthropologists stake their credibility and professional authority.<sup>7</sup> Following this observation to its logical conclusion, if one cannot "be there" for a certain amount of time (one to two years is the gold, if arbitrary, standard) and attune themselves to the intricacies of the field, then they do not meet the criteria to be considered a master of their profession.



**Figure 1.** Malinowski on fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands (1918). Source: London School of Economics Library Collections, via Wikimedia Commons.

Scholars of different disciplinary persuasions will likely recognize in the mythic origins of anthropology the origins of area studies as well. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, early armchair Orientalists synthesized various second-hand accounts from missionaries, merchants, and travelers, etc. Over time, scholars ventured to non-Western regions to

<sup>6</sup> Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, 71-73.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives*, 16.

conduct field research themselves and acquire regional expertise. Area studies, Orientalism's successor as the academic study of the non-West, was formed over the latter half of the twentieth century in response to World War II and reached its height during the Cold War.<sup>8</sup>

No one can deny that there are many practical benefits to "being there" in the far-away field, including the acquisition of linguistic fluency, building personal and professional networks with locals, observing in-person (offline) events, and visiting archives that are not digitized or digitally accessible from abroad. But the just-so stories of direct and active ethnographic fieldwork eclipsing distanced and passive observation to become anthropology's *raison d'être* and area studies replacing Orientalism obscure a number of finer points that we should consider.<sup>9</sup>

Humanistic research was facilitated by and complicit in the project of empire at every step in the evolution of these two fields.<sup>10</sup> So-called armchair studies were fueled by the circulation of myriad reports of various colonial agents circulating within a global network designed to gather information and deliver it to the metropole. As European empires expanded, scholars were enabled to conduct fieldwork through the many privileges, protections, and institutional resources afforded them as colonizers, including increased military presence and the growth of colonial settlements.<sup>11</sup> As Tessa Morris-Suzuki notes, colonial encounters and world wars highlighted "the strategic value of cultural knowledge: information about the languages, histories and traditions of geographically distant allies and enemies was vital to the conduct of war, and to the international power struggles of the Cold War world."<sup>12</sup>

The turn from remote to in-person research methods in non-Western fieldsites was not the product of sudden methodological enlightenment, but of the demands and desires of Western empire for certain kinds of knowledge pertaining



**Figure 2.** Globe highlighting the Asian continent. Source: Suzy Hazelwood / Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/license/>) Available from: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/brown-world-mapillustration-1098526/> (Accessed May 27, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Biray Kolluoglu-Kirli, "From Orientalism to Area Studies," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 93-111.

<sup>9</sup> P. Kerim Friedman, "Armchair Anthropology in the Cyber Age?" *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, May 19, 2005, accessed February 15, 2021, <https://savageminds.org/2005/05/19/armchair-anthropology-in-the-cyber-age/>.

<sup>10</sup> Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973), 16-18.

<sup>11</sup> Sera-Shriar, "What is Armchair Anthropology?," 33-34.

<sup>12</sup> Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Anti-Area Studies," *Communal/Plural* 8, no. 1 (2000): 9-23, 14.



to “the other.” The “field” was not designed to be the mystical location for the researcher’s initiation into another perspective, culture, or reality, but an arena to be documented, known, and eventually conquered. Despite our attempts to escape the problematics of this history in the intervening decades by attending to fragmented fields and global circulations,<sup>13</sup> this past continues to haunt us through our valorization of physical (i.e. offline), extensive, in-person fieldwork as the gold standard for humanities research and our uncritical skepticism of remote methods.

## Something Old, Something New

Having traced the source of our misgivings concerning the practice of remote research to the influence of the Malinowskian mythos and the historical entanglement of scholarship with empire-making on the development of our methodological and epistemological frameworks, we can now examine in more detail the claims that remote research is either outdated or too new, does not meet standards for academic rigor, and is not valuable in and of itself. Let us begin with the first fallacy: that remote research is either a relic of the past or a newfangled fad. As mentioned above, our earliest academic ancestors conducted remote research through a carefully curated, collaborative network of informants and resources. Efram Sera-Shriar argues that rather than being satisfied with passively gathering data from untrained informants and making uninformed pronouncements from a distance, armchair anthropologists were “highly attuned to the problems associated with their research techniques and continually sought to transform their methodologies” according to the resources at their disposal.<sup>14</sup> For example, in 1872 Tylor and a number of British anthropologists produced the first questionnaire for the nascent Anthropological Institute in order to provide a guide for traveling and native informants that would enhance the quality of the data collected.

During World War II and the Cold War, further turning points in the development of anthropology and area studies, Western scholars once again found themselves unable to safely travel abroad to fieldsites in places like Japan, Germany, and the Soviet Union to conduct their research and turned to media such as films, literature, and art.<sup>15</sup> Half a century later, others have had to rely upon native informants during periods of great social unrest in countries like Afghanistan and Russia and track people’s experiences of areas rendered inaccessible due to natural disasters in real-time through online means.

---

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); James Faubion and George Marcus, eds., *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology’s Method in a Time of Transition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Sera-Shriar, “What is Armchair Anthropology?,” 27.

<sup>15</sup> Postill, “Remote Ethnography,” 63.



**Figure 3.** Man looking through binoculars behind a stack of books. Source: Andrea Piaquadio / Pexels (<https://www.pexels.com/license/>) Available from: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/anonymous-person-with-binoculars-looking-through-stacked-books-3769697/> (Accessed May 27, 2021).

Researchers undoubtedly have faced a variety of historical and personal circumstances that have limited their ability to travel abroad. In their call for the development of “patchwork ethnography,” Günel, Varma, and Watanabe note that “family obligations, precarity, other hidden, stigmatized, or unspoken factors—and now Covid-19—have made long-term, in-person fieldwork difficult, if not impossible, for many scholars.<sup>16</sup>” However, these limitations and researchers’ responses largely have been overlooked as unfortunate anomalies born from extenuating circumstances. Surely, we may think to ourselves, the scholar in question would have conducted in-person fieldwork had they had the chance. But what, then, are we to make of researchers whose field sites are not physically located in one of our carefully fixed geographical areas of study? What of transnational and digital projects?

In recognition of the impacts of globalization and the “mobility turn,” anthropologists in the 1980s and 90s strove to account for flows of people, media, technology, capital, and ideas across physical and ideological boundaries.<sup>17</sup> This line of inquiry productively destabilized the long-established primacy of the classical fieldsite—the village—and

---

<sup>16</sup> Gökçe Günel, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, “A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography,” *Member Voices, Fieldsights* (June 2020): n.p. Accessed February 15, 2021. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>.

<sup>17</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2-3 (June 1990): 295-310.

reimagined an approach to ethnographic fieldwork that is distributed across multiple fieldsites (i.e. multi-sited ethnography).<sup>18</sup> While this paradigm shift toward an appreciation for the contingent and fragmented nature of the “field” reinvigorated theoretical and methodological discourse, the (Western) researcher’s mobility was once again taken for granted. The burden then fell to scholars to transform their research designs and grant applications to accommodate periods of time physically spent at a multiplicity of networked field sites.



**Figure 4.** A collection of passport stamps. Source: hjl / CC BY 2.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>) Available from: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/92605333@N00/101443399> (Accessed May 27, 2021).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, researchers began to explore another potential paradigm shift, this time technological in nature: the development of the Internet. Through various, ever-evolving forms of computer-mediated communication, people from all over the world could virtually inhabit the same space, whether it be a text-only forum, a multi-media social networking service, or even a three-dimensional virtual world. Opinions on pioneering research in digital anthropology tended toward extremes; either cyberspace was utterly devoid of meaningful human interaction deserving of study, or it presaged the death knell

<sup>18</sup> George Marcus, “Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (October 1995): 95-117.

of tradition anthropology (even humanity) as we knew it. Critics even warned against falling back into old disciplinary habits and practicing armchair anthropology from behind one's computer screen. After a few decades of further study, digital anthropologists and digital ethnographic methods gained enough recognition to be considered a subdiscipline, with several edited volumes and handbooks of method published in the last several years.<sup>19</sup> Thus, rather than being the rare exception to the rule, remote research broadly speaking has been present since the founding of our field, and approaches to it continue to undergo a process of evaluation and refinement in response to the needs of the moment.

### **Field Notes**

Like many remote or digital projects, my ethnographic research on transnational, online communities of Shinto ritual practitioners draws upon the strengths of both traditional anthropological methods and remote research depending on the affordances of a given situation. With my interlocutors living in different regions of the world and different time zones, synchronicity and physical co-presence are more often than not an impossibility regardless of social distancing and travel restrictions. The experience of interacting remotely is actually closer to their experience of community engagement. As such, participant observation remains the foundation of my data collection, but this observation takes place on and through the Internet, the same medium through which my research participants interact with each other. We meet with each other on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Reddit, and Discord. Interviews take place over video conferencing platforms like Zoom and, more often, in chat boxes and emails. I still take extensive fieldnotes, but they are located in mobile apps and superimposed on individual web pages through web archiving and annotation software.<sup>20</sup> Like the nineteenth century armchair anthropologists, I also actively gather information from various indirect sources on the Internet, such as individuals' public accounts on blogs and social media and newspaper articles and their comments sections. Again, this practice of searching for or happening upon various relevant streams of information is one that I hold in common with my research participants. Testing the limits of what is gained and lost through the practice of remote research in place of, but more often in tandem with, in-person research presents us with opportunities to reflect on, clarify, and reimagine the utility of traditional methods in new circumstances.

---

<sup>19</sup> For examples, see Tom Boellstorff, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor, *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Christine Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, Everyday* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Robert Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined*, 2nd ed., (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015); Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway, and Genevieve Bell, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 2017); Luke Sloan and Anabel Quan-Haase, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Kaitlyn Ugoretz, "Academic Talk | 'Hacking Fieldnotes: Using Scribe to Qualitatively Study the Internet' AAS 2021," YouTube, March 2, 2021, <https://youtu.be/aY11qmVZ5UM>.

## Rigor Is Not Geographically Dependent

Having established that there is much precedent for remote research, if also avenues for further growth, it is here that we turn to the second fallacy of remote research: that it is not rigorous. Again, this assumption results from the value we place on the experience of “being there” in the field. According to Ulf Hannerz, despite new approaches to conducting qualitative research, the classic model of the single fieldsite “for very long remained more or less the only fully publicly acknowledged model for field work, and for becoming and being a real anthropologist.”<sup>21</sup> During this period (lasting a year or two at first, part of a more prolonged engagement measured in decades) we are ideally isolated and immersed in our research, thinking on our feet and honing our skills. Upon our return, we tell our advisers, colleagues, and hiring committees—anyone we want to impress—that we went everywhere there was to go, saw everything there was to see, and participated in everything there was to do, to the best of our abilities. And thus, we emerge from this rite of passage tried-and-true experts in our field. But if we are honest with ourselves, this timeless narrative is not everything it is cracked up to be. What is worse, it deliberately overlooks a number of significant experiences that do not fit.

For one thing, “being there” in the field does not always guarantee access to the sources we desire. We may lack the right introduction. We may simply be refused entry into a particular archive or community. We may wind up based in another location due to contingencies like a host moving from one institution to another. There may be physical barriers barring access. Nowadays, we may be required to stay at home due to a lock-down. Then there are personal circumstances. We may not be able to attend an event because there was no available childcare. We may fall ill, wind up in the hospital, and require major surgery. We may be so overwhelmed and exhausted that we stay home for days. We may experience traumas we do not want to or cannot name. It happens more often than we like to admit, perhaps because it feels like failure; it does not live up to the ideal fieldwork experience. Even when there are no barriers to our research, we cannot be everywhere at once, much as we might like to be or present ourselves as having been (what John Postill refers to as the “ethnographic fear of missing out”).<sup>22</sup> We choose to focus on certain people, certain networks, certain archives and corpora. If we attend an event on one side of town, we are not attending the myriad other events happening on the other side. The boundaries of our research flex to include or exclude what suits our purposes and is within our limitations. Total immersion is a myth.

Thus far I have tried to prove the negative: that “being there” in the field is not inherently more rigorous than other forms of research. But what of remote research’s merits? Online researchers like Patty Gray, John Postill, Crystal Abidin, and Gabriele de Seta have admitted

---

<sup>21</sup> Ulf Hannerz, “Being there . . . and there . . . and there! Reflections on multi-site ethnography,” *Ethnography* 4, no. 2 (June 2003): 201-216, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Postill, “Remote Ethnography,” 66.

to ongoing anxieties as they engage in remote research,<sup>23</sup> asking themselves questions like: “Can I *do* anthropology this way? Am I *allowed* to do anthropology this way . . . ? Can this be considered a legitimate form of . . . ‘real’ fieldwork? Or is it cheating because the ‘being there’ part is missing?”<sup>24</sup> In response to these internal and external anxieties as to the validity of their research, digital anthropologists have demonstrated how it is entirely possible to “be there” immersed in the digital field and engaging in conversations and events on the same terms and at the same time as one’s research subjects.<sup>25</sup> In fact, in some ways digital anthropologists can maintain a broader and more active presence through a variety of digital devices and social media platforms.<sup>26</sup> At any given moment, I can share private conversations with several research subjects living on different continents, peruse archives of group discussion posts, and watch multiple ritual livestreams, all while cooking dinner for my family. Though researchers may interact with the field through a networked device while sitting at an office desk or (God forbid) in an armchair, they are not lazy or disconnected. They are active, and they are ‘present’ in different ways.<sup>27</sup> As much of our work has shifted online due to the pandemic, I am sure we can all appreciate that this is vital, demanding, and honestly exhausting work.

Indeed, if we measure the rigor of digital research according to the applicability of traditional methods and epistemes, then this kind of remote research passes muster. However, Postill cautions against simply projecting (and thus reifying) the quintessential fieldsite and mandate for “being there” onto cyberspace of offline modes of research at a distance. He argues that “it is still possible to extract valuable insights from archived moments, even from moments that we never experienced live.”<sup>28</sup> This statement likely will seem obvious to scholars of various disciplinary persuasions who study the past, but it is a controversial claim in ethnographic circles.

Freeing ourselves from the demands of constantly “being there” in the flesh and “being then” in the initial moment, Postill suggests that we can begin to explore other modes of research. We can dive into the imagined experience of being “then” and “there” asynchronously and remotely, as countless people have done before the pandemic and will continue to do. Moreover, we can choose to employ para-ethnographic means to learn from, collaborate with, and empower others who may bring their own experiences, memories,

---

<sup>23</sup> For examples, see Patty G *American Ethnologist Journal of Digital Social Research* 2, no. 1 (February 2020): 1-19; de Seta, “Three Lies of Digital Ethnography,” 93.

<sup>24</sup> Gray, “Memory, Body and the Online Researcher,” 502.

<sup>25</sup> For examples, see Douglas Cowan, *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2005); Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Kozinets, *Netnography: Redefined*; Hine, *Ethnography for the Internet*; Gregory Grieve, *Cyber Zen: Imagining Authentic Buddhist Identity, Community, and Practices in the Virtual World of Second Life* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> Gray, “Memory, Body and the Online Researcher,” 502.

<sup>27</sup> de Seta, “Three Lies of Digital Anthropology,” 88.

<sup>28</sup> Postill, “Remote Ethnography,” 66.

and insights to bear on our research subject and produce knowledge.<sup>29</sup> I may add that we can also dedicate our efforts in this moment to using our own resources and networks to support, complement, and signal boost research being done by native scholars and other professionals in other parts of the world. There is much work that may be done remotely and should be done regardless. It is ultimately dependent upon us, not our geographical location or some mystical notion of “being there” at a physical fieldsite, whether our work is rigorous and valuable.

### **Field Notes**

At the time of writing this piece, I am unable to enter Japan to begin my dissertation research fellowship, but I continue to conduct my digital ethnography remotely full-time from the desk in my parents’ kitchen. I am virtually plugged-in to my online network of fieldsites at all times. On an average day, I check my email and my social media correspondence with research participants. I then follow up on any notifications I missed overnight that indicate new or continuing discussions within the online religious communities I study. I archive and annotate these webpages with my initial impressions for future reference. Sometime in the afternoon, I’ll be in contact with a Shinto priest who is just starting her day on the other side of the country, whom I assist with managing the shrine Facebook group and drafting, translating, and posting shrine announcements across multiple social media platforms. Late at night, I attend ritual and cultural livestreams being broadcast from other time zones and continents.

This is taxing work. My neck and back ache from sitting at a desk or looking down at my phone. My eyes strain from hours of staring at a screen. My jaw locks in response to the emotionally-



**Figure 5.** Studying Online Shinto. Author design using elements from Irasutoya (<https://www.irasutoya.com/p/terms.html>). Available from: <https://www.irasutoya.com/> (Accessed Feb. 02, 2021).

<sup>29</sup> See George Marcus, *Para-Sites: A Casebook Against Cynical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, “Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography,” in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics and Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005); Douglas Holmes and George Marcus, “Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Scene of Fieldwork Encounter,” *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1 (2008): 81-101; Kasper Vangkilde and Morten Rod, “Para-Ethnography 2.0: An Experiment with the Distribution of Perspective in Collaborative Fieldwork,” *Collaborative Formation of Issues: The Research Network for Design Anthropology* (Aarhus: The Research Network for Design Anthropology, 2015).

charged discussions I participate in. I am physically, mentally, and emotionally fatigued by being available 24/7. I think that many more people understand the demands of this kind of work through our shared experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even still, I encounter colleagues who wonder what it is exactly that I do all day and whether it is “enough” to consider myself an area scholar because I am able to do it outside of Japan. To be completely honest, it is more than enough. In fact, it is often too much. In response to the scrutiny of my peers, I overwork myself to prove that I am actively engaged and that my work is serious and rigorous. It is my hope that the pandemic will serve as a catalyst for our understanding that rigorous research is not dependent on one’s geographical location (although the funding for said research often is) and for a communal reevaluation of how our current notions of rigor perpetuate harmful standards for researchers.<sup>30</sup>

### **Remote Research Is Valuable**

The third and final fallacy of remote research, that it is not valuable on its own, must now be put to rest. By now, I have already suggested just how valuable research at a distance can be. Yet despite decades of solid arguments in digital anthropology against it, the notion that digital research is partial or supplemental—that is, inherently insufficient—persists. After their experience of other countries and cultures being rendered inaccessible for a variety of reasons—spatial, temporal, legal, etc.—in the twentieth century, the venerable anthropologists Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux created a manual specifically designed to help guide “the study of culture at a distance” through media including films and literature. However, in the tome’s introduction, Mead explicitly qualifies remote research as applicable “only when it is essential” and unsuitable for “theoretical purposes.”<sup>31</sup>

Postill suggests that such a position stems from the “anthropological aversion to thin descriptions.”<sup>32</sup> But if the researcher is able to access the kind of insights into a research topic that they need through remote fieldwork, and if they treat it in the same methodical and ethical way as they do in-person fieldwork, there should be no reason that the results would be fundamentally inferior. Conducting research through primarily remote methods can yield a different perspective on an issue. We may use sources in more imaginative ways, focus on different aspects, and notice new patterns. Every part of this experience is valuable. Moreover, we conduct analysis at different speeds and depths depending on a number of factors, such as a topic’s relative significance the focus and scope of our research, uneven materials, space constraints, and editorial requirements. There is a place in our research for both thick and thin description.<sup>33</sup> Granted, it is entirely possible to do “bad” remote

---

<sup>30</sup> Devon Prince, *Laziness Does Not Exist: A Defense of the Exhausted, Exploited, and Overworked* (New York: Atria Books, 2021), 14.

<sup>31</sup> Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux, eds., *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Postill, “Remote Ethnography,” 66.

<sup>33</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).



research just as it is to do bad in-person research. The onus is on the researcher to produce thoughtful and meaningful work out of the methods and materials they choose.

### **Field Notes**

It is not presumptuous to acknowledge that my digital and remote research is valuable. My methods are tailor-made to investigate emerging trends and answer questions that my field has not addressed in this way before. By focusing on transnational networks facilitated by the Internet that both center and de-center Japan as the locus of Shinto ritual practice, I am able to study the process of Shinto's globalization as it unfolds and interrogate notions of religious authenticity and authority that intersect with race and culture. My project has everything to do with Japan, but it is not geographically bound to the territorial borders of the Japanese state. This work demands online and remote ethnographic research, but it also requires institutional support.

We have all come to appreciate the very real costs of conducting remote research. Studying another region does not exempt us from living expenses wherever we are physically located. On top of that, there are technology costs (hardware, software, subscriptions), research assistant and participant compensation, and even travel costs on occasion. But remote research must also be valued as an analytical perspective and an area of technical expertise by hiring committees. More than once, colleagues have wondered aloud if I will be at all competitive on the job market due to the nature of my research. Prior to the pandemic, my decision to conduct transnational, digital ethnographic research was considered a personal choice and a risky gamble. If it paid off, I would be a cutting-edge contender; if it failed, no one would take me seriously as an area studies scholar. Now that remote research is not a choice made by few but a necessity for many, we need as a field to critically reexamine how we value and support this kind of scholarship.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 on the Global Academy**

The many unanticipated consequences of the global pandemic have exposed a multitude of flaws in the infrastructure of academia. At the present moment, the task of reimagining remote research and an academy which supports this type of work is of critical importance to the wellbeing of the scholarly community, in particular our graduate students. We are entirely dependent on the support of grants and fellowships to conduct what is for many of us our first extended time in the field. These funds typically allow us to travel to archives and fieldsites, to purchase equipment, attend conferences, and participate in workshops. But even more fundamental, they support our day-to-day living expenses: food, rent, utilities, health insurance, childcare, and student loan payments.

What then are graduate students to do when funding packages do not allow for remote research? I will use myself as an example. Even prior to the pandemic, remote research—central to my project from the beginning—posed a problem for my funding prospects. Fellowship selection committees were puzzled by my proposals focusing on online religious

communities. If I could do that work anywhere, why did I need funding? I was counseled by various mentors that I had to prove why I needed to be physically present in Japan to conduct my research in order to be competitive in any way. Digital and transnational scholarship are buzzwords these days, but the decisions made about what kind of research is rigorous and what projects are worth funding are still bound to physical and national units. I knew that getting my research funded by a prestigious organization was crucial if I had hopes of an academic career. So, I did what I had to do. Eventually, I successfully crafted a proposal that foregrounded classical anthropological research at religious sites and buried the communities that were at the heart of my work. I figured that I had resolved the problem.

In preparation for my fieldwork, I followed all the proper procedures. I filed in absentia at my university, hitting pause on my institutional funding. This meant that I needed to move out of subsidized graduate housing, put everything in storage, move from California back to New York, and rely on my parents' health insurance (I was lucky to be 25 at the time) until the summer of 2020 when I would move to Japan. I found an apartment and a roommate in Tokyo, and we signed a contract. Then COVID-19 hit, and international borders closed. At first, I was not too worried about my situation; I was well-positioned to continue the online research I had already started. I did everything I could to make sure I was ready to move when the restrictions lifted.

But as weeks of lockdown turned into months, I began to realize the immense financial cost to not being able to conduct in-person research in another country. I was paying storage fees in California and rent in Tokyo. I turned 26 and aged off of my parents' health insurance. One funding agency was incredibly flexible and generous; they had the ability to support my remote research. But as of writing this piece, that fellowship has ended. I cannot start the next one until I am physically present in Japan. I am effectively stranded. I barely have time to conduct my online research as I take whatever side jobs I can get and deplete my meager savings to pay the bills. And the kicker is, my position is much more fortunate than others. I am single, have no children, have some savings and marketable skills, and a place to live with family who support me. Meanwhile, colleagues in my cohort are going further into debt to try to make ends meet while they wait to begin their fellowships. They tell me that if the situation continues for a few months more, they will have to leave academia altogether in order to provide for their families.

It has become painfully clear that our livelihoods hang in the balance because of the academy's expectations regarding where and how scholars ought to conduct their research. However well-equipped we may be to conduct remote research, it is not viable if it is not valued in dollars and cents. If institutional attitudes toward remote research do not change significantly and soon, area studies as a whole is poised to lose an entire generation of young scholars unable to support themselves in their fieldwork years, save those who are independently wealthy and can afford to wait and work for free.

## Conclusion

In this essay, I have attempted to demystify the history of remote research in anthropology and area studies and trace several prevalent misconceptions concerning the practice of research at a distance. I find that one of the powerful ideologies behind our anxieties over remote research is the notion that “being there” is fundamental to one’s work and professional identity. I have suggested that remote research has a significant history and offers new possibilities given recent technological developments. Remote research can be equally as rigorous and productive as in-person fieldwork, if in different ways.

Researchers have had to negotiate numerous personal and professional commitments and constraints long before the pandemic. The consequences of COVID-19 have only multiplied, exacerbated, and distributed issues many of us were already facing. What is different about this moment is that we all find ourselves (not just digital ethnographers and online researchers), at the same time, in a crucible, a crisis of methods and epistemologies—one which offers us the opportunity to reimagine what it means to *be* a researcher and to *do* scholarly research at a distance, both in our individual fields and as a scholarly community. Moreover, this period of great immobility has highlighted the privileges that many of us have taken for granted for too long. We must be careful to recognize that the solutions to the problems that currently stymie our research do not lie in overcoming the temporary obstacles to our movement, but in addressing the burdens that our expectation of mobility put on those who for a multiplicity of reasons cannot or do not choose to do so.

It is my hope that, having named and contextualized the misgivings we share about increased engagement with remote research, we may push past these anxieties and bring our considerable knowledge and diverse perspectives to bear on more critical questions: How exactly do we conduct remote research in our disciplines? How does remote research trouble what George Marcus calls “the aesthetics of practice and evaluation” that define our “disciplinary culture[s] of method and career-making?”<sup>34</sup> How do we reconcile the necessities of remote research with our professional identities as area specialists deeply embedded in the languages, locations, and cultures we study? How should we go about training people in remote research methods? What role should remote research play in our work long-term? How do we change institutional structures and expectations so that scholars conducting remote research projects are recognized as members of the academic community, eligible for funding and other forms of support, and taken seriously on the job market?

We need to get comfortable with the fact that remote research will not simply go away once the pandemic has passed—nor should it. Where there is anxiety, there is opportunity for reflection, insight, and growth. If remote research, as it is now, presents an existential threat to area studies, it benefits us to articulate why. We need to clarify what area studies has to offer when those areas are off limits. Doing so will only make us more resilient in the face of future disruptions and better-equipped to respond to the problems of our times.

---

<sup>34</sup> George Marcus, “Introduction,” 1.

## Author Bio

Kaitlyn Ugoretz is a PhD Candidate in East Asian Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She holds BA and MA degrees in East Asian Studies from the University of Pennsylvania. Supported by the Social Science Research Council and Japan Foundation, her dissertation explores the globalization of Shinto through a multi-sited ethnographic study of transnational, online Shinto communities. Ugoretz's research interests include religion, media, digital technology, globalization, and materiality. Her work has been published in *Critical Asian Studies* (2021), the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Japanese Religions* (2021) and the *New Nanzan Guide to Japanese Religions* (forthcoming), and she serves as the Japanese Religions Editor for the Database of Religious History. As a 2021 Sacred Writes Public Engagement Fellow, Kaitlyn creates educational content on East Asian religions for the educational YouTube channels *Religion For Breakfast* (writer) and *Eat Pray Anime* (host).

## Acknowledgements

This publication was made possible by support from the Social Science Research Council's International Dissertation Research Fellowship, with funds provided by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

## Bibliography

- Abidin, Crystal and Gabriele De Seta. "Private Messages from the Field: Confessions on Digital Ethnography and Its Discomforts." *Journal of Digital Social Research* 2, no. 1 (February 2020): 1-19.
- Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Theory, Culture & Society* 7, no. 2-3 (June 1990): 295-310.
- — —. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Asad, Talal, ed. *Anthropology & the Colonial Encounter*. London: Ithaca Press, 1973.
- Boellstorff, Tom. *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the Virtually Human*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Boellstorff, Tom, Bonnie Nardi, Celia Pearce, and T. L. Taylor. *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Cowan, Douglas. *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2005.

de Seta, Gabriele. "Three Lies of Digital Ethnography." *Journal of Digital Social Research* 2, no. 1 (February 2020): 77-97.

Faubion, James and George Marcus, eds. *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be: Learning Anthropology's Method in a Time of Transition*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Friedman, P. Kerim. "Armchair Anthropology in the Cyber Age?" *Savage Minds: Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, May 19, 2005. Accessed February 15, 2021. <https://savageminds.org/2005/05/19/armchair-anthropology-in-the-cyber-age/>.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

— — —. *Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988.

Gray, Patty. "Memory, Body, and the Online Researcher: Following Russian Street Demonstrations Via Social Media," *American Ethnologist* 43, no. 3 (August 2016): 500-510.

Grieve, Gregory. *Cyber Zen: Imagining Authentic Buddhist Identity, Community, and Practices in the Virtual World of Second Life*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Günel, Gökçe, Saiba Varma, and Chika Watanabe, "A Manifesto for Patchwork Ethnography," *Member Voices, Fieldsights* (June 2020): n.p. Accessed February 15, 2021. <https://culanth.org/fieldsights/a-manifesto-for-patchwork-ethnography>.

Hannerz, Ulf. "Being There . . . and There . . . and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography." *Ethnography* 4, no. 2 (June 2003): 201-16.

Hine, Christine. *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied, Everyday*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

Hjorth, Larissa, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway, and Genevieve Bell, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Holmes, Douglas and George Marcus. "Cultures of Expertise and the Management of Globalization: Toward the Re-Functioning of Ethnography." In *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics and Anthropological Problems*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2005.

- — —. "Collaboration Today and the Re-Imagination of the Classic Scene of Fieldwork Encounter." *Collaborative Anthropologies* 1 (2008): 81-101.
- Kolluoglu-Kirli, Biray. "From Orientalism to Area Studies." *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 93-111.
- Kozinets, Robert. *Netnography: Redefined*. 2nd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015.
- Malinowski, Bronisław. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1922.
- — —. *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. London: Norton, 1926.
- Marcus, George. "Ethnography In/Of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (October 1995): 95-117.
- — —. *Para-Sites: A Casebook Against Cynical Reason*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Mead, Margaret and Rhoda Metraux, eds. *The Study of Culture at a Distance*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952.
- Morris-Suzuki, Tessa. "Anti-Area Studies." *Communal/Plural* 8, no. 1 (2000): 9-23.
- Postil, John. "Remote Ethnography: Studying Culture from Afar." In *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*, edited by Larissa Hjorth, Heather Horst, Ann Galloway, and Genevieve Bell, 61-69. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Price, Devon. *Laziness Does Not Exist: A Defense of the Exhausted, Exploited, and Overworked*. New York: Atria Books, 2021.
- Sera-Shriar, Efram. "What Is Armchair Anthropology? Observational Practices in 19th-Century British Human Sciences." *History of the Human Sciences* 27, no. 2 (April 2014): 26-40.
- Sloan, Luke and Anabel Quan-Haase, eds. *The SAGE Handbook of Social Media Research Methods*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2017.

Vangkilde, Kasper and Morten Rod. "Para-Ethnography 2.0: An Experiment with the Distribution of Perspective in Collaborative Fieldwork." *Collaborative Formation of Issues: The Research Network for Design Anthropology*. Aarhus: The Research Network for Design Anthropology, 2015.



*The Chinese oil tanker Han Xing sails off the coast of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands, December 2011.  
Author photo.*

## THINK PIECE: Is it Possible to Think of a “Chinese Pacific” in the Making? Decolonizing Anthropology in the Asia-Pacific Region

*By Rodolfo Maggio, University of Turin*

### Abstract

The travel restrictions implemented to limit the spread of the COVID19 pandemic prevent fieldworkers from collecting ethnographic data in the Pacific. The possibility of collecting first-hand data about indigenous perspectives on the recent growth of the Chinese presence and influence is therefore limited too. Despite the critical need for this kind of data, the situation provides an opportunity for a concerted reflection on the conceptual tools scholars deploy to study China in the Pacific. A decolonial methodology seems necessary to prevent the superimposition of preconceived ideas upon indigenous views that, at the moment, can only be accessed in journalistic and social media outlets. It interrogates the position from which scholars speak or write, the benefit derived from theorizing indigenous ideas, and the extent to which, in the absence of a decolonial methodology, such ideas might become invisible. Although the theoretical explanation of how the deconstruction of these conceptual tools can be conducted is specifically focused on the Pacific, the proposed interaction between anthropology, environmental science, and geopolitics could potentially be applied in other research endeavors.

**Keywords:** “China threat,” Sino-Pacific relations, interdisciplinary methods, COVID-19, Pacific Islands, decolonization, everyday geopolitics



In these pandemic times, the opinions of Pacific Islanders are mostly, if not only, recorded by journalists and bloggers, rather than ethnographers trained in interdisciplinary methods. That is especially problematic, for these are also times of great change in the Pacific, as the recent withdrawal of 5 Micronesian states from the Pacific Islands Forum starkly illustrates. In this think piece, I reflect upon studying the game-changing presence and influence of China in the Pacific with an anthropological approach that, despite the methodological challenges caused by the current travel restrictions, seeks to incorporate a plurality of Pacific voices into the analytical process. Taking into account the obvious limitations, I propose to apply a decolonial methodology to look at the interactions between Pacific Islanders and Chinese actors in the region, in order to be better prepared for the time when ethnographic fieldwork will be a convenient research method again.

As even the casual observer of the Pacific knows by now, China's transoceanic expansion is accelerating with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the exploration of oceanic sea beds, and the diplomacy with Pacific Islands Countries (PICs). However, even though research on and with China is considered a priority in many sectors, not only in academia, relatively few studies are focused on the Pacific theater. Scholars from various disciplines have been studying Chinese activities in Africa, South America, and Eurasia,<sup>1</sup> producing an ever-growing corpus of innovative literature, and contributing to an increasingly heated debate. In contrast, the presence of China in Oceania is much less studied and, most importantly, the existing literature still lacks indigenous voices and interdisciplinary approaches. This lack is exacerbated by the current travel restrictions, hence scholars of Sino-Pacific relations need to rethink their research strategies for the time being.

## **Reimagining the Research of Recent Sino-Pacific Relations**

The scholar who wishes to reimagine the study of these interactions during the current pandemic might focus on national discourses between PICs and powerful regional actors such as China and the United States. Preliminary discourse analysis suggests that, despite President Xi Jinping's recent departure from a low-profile policy, the perception of China in the Pacific is still influenced by a universalizing message to current and future partners that emphasizes people-to-people relations and mutual respect between cultures. Such an attitude sharply contrasts with the message of superiority and separation symbolized by the "America First" slogan and the exclusionary policies of the Trump administration.

## ***Finding and Interpreting Indigenous Statements about the Chinese***

Searching relevant expressions for a discourse analysis of Sino-Pacific relations, a very interesting case can perhaps be found in the recent debate about the PICs not being invited at the United Nations Climate Change Conference by US President Joe Biden. At a reception

---

<sup>1</sup> Carmen Amado Mendes, ed., *China's New Silk Road: An Emerging World Order* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018), 1-7.

at the State House in Suva, Fiji's Prime Minister Frank Bainimarama is reported to have said to the former US Ambassador Judith Sefkin, "You are not a true friend of Fiji. See that guy over there? (Pointing to the Chinese ambassador). That's a true friend of Fiji." "Friendship" is a key term in journalistic reports and diplomatic documents that should be analyzed from an anthropological perspective to suggest new interpretations of the recent successes of Chinese diplomacy in the Pacific.

It is crucial, indeed, to focus on indigenous sources, for the history of colonialism still weighs on anglophone and francophone post-colonial discourses. The fact that criticisms of Xi's foreign policy have mostly come from former colonial powers arguably has the unintended consequence of encouraging many Pacific Islanders to look favorably towards China. Despite some episodes of tension and even violence against Chinese businesses, Pacific Islanders in the past few years have been generally well disposed towards their local Chinese communities.<sup>2</sup> That partly explains why some Pacific leaders recently invited China to operate in the region. However, these dispositions have not been comprehensively analyzed.

In contemporary literature, the interpretation of such an active role is mostly left to geopolitical scientists and economists who study China's state-led strategic expansion in PICs in isolation and/or in opposition to each other. The three most comprehensive studies of China in the Pacific<sup>3</sup> since Crocombe's 2007 work<sup>4</sup>, all came to "similar conclusions in viewing China as less of a destabilizing force in the Pacific than had hitherto been asserted, and in viewing Pacific Islanders as astute and active players pursuing their own interests in dealing with outsiders."<sup>5</sup> In contrast, a multidisciplinary study seems more appropriate to explore the multiple dimensions in which Sino-Pacific relations are taking shape, including geopolitics, the environment, and Chinese and indigenous cultures.

Information about the "new Chinese"<sup>6</sup> are usually limited to broad-brush depictions of Chinatowns. There is a valuable section of historiographical literature about Sino-Pacific relationships that partly addresses these issues in combination with each other.<sup>7</sup> However,

---

<sup>2</sup> Rita Parker, *Unregulated Population Migration and Other Future Drivers of Instability in the Pacific*. Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Arguably, these are: Terence Wesley-Smith and Edgar A. Porter, eds., *China in Oceania: Reshaping the Pacific*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010); Paul D'Arcy, Patrick Matbob, and Linda Crowl, eds., *Pacific-Asia Partnerships in Resource Development* (Madang, Papua New Guinea: DWU Press, 2014); Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands* (Acton: Australia: The Australian National University, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Ronald G. Crocombe, *Asia in the Pacific Islands: Replacing the West* (Suva: University of South Pacific, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> D'Arcy et al., *Pacific-Asia Partnerships in Resource Development*, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Graeme Smith, "Beijing's Orphans? New Chinese Investors in Papua New Guinea." *Pacific Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2013): 327-49.

<sup>7</sup> William Willmott, "Origins of the Chinese in the South Pacific," in *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, ed. Paul McGregor (Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995), 129-40; Willmott, *A History of the Chinese Communities in Eastern Melanesia* (Christchurch, N.Z.: Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, University of Canterbury, 2005); Willmott, "The Overseas Chinese Experience in the Pacific," in *China in Oceania*, ed. Terence Wesley-Smith and Edgar A. Porter (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 93-103; Ron Crocombe, 'The Fourth Wave: Chinese in the Pacific Islands in the Twenty-First Century', CSCSD, Occasional Paper 1 (2007); Crocombe, *Asia in the Pacific Islands*.

it mostly concerns the early years of the Chinese diaspora in the region (second half of the nineteenth century-early 1900s), tellingly referred to as “the old Chinese,” overseas Chinese (*huáqiáo* 华侨),<sup>8</sup> or pre-*huáyì* 华裔.<sup>9</sup> In very recent years this gap has been partly addressed by a few but notable ethnographic works.<sup>10</sup>

### ***When Fieldwork in the “Chinese Pacific” is Not an Option***

When fieldwork is not an option, newspapers can provide information about topics currently under discussion in the mediascape. For example, insights about the relationship between diplomatic relations and influxes of Chinese capital came from the words of Samoa’s Prime Minister at the 2019 Pacific Leaders Forum held in Tuvalu, who stated that if “Western powers don’t like what China is doing in the Pacific then they should provide the assistance currently on offer from the superpower.”<sup>11</sup> China is now the largest donor in Fiji and the second-largest donor for Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands, and Vanuatu. However, even though foreign investments and aid play a major role, it seems limiting to assume that money alone can explain why some PICs have an increasingly welcoming attitude towards China. To investigate these reasons, data from newspapers and blogs are definitely not enough.

In the absence of first-hand data about local perceptions of geopolitics, diplomatic speeches can be used to frame some of the key issues. Like in other countries with which China has diplomatic relations, Chinese statesmen need to demonstrate a willingness to formulate a purpose for their “expansion” into the Pacific that is also, if not primary, social and shared. Even if influxes of foreign capital might be of primary importance for countries severely affected by the consequences of climate change, a discourse has to be in place to frame the monetary transfer as coming from a partner country whose national identity and geopolitical message is coherent with the agenda of the receiving country. It is indeed the content of the relationship that should be investigated in order to provide a contribution to debates such as that about the tension between China and former colonial powers in the Pacific.

---

<sup>8</sup> Laurentina ‘Mica’ Barreto Soares, “Overseas Chinese, Soft Power and China’s People-to-People Diplomacy in Timor-Leste,” in *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*, eds. Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith (Acton, Australia: The Australian National University, 2021), 473–498.

<sup>9</sup> Paul D’Arcy, “The Chinese Pacifics: A Brief Historical Review,” *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 396–420.

<sup>10</sup> Anne-Christine Trémon, “Flexible Kinship: Shaping Transnational Families Among the Chinese in Tahiti,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 1 (2017): 42–60; Trémon, “Cosmopolitanization and Localization: Ethnicity, Class and Citizenship Among the Chinese of French Polynesia,” *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 1 (2009): 103–126; Graeme Smith, “Nupela Masta? Local and Expatriate Labour in a Chinese-Run Nickel Mine in Papua New Guinea,” *Asian Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (2013): 178–195; Henryk Szadziowski, “A Search for Coherence: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Pacific Islands,” in *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*, eds. Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith (Acton, Australia: The Australian National University, 2021), 283–318.

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Dreaver, “China’s Influence and Climate Change: Pacific Leaders Forum in Tuvalu Shaping Up to be Fiery,” accessed October 8, 2019, <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/chinas-influence-and-climate-change-pacific-leaders-forum-in-tuvalu-shaping-up-fiery>.

At a time when fieldwork is not as accessible an option as it used to, we might want to take the opportunity to distance ourselves from the above-mentioned issues and look at them differently. So, rather than the large flow of foreign capital in itself, a deeper explanation might be sought into *how* money is transferred. One way to do that is perhaps to look at the alleged absence of political preconditions in Chinese assistance, as do those who see the “China Inc.” strategy in the Pacific as a “recolonization by invitation,”<sup>12</sup> as opposed to the conditionality<sup>13</sup> of Western countries. However, it has been argued that the Chinese government’s political precondition is far from absent. For example, voting compliance by PICs (e.g. in the United Nations) seems to be a fairly strong form of reciprocity. Still, such an argument has been challenged too.<sup>14</sup>

Since looking solely at political interests does not provide the basis for conclusive arguments, scholars should focus on natural resources and examine China’s growing need to access these in partner countries.<sup>15</sup> The issue of resource extraction is especially controversial because there is evidence that it weakens the democracy promotion effect of Western aid.<sup>16</sup> However, the latter concept has many detractors, such as the Australian economist Hughes who denounced that “Australian aid” among other sources of Western capital, “has been a key component of the Pacific’s decline.”<sup>17</sup>

The lack of consensus among these political and economic scholars signals at once the complexity of this debate and its urgency. Most notably, however, the extant literature reveals the general absence of interdisciplinary approaches to indigenous voices, which is another reason why it is necessary to re-imagine research about these issues at a time when conducting fieldwork in the Pacific is extremely difficult. As evidenced by a long and established tradition of ethnographic studies, Pacific Islanders tend to look at the issues above in connection with their culture and especially the value of the environment, not as isolated phenomena. However, given the current travel restrictions it becomes all the more difficult to listen, record, and give value to these perspectives.

---

<sup>12</sup> Roland Seib, *China in the South Pacific: No New Hegemon on the Horizon*, Peace Research Institute, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> David Mosse, *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Mosse, “The Anthropology of International Development,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 227-246; Jonathan Temple, “Aid and Conditionality,” In *Handbook of Development Economics*, vol. 5, eds. Dani Rodrik, Mark Rosenzweig (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2010), 4415-4523.

<sup>14</sup> Bob Jurriaan Van Grieken and Jaroslaw Kantorowicz, “Debunking Myths about China: The Determinants of China’s Official Financing to the Pacific,” *Geopolitics* 26, no.3 (2019): 861-888.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Vanderhill, *Promoting Authoritarianism Abroad* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013), 6; Giorgio Gualberti, Morgan Bazilian, and Todd Moss, “Energy Investments in Africa by the US, Europe and China,” *International Association for Energy Economics* (2014): 31-35.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Wolf Jr, Xiao Wang, and Eric Warner, *China’s Foreign Aid and Government-Sponsored Investment Activities: Scale, Content, Destinations, and Implications* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013); Thomas Lum, Hannah Fischer, Julissa Gomez-Granger, and Anne Leland, *China’s Foreign Aid Activities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service Report, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Helen Hughes, “Aid Has Failed the Pacific,” *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 25 no. 3 (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2010): 233.

## The Importance of Including Indigenous Perspectives on China in the Pacific

During the pandemic, scholars of the Pacific have been mostly unable to include these perspectives in their analysis, hence there is a risk of misrepresenting how Pacific Islanders frame the increasing Chinese presence and influence. Currently, one of the top priorities of PICs is tackling the consequences of climate change, which is why it warrants even more scholarly attention at a time when fieldwork research is not possible. There is a sense of urgency, since for many communities the major concern is not whether they will leave their island of residence or not, but when.<sup>18</sup> Hence, development assistance to respond to environmental issues is perhaps the most important aspect of their relationships with partner countries and international aid agencies.

Although China is the largest producer of CO<sub>2</sub>, in some academic and political circles it has been recently re-labeled a “Global Clean Energy Champion.”<sup>19</sup> That has had important consequences on the perception of its role in the Pacific and might play a role in explaining why China is increasingly seen as a Pacific actor with a legitimate regional presence. As a consequence, high-level meetings with Pacific leaders accumulate and new partnerships with diplomats, private companies, and aid agencies result in new projects and infrastructures, such as the Pacific leg of the BRI’s Maritime Silk Road. All this is affecting the perception of Pacific Islanders and in some instances this is having a profound impact on the future of PICs and the Asia Pacific region more broadly.

For example, a few months before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, in September 2019, the debate regarding new Sino-Pacific relations reached a peak with the decision of the Solomon Islands government, quickly followed by Kiribati, to sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan. These PICs, with a rate of sea-level rise 2–3 times higher than the world average and a capillary debate about the causes and consequences of severing their diplomatic ties with Taiwan, have become “moral laboratories” for China’s maritime diplomacy in the Pacific. There, we can learn about the processes that are seemingly leading to changes in regional maritime sovereignty and, potentially, to a new thalassocratic order.<sup>20</sup>

In Solomon Islands, local concerns about the negative consequences of climate change are seen from a different perspective as the Government undergoes a three-year transition

---

<sup>18</sup> However, their preoccupation might be unwarranted as scholars of climate change and its impact on governance only presented irrefutable evidence of relocation solely or mainly caused by climate change in Alaska, not the Pacific. See: Robin Bronen and Stuart Chapin, “Adaptive Governance and Institutional Strategies for Climate-Induced Community Relocations in Alaska,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 23 (2013): 9320–9325; Christine Shearer, “The Political Ecology of Climate Adaptation Assistance: Alaska Natives, Displacement, and Relocation,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 19, no. 1 (2012): 174–183.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Andrews-Speed, and Sufang Zhang, *China as a Global Clean Energy Champion: Lifting the Veil* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> Patrick L. Barnard et al. “Coastal Vulnerability Across the Pacific Dominated by El Niño/Southern Oscillation,” *Nature Geoscience* 8 no.10 (2015): 801–807; Yimou Lee, “Taiwan Warns Solomon Islands of China ‘Debt Trap’ in Diplomatic Switch,” accessed June 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pacific-china-solomonislands-idUSKCN1VR09W>; Cheryl Mattingly, *Moral Laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for a Goodlife* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

(2020–2023) of bilateral ties with China that followed the severance of diplomatic ties with Taiwan (“The Switch,” as the locals call it). The structure of foreign aid is changing and that generates an intense debate about China’s climate-change diplomacy in Oceania.

Another way to take a Pacific perspective on the Chinese presence concerns the value of the sea. In this respect, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), headquartered in Honiara, the capital city of Solomon Islands, is perhaps the most dominant actor in the redefinition of the Pacific Ocean as a sovereign space, a resource extraction site, and a securitized territory. China, in the attempt to control growing portions of the Solomon Sea, has reached deals to “strengthen” tuna fisheries in Solomon Islands, an industry in which it had “no role” before its diplomatic ingress.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, fishing was the only industry in which Taiwanese predominated<sup>22</sup> before The Switch.

It follows that unprecedented changes are happening, and will be happening in the next few years, especially for the local fishing communities affected by climate change, i.e. two areas where Pacific Islanders express specific perspectives and should be listened to. However, their opinions are being recorded by local journalists and bloggers, rather than fieldworkers trained in multicultural approaches and interdisciplinary methods. The current travel restrictions are worsening this lack of fine-grained data about the perspectives of Pacific Islanders on the Chinese presence and influence. Hence it is necessary to reimagine a methodologically coherent way to produce innovative knowledge about issues of such pressing relevance despite the current travel restrictions.

### **Travel Restrictions and Data Collection in the “Chinese Pacific”**

In response to the problems illustrated above, it would be necessary to collect ethnographic data. Direct observations and interviews should be processed with qualitative methods such as thematic analysis and grounded theory to add theoretical value to bottom-up indigenous perspectives. As travel restrictions make the collection of this kind of data difficult, the study of Sino-Pacific relationships must be conducted with other means. However, as we will see, there is hardly a replacement for the kind of data that can be collected by means of ethnographic fieldwork.

For example, it would be necessary to measure local levels of engagement with the island of residence. Ethnographers could do that by looking at transactions of valued objects, such as materials used to build houses, piggeries, and ancestral shrines. This is not the kind of observation that can be conducted at distance. Although it is possible to interview informants on the phone, their narratives would inevitably be partial and there would be no means to verify the information. Although there is some value in interview data

---

<sup>21</sup> Ronald Toito’ona, “China Eyes Solomons Tuna,” accessed June 14, 2021, *FFA’s Tuna Pacific: Fisheries News and Views*, <https://www.tunapacific.org/2020/02/17/china-eyes-solomons-tuna/>.

<sup>22</sup> Clive Moore, “No More Walkabout Long Chinatown: As An Involvement in the Economic and Political Process,” in *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, ed. Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008): 64–95.

about material transactions, the lack of direct observation makes the assessment of island engagement impossible.

That is not to say that there is no value in subjective narratives, of course. Much to the contrary, collecting oral histories about the relationship between the community and the environment is crucial. Oral histories of this kind would help one to understand the value of land, sea, and natural resources as opposed to the value of foreign influxes of capital. However, this kind of data should be supported by direct observations too. Otherwise, the researcher can only use them to formulate theoretical arguments about the actions people consider important, without any description of the extent to which they follow their own principles in everyday interactions.

Observing social situations is, thus, a research practice that cannot be replaced without important losses. Specifically, in the context of this research theme, the Chinese influence must be observed as it concretizes into social action by means of negotiations. For example, land use and access to fishing areas are issues likely to elicit values and give interested parties good reason to take action. This is the kind of data that would provide direct evidence of how local actors handle their resource management duties as they confront the presence of the “New Chinese.”

All this does not mean that the only condition to make such a study possible would be to have ethnographers working in the selected areas. Other conditions should be satisfied, such as active and positive participation of the local communities. That would be necessary for an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the sea, land, and the socio-scape are valued. That can be studied with participatory methods such as 3D Participatory Modeling (P3DM), a community-based mapping method. Large scale tri-dimensional maps could be co-constructed to locate areas of particular value, such as fishing spots or gardening grounds, as well as land affected by climate change, soil acidification, and sea-level rise. In addition to providing first-hand data on the local valuation of land and sea, this method enables the participants to raise issues of local concern that the research protocol does not originally include. The fieldworker should be prepared to incorporate these in the research agenda, if possible and deemed necessary. That is especially important when new perspectives are offered by minorities of fragile actors who would otherwise lack an opportunity to have their voices heard. Methods such as P3DM allow participation regardless of gender, literacy, and status, hence they constitute one of the most indispensable tools of such a methodology. However, this and the other methods listed above cannot be deployed at the moment.

Arguably, the only method that is not irremediably compromised by the travel restrictions during the pandemic is the collection of photographic images taken by the research participants with their smartphones. This kind of image can be very useful and, in some cases, strikingly eloquent. That is the case of the image of the diplomatic visit of the Chinese ambassador Tang Songgen in Kiribati. As he was welcomed on Marakei Island, someone took a picture of him walking on a “red carpet” of I-Kiribati children. Unsurprisingly, when the image began to circulate on the internet, it generated a widespread debate on Twitter,

in the foreign policy sections of newspapers such as the *New York Times*, and university classrooms around the world. Many have openly sided against the ambassador's behavior, judged to be an explicit expression of neo-colonial oppressive relations. The criticism of ethnocentrism was leveled at this accusation, arguing that the welcome ceremony was, if viewed from the point of view of the I-Kiribati, no more than a traditional custom adapted to the circumstances. However, the extent to which this is indeed the perspective of I-Kiribati people remains to be ascertained.

Anthropologists of the Pacific were asked to comment on the image. It might seem appropriate to quote the perspective offered by Professor Katerina Teaiwa, a native of Kiribati herself. However, rather than claiming to speak on the behalf of I-Kiribati and take a side on the debate, she said that it was "frustrating for Pacific Islanders not to be taken seriously or heard".<sup>23</sup> This is indeed the kind of circumstances in which it is clear that the work of ethnographers is necessary and urgent in order to study the ways in which the Chinese presence is perceived in Kiribati or, for that matter, Solomon Islands, and the Pacific more broadly.

### **Decolonial Methodologies in the Pandemic Pacific**

Until ethnographic fieldwork in the Pacific becomes more compatible with the restrictions implemented to limit the spread of the SARS COV-2 virus, other research methods can be envisaged. As argued above, there is hardly a suitable substitution for the kind of research data that would be necessary to study the Chinese presence and influence on Pacific lives. Hence, one alternative research trajectory would be to concentrate on the material published by local newspapers, as well as the testimonies and opinion pieces posted on social media. However, this kind of material should not be analyzed uncritically, that is, within the framework of theoretical legacies that produced and circulated concepts such as "trade war," "debt traps," "Chinese corruption," "dollar diplomacy," and "neocolonialism," as well as non-indigenous ideas such as "climate crisis," and "refugee migration." These concepts have been constructed in contemporary, mostly subject-specific, debates about Chinese "expansionism," hence de-constructing them is a necessary step towards laying the groundwork for a study of indigenous perspectives with an interdisciplinary approach.

Without this kind of preliminary deconstruction, there is a risk of pre-supposing the categories within which indigenous statements and local concerns will be framed once extracted from recently published materials. Given the pressure on academics to contribute to debates that are well beyond the interests and control of Pacific Islanders, such as the US-China "trade war" or the territorial claims in "East Asia" (itself a term coined in the West), there is a potential for the misuse of indigenous perspectives on the Chinese presence and influence. As Grydehøj *et al.* convincingly argued, there is a tendency in Western media

---

<sup>23</sup> "Why Did a Chinese Diplomat Walk All Over People on a Pacific Island?," *New York Times*, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/19/world/asia/kiribati-china.html>.



to tag as “China threat” phenomena that might not necessarily be enclosed in such a category.<sup>24</sup> That is particularly the case in former colonies such as the PICs.

The “China threat” discourse is, in brief, a complex set of discursive formations that frames former colonies as tokens to be won or lost on the geopolitical chessboard. Focusing on the Pacific, there is no shortage of reports warning about the potential risks associated with the penetration of Chinese power, including environmental, economic, and military risks. The majority of publications about the Chinese presence and influence in the Pacific defends, to a variable extent, a position within the “China threat” discourse. This epistemic framing within the structure of pre-existing discourses requires a conscientious and precise reflection on the part of scholars who wish to position themselves, as much as possible, alongside their Pacific informants. Although, generally speaking, the history of ethnomethodology illustrates the limitations of such an endeavor, the discursive construction of the “China threat” as a pre-existing category that can potentially obliterate the plurality of Pacific voices poses a much more ethically compromising threat. Anthropologists are not necessarily devoid of hegemonic tendencies in their epistemologies. Consciously or not, their biases influence the formulation of what is thinkable and what is not.<sup>25</sup>

It follows that the integration of indigenous perspectives into a research project about China in the Pacific requires a conscious detachment from the “China threat” discourse. That is possible by focusing on the articulation between processes of knowledge production, circulation, and power in the contemporary Pacific. Such a focus would encourage a deep understanding of the ways in which colonial forms of domination, independentist movements, and neo-colonialism in the Pacific all relate in some ways to concepts originating in discourses.

Despite the commitment of anthropologists to construct epistemological discourses on the basis of knowledge produced by people who are not in positions of dominance,<sup>26</sup> that alone does not ensure that their perspectives will be taken into account and applied into concerted conceptualizing efforts. Genuine care for and attention to the emic perspective does not automatically result in a re-evaluation of what is thinkable. Rather, it is the other way around. In order to give value to indigenous perspectives on such a critical issue as the Chinese presence and influence in the Pacific, to the point where they are brought to bear theoretically on current geopolitical issues, our knowledge-production processes should first be liberated from the professional stigma of “thinking the unthinkable.”

---

<sup>24</sup> Adam Grydehøj, Michael Lujan Bevacqua, Megumi Chibana, Yaso Nadarajah, Aká Simonsen, Ping Su, Renee Wright, and Sasha Davis, “Practicing Decolonial Political Geography: Island Perspectives on Neocolonialism and the China Threat Discourse,” *Political Geography* 85 (2021): 102330.

<sup>25</sup> Eduardo Restrepo and Arturo Escobar, “‘Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise’ Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework,” *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2005): 99–129; Arturo Escobar and Eduardo Restrepo, “Anthropologies hégémoniques et colonialité,” *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 62 (2009): 83–95.

<sup>26</sup> Sonita Sarker, “Subalternity In and Out of Time, In and Out of History,” in *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment*, ed. David Kreps (London: Routledge, 2016): 91–110.

The current phase should therefore not be spent absorbing the ever-increasing corpus of journalistic and popular materials about who is winning or losing the Pacific to whom. Rather, the challenge for scholars interested in comprehending the current situation would be to question the epistemic position from which we look at the places where relatable knowledge is produced.<sup>27</sup> They should be genuinely interested in explaining why and how such knowledge is situated and how it is used normatively to orient our thinking and discredit alternative viewpoints. The possibility itself of anthropological knowledge production processes depends on the willingness of scholars to question the conditions of their own knowing.

Scholars acknowledging the importance of questioning their own epistemic position in the “Chinese Pacific” might turn the challenges of the pandemic into an opportunity for developing such a reflexive effort in a methodologically explicit way. Arguably, such an effort can only rest on a refusal of the dichotomic, and rather unsophisticated, separation between being “pro-China” and “anti-China.” Although there is no need for this refusal to be explicit, it is necessary to illustrate how our methodology operates in such a way as to prevent the superimposition of patterns of colonial dominance on the knowledge production process. If ethnographic fieldwork was an option, one way to do that would be to open the analytical process up to the incorporation of a plurality of Pacific voices. However, currently, the extent to which such voices can be collected and convincingly tagged as “indigenous” without ethnographic fieldwork is very limited. Hence, while the ethnographic exploration of Pacific perspectives on the Chinese presence has to be postponed, the opportunity might be sought to bring the project of decolonizing knowledge further, which has never ceased to be a necessity and arguably will never do.

## Author Bio

Rodolfo Maggio teaches anthropology at the University of Turin, Italy. He has been a Special Foreign Researcher at the Waseda University (2019–20), Tokyo and Wellcome Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oxford (2015–18). He is the author of journal articles and book chapters on religion, morality, economy, and the anthropology of Solomon Islands. He published three monographs about, respectively, the works of Pierre Bourdieu, Karen Ho and Jared Diamond. His book *The Kwara’ae of Honiara: Migration and ‘Good Life’ in Solomon Islands* was published in 2019 (Milan: Meltemi).

## Bibliography

Andrews-Speed, Philip, and Sufang Zhang. *China as a Global Clean Energy Champion: Lifting the Veil*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.

---

<sup>27</sup> Hourya Bentouhami, “Audre Lorde, la poésie n’est pas un luxe,” *Ballast* 1 (2017): 90–103; Ramón Grosfoguel, “The Epistemic Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms,” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 211–223.

- Barreto Soares, Laurentina 'Mica'. "Overseas Chinese, Soft Power and China's People-to-People Diplomacy in Timor-Leste." In *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, 473-498. Acton, Australia: The Australian National University, 2021.
- Barnard, Patrick L., Andrew D. Short, Mitchell D. Harley, Kristen D. Splinter, Sean Vitousek, Ian L. Turner, Jonathan Allan et al. "Coastal Vulnerability Across the Pacific Dominated by El Niño/Southern Oscillation." *Nature Geoscience* 8, no. 10 (2015): 801-807.
- Bentouhami, Hourya. "Audre Lorde, la poésie n'est pas un luxe." *Ballast* 1 (2017): 90-103.
- Bronen, Robin, and F. Stuart Chapin. "Adaptive Governance and Institutional Strategies for Climate-Induced Community Relocations in Alaska." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 23 (2013): 9320-9325.
- Crocombe, Ronald G. *Asia in the Pacific Islands: Replacing the West*. Suva: University of South Pacific, 2007.
- Crocombe, Ronald G. "The Fourth Wave: Chinese in the Pacific Islands in the Twenty-First Century." CSCSD, Occasional Paper 1, 2007.
- D'Arcy, Paul. "The Chinese Pacifics: A Brief Historical Review." *The Journal of Pacific History* 49, no. 4 (2014): 396-420.
- D'Arcy, Paul, Patrick Matbob, and Linda Crowl, eds. *Pacific-Asia Partnerships in Resource Development*. Madang, Papua New Guinea: DWU Press, 2014.
- Dreaver, Barbara. "China's Influence and Climate Change: Pacific Leaders Forum in Tuvalu Shaping Up to be Fiery." Accessed October 8, 2019. <https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/chinas-influence-and-climate-change-pacific-leaders-forum-in-tuvalu-shaping-up-fiery>.
- Escobar, Arturo, and Eduardo Restrepo. "Anthropologies hégémoniques et colonialité." *Cahiers des Amériques Latines* 62 (2009): 83-95.
- Hughes, Helen. "Aid Has Failed the Pacific," *Pacific Economic Bulletin* 25 no. 3. Canberra: The Australian National University, 2010.

Grosfoguel, Ramón. "The Epistemic Turn. Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms." *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 211-223.

Grydehøj, Adam, Michael Lujan Bevacqua, Megumi Chibana, Yaso Nadarajah, Aká Simonsen, Ping Su, Renee Wright, and Sasha Davis. "Practicing Decolonial Political Geography: Island Perspectives on Neocolonialism and the China Threat Discourse." *Political Geography* 85 (2021): 102330.

Gualberti, Giorgio, Morgan Bazilian, and Todd Moss. "Energy Investments in Africa by the US, Europe and China." *International Association for Energy Economics* (2014): 31-35.

Lee, Yimou. "Taiwan Warns Solomon Islands of China 'Debt Trap' in Diplomatic Switch." Accessed June 14, 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pacific-china-solomonislands-idUSKCN1VR09W>.

Lum, Thomas, Hannah Fischer, Julissa Gomez-Granger, and Anne Leland. *China's Foreign Aid Activities in Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service Report, 2009.

Mattingly, Cheryl. *Moral Laboratories: Family Peril and the Struggle for a Good Life*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2014.

Mendes, Carmen Amado, ed. *China's New Silk Road: An Emerging World Order*. Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018.

Moore, Clive. "No More Walkabout Long Chinatown: As an Involvement in the Economic and Political Process." In *Politics and State Building in Solomon Islands*, edited by Sinclair Dinnen and Stewart Firth, 64-95. Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008.

Mosse, David. *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London: Pluto Press, 2004.

Mosse, David. "The Anthropology of International Development." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 227-246.

*New York Times*. "Why Did a Chinese Diplomat Walk All Over People on a Pacific Island?" Accessed August 19, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/19/world/asia/kiribati-china.html>.

- Parker, Rita. *Unregulated Population Migration and Other Future Drivers of Instability in the Pacific*. Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2018.
- Reid, Anthony. *The Chinese Diaspora in the Pacific*. London: Routledge, 2017.
- Restrepo, Eduardo, and Arturo Escobar. "'Other Anthropologies and Anthropology Otherwise' Steps to a World Anthropologies Framework." *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 2 (2005): 99-129.
- Sarker, Sonita. "Subalternity In and Out of Time, In and Out of History." In *Gramsci and Foucault: A Reassessment*, edited by David Kreps, 91-110. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Seib, Roland. *China in the South Pacific: No New Hegemon on the Horizon*. Peace Research Institute, 2009.
- Shearer, Christine. "The Political Ecology of Climate Adaptation Assistance: Alaska Natives, Displacement, and Relocation." *Journal of Political Ecology* 19, no. 1 (2012): 174-183.
- Smith, Graeme. "Beijing's Orphans? New Chinese Investors in Papua New Guinea." *Pacific Affairs* 86, no. 2 (2013): 327-49.
- Smith, Graeme. "Nupela Masta? Local and Expatriate Labour in a Chinese-Run Nickel Mine in Papua New Guinea." *Asian Studies Review* 37, no. 2 (2013): 178-195.
- Smith, Graeme, and Terence Wesley-Smith, eds. *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*. Acton: Australia: The Australian National University, 2021.
- Szadziowski, Henryk. "A Search for Coherence: The Belt and Road Initiative in the Pacific Islands." In *The China Alternative: Changing Regional Order in the Pacific Islands*, edited by Graeme Smith and Terence Wesley-Smith, 283-318. Acton, Australia: The Australian National University, 2021.
- Temple, Jonathan. "Aid and Conditionality." In *Handbook of Development Economics*, vol. 5, edited by Dani Rodrik, Mark Rosenzweig, 4415-4523. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2010.
- Toito'ona, Ronald, "China Eyes Solomons Tuna." *FFA's Tuna Pacific: Fisheries news and views*. Accessed June 14, 2021. <https://www.tunapacific.org/2020/02/17/china-eyes-solomons-tuna/>.

Trémon, Anne-Christine. "Flexible Kinship: Shaping Transnational Families Among the Chinese in Tahiti." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 23, no. 1 (2017): 42-60.

Trémon, Anne-Christine. "Cosmopolitanization and Localization: Ethnicity, Class and Citizenship among the Chinese of French Polynesia." *Anthropological Theory* 9, no. 1 (2009): 103-126.

Vanderhill, Rachel. *Promoting Authoritarianism Abroad*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2013.

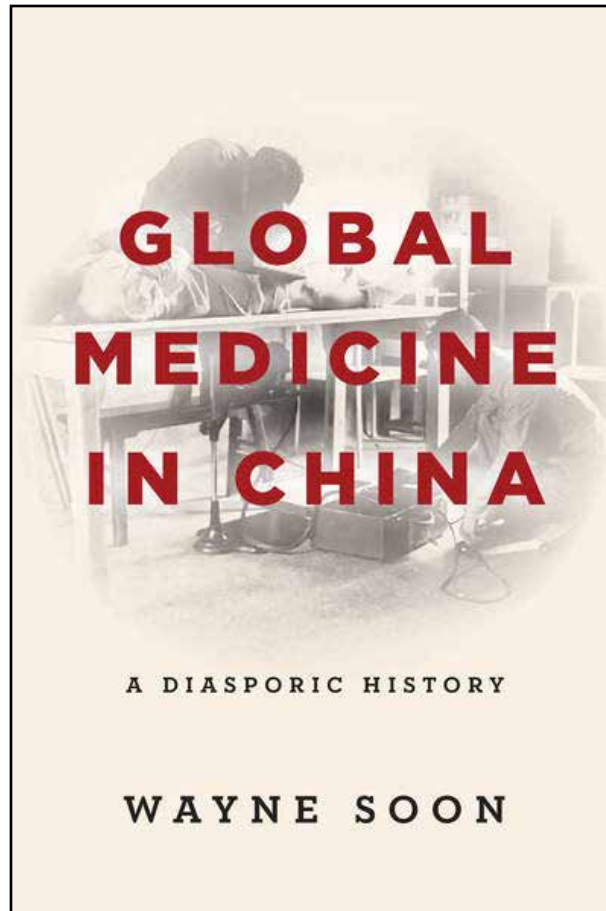
Van Grieken, Bob Jurriaan, and Jaroslaw Kantorowicz. "Debunking Myths about China: The Determinants of China's Official Financing to the Pacific." *Geopolitics* 26, no.3 (2019): 861-888.

Wesley-Smith, Terence, and Edgar A. Porter, eds. *China in Oceania: Reshaping the Pacific*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Willmott, William. "Origins of the Chinese in the South Pacific." In *Histories of the Chinese in Australasia and the South Pacific*, edited by Paul Mcgregor, 129-40. Melbourne: Museum of Chinese Australian History, 1995.

Willmott, William. "The Overseas Chinese Experience in the Pacific." In *China in Oceania*, edited by Terence Wesley-Smith and Edgar A. Porter, 93-103, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010.

Wolf Jr, Charles, Xiao Wang, and Eric Warner. *China's Foreign Aid and Government-Sponsored Investment Activities: Scale, Content, Destinations, and Implications*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2013.



***Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History, by Wayne Soon***

By Carles Brasó Broggi, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)

Soon, Wayne. *Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020. 328 pages. \$30. ISBN: 9781503614000.

Modern medicine in China cannot be understood without studying the contributions of Overseas Chinese medical personnel. *Global Medicine in China* demonstrates this transnational flow of medical knowledge through well-educated doctors from the Chinese diaspora who decided to create new institutions to improve the education and practice of biomedical science in China. The book starts with a plague that affected the Northeast regions of China in 1911, and the laudable efforts made by Dr. Wu Lien-teh (Wu Liande 伍連德) to counter it; it ends with references to Covid-19 in both the PRC and Taiwan. Dr. Wu's

recommendations to wear masks to reduce the spread of the pandemic in 1911 (as well as other hygienic measures) still resonate today.

The first chapter is a fascinating overview of the contributions of doctors and entrepreneurs from the Chinese diaspora in the making of modern Chinese biomedical institutions. The transnational character of these path-breakers allowed them to act as mediators between the centers of knowledge and education in the West and China, although these transfers were not carried out without problems. The author brings to light the racist milieu in which they worked, the difficulties in getting financial aid, and the problems facing the reception of modern biomedicine in China. One of the surprising conclusions of the book is that military medicine in Nationalist China—from Sun Yat-sen’s revolution until the withdrawal of the government to Taiwan in 1949—was dependent on Overseas Chinese capital and other forms of foreign investment.

The focus of the book (four chapters of five) is on the long decade of war that affected China between 1937 and 1949: first in China’s war against Japan and, next, in China’s civil war. During this difficult period, a notable figure stands out: Robert Lim (Lin Kesheng 林可勝) who led the creation of major medical institutions that receive close attention in the book: The China Red Cross Medical Relief Corps (CRCMRC, Chapter 2), the Emergency Medical Service Training School (EMSTS, Chapter 4); and the National Defence Medical Center (NDMC, Chapter 5). Indeed, Dr. Lim’s contribution to the modernization of Chinese medicine is important, and has already been researched by other authors. The merit of Wayne Soon’s scholarship lies in his emphasis upon transnational networks as key to the success of these institutions through the transfer of financial capital, technology, and personnel.

Robert Lim’s broad social networks, professional skills, good character, and commitment to help China made him a natural leader. His successful role as a mediator (despite all difficulties and setbacks) was possible thanks to a mix of relationships that were partially a product of good luck and family connections: some were inherited from the pioneering activities of his father Lim Boon-keng (Lin Wenqing 林文慶), in South-East Asia and China, while Lim also strengthened relations with doctors and institutions in Great Britain and the United States. Back in China, he became a well-known professor at the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC). Furthermore, he committed to modernizing Chinese military medicine after China’s war with Japan. The institutions he created (or helped to create), like China’s first blood bank (the focus of Chapter 3), pioneered the practice, innovation, and formation of biomedicine in China in times of war.

The book relies on a wide range of primary and secondary sources. However, a greater engagement with recent literature in Chinese and English might add nuance to some broad-brush comparisons and assumptions. The author states, for instance, that the institutions formed by Dr. Lim “have been largely forgotten in contemporary China” while scholarly attention has focused on the Canadian doctor Norman Bethune.<sup>1</sup> Here, the book could have benefited from recent literature, published in both the People’s Republic of China

---

<sup>1</sup> Wayne Soon, *Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2020), 77.



and Taiwan, that deal with Robert Lim and the China Red Cross Medical Relief Corps (CRCMRC).<sup>2</sup> In addition, the archives of CRCMRC in Guiyang (in both the Guizhou Provincial Archives and Guiyang Municipal Archives) provide new insights about Dr. Lim and the institutions he created during the war. While physical access to archives is rather limited, some selected primary sources have been published that would contribute additional depth to the book.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, other migrants, not only Overseas Chinese, also participated in these organizations: more than 20 European doctors of Jewish origins who were escaping the Holocaust were also recruited by Dr. Lim. Some of these doctors published amazing memoirs with detailed descriptions about their work and their relationships with Dr. Lim. Thus, the book could have been enriched by such experiences that deal with other diasporic networks.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the aforementioned doctor Norman Bethune is markedly absent from the chapter on blood banks. Before going to China, Bethune created one of the first blood banks in the history of medicine: in 1936 Spain. Therefore, the institution of blood banks did not emerge in 1937 in Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

These potential additions aside, the book gives a compelling picture of the influence of Overseas Chinese on the modernization of biomedicine in China. It relies on archival data from different countries that enriches our understanding about this network of elites that crisscrossed the continents, bringing new medical methods and adapting them to the realities of China. The book is also easy to read and extends beyond the war period to more recent times. The contribution of the book, however, lies in the wartime period, when a group of Overseas Chinese decided to move to China and help modernize its medicine.

## Author Bio

Carles Brasó Broggi is a Spanish Sinologist and economic historian. He has investigated issues of knowledge and technology transfers between China and other countries in the 20th Century. He wrote a book about China's textile industry from the 1920s to the beginnings of the reforms (*Trade and Technology Networks in the Chinese Textile Industry: Opening Up before the Reform*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) and is now working on a book about a group of international doctors who worked in both the Spanish civil war and China's war with Japan. He has published several articles on Chinese fashion (*China Perspectives*), China-Spain relations (*Modern Asian Studies*), and China's economic planning (*Economic History of Developing Regions*).

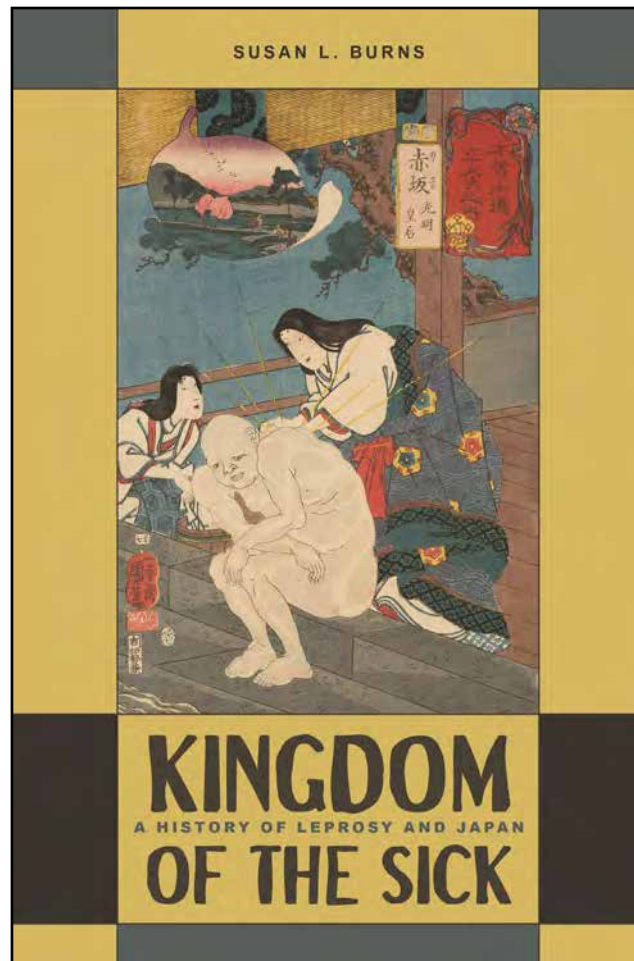
---

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, He Bangli 何邦立, *Lin Kesheng. Minguo yixue shishang diyiren 林可勝. 民國醫學史上第一人* [A collection of essays in memory of Dr. Robert Kho-Seng Lim (1897-1969)] (Taipei, Zhonghua kejishi xuehui, 2017); Dai Binwu 戴斌武, *Kangzhan shiqi zhongguo hongshizihui jiuhu zongdui yanjiu 抗战时期中国红十字会救护总队研究* [Research on China's Red Cross Medical Relief Corps during the war against Japan] (Tianjin, Tianjin gujichubanshe, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Liu Lei 刘磊, ed., *Zhandi hongshizi. Zhongguo hongshizihui jiuhu zongdui kangzhan shilu 战地红十字, 中国红十字会救护总队抗战实录* [The Red Cross at war: Reports on China's Red Cross Medical Relief Corps] (Guizhou, Guiyang shi dang'anguan and Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Mamlok, *The International Medical Relief Corps in Wartime China* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2018).

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Soon, *Global Medicine in China: A Diasporic History* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2020), 103.



## ***Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan, by Susan Burns***

By Kristin Roebuck, Cornell University

Burns, Susan L. *Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. 344 pages. \$68.00. ISBN-13: 9780824879013

Leprosy occupies a prominent place in Japanese history, with over 700 books on the topic published since the year 2000. Susan Burns deftly lays out the reasons for this centrality in the introduction to her monograph, the first in English on the history of leprosy in Japan. In the 1990s, victims of historical injustice ranging from comfort women to prisoners of war repeatedly sued Japan's government. Though grounded in fact, these lawsuits were generally unsuccessful as matters of law, with the striking exceptions of suits launched by Hansen's

disease patients confined in state sanitariums. In the early 2000s, first Japanese patients, then those in former colonial sanitariums in Taiwan and Korea won their suits and cash damages from Japan. Burns argues that these lawsuits have warped the historical record, privileging “denunciatory” stories of confinement, abuse, and forced sterilization while suppressing other narratives. She sets out to set the record straight in her account of the *longue durée* of leprosy and attitudes and policies toward it from the 700s CE to the present day.

As Chapter 1 explains, *rai* 癩, the Japanese term for leprosy, derives from the Chinese *lai*, which was imported into the Japanese archipelago with continental texts and technologies in the mid-first millennium CE. The early Japanese imperial state regulated the lives of lepers (*raisha* 癩者) in a variety of ways, defining *raisha* as “polluted” and facilitating their expulsion from families into the outcast group known as “non-human” (*hinin* 非人). As Buddhism and especially the Lotus Sutra gained influence from the late 1100s, karmic interpretations of the disease were layered atop the stigma of “pollution.” Like many Indian sutras, the Lotus Sutra defined *rai* as karmic, corporeal evidence of wrongdoing.<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 2 explores *rai* in the early modern era (1600–1868) when some medical practitioners treated the disease as somatic rather than spiritual. Early-modern Japanese doctors debated whether the disease was caused by miasma (*akki* 悪気) or “self produced” (*jihatsu* 自発) by bad behavior and bad blood. Burns traces the influence of Chinese medicine and Confucian texts on Japanese accounts of *rai*, and explores treatments ranging from acupuncture to “southern barbarian” [European] medicines, which despite their name, used ingredients from Chinese rather than European pharmacology. Burns also discusses Luke Demaitre’s analysis of leprosy in thirteenth to seventeenth-century Europe, where Biblical theories of causation declined in favor of humoral theories.<sup>2</sup> Whereas Demaitre argued that secularization could entail destigmatization, Burns argues that in Japan, the shift from “bad karma” to “bad blood” stigmatized entire lineages and justified their social exclusion. As “blood” talk diluted the connection between *rai* and actual cases of leprosy, *raisha* emerged as a hereditary status group subject to exclusion even in the absence of disease.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore leprosy in the Meiji era (1868–1912), when hereditary status groups were dissolved, “liberating” *raisha* from segregated villages while depriving them of early-modern entitlements to alms. Fascinating in these and subsequent chapters is evidence that Japanese routinely positioned themselves at the cutting edge of global anti-leprosy campaigns rather than as needing to “catch up” to the West. Entrepreneurs, scientists, and officials in the United States and Europe repeatedly turned to Meiji Japan for guidance on how to treat leprosy. However, as it became clear that Japanese treatments could not cure Hansen’s disease, an international consensus emerged in favor of quarantine.

Nonetheless, Burns argues in Chapter 5 that Japan’s 1907 Leprosy Prevention Law was a form of poor relief aimed at cleaning leprous beggars off the streets rather than

---

<sup>1</sup> Susan L. Burns, *Kingdom of the Sick: A History of Leprosy and Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2019), 31.

<sup>2</sup> Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

segregating all infected persons. Japan's public sanatoria, developed after 1907, were "porous by design" because their designers "did not anticipate that patients would want to flee."<sup>3</sup> That indigent patients proved less than grateful for shoddy, sex-segregated group dwellings forced adjustments in sanitarium design, such as construction of moats and barbed-wire barricades. Patients also secured certain privileges, such as improved food and opportunities for recreation. Sanitarium residents also won the right to marry, defeating sex segregation, an innovation that provoked the institutional turn to sterilization and abortion. Throughout Chapters 5–8, Burns details the development of sanatoria as contingent on negotiations between agentive *raisha* and state and medical authorities.

Chapter 6 explores the expansion and re-envisioning of sanatoria in the 1930s as institutions designed to encompass patients of means and education as well as the poor. Ever more confident of its world leadership in fighting leprosy, Japan now positioned sanitarium patients as patriotic and progressive participants in that mission. Chapter 7 details the extension of sanatoria to colonial Korea and Taiwan and the increasingly coercive nature of confinement in sanatoria amid Japan's descent into authoritarianism and total war. Chapter 8 discusses leprosy amidst the post-World War II revival of democracy and patient activism in Japan. Under Allied occupation (1945–52), Japan began manufacturing Promin, the drug discovered by Dr. Guy Henry Faget of the U.S. National Leprosarium to be effective in treating or even curing leprosy. Patient activists in Japan pushed for the rapid distribution of Promin, and for the right of recovered residents either to leave sanatoria or to stay. The right to stay was preserved even after leprosy was effectively eradicated and the Leprosy Prevention Law repealed in 1996.

The scope and depth of Burns's research into the medical, religious, political, legal, social, and international aspects of leprosy in Japan is impressive. Yet her book is marred by a few flaws, such as repeated misspellings of political scientist Tiana Norgren's name.<sup>4</sup>

A more substantial problem is that in her postwar history, Burns never discusses the grounds on which some leprosy patients won lawsuits against the Japanese government. Perhaps Burns assumes readers will already be familiar with the "denunciatory" history advanced by her chief intellectual foil, Fujino Yutaka.<sup>5</sup> But given that little of Fujino's work is available in English, many readers will likely know only what Burns tells them. She accuses Fujino of cherry-picking evidence, citing only residents critical of sanatoria. Burns makes an important point that some residents appreciated access to free medical care and housing, and to procedures like sterilization and abortion, which were less accessible outside sanatoria before 1948. Yet in making this argument, Burns too cherry-picks her evidence, citing not a single resident who complained of coercive sterilization or other gross abuses of human rights. An otherwise unknowing reader might come away from this book believing that Japanese courts in the 2000s were wrong to rule in favor of plaintiffs, or even that

---

<sup>3</sup> Burns, *Kingdom of the Sick*, 141–42.

<sup>4</sup> Burns, *Kingdom of the Sick*, 230, 297 n.16, 314.

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Fujino Yutaka, *Nihon fashizumu to iryō: Hansenbyō o meguru jishhōteki kenkyū* [Japanese fascism and medicine: Empirical research on Hansen's disease] (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1993).

plaintiffs were money-grubbing hysterics with no grounds for complaint against Japanese sanitaria and government. In this sense, the necessary corrective Burns provides may be an overcorrection.

Despite this shortcoming, Burns's tome will be indispensable to scholars and graduate students of the transnational history of medicine, public hygiene, disability, and discrimination, as well as to historians of Japan.

### **Author Bio**

Kristin Roebuck is assistant professor of Japanese history at Cornell University. A Fulbright Scholar and one-time Mellon Diversity Postdoctoral Fellow, Roebuck has a PhD in East Asian History from Columbia University. Her research interests encompass the history of the body, medicine and law, race and sexuality, war and migration, and nationalism and international relations. Her first monograph, *Japan Reborn: Race and Nation from World War to Cold War*, is under contract with Columbia University Press. She recently launched a new research project on kinship, slavery, and the gender of freedom in the era of emancipation and empire, 1800-1960.