

Internationalization in Action:

Transformative Student Research at the Asian Institute

Richard Charles Lee Insights through Asia Challenge
Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan
2020 Virtual Student Presentation Event

Thursday, October 1, 2020
11:00am-1:00pm (EDT)



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

THE ASIAN INSTITUTE at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy is one of North America's leading centres of research and teaching on Asia. Our approach to Asia balances regional specialization rooted in local knowledge with transnational, global, and interdisciplinary conversations that contextualize and transect local viewpoints on contemporary issues.

The Asian Institute prides itself on offering innovative teaching programs, as well as distinctive experiential learning opportunities for students. In their future careers, our students will navigate a knowledge economy shaped by globalization that requires fluency across cultural, business, social, and political spheres.

In order to develop this fluency, student researchers supported by the Richard Charles Lee Insights through Asia Challenge (ITAC) and the Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan conducted original research projects that engaged pressing and complex issues at stake in Asia and the diaspora. These researchers responded with enthusiasm, creativity, and thoughtfulness, redesigning their projects for the virtual research context engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The quality, imaginativeness, and significance of the work conducted by these emerging scholars continues to exceed our expectations. Students' ITAC and Exploring Global Taiwan work often serves as a launchpad for transformative, long-term scholarly and professional pursuits. Through this work, students better understand the world in order to reshape it.

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**Richard Charles Lee Insights through Asia Challenge (ITAC) &
Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan
2020 Student Research Presentations
11:00am – 1:00 pm (EDT), Thursday, October 1, 2020**

Meeting Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83882863519?pwd=M1Nudng5Q1d0ZkFvaG5tSzU2RGRDQT09>
Meeting ID: 838 8286 3519
Passcode: 7h5uBQ

PROGRAM:

- 11:05-11:10 ITAC Introduction
Professor Rachel Silvey, Richard Charles Lee Director, Asian Institute
- 11:10-12:10 ITAC Presentations

Record Unavailable: Unsettling Approaches to South Asian Archives in the Age of COVID-19

Henria Aton (PhD student, Faculty of Information and Centre for South Asian Studies)

The COVID-19 pandemic has swiftly and deeply changed the way scholars of South Asia can approach their research, particularly through limitations of access to archival sources. This ITAC project explores the current response of scholars of South Asia to the pandemic and its effects on the ways we carry out research, arguing that new interdisciplinary conversations must occur between scholars of South Asia and their colleagues in archival studies. Such collaborations, I argue, will bolster our understanding of archives, how they are constructed, and what materials and histories remain at the limits of our definitions of “archives” and the funding that enables digitization projects in the global south. Through intensive research across disciplines and platforms, and drawing from my own research with unconventional archives in South Asia, this project responds to the current moment and seeks to centre open collaboration between two fields that have rarely overlapped but that can provide critical new insights on archives and the digital world in South Asia.



The outcomes of this research are twofold: first, I produced a “literature review” (an evolving document that will be frequently updated) that provides an overview, designed for graduate students, of how scholars of South Asia have responded to our current research crisis. Second, I am writing a longer, scholarly article that uses this research to demonstrate that scholarship drawing from both archival studies and South Asia studies can provide new, innovative avenues for research on archives in the region during COVID.

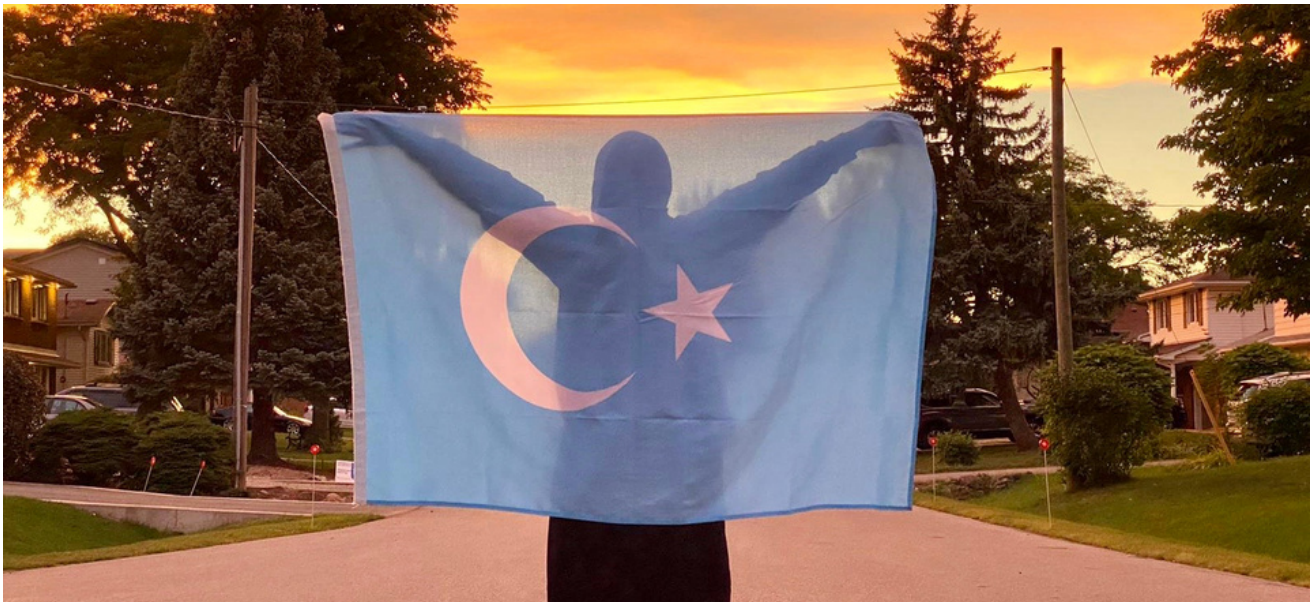
Searching for Belonging: Sense of belonging as a protective factor against Depression, PTSD, and Distress amongst Uyghur refugees

Hala Bucheeri (Psychology and Neuroscience)

Shahd Fulath Khan (Psychology and Neuroscience)

More Uyghurs are fleeing their homes in Xinjiang due to oppression by the Chinese government, resulting in large numbers of refugees and diaspora communities around the world. While Uyghurs may face several challenges in their host countries, having a sense of belonging to their new home can be a protective factor against mental illness and distress. In this study, we hypothesized that a higher sense of belonging would be associated with lower incidences of distress. We used a mixed-method study consisting of interviews and questionnaires to investigate the research question. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, as well as the General Belongingness Scale (GBS), the Centre of Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), PTSD Symptoms Scale (PSS), and

Kessler's Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Interviews were semi-structured and questions were centered around belongingness and wellbeing. We found that higher belongingness was associated with low scores on the depression, PTSD, and distress scales, demonstrating a moderate negative relationship. We also found that Uyghurs are facing a variety of challenges that deplete sense of belonging, such as absence of political support, lack of cultural programs, uncertainty about the status of loved ones, language barriers, and frequent cyber attacks by the Chinese government while they are abroad. These findings offer several suggestions for policymakers and social workers to implement in order to promote wellbeing among Uyghur communities in their host countries. Future studies should investigate identity issues and their relationship with belonging, especially among Uyghur youth.



Belonging in Bollywood's Contemporary Nation Making Culture

Yazmeen Kanji (Equity Studies, Peace Conflict & Justice Studies, and Cinema Studies)

Mayadevi Murthy (Religion Studies and Equity Studies)

Our research project examines the Indian Hindi film industry (Bollywood)'s shift towards the Hindu nationalist right by interviewing industry "newcomers" in order to explore the interplay between content production and the broader political landscape in which the industry exists today. We found these newcomers would either a) pursue the creation of content that would be lucrative regardless of how they contributed to perpetuating narrow perceptions of belonging within the nation-state, or b) consciously attempt to expose the viewing public to more progressive outlooks. In latter cases, progressive participants acknowledged a need to strategize around the threats of state censorship, violent public mobilization, and disinterested investors. These threats and other dimensions in today's

industry environment produce a cycle in which the audience primarily internalizes Hindu nationalist content. This reifies an ever-narrowing definition of “Indian” identity and, in turn increases demands and funding for such cinema. This ultimately drives the further proliferation and influence of films that propagate Hindu nationalist conceptions of “belonging.”

Caught Between and Left Behind: Analyzing Chinese Taxi Driver’s Moral Idioms in the time of Platform Capitalism

Yang Liu (PhD student, Anthropology)

This project explores the echoes of old moral economic discourses in taxi drivers' struggles against the rise of the platform economy. By analyzing the posts and comments from a WeChat account dedicated to taxi drivers and taxi related news, I studied traditional taxi drivers' reliance on moral economic sensibilities. I show how these taxi drivers maintain a sense of belonging in an increasingly precarious working condition. When traditional taxi drivers' sense of belonging is replaced with and swept away by new developments in technology and the economy, they fall back to the discourse of moral values and virtues, seeking a sense of belonging in an already lost world. As such, this project not only demonstrates the frustration traditional taxi drivers are experiencing but also highlights their strategic and moral responses to the threat of disruptive technologies.

PUNK! In the Nation, Redux: Complicating Punk Identities of Political Resistance and Community Resilience in the “Frictions” of the Indonesian Nation-State

Rushay Naik (MSc Candidate in Health Services Research; BSc, Hons. Human Biology-Global Health and Peace, Conflict & Justice)

Mariah Stewart (B.A., Hons. Political Science, Contemporary Asian Studies and Mathematics)

Media interpretations have been the source of most perspectives on Indonesian punk music as a subcultural force of uniform resistance in Indonesia. Though some scholars and commentators have challenged these boundaries, perceptions of Indonesian punk scenes often adopt fixed, hybrid identities that oversimplify the relationships between punk and global and local historical events. We argue that the role of punk in Indonesia as a cultural phenomenon is “frictional,” existing as a complex and interactive force within the contexts of unbounded, diffuse aspects of political, economic, and social factors. These instances of “friction” take on forms of community and belonging, as well as resistance at multiple levels of social and governance structures. We find that, through the prism of reaching

punk narratives “where they are” with the use of virtual research interviews and media analysis, we are able to situate their constituent philosophies of DIYism --“what they do”-- and materiality --“what they have”-- in broader socioeconomic forces, political violence, and cultural transitions in Indonesian history. Thus, this paper abandons more traditional dialectics of understanding Indonesian punk, such as the ‘global/local’ or ‘commercial/underground,’ and instead bridges these different narratives to understand “friction” within Indonesian punk more holistically. We utilize anthropologist Anna Tsing’s definition of “friction” in concert with the above research methodology to frame Indonesian punk for ‘what it is,’ a process based in awkward and creative interconnectivity.

The Search for Belonging: Digital Protest of North Korean “Defector-Creators”

Hyunji (Hillary) Song (International Relations, Contemporary Asian Studies, and History)

The exponential increase in User-Generated Content (UGC) creation within North Korean defector YouTubers, termed defector-creators, is a clear indicator of the development of soft power by these individuals who have newly acquired the freedom of expression. This project aims to investigate the impact of the production of digital content on the North Korean defectors’ ability to manufacture a sense of belonging and civic engagement in South Korean society. Through a case study of five videos produced by the defector-creators, this project analyzes the content of the videos and their implications. My research draws the conclusion that the creation of digital content enables the defector-creators to manufacture a sense of community through a dynamic contestation and discussion of South Korean society, through providing a platform for them to claim self-determination, autonomy, and ownership over their productions. Furthermore, my research examines the impact of the production of UGC on the levels of civic engagement of the North Korean defectors and concludes that the defector-creators experience a psychological empowerment and a rehabilitation of their political agency by transitioning from a muted group to an active voice of protest against discrimination and human rights violations. These developments call for new theoretical frameworks that can account for the processes of soft power construction of the marginalized refugee groups who emerge from precarity.

Smart, Green, or in Between: Smart City and Eco-Town Programs in Singapore and Toronto

Elizabeth Shaw (Contemporary Asian Studies, Peace, Conflict & Justice Studies, and Political Science)

Michelle Zhang (Peace, Conflict, and Justice Studies, Urban Studies, and Geography)

In recent years, innovation based movements like smart cities and eco towns have become trademarks of the way forward in urban planning. This paper uses Sidewalk Toronto's now-abandoned Quayside project and Singapore's Treelodge@Punggol to examine the role of innovation in our urban futures. Through a series of in-depth interviews with academics, scholars, and practitioners from both cities, we examine how local-global, private-public, and digital attitudes shape the reception and practical outcomes of these futuristic development projects.

Singapore findings include: state-led rhetoric surrounding the ideologies of national progress and success; techno solutionism as a means to achieve these goals; and sustainability as a performative but unconstructive act. In Toronto, we find deeply rooted public distrust and suspicion toward corporate high-tech and outsiders that found an outlet in Sidewalk Labs' smart city, but far less hostility directed towards the broader aspiration of a digitally innovative city.

Urban village under China's rapid urbanization: the challenge of rural migrant workers in Guangzhou and Shenzhen

Yang (Tiffany) Zhou (Contemporary Asian Studies and Political Science)

Urbanization is driving economic development and creating problems of environmental sustainability in China. The space of a city is not only shared by the government, real estate developers, urban residents, but also residents in urban villages, who constitute a remarkable social feature of the city landscape. When villagers in urban villages continue to transform into urban residents, they change from working on labor-cultivated farms to another spatial production unit: rural migrant workers in a self-built urban village in Guangzhou and Shenzhen, thus changing existing urban spatial relations. This paper attempts to compare the living conditions and state policy towards rural migrant workers in Guangzhou and Shenzhen in terms of redevelopment plans, land-use rights, and government subsidies. Rural migrants were major tenants of Chengzhongcun. They were economically and politically powerless, but these tenants inhabit geographically shifting disordered spaces. In general, my project aims to contextualize rural migrant workers' living conditions and the changes they have been undergoing since the 1980s, focusing on how their living conditions in Guangzhou and Shenzhen have changed in the year, 2020—the

year in which Shenzhen marked the 40th anniversary of the establishment of the special Economic Zone. For this project, I conducted interviews with urban villagers, real estate agency managers, and organizations with migration-related projects in Guangzhou and Shenzhen.



Untangling the Causative Web behind Farmer Suicides in India

Deep Leekha (International Relations, Contemporary Asian Studies, and History)

Between 1995 and 2015 more than 300,000 farmers committed suicide in India. The consensus among most agrarian scholars and government officials is that the prima facie reason for this ongoing epidemic is farmer indebtedness. However, as scholars like Nagaraj have argued monocausal explanations of suicide like the one being proffered in the Indian instance “reduce suicide to blaming the victim while ignoring larger socio-economic conditions.” Indeed, there is a web of socio-economic conditions and environmental circumstances which engender indebtedness. I produced my research as an article which seeks to dissect the monocausal explanation and better understand the web of factors which contribute to indebtedness, and consequently, to suicides. My research shows that indebtedness needs to be understood not purely as an economic condition but also a social one. Accounts of suicides and indebtedness throughout India shed light on a ‘causative web’. This web explains how cultural phenomena such as losing face in society and dowry payments along with arability changes due to the vicissitudes of global warming put added pressure on individual farmers. This work also draws upon the frameworks of critical theorists like Althusser, Gramsci, and Beck, among others, to examine and underscore the socio-political forces at work which essentially sever extant ties between farming communities, thereby further individualizing and isolating farmers. It concludes by arguing for a reimagining of rural spaces and once again integrating farmers into agrarian communities and, consequently, into support systems.

- 12:20-12:25 Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan Introduction
Professor Tong Lam, Director, Global Taiwan Studies Initiative, Asian
Institute
- 12:25-1:00 Big Ideas Competition: Exploring Global Taiwan Presentations

The role of Indonesian domestic care workers in Taiwanese society

Kana Minju Bak (Contemporary Asian Studies)

Pranav Dayanand (Contemporary Asian Studies)

Angelah Liu (Contemporary Asian Studies)

Jielun Zheng (Contemporary Asian Studies)

Our project is an in-depth view into the mechanisms that characterize the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Our study focuses on migrant workers in Taiwan and the role they play in wider domestic study. Using a variety of peer-reviewed literature, surveys, and social media, we compiled findings that shed light on the positions of Indonesian domestic care workers and their experiences in Taiwan.

Our study delves into much of the pre-existing literature on Indonesian domestic care workers in Taiwan and the historic context that played a role in their position today. We supplement these materials with surveys on wider Taiwanese public opinion on these migrant workers as well as an in depth look at the heavy presence of Indonesian TikTok users for insight into their daily lives.

Yao-Chi City: A Case Study on Taiwanese Paranormal Literature and Contemporary Art Exhibition

Wanwen Chen (East Asian Studies)

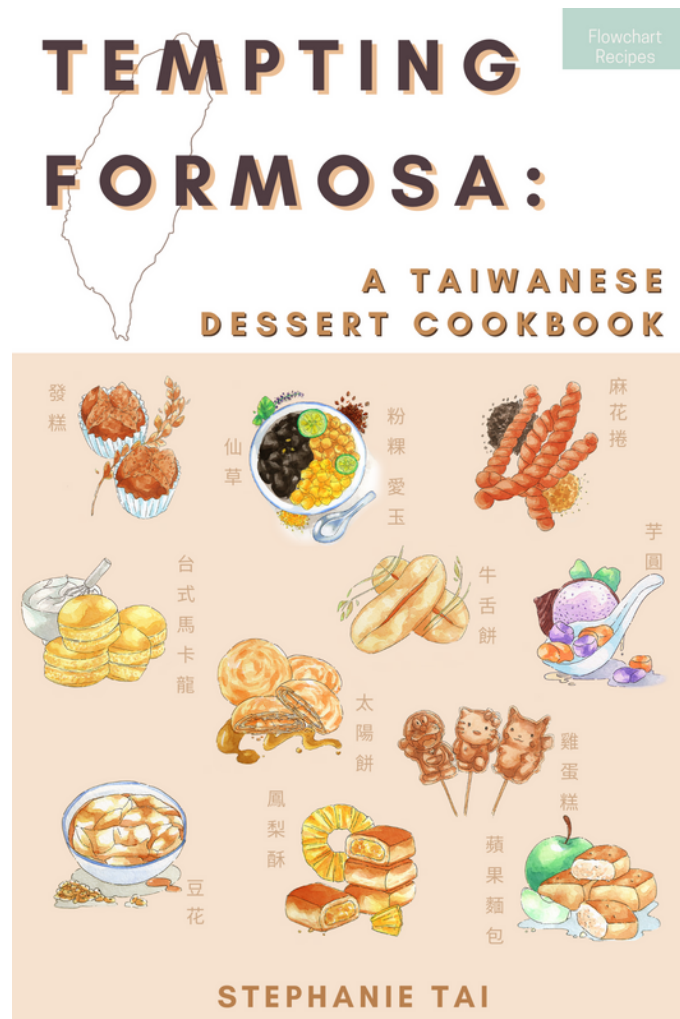
My research will contribute to “Yao-Chi City”, a Taiwanese Paranormal Literature and Contemporary Art Exhibition. It is the first platform in Taiwan to identify the intersection of contemporary art and literature and the appreciation of Taiwanese Yao-Chi mythology and beliefs. This study will explore the horror genre in Taiwan through related works of literature and art, graphic novels, installations, performances games, and parades. Additionally, the ultimate purpose of this study does not only present the methods and theories of how these artists amalgamate traditional folk beliefs with Taiwan’s urban framework, but also investigates questions of national identity explored by these works.

Tempting Formosa: A Taiwanese Dessert Cookbook

Stephanie Tai (City Studies, International Development, and Anthropology)

Tempting Formosa: A Taiwanese Cookbook is an insight into the traditional desserts offered in Taiwan with accompanying recipes that tell the story of the nation rich with culinary history. The cookbook looks to shine a spotlight on Taiwanese desserts that are not well-known internationally, as told through stories of colonial influences, modern innovation, and the evolution of the contemporary Taiwanese palette.

Tempting Formosa is not only a history lesson on Taiwan, it also serves as a medium for hands-on interaction that connects the cuisine with a global audience looking to broaden their culinary horizons as food continues to represent the improved awareness and preservation of global cultures and heritage. As the cookbook takes you on a journey of the island's beloved desserts, the idea of what we know as Taiwanese food should widen to allow for an anthropological look into what makes a country's cuisine distinguishable. So, enjoy the whiffs of butter and sugar that magically materialize out of the air as you flip through the pages, and let Tempting Formosa act as your guide on this Taiwanese culinary exploration.



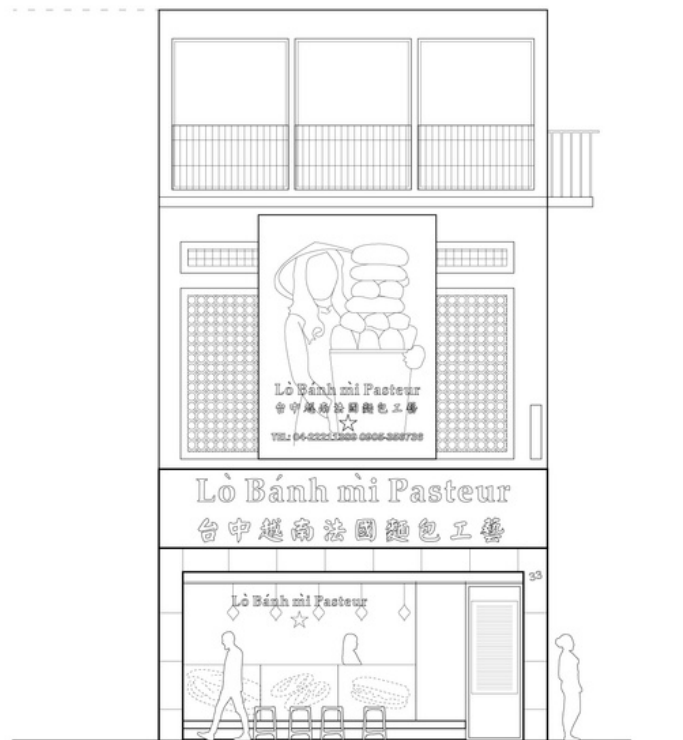
On the Transnational Migration of Vietnamese Women: Creating a Sense of Place within Taiwan's Urban and Domestic Environment

Miranda Fay (Masters of Architecture Candidate, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design)

Phat Le (Masters of Architecture Candidate, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design)

Sidney Tsao (Masters of Architecture Candidate, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design)

Throughout the island's history, Taiwan's national identity has been a topic of contestation. This research aims to document Taiwan's shifting demographics in the modern era; specifically, the influx of Vietnamese migrants into Taiwan--who are predominantly female. These women often adopt roles as care-takers, foreign brides, or small business owners in search of economic growth and stability. Sociologists recognize this phenomenon as the 'feminization of migration' (Hugo, 2005) which describes the challenges that migrant women face in attempts of assimilation; including conflicting cultural norms, lack of social capital, or exploitative marriage arrangements. Building on research discussing the politics of space (Lefebvre, 1974) and the contributions of the built environment to a sense of place (Stedman, 2003), this research asks: in what ways have Vietnamese women created identity and agency for themselves through physical interventions of space within Taiwan's urban and domestic landscape? Using online documentation--such as articles, websites, and



social media posts--and a series of architectural and urban drawings as methods of analysis, the research is meant to record and map evidence of these Vietnamese spaces--ie. homes and restaurants--and how they have been used to establish autonomy and cultural representation for the Vietnamese community.

Marriage Anxiety: Citizen Production, Exclusion and Taiwan's LGBTQ

Thomas Elias Siddall (International Relations and Contemporary Asian Studies)

This work explores how the Taiwanese state has anxiously secured a dynamic sociopolitical regime with its citizens that have enabled same-sex marriage by learning from the biopolitics around cross-border marriage. Under a global "progressive" neoliberal rights regime, cross-border migrants in Taiwan are actively marginalized while the LGBTQ in Taiwan become a hallmark of progress; both bodies reproduce essentialized values in Taiwan. I make use of family-state discourse analysis, work with imitation and queer Marxist theory, and read tongzhi wenxue and the Act Governing the Choice of Law in Civil Matters Involving Foreign Elements (2010) as ideology and society as text to consider the construction of Taiwanese subjectivities and the necessity to construct bodies in specific ways. This work contributes to the immense literature on cross-border marriage and of the Taiwanese developmental state to explore how biopolitics disciplines sexuality as a resource in global contexts to signify Taiwan's belonging in a community of Western nations, and by making use of Butler's use of imitation to demonstrate how the LGBTQ imitation of a heteronormative subject position simultaneously constructs the limits of Taiwanese citizenship. In sum, this work finds that there is a dynamic relationship between the state and its subjects and that the state makes its subjects knowable based on access to services. This piece finds that the LGBTQ in Taiwan follows a developmental model of construction and is a step away from queer activism in Taiwan before democratization. Finally, this work finds that law works as an intermediary for biopolitics.

(ITAC)

"Threads of a Past Life": Kimono in the Lives of Japanese-Canadian Women

Bailey Irene Midori Hoy (History Specialist)

Wing Yan Sarina Wong (Peace, Conflict & Justice)

This research explores kitsuke (kimono and the art of wearing kimono) as a source of cultural knowledge, identity, and power amongst Japanese-Canadian/Nikkei women today. Focusing on women with ties in the Greater Toronto Area, we attempt to

defetishize the idea that kimono and the people who wear them are “traditional” and “never-changing.” In examining the collective narratives that shape the history of many Nikkei women, we found that the highly visual and symbolic nature of the garment made the kimono a sort of “universal heirloom,” in which memories and culture are stored amongst our participants as an item that could be used to “perform” their cultural identities.

We conducted semi-structured interviews over the phone and Zoom video conferencing software with Japanese-Canadian women above the age of 18. Books, newspapers, digital museum archives and their curators, etc. helped consolidate the history of kimono and contextualize the interviews.



