

The 3rd Annual CGA-GPS Young Scholars Symposium Abstracts

Panel 1: Media and Society

Matan Cohen

Surplus Humanity & the Prospects of Egalitarian Politics in Palestine-Israel

Premised on a principle of minimal responsibility for and maximal control over its subject population, Israeli subjugation of Palestinians is based today on control beyond discipline, and de capacitation of economic production beyond direct exploitation. Predicated on the obviation of native labor as means for its economic flourishing, this separation regime has mostly expelled Palestinians from the circuits of production and, ostensibly, also from most Jewish Israelis' conscious mind. No longer mediated to the same degree by the sort of engagements previously operative—be it in the in sense of labor relations or cohabitation of space—racial violence structurally distinct from, and potentially more intensive than of that of “exploitative racism” is daily threatening to materialize. Under a matrix of inclusion/exclusion, Palestinians become superfluous in a double sense: as the unproductive of the capitalist system, and as the undesired racialized population beyond the pale of law.

Taking Palestine as a site from which to (re)think contemporary forms of political praxis and our theoretical orientations, this paper examines recent attempts to decouple political belonging from national sovereignty in Palestine-Israel, and explores what could an alternative version of planetarity look like, what institutional arrangement could sustain a political community where we could re-imagine the value of human lives deemed valueless under the auspices of late capitalism and (neo)colonialism. Indeed, I ask what spatial conceptions are required of us today in order to think anew about egalitarian forms of collective life, imagine solidarity beyond the organic or mechanical sorts, and political belonging beyond the exclusionary practices of settler-colonial bordering, without recourse to either utopian deterritorialization of law or to the “realism” of the nation-state.

Wei Peng

Staging the Evidence of Violence: Photographic Illustrations of Crimes in Late 1940s Shanghai

This paper examines the role that photograph played in illustrating real crime cases in the magazine *The Big Detective* from 1946 to 1948. While focusing on native and translated detective fiction, *The Big Detective* also published detailed reports on contemporaneous local crime cases such as murder, kidnapping or drug smuggling. These narratives of real life cases were lavishly illustrated with crime scene photographs, which represented the material evidence, autopsy, and even crime reenactments. This paper examines how photography as a new media representing crime cases in popular mass culture in Republican China. I argue that the crime scene photographs opened a new visuality of “calibrated violence.” Rather than a new objective tool for identifying and classifying criminal bodies

and physical evidence during that time, these crime scene photographs regulated the unruly force of violence through their reproduction. These images transformed the traumatic experience of crime into both a eulogy of the authority of the state apparatus of policing and a consumable “story-telling” for the mass reader.

Anne Ma

Between Resemblance and Reality—Early Portrait Studios and the Making of Visual Traditions in Taiwan’s Local Society, 1895–1940

This paper discusses the relationship between formations of self-identities and the practice of photographic portrait-making within the network of colonial archive and local photo studios in 1930s Taiwan, when the island was subject to Japanese colonial rule. The decade of 1930s was also a time when “modern” technology and technique, mainly in the format of visual media such as motion pictures and photography, began to occupy an increasingly influential role in the everyday life of local people. The introduction of new, or modern visual experiences not only signaled the localization of ideas for “modern” or “modernity,” but more specifically, marked the beginning of the transformation of conception for the “self”—both physically and pictorially. Photo-portraits and the stories of those who were involved in the making of them thus serve as the primary source of analysis for this paper, and materials such as autobiographies also formed the basis of this research. Through looking at the different ways invented by makers and clients of individual photo-portraits to negotiate their own images within and beyond the “private” space of home, “public” space of governmental institutions, or the lineage temples in between, this paper proposes that “photo portrait” was gradually being utilized to accommodate the specific means of representing one’s own subjectivity in a local society caught between the forces of colonial cultural assimilation and processes of globalization.

Panel 2: Imperialism, Environment, and Infrastructure

Erica Mukherjee

The Failure of an Ecological Machine Ensemble: Dredging Bengal’s Rivers in the Early Nineteenth Century

In the seminal cultural history of the railways, Wolfgang Schivelbusch employs the term “machine ensemble” to describe a technical system with seemingly discrete parts that cannot properly operate without each other, such as the locomotive and track that make up the railway. This paper proposes expanding Schivelbusch’s concept to an “ecological machine ensemble,” or a system in which both technological artefacts and the non-human environment need the other to achieve their proper form. In this case study, the East India Company (EIC) defined what was proper. In 1826, they commissioned a steam-powered dredging vessel to regularize and “improve” the tropical rivers of the Bengal delta. During the two years of its construction, EIC administrators imagined an ecological machine ensemble in

which steam engines would be gainfully employed to retrain the rivers onto a civilized course. But, when it turned out that the vessel's draught was too deep to float on the rivers it was meant to dredge, the EIC's explanations for this failure split the rivers and the engine into two discrete, and inherently incompatible, parts. By framing the narrative as the failure of an ecological machine ensemble, this paper argues that, in the early nineteenth century, the British sought to "improve" the tropics through the integration of the environment and technology rather than the subjugation of the environment by technology.

Vidhya Raveendranathan

Property Making, Pier Building and Policing of Coastal Labour and Commons in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Madras

Early histories of public works pioneered by nationalist historians understood the investment and construction of large scale projects as part of a specific colonial strategy to siphon the country's resources. In contrast, colonial administrators, military engineers and policy makers regarded infrastructural projects to be an integral part of the state's modernizing efforts meant to enhance the connectivity and productivity of the colonies. With a critical eye on the colonial archives, a recent crop of writings have embedded histories of large scale state driven projects within extant social spaces, local and regional economies and circulatory networks to reveal both the creation of bound national and regional economies, the deepening of spatial unevenness and the engineering of landscape. While all these perspectives have opened out the category of infrastructure, they tend to offer only a limited insight into the ruptures and continuities in the material and social worlds of labour. Moreover these writings have also inadequately examined the relationship between ecology and labour in shaping the outcomes of infrastructural projects. In order to address this lacunae this paper, through a study of port infrastructures, property making and policing of labour, presents a connected history of the colonial disciplining of an errant coastline and the fixing of a mobile workforce. This paper argues that colonial efforts to design and circumscribe the shore into a spatially coherent geographical unit not only sharpened the boundaries between the land and sea but also transformed the lived social practices and working rhythms of itinerant and mobile populations.

Yiying Pan

At the Crossroad of Currents: Environment, Infrastructure, and Imperial Knowledge in Nineteenth Century China

The Upper Yangzi River, particularly the segment between Chongqing and Yichang, was densely distributed with dangerous shoals and ledges. Navigation along this river segment had been extremely difficult before the late seventeenth century, while systematic surveys of those dangerous sites did not start until the mid-eighteenth century. This paper traces three waves of investigations of the dangerous sites from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century. The first wave was organized by the local merchants in the early nineteenth century, who used such investigations to plan out philanthropic

reconstructions of the dangerous sites. The second wave was organized by the Qing provincial state in the 1880s, which aimed to implement systematic networks of militia and salvage teams along the Upper Yangzi. The last wave was organized by the British pilots in the early twentieth century, who hoped to extend their colonial steamship network into China's western frontiers. Although these three groups shared the same body of knowledge about the locations of the dangerous sites and the basic transportation techniques at those sites, they exemplify very different ways of organizing the relationships among the shoals, the river, the ships, and the shipping communities. By comparing how these three groups transmitted, circulated, and transformed a shared body of navigation knowledge, this paper traces how logistical designs of navigation interacted with changing conceptualizations of statecraft, sovereignty, environment, and community throughout the long nineteenth century.

Panel 3: Constructing and Contesting Imperial Knowledge

Chi Chi Huang

Constructing The Tropical Ideal: Hong Kong in British Popular Culture

Hong Kong's cultural place within the British Empire has often been overshadowed by larger colonies or its significance has been tied to the end of the Empire, marked by the handover of the territory to China in 1997. However, this talk considers Hong Kong's place within the British imagination during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to argue that this entrepôt was a persistent feature of British popular culture. The colony was at once idyllic: a model of British virtues and energies, and objectionable: a breeding ground for disease and a shelter for immorality and colonial mediocrity. By examining the circulations of these perceptions from a broad range of visual and rhetorical texts such as newspapers, periodicals, travel writing, novels, exhibition pamphlets, musicals, photographs, postcards, and illustrations, I explore how Hong Kong was made to matter to a British audience.

While the colony's presence may not have been as visible as larger dominions, the study of Hong Kong in British popular culture allows for a study of cultural margins. It has long been accepted that the British Empire was experienced at home, but how did smaller colonies like Hong Kong feature, fit in, or complement the wider popular imperial culture. By showing that Hong Kong was far from absent from the British imagination, it is clear that the landscape, geography, and climate of the island and peninsula were crucial to how the colony was perceived and communicated to audiences back in Britain. These depictions of Hong Kong, over the course of a century, cemented the idea that this colony was a tropical ideal and a paradise of potential.

Fang He

Contested Bodies: Gendering Chinese Exclusion and Empire in the Continental U.S. and Hawaii

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, enforcement officials of Chinese exclusion laws in the continental U.S. favored Chinese women with bound feet as women of higher class and better morals in immigration screenings. However, officers at the port of Honolulu rarely considered Chinese women's admissibility in the same light after the Chinese exclusion laws were applied to U.S. territories. In Hawaii, footbinding was officially banned in 1895 prior to U.S. occupation. In contrast to Orientalist obsession and admiration evident in numerous accounts of footbinding in mainland U.S. newspapers, periodicals, and magazines, Hawaiian editors demonstrated little fascination with this practice. This paper offers a comparative analysis of the circulation of ideas about Chinese footbinding and its relation to the gendered enforcement of Chinese exclusion laws across the Pacific. Through the lens of "the body," it analyzes the ways in which competing reasonings about Chinese immigrants and their bodies in relation to race, gender, and class manifested in different sites of the American empire. It interrogates U.S. operations of difference in consolidating and stabilizing its imperial power in the Pacific and the paradoxes of U.S. inclusion and exclusion.

Brett Goodin

Cannibals on the Maritime Frontier: The United States Exploring Expedition in Fiji, 1840

The United States Exploring Expedition (1838-1842) was the first U.S. Navy-scientific expedition to circumnavigate the globe. This paper explores the Expedition's longest pause, three months in Fiji during 1840, where the Expedition signed treaties, kidnapped a native chief, massacred villages, and collected the bulk of its specimens that became the founding collections of the Smithsonian. This time among Fiji's "cannibal chiefs" inspired more U.S. newspaper coverage than any other aspect of the four-year journey, helping ordinary Americans position themselves in the world and informed by scientific racism that legitimized racial hierarchies and territorial conquest elsewhere in the nineteenth century.

Fiji was also the port that the Expedition's crew most feared visiting. It was the one place where they all made sure to make out their last will and testament before stepping ashore. This paper will draw from social, cultural, and environmental history to explore why American sailors and citizens singled out Fiji as the most feared and cannibalistic nation, and how this phobia, combined with America's broader global ambitions, inspired the Expedition's perceptions of and experiences in Fiji.

Panel 4: State Power and Privilege

Shirley Zhao

The Great Manchurian Plague 1910-11: An Event of Nation-Making and the Experiences It Failed to Capture

A pneumonic plague stormed Manchuria at the turn of the year 1910-11. Soon after its outbreak in October, a nationalist discourse dominated both regional and national print media in China, where Chinese elite and intellectuals treated the plague as a national rather than a medical crisis. Guarding the nation's health *was* defending the state's sovereignty while overcoming the crisis embodied a national transformation. Such nationalist narratives of the plague fit in the progress of nation-making in modern China but failed to capture the experiences of the inarticulate masses. The vast majority of the people were struggling for survival at the bottom of the society, and the fear and anxiety that they suffered were not only caused by the disease but the state with which they were supposed to ally. But however much the grass-roots experiences deviated from the elite's discourse, writers and leaders found ways to force them back into a coherent nationalist narrative. When the plague finally passed, the Chinese nation was strengthened and preserved while some lives were forever lost and forgotten.

Xavier Ante

The Qingshuijiang Documents and the Persistence of the Miao Forest Frontier in the Qing

Contracts related to tenancies, forest sales, profit divisions, and dispute resolutions from 1736-1950 in what is now Jinping county of the Qiandongnan autonomous region in Guizhou demonstrate that there was a strong institutional and infrastructural basis for the area's timber industry. Highly liquid shares of forest crops, local dispute resolution mechanisms, and a network of flood paths cutting across the highlands in particular do much to overcome the most serious difficulties of cultivating timber for commercial purposes in an organic economy. But how was this sustained amidst the large scale migration of Han into the southwest? A tentative answer is that Han immigration in southeastern Guizhou was concentrated around walled settlements with resident Han officials, while accompanying infrastructural improvements like river dredging were most beneficial to Miao areas selling commodities that were "areal" and spread out—an unintended legacy of the Miao integration efforts under Yongzheng that fell through halfway. While this case of frontier integration bears similarities to the experience of Xinjiang, with Han settlement concentrated in mineral exporting enclaves, the distributional effects were different, as Miao cultivators and merchants profited greatly from Qing intervention.

Panel 5: Trajectories of Transformations

Shujing Wang

Paper Documents in Transformation: A Case Study from the Karakhoja Cemetery (Turfan, Xinjiang)

This study investigates the transformation of ancient paper documents excavated in the Karakhoja Cemetery from the perspective of object itineraries. Karakhoja cemetery is located in Turfan, an important nexus of the Silk Road networks, in present-day Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, China. Thanks to the area's dry climate, an extensive amount of highly perishable paper documents dated from the fifth to the eighth centuries CE have survived and constituted one of the earliest collections of paper finds in China. Previous studies of these documents mostly focus on their texts and calligraphic styles. However, the materiality and social roles of these paper pieces in the milieu of human-object interactions have long been neglected. Therefore, the current study aims to reconstruct the itineraries of Karakhoja paper documents and discusses how their functions and meanings shifted along the trajectory across various temporal and spatial scales. Through a meticulous archaeological reading, this study reveals that these documents were reused, recycled, pasted together, trimmed, assembled into burial clothes, and finally, deposited in the mortuary context. These itineraries demonstrate that Karakhoja paper documents underwent a series of transformations, from being the information carrier to accompanying the deceased to the afterlife, traversing the realms of the living and the dead.

Ping-hsiu Alice Lin

Between a Rock and a Gem: Embodied Skill and Labor

Precious stones are worked, not mechanically mass produced, and require a remarkable set of skills, artistry, and labor. This paper examines the transformative nature of gem cutting within the global industry of gems and jewelry. As a craft, gem cutting generates livelihood earnings for many of the working class across South and Southeast Asia. But any appreciation for the value of this labor is frequently overwhelmed by the romanticized origin stories of gems and their marketing as objects of luxury. Drawing on fifteen months of ethnographic research and apprenticeship in the Peshawar market of Namak Mandi in northwest Pakistan, I draw attention to the skills, labor, and knowledge mobilized to turn minerals into gems. I consider the practice of gem cutting as an artisanship and a livelihood choice located within political economic regimes of the region. The acquisition of gem cutting skills enables some artisans to evolve towards a shared occupational identity and collective professional norms. It affects social positioning, providing leeway for some autonomy and upward mobility amongst the working class. Through an exploration of the everyday practices of gem cutters in Namak Mandi, I thus link micro stories with macro structures to show how gem artisanship as a skill and a social practice is situated in the global, and how current forms of working with minerals privileges modern discourses centered on mechanized skill at the expense of those that value manual labor.

Juan F. Moreno

Aerial Herbicidal Warfare from Vietnam to Colombia: Imperial Technopolitics in Transformation

Between 1978 and 2015, Colombia was the only state in the world to sponsor a systematic program of aerial herbicide spraying with the aim of eradicating illicit plants (mainly, coca). During those years, the image of low flying crop-dusters spraying foliage became iconic of the way in which the global “War on Drugs” was waged in its Colombian “front”. In this presentation, I conceptualize the use of a technological infrastructure of aerial spraying as a form of technopolitics that can be placed within a larger historical context of colonizing projects of aerial herbicidal warfare. More specifically, I contend that the exceptionality of illicit-crop fumigations in Colombia is not to be located solely in the history of drug interdiction, but on a more extensive technopolitical framework concerning the use of technologies of aerial spraying of synthetic chemicals with the aim of destroying, controlling and/or modifying plants and, thus, colonizing landscapes. Under this framework, the Vietnam war constitutes a key precedent to understand the war on drugs in Latin America. Between 1966 and 1971, during the Vietnam war, as a pivotal part of the program known as Operation Ranch Hand, nearly 19 million gallons of herbicides were sprayed in the Vietnamese forests with the goal of destroying enemy crops while defoliating to improve visibility. In this presentation, I track some of the connections and transformations between these two cases within the context of the history of imperial technopolitics of aerial herbicide spraying.

Panel 6: How to Read What Is Lost? Missing History, Missing Objects, Missing Words

Ritwik Ranjan

Bhudev Mukherjee and the Lost Histories of Hindu Conservatism

Bruno Latour in his book *Down to Earth* (2018) argues that we have entered into a new climatic regime. This new regime requires us to adopt a political agenda that disregards the conventional divisions between the right and the left. In light of such observations this paper attempts to rethink the intellectual history of Hindu Conservatism. I turn to the Indian essayist Bhudev Mukherjee’s (1827-1894) thought on history, missing from the genealogies of both the Indian right and the left, to demonstrate how conservative thought might contribute to a non-conservative political project. A new history of conservatism, this paper claims, may facilitate a possible sublation of the traditional left/right division in the future, bringing into being a new political culture that is better able to respond to the currently unfolding climate crisis.

Xuenan Cao

Techniques of Loss: Book-making in Late 1950s China

During the Great Leap Forward in China, a massive number of brittle documents constituted the reading culture that is impossible to retrieve now. Paper quality dropped. Slim books made up of brittle, translucent pages were distributed to working-class households. Bibliophiles, meanwhile, neglected these disappearing books and preserved instead rare prints in their clandestine networks;

their fine books overwrote the lost past. This paper reconstructs the irretrievable sensory experience of lost documentation in the late 1950s in China, bringing into view what is ontologically negative and cannot be empirically verified. This discussion on lost objects undercuts one rooted privilege in our attempts to understand the past: despite various deconstructionist attempts to anatomize the production of historical knowledge and critique its alleged objectivity, our understanding of history is inevitably skewed towards objects that can be stored, seen, and verified.

Anandi Rao

Lost and Found in Translation: Habib Tanvir's 1993 Translation of Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna

As the title of the famous movie suggests, we often think of what is “lost in translation”. This paper looks at that which is “lost” in Habib Tanvir’s 1993 translation of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*. Combining Hindi theatre with Chhattisgarhi folk forms, this adaptation fits within Tanvir’s oeuvre of what Anjum Katyal terms as “inclusive theatre”. Unlike many other Indian translations and adaptations of Shakespeare’s plays which Indianize locations and names of characters, Tanvir retains the Athenian location and names. What does change, however, is the weightage given to the various plots. The forest adventures of the young Athenians are “missing” with Lysander and Demetrius only appearing in the last scene. Instead, most of the plot shifts between the “mechanicals”, who speak in a local Chhattisgarhi dialect, and the fairies, who like Theseus and Hippolyta speak in Hindi/Hindustani. This paper focuses on two aspects that are “missing”—scenes that are missing in the translation (when compared to Shakespeare’s “original”) and scenes that are missing in the performance (when compared to the published translation)—to consider the subversive potential of translational “loss”.