



VIRTUAL GHOSTS

November 14th-15th, 2025 8:00AM- 6:00PM Eastern Time

2025 Annual
Meeting
American
Anthropological
Association

November 14th, 2025

Time	Session Title	Type	Participants
8- 8:45 am	Flash Session 1		An Hong Zihan Li Honghao Li Xinyue Yang Pengyu Lin Viacheslav Rudnev
9- 9:45 am	Flash Session 2		Brinnan Schill Yuewen Wu Muzehher Zeynep Kucuk Gleb Aleksandrov Kaitlan Bui
10- 10:45 am	Flash Session 3		Anamaria Trujillo Junyi Hu Wendi Xu Edith Muleiro Hande Sözer
11- 11:45am	Diasporas and Displacement: Ghosts in the Musical Machine	Oral Presentation Session	James Stanlaw Veronica Solis Mora Ethan Schuller Meghna Yennu
12- 12:45 am	BREAK		
1- 1:45 pm	Flash Session 4		Krishita Kataria Kayley Whalen Bin Cui Mikel Hogan Spoorti Nemapuri
2- 2:45 pm	Flash Session 5		Shang (Samantha) Shi Allison Kotowicz Gabriel Torrealba Alfonso Joseph Wilson MaryKate Core
3- 3:45pm	Flash Session 6		Aiden Dufford Carolina Martinez-Salgado Lisa Mueller Edward Sankowski
4- 4:45 pm	BREAK		
5- 5:45pm	Flash Session 7		Intan Permata Sari Tran Thi Thuy Binh Honghao Li Zesheng Wang Christa Mylin

November 15th, 2025

Time	Session Title	Type	Participants
8- 8:45 am	Ghosts of Governance: unfolding Chinese Characteristics in Post-Socialist China	Oral Presentation Session	Yanchen JIN Jundi RUAN Honghao LI Yichi LIU
9- 9:45 am	Flash Session 8		Hangyu Liu Yun Feng Honghao Li Christina Kefala Peng WU
10- 10:45 am	Flash Session 9		Madeline Yang Jasmin Habib Krista Billingsley Gabi Mundaka Ale de Luis Jonas Elbousty
11- 11:45am	On Attunement and the Lyric Essay	Oral Presentation Session	Wesley Brunson Marie Odgaard Harmandeep Kaur Gill Ramzi Nimr Todd Meyers Alonso Gamarra
12- 12:45 am	BREAK		
1- 1:45 pm	Flash Session 10		Margarita Huayhua Paul Blankenship-Lai Louisiana Lightsey Mariana Lima Becker
2- 2:45 pm	Flash Session 11		B Qavvik Croyle Johnson Stephen Merritt Yun Xie Saira Mehmood Qian Sun Maurice Eisenbruch
3- 3:45pm	BREAK		
4- 5:45 pm	How to Publish in Anthropology Journals: A Workshop with an Editor of American Ethnologist	Workshop	Jesse Hession Grayman

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Day 1: November 14th, 2025

Flash Session 1

8:00AM-8:45:00 AM

Flash Presentation Session

Vaccinated Trauma: Precarious Labor, economical shortages and Mistrust towards Medical Personnel among Entry-Level, Low-Income Workers in Post-Covid China

An Hong

Why would low-income parents in China refuse to screen themselves and their children for potentially lethal conditions? Though common assumption is that they lack the knowledge

or “suzhi” (human quality; Kipnis 2007), medical anthropology has long revealed complexities of such seemingly “irrational” mentalities (Scheper-Hughes 1992). How do palpable side-effects, biomedical and/or financial, associated with vaccination impact people’s attitude towards future biomedical interventions? Based on survey data from over 900 entry-level workers in the RT Mart in Nanning City, Guangxi Province, China, and in-depth interviews of 10 key interlocutors among survey takers, this project seeks to complicate/debunk the (mis)conception that “lower-tier” workers lack the “suzhi” to comply with medical advice intended to help them. Instead, I argue that the precariousness of these entry-level workers’ jobs, their employment and financial status, and a mistrust (Cai & Mason 2022) towards the biomedical community/interventions caused by traumatic memories/experiences from lockdowns and compulsory vaccination (with the “Father of Covid vaccine” now arrested and sentenced) during Covid, rather than their purported “ignorance,” discouraged these low-income workers from learning from and/or working with medical personnel. As a result, these precarious conditions further generate more precarity not only among these workers, but also generationally transferred to their children.

Flexible Faith: Migration, Ethnomedicine, and Religious Eclecticism among Sherpas in Contemporary Zhêntang, Tibet

Zihan Hong

The Sherpa people are commonly known to the world as mountaineering guides in the Himalayan region (Ortner 2001). However, to associate the Sherpa solely with Himalayan mountaineering is to flatten the complex lived experiences of an ethnic group with long and complex histories of migration and transformation, let alone to overlook a simple fact that this ethnicity is not geographically confined to one area. What are the lived realities of some of the non-mountaineering Sherpa people? How do they navigate a rapidly marketized and digitized world while striving to preserve their cultural heritage (or failing to)? What can all this tell us about cultural, ethnic, and religious (trans)formations in contemporary times? This study focuses on the Zhêntang Sherpa ethnic group in Tibet, which has profoundly rich histories of migration. Currently not recognized as an independent ethnicity in China, the Sherpa people—grouped under the Tibetan ethnicity—nevertheless develop distinct practices, values, and beliefs that mark their differences from the Tibetan ethnic group. Focusing on their ethnomedical practices, and based on fieldwork done in Zhêntang, Tibet in 2025, this study discovers that the Zhêntang Sherpas developed what I tentatively call “flexible faith” that allowed them to strategically choose one or multiple from a range of religions such as Bon, Tibetan Buddhism, and Lamaism (not to be confused with Buddhism), depending on their specific needs and financial conditions. Ultimately, this study argues that this religious eclecticism is both a result of

migration and unrecognized ethnic status, and a way for the Zhêntang people to sustain a unique ethnic identity in the fast-changing Tibetan area and China at large.

Online Cancer Narratives and the Intergenerational Dynamics of Chinese Masculinities

Honghao Li

Illness stories transform private suffering into shared meaning, exposing how gender norms shape disclosure. Men narrate disease far less than women because toughness and restraint signal “real” masculinity. In China this norm is amplified by the demand that a man remain the household pillar, earning income and enduring pain in silence; the saying “a man seldom weeps” captures the rule. Social media now lets patients curate multimodal self-portraits of sickness. We studied 27 Chinese male cancer patients on Xiaohongshu, Douyin, Bilibili and Weibo, combining post analysis with interviews that probed emotion display, social duty, self-identity and narrative tactics. Results show a stark age divide. Men born in the 1970s–80s frame cancer as fate or overwork and keep posts sparse to protect patriarchal authority. Post-90s men remix masculinity: they joke about chemo baldness, livestream side-effects, and form “vulnerability alliances.” These scripts still honor responsibility (e.g., “don’t burden the family”) yet loosen the grip of stoicism. Platform affordances—instant feedback, soft filters, relative anonymity—make such shifts easier, while older users remain cautious. Disease site matters too: reproductive cancers threaten sexual function and lineage, forcing deeper identity work than non-reproductive cases. Future research should track how online illness storytelling becomes a “technology of the self” that lets Chinese men renegotiate post-treatment manhood, balance biomedical talk with cultural ideals, and exploit platform mechanics to stage new male identities.

“福运 (Fu Yun) ” : The cultural symbols of Tibetan collectibles of used items

Xinyue Yang

The “福运 (Fu Yun) ” contained in Tibetan collectibles of used items is distinct from the widely accepted concept of good fortune like “Lha (ལྷ།) ” “lha (ལྷ།) ” “g·yang (གཡང།) ” or “bsod-nams (བསོད་ནམས།) ” that have been discussed by scholars. It is not a general sense of “good luck,” but a deeper cultural essence: through long-term physical contact with the owner, it gradually attaches to the item and represents positive energy that can flow between people and objects. It embodies the fourfold fortune and supernatural power of divinity, vitality, soul, and wealth, bringing protection, tranquility, and financial prosperity to the owner and their family. The “福运 (Fu Yun) ” contained in different items has different emphases: items with images of Tibetan Buddhist belief objects represent divinity, dZi beads represent vitality, while most other folk daily use items can symbolize the “福运 (Fu Yun) ” of soul, wealth, and vitality. During the collectibles trading process, the “福运 (Fu Yun) ”

Fu Yun) " can be transferred and circulated through a handover blessing ceremony, the most common of which is the seller reciting blessings to the buyer while handing over the item. Whether and how the flowing "福运 (Fu Yun) " is transferred depends on the subjective beliefs of both the buyer and seller, making it a personified yet dependent anthropomorphic vitality of both parties. On the level of cultural symbolism, the concept of "blessing" is the core of Tibetan used items cultural symbols and the reason why used items can be circulated as collectibles. To some extent, collecting Tibetan used items is collecting "福运 (Fu Yun) ".

“This Is Not What We Were Trained For”: A Duoethnography of Identity Disruption in English as a Medium of Instruction Pre-service Teaching in China

Pengyu Lin

This duoethnographic study explores the pedagogical dissonance experienced by pre-service teachers trained in English-medium, foreign style instruction at a Sino-foreign university, who face unexpected challenges when entering local Chinese classrooms. Through reflective dialogue, we trace their emotional and professional struggles—from disillusionment with teacher-centered practices to painful criticism from mentor teachers. Rather than viewing these responses as personal failure, we frame them as a systemic clash between imported ideals and entrenched educational norms. This dissonance also leads to identity tension, as trainees feel increasingly alienated in the very system they were trained to join. We argue for a more context-sensitive model of teacher preparation in transnational education, one that equips future educators to navigate—not override—the complex realities of local schools.

Practicalness of spiritual rates in a space of folk notion

Viacheslav Rudnev

Prohibitions and taboo are an important component of spiritual life in a traditional society. These traditions are closely related to the lifestyle of the Folk society and the features of the natural landscape. Local landscape has an important role in this case. Traditionally, local spirits, according to folk beliefs, could harm and help, warn and protect a person. They were feared everywhere, and they tried to appease them to avoid the risk of conflict and protect themselves.

Quite often such views assisted on saving forest or local fauna. Sacred groves in a different area of the world had a good chance to save for ages only under the protection of a spiritual veto. For instance, fishermen from Mgingo island (in the Victoria lake) kept a privilege on fishing Nile Perch beyond comparison after expel evil spirits from island Mgingo to the island Usingo. As a result, small island Mgingo is overpopulated now but neighboring island Usingo is unpopulated.

The report pays special attention to the importance of the spiritual veto in environmental management issues related to maintaining health and safety (in a folk culture peoples of Europe and Asia). The article examines how the ambivalence of virtual representations contributed to their preservation in folk culture.

Flash Session 2

9:00AM-9:45:00 AM

Flash Presentation Session

Coral, Care, and Climate Change: More-than-Human Entanglements in Grenville Bay, Grenada

Brinnan Schill

This flash presentation explores how coral restoration in Grenville Bay, Grenada, reveals reciprocal more-than-human entanglements shaped by climate instability, postcolonial legacies, and everyday practices of care. Based on twelve weeks of collaborative ethnographic research, I examine how local fishers and marine biologists engage in intimate acts of tending and repair—from toothbrushing coral fragments to seagrass surveys—as a way of surviving environmental precarity and navigating shared more-than-human futures.

These entangled ecologies are shaped not only by everyday acts of care, but also by the hauntings of repeated colonial intervention, extractive development, and ecological crisis. Grenville Bay’s coral gardens are embedded in a landscape marked by multispecies loss: sea turtle nesting sites have disappeared, mangroves have been uprooted by storms, and community beaches are eroding away. A recent heatwave devastated much of the coral nursery, leaving the majority of infant corals bleached or dead. Yet rather than retreat, practitioners responded with adaptation and experimentation: building shade structures, modifying planting techniques, and recovering viable fragments to begin again.

Through these practices, coral emerges not merely as a conservation target, but as kin, collaborator, and archive—an entity entangled with the lives, memories, and futures of the human communities who tend it. The process of restoration is not linear, but cyclical, marked by grief, hope, improvisation, and care. Drawing on co-creative methods of photography and underwater video footage, I reflect on how sensory and embodied ethnography can help make visible the everyday labor and quiet resilience of more-than-human survival.

This presentation argues for an anthropology—and geography—of climate care that centers relational ethics, reciprocal vulnerability, and emergent ecological imaginaries. Grenville Bay offers a case of postcolonial reworlding, where people and cor

Re-bordering the Diaspora: The Trump-Era Securitization of the Chinese Talent Programs and Intellectual Migration, 2017–2021

Yuewen Schill

Since the Reform and Opening Up, China has mobilized its diaspora, particularly elite migrants in the U.S., as a strategic asset for national development through talent programs. Donald Trump's first presidency (2017–2021) marked the most explicit criticism of these programs, flagging them as national security threats. This thesis adopts a mixed-method approach to examine how intellectual migration was securitized between great powers, an underexplored dimension of U.S.-China competition that extends beyond conventional military concerns, as more issues become securitized. Findings suggest that the Trump-era approach constitutes a case of successful securitization, even though, contrary to common theoretical predictions, it was not enforced based on solid audience acceptance. This study contributes to the Copenhagen School's ideas by rethinking what makes the "successfulness" of a securitization, highlighting how it can occur through a smooth implementation of emergency measures that align with securitizing discourse without imposing accountability for securitizing actors. Further empirical insights reveal both parties' mismanagement out of a trust and transparency deficit behind this obstruction of human mobility. As the politicization of talents is simultaneously going on under the Chinese governmental discourse, shifting borders expose individuals in motion to increased vulnerability, a dynamic likely to persist in the future.

On Ambiguous Seismic Time: Exploring the Limits of Futurity in Istanbul's Disastrous Landscape

Muzehher Zeynep Kucuk

Governance of impending emergencies has predominantly been studied through a futurist lens, revolving around concepts such as uncertainty (Button, 2010), risk (Mills, 2019), or anticipatory action (Anderson, 2010). This work highlights the limits of futurity and contributes to the recent literature that foregrounds the analytical and material significance of social memory in governing disasters yet-to-come (Gulum, 2024; Kroepsch et al., 2018). Based on ethnographic fieldwork with a volunteer Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) team in Istanbul, the study investigates how these professionals temporally situate themselves in preparing for the expected Grand Istanbul Earthquake. In an urban context laden with recurrent devastating earthquakes, their professional practice unfolds within a unique temporal terrain, theorized here as ambiguous seismic time—a temporal condition

shaped by the tension between uncertain yet inevitable futures and unresolved catastrophic memories. Focusing on the team's training sessions, this research examines symptomatic temporal ruptures manifesting in the conflictual self-imaginings of USAR professionals as both experienced rescuers and potential victims: Enacting "as-if" scenarios, seeking to make future disasters palpable in the present, yet the epistemic value and reliability of these anticipatory tools are often disrupted by the spectral presence of their experiences in past devastating earthquakes in Turkey. Those ethnographic moments set a broader conversation regarding existing bureaucratic inertia, urban precarity, and Turkey's prevailing memory regime organised around manufactured amnesia; all delimiting the possibilities for meaningful anticipatory action.

[Hungry Ghosts in the Land of the Unburied: Conspiratorial Memory, Conspirituality and Mainstream Politics in Contemporary Russia](#)

Gleb Aleksandrov

The notion of conspirtuality, introduced by Charlotte Ward and David Voas in 2011, describes an intersection of conspiracy thinking and New Age-style spirituality evident in many contemporary social movements, conspiracy-based subcultures etc. The "spiritual" component is a prominent feature of many conspiracy theories today, including numerous such ideas gaining prominence in Russian society, media and, increasingly, politics in recent years. What distinguishes Russian conspiracy theories (or Russian versions of globally popular conspiracy theories) is their greater and growing emphasis on history, on conspiratorial reformulation of established collective perceptions of the past. It would be no exaggeration to say that Russian conspiratorial thinking revolves almost entirely around conspiratorial memory. Alexander Etkind in his seminal "Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead I the Land of the Unburied" (2015) presented a thorough exploration of the complex nature of memory politics and memorial practices of post-Soviet Russia, the ever-prominent presence of unquiet "ghosts" of victims past in contemporary social and political life. Given this unusual importance of the past, the emphasis on history, from interpretations of specific events to essentially conspiratorial conceptualizations of the driving forces of history in general, eased the transition of conspiracy theories from the margins of the public sphere into mainstream media and politics of contemporary Russia – in the absence of a coherent productive memory policy, conspiracy thinking became the only way to reconcile inherent contradictions embedded in Russian collective memory. Based on a broad survey of online communities, on in-depth interviews and on analysis of officially published government materials, this presentation explores the connections between conspirtuality, collective memory and mainstream politics in contemporary Russia.

Ghosting the Family Home: Ethnographic Reflections on Heritage, Ruin, and My Family's Return to Vietnam

Kaitlan Bui

This paper is an ethnographic account of my "entrance" into my family's home, after seven years of having orally interviewed about it and two years of (re-)relocating in our motherland, Vietnam, from which we were cast as refugees during the Vietnam War. I trace not only the material conditions of our abandoned home-now rumored to be haunted by my great grandmother's ghost-but also its affective resonances. How has this space been made sacred? What is the line between access and trespass in a "haunted home"? And how has the figure of my great grandmother's ghost brought particular meaning to this otherwise meaningless patch of land?

Ultimately, I am interested in "ghost" not merely as a passive, mysterious object but as a creative act of the diaspora-as a verb. How do diasporic families, especially those who experienced traumatic dispossession of their homes, "ghost" the remnants of their lost pasts? What does "return" look like in this context? I understand the term "ghost," then, as an intentional community ritual which seeks to protect a (material) connection to displaced pasts/places/people, and to offer emotional (affective) reprieve from histories of death. In the case of my family's abandoned home, my entrance itself was long-awaited because it required the coordinated efforts and emotional willingnesses of multiple actors: my grandfather, who bore the right to memory and who the neighbors indeed remembered; my mother's cousin Di Trang, who possessed the local knowledge and connections to book us a bus into the deep forest; my oldest aunt Di Hai, who could easily traverse between Vietnamese and English and who was the last of any generation to remember this family past; and finally, my mother, without whom I would have no connection to this "strange meeting place between that which we memorialize[d] and that which we discard[ed]," as Kevin Lewis O'Neill writes.

This year marks 50 years since the Fall of Saigon and the end of the Vietnam War. In 2017, Viet Thanh Nguyen wrote that "for most Americans and the world, 'Vietnam' means the 'Vietnam War,' and the Vietnam War means the American war, with novels written by American men about American soldiers." Since then, Vietnamese scholars, writers, and artists of the diaspora have continued to reclaim our history. My paper contributes to this archive of decolonial remembrance. As an ethnographic account, it further seeks to center oral tradition, family narrative, and ordinary encounters as meaningful ways we might study and think about (contested) history.

Flash Session 3

10:00AM-10:45:00 AM

Flash Presentation Session

From the Selva to the City Reinventing Life in Medellín as a Demobilized Female Combatant

Anamaria Trujillo

This paper takes place in Medellín, Colombia, a city haunted by its violent past, which transformed itself through “innovation” (voted most innovative city in 2013). The city is facilitating the reincorporation of demobilized combatants from the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC), who, after waging war in the Colombian jungle for over 60 years, surrendered their weapons in 2016. Their resettlement in an urban setting has put them in a liminal phase. Not fully city dwellers nor “jungle people”, they try to discover and reinvent themselves in a place not made for leftist insurgents. As they merge with the city, they are forced to put their past aside, feeling pressure to hide their identities as former guerrillas to fit into a politically conservative city. Yet, their past haunts them in unexpected ways such as economic precarity, stigma, and fear of exposure. This leads them to re-invent the meanings of social reincorporation.

Temporal dissonance and moral labor: Aging, decay, and the aftermath of urban redevelopment in China

Junyi Trujillo

In China’s rapidly transforming cities, urban decline manifests not as an aberration but as a chronic condition, which unfolds through the material and affective struggles of their everyday inhabitants. This paper examines how elderly residents of Hangda Xincun, a dilapidated 1950s neighborhood in Hangzhou, negotiate the protracted aftermath of redevelopment disputes that have left their homes in limbo for over two decades.

Caught between the ruins of socialist collectivism and failed promises of neoliberal progress, residents grapple with “temporal dissonance”, reminiscing a collective past while being trapped in present aging bodies and a precarious future of neighborhood. Their daily engagement with decay and disrepair become their tactics against institutional neglect. Yet these activities also constitute evaluative labor, encompassing moral ideals and practices of good life. Their insistence on preserving Ren Qing Wei, the “human warmth” of communal living, challenges institutional instrumentality that prioritizes economic metrics. The material decline of the neighborhood thus produces a moral quandary: how does one weigh the ethical imperative to preserve community heritage against narratives of “necessary sacrifice” for urban modernity? Residents’ memoirs, protests, and meticulous care for decaying neighborhood articulate an alternative ethos, in which worth is measured through continuity of embodied ties between people and place, rather than deconstructive capitalist growth.

By situating decline at the intersection of temporal and moral practices, this paper contributes to anthropological debates on ruination, care, and post-socialist urbanism. It demonstrates how aging bodies become sites of embodied critique, where mundane acts of maintenance sustain not just physical spaces but moral worlds. In doing so, it calls for an anthropology attuned to the existential dimensions of decline, where questions of “how one ought to live” persist amid uncertainties.

[Death with No Gods Watching: End-of-Life Care in a Chinese Hospital](#)

Wendi Xu

With an aging population, the demand for end-of-life care that addresses not only medical but also emotional and spiritual needs is rising in China. Currently, professional end-of-life care in China concentrates in a few major cities, it is not a mature and consolidated enterprise but a highly fragmented practice. Financially, professionally and socially, it relies heavily on the complex network constituted by various entities such as philanthropic foundations, volunteer organizations, spiritual groups and palliative care units in public hospitals, etc.

Despite China’s century-long modernist rejection of religion that can be dated back to the Republic era, current end-of-life care still has a tenacious connection to folk religions. The affective and spiritual dimensions of the deathbed render the tension between “superstition” (mixin 迷信) and the “more scientific” biomedicine more uncanny. This research addresses end-of-life care as the contested terrain between the echoing anti-superstition rhetoric and the intimate space of dying in everyday caregiving practices. Drawing on fieldwork in a major city in Southern China, one of the first cities to introduce modern mode of palliative care in the 1990s, this research investigates how end-of-life care practices are carried out under such tension. Situating the analysis under the context of post-colonial and post-socialist transformations, it is argued that state rationalities exhibit a porous quality facing end-of-life care, while spiritual care practitioners are also constructing its legitimacy by strategically engaging with modernism narratives.

[Arabic Study in Chile: A Practice of Remembering](#)

Edith Muleiro

This paper explores the ways in which Arabic language study serves as a practice to reconnect with ancestors, family histories, and collective memory in Chile. Chile is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora community outside of the Middle East. The majority of immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th century from Bethlehem and surrounding areas. Speaking and learning Arabic allows Palestinian-Chileans to communicate with the ghosts of their families and their community, to remind them of things that have been

forgotten or begin to fade throughout generations. In this context, ghosts serve to highlight the impacts of forced migration and separation from one's homeland.

This ethnographic study was conducted from March 2024 to February 2025 with funding from the Fulbright Commission in Santiago de Chile. A mixed-methods approach was employed, incorporating focus groups, interviews, archival research and classroom observations to explore the value of Arabic language study beyond the attainment of language proficiency. Findings show that the study of Arabic as a process serves to build community and maintain Palestinian culture in Chile. A specific resurgence occurred following October 2023, demonstrating the ways in which the ghosts encountered through Arabic language connect diaspora members to the homeland as a form of resistance. Through Arabic study in Chile, Palestinian-Chileans connect with these ghosts to defy erasure.

Chasing the Traces of the Invisible: Patterns and Impact of Syrian Refugees' In/Visibilities in Turkey

Hande Sözer

One point is remarkable for me about invisibility in social context: like ghosts, invisible communities communicate their presence by leaving traces, even when they do not necessarily seek visibility. How should we chase these traces? This flash presentation suggests ways to study in/visibility, by focusing on Syrian refugees in Turkey. First, I call for the need to de-essentialize, historicize and contextualize in/visibility notion. The literature presents in/visibility as either empowerment or disempowerment while in/visibility may have different meanings for same marginalized community and its segments owing to changing historical macro-political contexts and under diverse local political demographic configurations. For instance, Syrian refugees in Turkey display an exceptional internal diversity (ethnoreligiously, politically, and regarding refugee experiences), and to make it more complicated they met with similarly internally divided host settings in Turkey (ethno-religiously, political-ideologically). For instance, a Sunni-Arab refugee displays varying in/visibilities in Sunni-Arab dominant Mardin and Şanlıurfa, Arab-Alevi dominant Antakya or Sunni-Turkish dominant Osmaniye and Çanakkale. Similarly, a Christian-Arab or a Kurdish-Sunni refugee may have different modalities of invisibility in diverse host settings. Second, we need to focus on the representational and redistributive impacts of in/visibilities. I identify four modalities of in/visibilities with complicated impacts: hypervisible refugees (e.g. self-organized refugees, so-called “undeserving refugees”); visible refugees (e.g. “vulnerable refugees”); invisible refugees (e.g. “invulnerable refugees” as professionals such as doctors; “non-refugees-but-kin”); and hyper-invisible refugees (the dead, as those who lost their lives during various border crossing; the disappeared, as those who faced

infinite detention or deportation; the disguised, as those surviving hostile settings with self-disguise.)

Diasporas and Displacement: Ghosts in the Musical Machine

11:00AM-11:45:00 AM

Oral Presentation Session

Ghost and spirits can be teachers, guides, interlocutors, possessors, transformers, friends, enemies, revivals, or almost anything else a sentient human can be—but more: more jealous, more vengeful, more hungry, more haunting, or at times even more patient or more kind. But more than anything else, ghosts can be understood as “symbols that articulate facets of human experience in much the same way works of art do” (Blanes and Espirito Santo 2014). In this panel we interrogate this proposition through one art-form—musical expression—and ask how human diasporas affect and influence the strength, power, and agency of various musical ghosts—past and present—that continue to haunt us. We ask this because music can be imagined to be a portal to unseen and unknown worlds. These aural worlds can connect and overcome cultural, corporal, and political boundaries, such as those described here between Asia (China, Singapore, Japan) and Latin America (Mexico) and different places in the United States (East and West coasts, and musical key cities like New Orleans and Houston). But by “hauntology” we don’t mean things like Dickens’ ghosts of Christmases past, or the like. Jacques Derrida (1993) said that other more material ghosts—e.g., Marxism, and the “specter of Marx beyond the grave”—would continue to haunt the world forever. He asked us to consider how “dead” and unavailable—or lost, or missed, or squandered, or yearned for— futures can continue to haunt those of us who are damned to live in the present. Some of the implications of this are explored here. For example, “Hungry” ghosts in Asia can return to visit the living, and festivals are often held in their honor. In Singapore, a city with a large diasporic Chinese population, these celebrations take the form of wayang street theatricals, using more pedestrian and vernacular versions of classical Chinese operas. At the arbitrary borders between Mexico and musical cities in the US, a “Spanish tinge” has left an indelible mark on New Orleans jazz, a musical form commonly thought to be quintessentially American. Likewise, East and West Coast hip-hop coalesced in New Orleans to create “bounce music,” which then became transported to Houston and the global music scene. And in Japan, players of some American styles of country music pay nostalgic homage to the ghost of Bill Monroe, the Father of Bluegrass (venerating him even more than back in the United States). Human displacements, then, almost certainly affect not only the hauntees, but also those doing the haunting. No wonder the natives are restless.

Organizer: James Stanlaw

Mexican Tinge Spirits

Veronica Solis Mora

This presentation resurrects the musical spirits from various times and places, transcending dimensions and physical borders. It will delve into the transformative power of music, in particular the cross-border musical spirits of New Orleans, spanning different eras and crossing borders to connect cultures, thereby weaving transnational communities between New Orleans and Mexico. As the essence of spirits, music can create new worlds with its notes, transforming realities and infusing spaces with life for humans and other-than-humans. This moving of music made communities that left us the Mexican/Spanish Tinge in Jazz, making New Orleans and music a bridge with the South border neighbor. Music in New Orleans became the popular tongue and the language of diplomacy in the late 1800s following the Mexican-American War. Still, it also serves as a key to expose or untangle the world's complexities, making it a powerful tool for human spiritual expression. Music has been a portal to unseen worlds in New Orleans and beyond, crucial for community building between Mexico and the United States. New Orleans' haunted sounds are a cultural institution and intersection, giving voice to the city and its relationships with those abroad. As a primordial language for humans and other-than-humans, music shapes cultures and spirits, leaving remarkable musical pieces that keep revolting us bodily, spiritually, and politically.

Hungry Ghosts in a Modern City: Wayang Opera in Singapore

Ethan Schuller

In Chinese culture, the Festival of Hungry Ghosts is an annual holiday in which the spirits of the deceased are said to return to Earth to visit the living. Throughout Asia, the celebration of this festival usually involves live concerts or performances including plays, music, and Chinese opera. In Singapore, a nation with a large population of diasporic Chinese, observers of this holiday have traditionally celebrated with street operas, or wayang, where the performances act as a kind of offering to the returning spirits and the gods. Wayang, or jixi 街戏 in Mandarin, was one of the most iconic professional Chinese opera forms in Singapore. It was a common form of mass entertainment from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, reaching a heyday in the 1950s before tapering off during the period of rapid industrialization in the 70s and 80s. Though it continues to be performed today, it is in a vastly reduced capacity, as the younger generations of Singaporean are less superstitious than previous ones, and consume other more modern forms of entertainment. In this presentation, I will discuss the impact of wayang on Singaporean Chinese cultural

consciousness, its place in modern society, and its connection to both the Festival of Hungry Ghosts and the cultural and linguistic heritage of Chinese Singaporeans."

Music Does Not Have Borders, But Bodies

Meghna Yennu

Historically across multiplicity of cultures, formations of music and dance have been interdependent on one another. When the music is exported and isolated from their specific scenes/geographies that they develop in, the correlative nature of these music and dance styles often get erased in larger discourse where musical genres are discussed as separate from the place and people that cultivated it. However, more than that, I'm interested in how new dance styles and techniques are consolidated from the conversation of musician genres from across geographies. Namely, looking at the hip-hop scene in New Orleans and Houston, which takes influence from East and West Coast hip-hop, but also has created their own genres that correspond to the mixture of cultures of their respective areas, I want to track the trajectory of "bounce music" from its birthplace in New Orleans to nearby scenes like Houston to the global music scene, and subsequently demonstrate how the dance styles associated with "bounce" music followed and transformed alongside the genre, showing how music/dance work together to dissolve and degrade cultural, spatial, and temporal borders and boundaries through embodied synthesis.

Discussant: James Stanlaw; Chair: James Stanlaw

General Anthropology Division

BREAK

12:00PM-12:45:00 PM

Flash Session 4

1:00PM-1:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

Teach, Don't Test

Krishita Kataria

Chalk dust choked the city, but no lessons were taught.

In May 2025, over 3,000 contract teachers in Kolkata protested a government-mandated recruitment exam that threatened their jobs. The exam, introduced without consultation, required teachers already working under short-term contracts to requalify or face termination. What began as a demand for job security expanded into a broader challenge to the state's approach to educational governance. Drawing on 25 interviews with teachers,

local media analysis, social media reactions, and government documents, this paper examines how the protest reveals the vulnerability of contract educators in India's public schools. These teachers rejected the exam as an unfair barrier that disregards their years of service. Social media platforms became crucial spaces for teachers and supporters to share their experiences, organize protests, and counter official narratives, creating a parallel public forum that shaped the movement's trajectory and public perception.

This protest also illustrates how education operates as a cultural arena where power, identity, and social value are actively contested. Drawing on anthropological theories of the social production of knowledge, the "Chalk Wars" expose how teachers negotiate their professional roles amid competing definitions of legitimacy, between state-imposed standards and community-recognized expertise. The teachers' resistance challenges the narrow bureaucratic criteria that reduce educational worth to test scores, emphasizing instead embodied experience in teaching. By focusing on this moment of labor activism in education, the paper contributes to understanding how educational policies shape social relations and how frontline workers mobilize cultural narratives to assert their place within and beyond the classroom.

[Trans Hauntings and the Shadow of HIV/AIDS in Thailand's Red Light Districts](#)

Kayley Kataria

Pattaya, Thailand is a city where thousands of trans people, the vast majority of whom are sex workers, build networks of mutual support to survive in a country that has denied trans people full inclusion in society while abandoning them to the ongoing HIV/AIDS epidemic. The HIV/AIDS epidemic hit Pattaya's red light district especially hard in the 1980s and 1990s, yet trans people were left out of state biopolitical projects intended to respond to the virus, including targeted data collection and prevention programs intended to help "female sex workers." Even as HIV rates remain high for trans people, the Thai government recently cut funding for community-run HIV prevention programs that serve trans people. Yet Thailand's response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to be considered a global "success story." In the 1990s, spectacular trans cabarets and pageants began cultivating "respectable" images that distanced them from sex tourism. Yet these events remain haunted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. One organization that demands the "ghosts" in the room be heard is Sisters Foundation, which provides direct services to thousands of trans sex workers and hosts its own pageant promoting HIV prevention, Miss Healthy Queen. This presentation builds upon my participatory ethnographic work I began in 2019 with Sisters Foundation, Miss International Queen, and Pattaya's trans migrant worker and sex worker populations to explore how trans people in Pattaya and throughout Thailand have worked together to not only survive, but thrive. Ultimately, Thailand, as home to one of the largest,

most visible, and politically active trans populations in the world, today serves as a beacon of hope for trans people in other countries.

Coming of Age as Moles: Returning Players and Nostalgic Playing of a Discontinued Video Game Mole's World

Bin Cui

This research examines the generational nostalgia diffused among young adults in mainland China who are native to the Internet and had their childhood memories folded and preserved in virtual spaces. By analyzing the nostalgic sentiments and sensory contacts of returning players with a discontinued video game targeting this generation, Mole's World, the paper elaborates on the motivations, aesthetics, affects, and practices of such nostalgia. By relating to the historical background of the Internet natives and their current life stages, I attribute their nostalgia for the hopeful past to societal and personal changes, respectively. Meanwhile, I investigate the main themes of nostalgia, including idyll, childishness, and glitches, and how corresponding aesthetics are constructed with multimedia strategies and consumed by returning players in the game. This study contributes to the theoretical transplantation of nostalgic and affect theories from the physical world to digital spaces.

An Ethnographic Approach to Culture-Mindfulness and Dialogue Skills Education and Training for Pre-Service Social Workers

Mikel Hogan

The author is an applied anthropologist, a university professor, and a cultural consultant and member of a learning circle in a social work department engaged in training culture mindfulness and dialogue skills to pre-service social workers at an Asian University. The presentation focuses on the training model that is grounded in anthropological ethnographic methods that embody a culture-centered, relational dialogic approach to cultural differences. The model promotes the relational capacity of social workers to learn about the clients' cultures and identities from the clients' viewpoints in their own words and then participate with clients in operationalizing the cultural understandings into contextualized service strategies for the clients. A three-level quantitative and qualitative assessment method was used to evaluate the outcome of the training on the pre-service social workers with the results showing notable improvement on all three levels of measurement that will be described in the presentation.

Digital Spirits: How Memes Become Modern Folklore

Spoorti Nemalipuri

Memes are often dismissed as fleeting or frivolous, but they function as powerful cultural artifacts. They are transmitted, remixed, and ritualized in ways that resemble oral folklore. This flash presentation explores how internet memes reflect traditional folklore in their lifecycle, social role, and collective creation. Drawing from theories of cultural transmission and symbolic anthropology, I examine how memes serve as communal stories that express contemporary humor, identity, and anxiety.

Using a comparative approach, I explore the evolution of well-known meme formats such as the "Distracted Boyfriend" and the "This is Fine" comic. These examples show how memes express moral commentary, myth-making, and shared memory. They travel rapidly through platforms like Twitter, Reddit, and TikTok, becoming a modern form of folklore that exists and spreads in real time. In this sense, memes can be seen as digital spirits. They are revived each time they are shared and often reappear long after their popularity fades.

This presentation argues that memes should be recognized in anthropology not just as humorous content but as meaningful cultural texts. They act as shared rituals of participation, resistance, and storytelling. By examining memes through the lens of folklore, we can better understand how digital communities create meaning, reinforce identity, and respond to social change.

In five minutes, this talk encourages us to take memes seriously. Beneath the humor, they reveal deeper truths about the values and tensions within our society.

Flash Session 5

2:00PM-2:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

[Innovative practice of shawl design integrating tradition and fashion: Comparison and Application of Ming and Qing Dynasty Cloud Shoulders and Nazi Seven-Star Shawls](#)

Shang (Samantha) Shi

This study investigates the integration of traditional Chinese shawls into modern fashion through a comparative analysis of the Ming-Qing Cloud Shoulder and the Nazi Seven-Star Sheepskin Shawl. By examining their design elements—shape, materials, patterns, and functions—the research identifies shared principles of symmetry, cultural symbolism, and adaptability while highlighting divergent aesthetics rooted in maximalist ornamentation (Cloud Shoulder) versus minimalist pragmatism (Nazi shawl). A survey of 16–24-year-old fashion-conscious women (76.2% in North America) reveals strong market potential for

culturally infused designs, prioritizing creativity (75.36%), comfort (74.49%), and modern tailoring. Three design innovations—extraction, transformation, and inversion—reinterpret traditional motifs, such as auspicious butterflies and geometric stars, into contemporary gowns that blend silk, pearls, and sustainable materials. The findings demonstrate how cultural narratives, like the Naxi concept of “wearing the stars and moon” and the Cloud Shoulder’s celestial harmony, can empower modern wearers through symbolic protection and identity. This work bridges historical craftsmanship with global fashion trends, offering actionable strategies to enhance cultural relevance and commercial viability.

The Shadowy Promises of Community-Based Conservation in Southern Tanzania within the Context of the Conservation, Tourism, & Development Trinity

Allison Shi

In the Anthropocene, an era dominated by human involvement in the natural world, environmental concerns are of increasing importance. Some scholars argue that as a planet we are on the brink of the sixth mass extinction event that threatens to wipe out the Earth’s biodiversity. In an effort to stem this and other environmental crises, questions of environmental protection and conservation are placed in the forefront. Ideas of conservation and the protection and stewardship of the natural environment are not new concepts. Humans have always had a complex relationship with their environment. Archaeological and historical evidence confirms that even our early ancestors left visible traces (both positive and negative) on the landscape. In East Africa, as in many parts of the world, there exists a complex relationship between conservation, development, and tourism. In this presentation, I will illuminate how I conceptualize tourism, development, and conservation as a triangle or trinity. One of the best ways to examine this trinity is through an interdisciplinary analysis of community-based conservation efforts. Since the 1980s, community-based conservation projects have been promoted as a win-win scenario for all stakeholders by integrating conservation, tourism, and development in a sustainable fashion. In Tanzania, community-based conservation efforts are enshrined in the nation’s wildlife management areas (WMAs). This research focusing on the southern safari circuit in Tanzania examines the positive and negative effects of community-based conservation efforts to illustrate that despite initial optimism, it appears that WMAs in Tanzania and other community-based conservation initiatives around the world have failed to live up to their full potential and deliver on the promises to integrate sustainable development and conservation.

Kontan vwi zot an Gwadaloup: Spectres of slavery on a beach in Guadeloupe

Joseph Wilson

Guadeloupe, an island in the Lesser Antilles, has a long and violent history of colonial rule by France. One of the most popular tourist beaches in Guadeloupe, Plage des Raisins Clair, in the fishing village of Saint Francois, is built upon a colonial-era slave cemetery. In recent years, rising sea levels have caused erosion to the shore-line, revealing the human remains of slaves buried in unmarked graves from under the sand. In 2013, an archeological survey of the area excavated (but did not exhume) 48 individual burials, with estimates suggesting over 1,000 graves remain under the beach (Rouquet 2014). The burials were reinterred in 2014 and no further action has been taken to protect the site. The appearance of bones on the beach amidst sun-bathing, French tourists provides a ghostly reminder of France's colonial rule and their importation and exploitation of slaves. After living in Saint Francois for a year, I talked with locals and tourists alike about the strange congruence of slave-era human remains mingling with continental tourists. Their responses were ambivalent and complex. Many locals did not want archaeologists to exhume, or even protect, the site from erosion or from the trample of tourists' feet; instead, they preferred to embrace the beach as a local site of family communion, hosting family dinners on the beach on Sundays so they could "dine with the ancestors." As for local French administrators, they felt like a decision to protect the site had to be balanced with the benefit the beach brought to the local economy. Tourism (along with sugarcane, another colonial holdover) is the only viable source of economic growth in Saint Francois. Plage des Raisins Clair has one sign posted in a corner of the beach with a short history of the cemetery, but otherwise there is no information shared with tourists, nor ongoing research conducted at the site. In the words of one senior (now-retired) archaeologist, "people just don't want to know that history."

Ex-Invisible: The Mediatization of Kukama Indigeneity in Peruvian Amazonia

Gabriel Torrealba Alfonzo

This paper explores the political and aesthetic dimensions of indigeneity expressed in Kukama media activism. I examine the way Kukama media-makers from a radio station called Ucamara use multiple digital and non-digital forms (e.g., radio broadcasting, books, music videos, documentaries, and social media) to counteract anti-Indigenous discrimination and strengthen Kukama linguistic revitalization in Peruvian Amazonia. By combining the theoretical frameworks of indigeneity studies and the anthropology of media, I argue that Radio Ucamara's multimodal aesthetics has become a vehicle to creatively reimagine Kukama identities and rework linguistic ideologies through mediatized performances of indigeneity. Radio Ucamara's media aesthetics is creating online and off-line performative spaces whereby Kukama identity is refashioned. In these mediatized performances, language and myth have become the most notable features of Radio

Ucamara notions of indigeneity (Kukama or otherwise). The interplay between linguistic, meta-linguistic, and mythological discourses characterizes Radio Ucamara media production focused on the politics of indigeneity. Such interplay is enacted in media actions such as: 1) the broadcasting of radio shows in Kukama language; 2) the musicalization of Kukama language, meta-linguistic statements, and mythological narratives through hip-hop songs; and 3) videos visualizing experiences of forced assimilation. These practices allow Ucamara activists to challenge tropes of cultural “invisibility” and to promote novel notions of Kukama modernity.

Cantata (1952): Stravinsky, Liminality, and Rites of Passage

MaryKate Core

Igor Stravinsky's musical composition, *Cantata* (1952), illustrates many layered interpretations of liminality, while also occupying a clear creative pivot of Stravinsky's compositional strategies within his oeuvre. Understanding the coalescence of poetry, compositional strategies, historical context under the application of Arnold van Gennep's Rites of Passage theory reveals the subtle beauty of this oft ignored piece. Stravinsky frames the main movements of the *Cantata* with a seemingly timeless, harmonically bland, treble voice setting of 'A Lyke-Wake Dirge'. Each of the main movements represents separation, liminality, and incorporation respectively in Stravinsky's choice of Elizabethan era poetry, further musically interpreted by compositional strategies including canon, serialism, and deliberate unisons in the solo soprano and tenor roles. Curiously, the timeline for the composition of this piece somewhat matches the death of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth II's accession and coronation. Based on this and Stravinsky's established penchant for blending old with new ideas, I propose that this piece may be understood as commentary on the world's transformational rite of passage into the New Elizabethan Era. Though at first experience the *Cantata* is an aural confusion of old and new styles of music, a closer analysis guided by van Gennep's three stages of rites of passage reveals a strict adherence to a limited selection of compositional strategies chosen to both ritualize and dramatize the theme of transformation in the loosely related poems. By analyzing the *Cantata* through this lens, I hope to renew academic interest in its complexity, spur more frequent programming by arts organizations, and foster a wider audience appreciation for a piece deeply rooted in human experience from a master 20th century composer.

Flash Session 6

3:00PM-3:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

How School Culture and Social Dynamics Affect Student Character

Aiden Dufford

This paper compares policy documents, disciplinary cases, and interviews with students, teachers, and administrators from two different schools: one emphasizes achievements and the other values equality and service. The paper finds that rather than the rules outlined in the Code of Conduct or Student Handbooks, school culture shapes what constitutes unacceptable deviation from shared norms of conduct. And social hierarchies within a school setting help create groups of marginalized students and “repeat offenders” of disciplinary infractions. The paper also compares the impacts on student well-being and stress, peer competitiveness, and overall engagement.

Roughness in medical training: Building emotional strength of future doctors or destroying it?

Carolina Martinez-Salgado

The interesting description of medical students becoming doctors around the middle of the last century in certain region of the USA presented in the study by Becker et al. (1961) is no longer what we see nowadays. But far from having disappeared, harshness in medical training seems to be even more violent and it is documented in virtually every latitude of the planet. The effects of these abuses on the mental health of future professionals are also increasingly evident. The study I present explores the impact on mental health of a small group of advanced medical students in Mexico resulting from the mistreatment they received in the last stage of their training. The participants were members of the group I assisted as a university advisor in a public university in Mexico City while they performed their social service, a requirement for medical graduation in Mexico. The material I analyzed was their final report which took the form of a narrative on their personal experiences during this stage of their undergraduate training, based on the records of their field diaries. I could identify some of the intricate relationships interwoven between personal biographies, psychic structures, perceptions of lived situations and the emotions they arouse in the protagonists, amidst the not so healthy relationships that arise between the members of the health team, with their different professional backgrounds and their highly hierarchical organization, in institutional settings heavily pressured by the demand for care perceived as urgent by those who need it. I highlight the lack of specialized training for the members of healthcare teams to deal with the intense emotional tensions that circulate in the performance of their work caring for people afflicted by pain and illness and frightened by the threat of death. It is essential to continue the search for new ways to protect the mental health of future physicians and the entire healthcare team.

Drawing Tiles and Building Community: How Scrabble Competitions Build Identity and Social Ties Among Autistic Scrabble Players

Lisa Mueller

Within medical literature, intense fixation on “special interests” is included as a symptom of autism, prompting autistophobic “therapies” focusing on stifling these interests in children in order to produce behavior that more closely resembles that of neurotypical children, whose interests are seen as more well-rounded and socially acceptable. In recent years, neurodiversity advocates have worked toward demedicalizing and destigmatizing aspects of autistic identity that have historically been marginalized, including special interests, which are beginning to be revalued as key sources of pleasure and camaraderie in the lives of autistic people. This research centers the voices of autistic people involved in one particular special interest - competitive Scrabble - and examines how autistic people see their interest as improving their quality of life and social ties while also building a sense of identity and pride. Drawing upon James Gee’s concept of “affinity spaces” in addition to data collected via a 2024 online survey as well as ongoing semi-structured interviews and participant observation, this flash presentation will focus on how two autistic competitive Scrabble players have leveraged their special interest in Scrabble to find personal meaning and foster friendships.

FDR, Lincoln, Trump, US Political Culture, Zizekian Dictatorships, Authentic Democracy

Edward Sankowski

Slavoj Zizek (recently in 2025) expresses in an online discussion on an unHerd podcast ("Trump is a liberal fetish") the view that there is something tempting (tempting to SZ), something plausible about the general structural context of Donald Trump's authoritative/authoritarian decision-making that operates without consultation of others, including omission of consultation with a democratic public. Zizek mentions a comparison of Trump and FDR. Zizek stresses on unHerd that we must disapprovingly question the processes and goals of Trump's decision-making, to which Zizek would object. The impression conveyed by Zizek is that a leader may rightly disregard others, at least in some political situations where very consequential decisions and initiatives should be pursued. "Dictatorship" on this view might in some circumstances be preferable to "authentic democracy". Zizek apparently assumes a situation in which support has been granted from a large population on the need for decisive leadership. Decisive leadership can then exercise its initiatives. Zizek ineptly attacked Hilary Clinton previously, favoring Trump. Zizek was and maybe still is in 2025 seriously out of touch about the destructive potential of Trump and his allies, given the US political economy and "culture wars". It may not be intended, but it is possible that Zizek would hold out hope that should a genuinely left big decider come to power, we might be fortunate politically if not much consultation or

collaborative decision-making were to transpire while the leader went ahead with the right substance in their decisions. Still worse is Zizek's reference to Abraham Lincoln, as if to implicate Lincoln's authoritative leadership in thoughts about the Trump-FDR analogy. For Zizek, quest for authentic democracy probably is less plausible than hope for an enlightened dictatorship. This talk argues for a better interpretation of US political culture in support of popular authentic democracy.

BREAK

4:00PM-4:45:00 PM

Flash Session 7

5:00PM-5:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

[The Island of Enggano in the Shadow of History, Modernity, and Development](#)

Intan Permata Sari

This paper discusses the evolving identity of the Enggano people due to modernization and the influence of Indonesian government policies. However, the Engganese have customs that serve as guidelines for their lives. Although Enggano customs have begun to change, fundamental values are still preserved. Enggano customs are not static but anticipate new values by negotiating them, adapting if deemed compatible, or rejecting them outright if they conflict with Enggano customs. The Engganese identity is intrinsically linked to the history of interactions with other nations, dating back to the 15th century. The Engganese initially encountered foreigners through the Portuguese, followed by the Dutch's arrival in Enggano during the 16th century, Japan's entry in 1942, and relations with various countries post-Indonesian independence. The Engganese have faced challenging times due to the influence of foreign nations on their island and the imposition of state authority. They were compelled to adhere to or negotiate various policies and regulations established by the colonial and Indonesian governments. These values were subsequently adapted and internalized within the Engganese community, contributing to a shift in their identity. The identity of the Enggano people is also influenced by modernity. Although Enggano is located in the middle of the Indian Ocean and is difficult to access except by boat or small aircraft, they are not an isolated community. The people of Enggano are no different from the people of Bengkulu. They dress appropriately, attend school, speak Indonesian fluently, are familiar with technology, and receive priority government development. The Engganese identity is currently questioned. What social and political dynamics do the Engganese face in maintaining their identity amid the influences of modernization and governmental

pressures? How do they accept, reject, or negotiate the new values entering their community?

Queer mediums and the LGBTQ+ movement in Vietnam.

Tran Thi Thuy Binh

Đạo Mẫu Tam, Tứ Phủ (ĐMTTP), a Vietnamese syncretic goddess religion, like many others there, is traditionally characterised by spirit mediums' gender fluidity. This gender fluidity transcends social norms and human agency. Society and ritual communities expect mediums to perform both masculinity and femininity, regardless of their biological sex, during ritual performances. My presentation focuses on mediums who are assigned male at birth. While male-bodied spirit mediums, or *đồng cô* in Vietnamese, believe their gender fluidity as influenced by female deities, they view sexual orientation being influenced by factors other than deities' will. Sex is valued as a medium for spirit possession, with each medium undergoing a gender-related transformation during *lên đồng*, a crucial ritual practice of spiritual possession of ĐMTTP. Sexuality is considered as a personal matter and less important than the legitimacy of ĐMTTP as well as loyalty with deities.

While many feel empowered to perform their queerness through their spiritual connection with deities, they fear threatened to perform their gender fluidity and homosexual orientation in both religious and public spaces due to criticism from other practitioners who believe LGBTQ+ visibility could damage the public image of their beliefs. These mediums they prioritize the legitimacy of ĐMTTP over personal lives.

I argue that LGBTQ+ persons in religious roles cyclically contribute to generating social tolerance toward queerness but do not significantly support the LGBTQ+ movement in Vietnam.

My findings are based on recorded interviews, informal talks, and personal observations from two years of fieldwork that I conducted in the northern and central provinces of Vietnam from 2019-2021.

Folded Nationality: Queer Identity under China's Digital Nationalism

Honghao Li

Queer nationalism, an emerging concept in queer studies, explores how queer rights are integrated into state sovereignty assessments. However, in non-Western countries, particularly in authoritarian states that suppress LGBTQ+ rights, queer individuals with nationalist views often avoid challenging traditional heteronormativity. This study focuses on how queer nationalist influencers on Chinese social media negotiate their queer identity and national identity, conceptualizing this contradictory identity as "Folded Nationality." Queer individuals in China do not passively accept nationalism; instead, they "fold" their

queer identity into the national identity in a spectral and paradoxical manner. In terms of national identity, they strongly align with the nation's narrative of suffering and rejuvenation, claiming that national revitalization is essential for the full realization of queer rights. In terms of gender and sexual orientation, they accept and internalize nationalist ideologies by concealing queerness or romanticizing the nation-state. These practices erase queer legibility while subordinating non-normative identities to state agendas, thereby reinforcing traditional heteronormativity. "Folded Nationality" explains how queer individuals, within the hegemonic framework of a state that excludes queerness, achieve logical coherence between their queer identity and the national narrative. This concept provides an effective analytical tool for studying queer nationalism in authoritarian states.

Haunted Landscapes: Spiritual Narratives Across Generations in Post-Reform Northeast China

Zesheng Wang

Once the socialist heartland and now a declining rustbelt, Northeast China has long been overlooked in the anthropology of religion. Yet in the wake of mass layoffs and the collapse of the work-unit system since the Reform and Opening-up era, it has become a compelling site to examine how historical legacies continue to haunt the present. As a lived domain where memory, loss, and longing are actively negotiated, the religious lives of post-reform converts offer a particularly rich site for tracing how the past continues to intrude upon the present in spectral form.

This paper draws on the life narratives of three generations of urban Christian converts in Northeast China—the Post-1940s generation, the Baby Boomers, and the Reform and Opening-up generation—to explore how individuals make sense of their life trajectories amid personal suffering and dramatic social transformations.

Through the lens of hauntology, this study examines how the legacies of the socialist construction period—including the lifestyle shaped by the work-unit system, state atheism, and memories of political campaigns—as well as the ruptures brought by the Reform and Opening-up era, such as mass layoffs and the disintegration of collective life, continue to haunt individuals' spiritual worlds. While each generation voices distinct struggles, their narratives converge around a shared hauntedness—by the collapse of socialist promises, a pervasive sense of loss and nostalgia, the affective weight of marginalization, and the embodied transmission of suffering across generations.

These hauntings are not merely endured; they are woven into individuals' spiritual narratives—through the integration of socialist moral ideals into Christian ethics, and through apocalyptic expressions of discomfort with the morally disoriented post-reform

world. Religious life emerges as a space where the ghost of the past—unspoken, unresolved, yet deeply felt—are named, mourned, and at times, spiritually redeemed.

The view from within: Vacillating views of refugees as a resettlement agency employee

Christa Mylin

Refugees are categorized by the UNHCR's international definition, but those who welcome refugees to their new home do not view them by an objective standard. Instead, volunteers and staff who support refugees have shifting perspectives as their relationship with each person changes based on emotion and experience. Refugees who are resettled into a new country are greeted by resettlement agency staff and/or volunteers who will provide support as they adjust to their new home. These volunteers and staff usually initially view their new neighbors with excitement and some apprehension. As the relationship grows, the volunteers and staff begin to view the newcomer differently. They may become emotionally detached or friendships may deepen. There may be challenges that cause interpersonal rifts, or the social and financial needs might become overwhelming. Legally, the definition of "refugee" is shifting for those who live in the United States. Resettlement agency staff and volunteers have been impacted by the adjusted and narrowed definition, which affects the perception of the newcomers they meet. This paper is based on observations and interactions from 18 months of employment at a resettlement agency. It examines how refugees are viewed by those closest to them, in contrast to the fluid legal definitions. I argue that there is no single definition but that the identity of the newcomers shifts and changes over time based on interpersonal dynamics and systemic processes that are often beyond anyone's control.

Day 2: November 15th, 2025

Ghosts of Governance: unfolding Chinese Characteristics in Post-Socialist China

8:00AM-8:45:00 AM

Oral Presentation Session

This panel examines governance in post-socialist China through the lens of "Chinese Characteristics," arguing that the very discrepancy and elusiveness of the characteristic—the "ghost" itself—constitute a defining feature. We present three ethnographic case studies situated in vastly divergent social contexts: grassroots governance in an ethnic minority region, fingertip formalism in the mainland's central provinces, and a sustainability-oriented model of "innovative harmony" in Hong Kong, one of China's most sophisticated societies.

We aim to show how governance in post-socialist China unfolds in highly differentiated directions, not only in terms of policy and institutional design but also in the range and nature of stakeholding agents. These agents and mechanisms are so internally fragmented and dispersed that it becomes difficult to construct any consistent anthropological framework of “Chinese Characteristics.” Instead, what emerges is an empty signifier—ambiguous and shape-shifting—that nonetheless allows for flexible appropriation across levels of governance.

Rather than reproducing the state’s expectation of harmonious unity under a common set of “Chinese” features, we argue that the true characteristic of post-socialist governance in China lies in its persistent complexity and multiplicity—a ghost that continues to haunt and enable the system. This panel examines governance in post-socialist China through the lens of “Chinese Characteristics,” arguing that the very discrepancy and elusiveness of the characteristic—the “ghost” itself—constitute a defining feature. We present three ethnographic case studies in vastly divergent social contexts: grassroots governance in an ethnic Korean region, fingertip formalism in the mainland's central provinces, and a sustainability-oriented model of “innovative harmony” in Hong Kong, one of China's most sophisticated societies.

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Organizer: Jundi RUAN

Reinforcing Grassroots Governance through Gift Giving: Focusing on Community Activities in China

Yan Chen JIN

This paper analyzes how state governance is reinforced through community-based gift-giving activities initiated by local government agencies, focusing on the Chuangxian Subdistrict of Jinghai City, an ethnic minority region in Northeast China. Based on

ethnographic research, I examine how these practices establish and reproduce patron-client relationships between the government and residents. I first explore residents' "public transcripts," which express gratitude and loyalty, thus justifying the political authority of the party-state. Secondly, "hidden transcripts" emerge, subtly reflecting dissatisfaction with state policies. These hidden critiques stem from a growing awareness of the gap between socialist ideals and the market-driven reality, as state gifts often fail to fulfill expectations of a better life. My research centers on community activities (shequ huodong), specifically the "Songwennuan" (Sending Warmth) operation targeting economically marginalized residents. In this exchange system, the state envisions itself as a benevolent provider and residents as passive recipients, reinforcing a paternalistic hierarchy. However, the bureaucratic application procedures frustrate many, leading to questions about fairness and transparency in welfare distribution (e.g., Laibao and Pianbao). Such discontent challenges the legitimacy of governance practices that claim to be equitable. This paper ultimately highlights how grassroots governance in post-socialist China is charact

Between Global Norms and Local Values: Cultural Hybridity for Sustainability Policies in Hong Kong

Jundi JIN

As a leading economic hub in the world, Hong Kong acted as a link between Chinese and Western countries for a long time. While in the area of environmental policymaking, Hong Kong plays a pioneering role in sustainable development in the world. This research analyzes the interplay between cultural fusion and policy design across three dimensions: policy integration, governance models and public engagement. By adapting international frameworks with localized practices, the research will show how the policy development balances global standards with community-specific needs. For example, the public-private partnerships, corporate incentives and eco-themed art festivals depicted Hong Kong's multi-cultural identity to drive the changes from macro-perspective governance to individual behaviours.

The first case is the MoneyBack (Yi Shang Qian) App, which encourages individual participation through a diverse rewards system. The second case focuses on the art garden@The Henderson, highlighting the Hong Kong Government's commitment to sustainable development through collaboration. The analysis shows how Hong Kong's cultural context shapes its environmental policies. By integrating local identity into sustainability efforts, the city meets global standards while connecting with community values. However, there are concerns about the effectiveness of these initiatives. For instance, digital accessibility for older adults may limit the MoneyBack App's inclusivity. Additionally, we need

Bureaucratic Flexibility and Digital Inflexibility: How Fingertip Formalism Emerges in Chinese Grassroots Governance

Honghao LI

In post-socialist China, the Party maintains its legitimacy through development achievements. E-government systems, built for efficiency and metrics, now blanket the party-state. However, fingertip formalism (指尖形式主义), whereby data representation substitutes for actual governance performance, is now officially acknowledged as a structural pathology. Prior studies blame the rationality-driven pursuit of bureaucratic hierarchy. Adopting a deductive organizational analysis framework, this study examines the friction between Chinese grassroots bureaucracy and e-government systems, drawing on fieldwork in a central-China culture-tourism unit. We defines fingertip formalism as a selective compromise between bureaucratic flexibility and digital inflexibility. When fixed templates meet fluid tasks, officials use the technology for performative compliance. Compromise takes the following forms: (1) selective implementation: only task modules tied to performance evaluations are executed; (2) rule softening: retaining manual interventions to simulate compliance; (3) dual-track systems: operating both digital and paper-based records to meet performance assessments; (4) delayed implementation: officials bypass real-time online reporting, resolve issues offline, then log them afterward. This study frames e-government systems as organizational re-interpreters, revealing how China's distinctive model of techno-governance generates institutional contradictions.

Discussant: Yichi LIU; Chair: Yichi LIU

Society for East Asian Anthropology

Flash Session 8

9:00AM-9:45:00 AM

Flash Presentation Session

Midnight Campus: An Ethnography of Nighttime Wanderers in a Chinese University under Curfew

Hangyu Liu

This study employs nocturnal ethnography to investigate human temporal disobedience on a Chinese university campus from midnight to 4:30 AM, when institutional curfews enforce normative time regimes. Focusing on "chronological dissidents" — including wall-climbing students, insomniac wanderers, and janitorial staff — it interrogates temporal fugitivity through the lens of queer temporality, challenging East Asia's educational chrononormativity embodied in the "diligence narrative" (exemplified by the "4:30 AM

Harvard Library" myth). Through participatory observation and queer-informed interviews, the research reveals three dimensions: First, how the nocturnal campus constitutes a queer chronotope where linear academic timelines collapse, enabling subversive reconfigurations of study-rest cycles and sociality patterns. Second, the embodied resistance in wall-scaling techniques and surveillance avoidance as corporeal challenges to institutional time discipline, where wandering becomes a practice of desiring different temporal futures. Third, the temporal solidarity and conflicts between student activists and institutional agents (security guards, maintenance workers) in negotiating alternative time-spaces. By analyzing how marginalized bodies subvert the university's chronopolitical architecture, this study positions campus nocturnality as a queer temporal practice that destabilizes three dominant temporal ideologies: productivity-driven academic schedules, developmentalist life courses, and nationalist narratives of "youthful diligence". The findings contribute to queer time theory by demonstrating how educational institutions become battlegrounds for temporal sovereignty, where darkness facilitates both survival tactics and radical reimaginations of collective time.

[Luck, Fengshui, and Karma in E-commerce Villages: Imagine the World with Algorithms](#)

Yun Liu

Abstract: This article illustrates how e-commerce practitioners engaged in rural e-commerce use the cosmological knowledge of "Xuanxue" to imagine the rules governing the algorithmic world. Since 2009, state-sponsored digital technology and privately-owned e-commerce platforms in China have spurred an intense socio-economic transformation across rural China, where 13 million rural households have experienced a massive reshaping of family structures, socioeconomic roles, and gendered identities. I argue that in this human-machine game of e-commerce villages, to gain more traffic on the platform, sell more goods, and ultimately achieve greater profits, villagers use all their knowledge from human society, even including cosmological knowledge to imagine the world of algorithms, while algorithms only care about the reduced or partial human value. As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly embedded in daily life, the dynamic interactions between humans and algorithms offer profound insights into social structures, cultural practices, and individual identities. However, the humanism understandings of the digital world falls far short. My research seeks to unpack the algorithmic realities in which mankind are experiencing a set of new rules, values, and parameters of surviving and thriving in digital world.

Minimizing Queerness, Maximizing the Nation: Queer Nationalism with Chinese Characteristic

Honghao Li

Queer nationalism, an emerging concept in queer studies, explores how queer rights are integrated into state sovereignty assessments. Research shows that China's "pink feminism" blends gender equality with nationalism, using national discourse to legitimize feminism and reshape national narratives. Amid limited LGBTQ+ policy engagement, this study explores how Chinese queer online opinion leaders with nationalist leanings reconcile national and gender identities, forming a "queer nationalism" with Chinese characteristics. Unlike prior research focused on de-queering national narratives, this research delves into the interaction between Chinese queer culture and nationalist discourse. Using online ethnography and interviews with 27 queer opinion leaders and followers with nationalist views, it identifies two key narratives. First, the "imagination of state tolerance" arises from tacit acceptance of private queer behaviors despite lacking legal protections, fostering nationalist alignment among some queer individuals. Second, the "anti-Western hegemony" narrative frames Western gender politics as undermining China's legitimacy, asserting that national rejuvenation is prerequisite to queer rights. Contrasting with Western queer nationalism, the Chinese case demonstrates how nationalist discourse through a hierarchical compromise requiring gender rights to be contingent upon broader state legitimacy projects.

Dancing Machines: Anthropomorphic Robot Performances and the Choreography of AI Aesthetics in China's Creative Industries

Christina Kefala

In China's rapidly expanding creative industries, anthropomorphic robots have emerged as star performers on stages ranging from luxury brand events and tech expos to art festivals and livestream platforms. This paper explores how choreographed robot movements serve as cultural laboratories where notions of human embodiment, technological innovation, and affective labor are reimagined and contested. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with tech entrepreneurs and media analysis, I examine these performances as more than showcases of AI capabilities; they are also complex sites where Chinese techno-futurist dreams of modernity and soft power are staged and negotiated.

The paper highlights the tensions between the mechanical precision of these robots and the human desires projected onto them, revealing the affective labor involved in rendering machinic bodies lively, engaging, and seductive. By foregrounding the performative dimensions of anthropomorphic robots, this presentation reflects on how ideas of the human and the machine are mediated through everyday practices of design, spectacle,

and audience interaction. It invites anthropological reflection on the cultural meanings, labor relations, and embodied affects entangled in these performances, situating them within broader debates on technology, performance, and cultural production in contemporary China.

Engineered Dreams: State, Capital, and the Making of China's Digital Entrepreneur

Peng WU

This study offers a reflexive inquiry that integrates a decade of digital entrepreneurial practice with eight months of ethnographic fieldwork to critically examine the transformation of China's digital economy and its entanglement with evolving sociopolitical formations. It traces the emergence and decline of grassroots internet enterprises, state-orchestrated innovation drives, and the reconfiguration of traditional marketplaces under the expanding logic of platform capitalism. Anchored in the empirical terrains of Zhongguancun, Huaqiangbei and An'hai, the analysis delineates both symbolic and material shifts toward algorithm-mediated e-commerce and mobility services. By situating entrepreneurial subjectivity within the historical interplay of state governance, cultural ideology, and institutional continuity, the study challenges the idealised narrative of the Chinese entrepreneur and interrogates the precarity of individual agency amid dynamic institutional transformations. Through ethnographic micro-narratives, it elucidates how digital infrastructures restructure labour relations, reframe legitimacy, and reshape local socioeconomic geographies. This study seeks to reconceptualise the understanding of contemporary capitalism in China by foregrounding the enduring symbiosis between state and market, as well as the contingent strategies through which individuals navigate its contradictions.

Flash Session 9

10:00AM-10:45:00 AM

Flash Presentation Session

Exploring Ethnobotany: Indigenous Agriculture Practices for a Healthier Society and Planet

Madeline Yang

Indigenous agricultural systems represent the intersection of ecological knowledge and cultural practice, offering sustainable models of food production that have persisted for centuries. These systems—rooted in intercropping, polycultures, seed saving, agroforestry, and water stewardship—reflect deep relationships between people and land that have been shaped over generations. While contemporary discourse around sustainability increasingly embraces practices such as permaculture and agroecology, it often overlooks their Indigenous origins and the historical contexts from which they emerged. As

anthropologists seek to understand human-environment interactions, Indigenous agricultural knowledge presents not only a repository of sustainable strategies but also a source of resistance and resilience amid ongoing legacies of colonization and ecological disruption.

In contrast, modern industrial agriculture emphasizes efficiency, monocultures, and mass distribution, often at the expense of environmental health, biodiversity, and food sovereignty. The resulting food systems prioritize accessibility and profit over sustainability and nutrition, relying heavily on chemical inputs, genetically modified crops, and fossil fuels. These approaches have contributed to escalating crises in human and planetary health, making it increasingly urgent to reassess these methods. Though they may be viewed "inefficient" by modern standards, Indigenous and subsistence-based systems offer valuable alternatives—rooted in cooperation with the land rather than exploitation of it.

This presentation examines and advocates for the integration of Indigenous ecological knowledge into the future of sustainable agriculture. It also explores innovations such as hydroponics and agroforestry, which align with traditional principles while addressing contemporary environmental constraints. Re-centering Indigenous perspectives invites a more just, relational, and resilient vision for global food systems.

Refugee Experiences in Small and Medium-Sized Canadian communities

Jasmin Yang

Refugees arrive at their destinations normally after experiencing periods of intense suffering and disorientation, a status that affects their ability to integrate in their new localities. Understanding integration as a process of inclusion and participation, refugee integration becomes a challenging transformative experience for refugees and their host communities. Whether it is the “Holistic Model of Integration” or the “Whole-of-Community” model, a comprehensive understanding of refugee integration implies addressing their lived experiences, diverse resettlement practices and integration policies, the institutional infrastructure available in their new communities, socioeconomic factors, among a wide range of actors interacting at multiple levels. This approach combines examining the “social context” of host communities with exploring the various aspects of integration including the material aspects of employment, housing, language training, and healthcare, with a special focus on the emotional aspects of social connections, and the subjective aspects of belonging and homemaking. In this sense, the study of refugee integration involves addressing the interrelationships between refugees’ individual and communal accomplishments and the structural opportunities and barriers they face in their new localities. This experience can be more distinctive in smaller communities that

generally characterized by their lack of ethnic diversity, limited exposure to immigration, and a general shortage of resettlement resources. Nevertheless, stronger local social bonds may offer unexpected levels of acceptance, community mobilization, and a greater sense of familiarity. This paper aims to address the knowledge gap around refugee integration by focusing on the multifaceted experiences of refugee integration in small and medium communities in Canada.

Women and Transitional Justice in Nepal: Understanding Gendered Experiences During and After Armed Conflict

Krista Billingsley

Following a decade-long armed conflict, mechanisms of transitional justice were implemented in Nepal. Although scholarship on transitional justice often fails to examine gendered experiences, females and males expressed their hardships in accessing justice mechanisms as directly related to their gender. Further, the experiences of gross violations of human during Nepal's armed conflict varied by and were patterned according to gender. In this flash presentation, I argue for greater access to justice mechanisms for women who experienced gross violations during armed conflict in Nepal.

“Reading” for Ontology: A Brujería Divination

Gabi Mundaka

Brujería, as practiced in the diaspora, can serve as a form of resistance to colonial legacies and US imperialism --- a tactic of refuse against hegemonic absorption that redistributes power. Brujería requires knowledge of the body and communion with supernatural forces for healing, attracting, and authority. Often--but not always--it meshes various cultural practices together.

Brujerías becomes a mode of resistance when it involves remembering and redeeming elements and entities related to land-based practices of ancestors as acts of autonomy and collective liberation. Altars are fed, spirits are invoked, and kinship is revived— including with the more-than-human whose ties were severed or harmed by colonization.

Brujes contribute to communities of care through acompañamiento and camaraderie, facilitating collaboration among marginalized people in ways that challenge dominant understandings of being, existence, and reality

Being displaced from your land-territory leaves absences---ghosts---that manifest as ontological disadvantages, such as disconnection from plant medicines or the inability to access multi-generational testimonios.

This presentation looks at the ontological impact of diasporic distance from decolonial spiritualities and offers “reading” for ontology as a practice that allows for kinaesthetic connection to more-than-human lineages, even across geographic separation. Reading here is being used as an activity done with the eyes and as a performance that is embodied. To center ontology and specifically relational ontology means to acknowledge that land is alive and that spirits participate in social life; it is the acceptance that there are multiple ways to be human. This presentation is based on ethnographic fieldwork on affective solidarity that was conducted in Wallmapu -Chile.

Scholars such as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, Martin Holbraad & Morten Pedersen and Tim Ingold have challenged the taboo of non-western and non-capitalist ways of being

Disordered Information: Commercial Care and Algorithmic Recoveries in Youtube ‘Eating Disorder Stories’

Ale de Luis

YouTube is rife with 'storytime' vlogs: informal, minimally-edited, conversational videos in which the creator tells their audience about events taking place in their daily life. A unique sub-branch of this video genre is 'eating disorder stories', in which creators often share graphic accounts of their battles with eating disorders from illness onset to debilitating symptoms, treatment, and eventual recovery. In a context where eating disorder prevalence continues to grow, and social scientists identify a growing trend toward digital patient-to-patient health information exchange, social media platforms like YouTube become critical resources to understand the kinds of health information people are engaging with. The fact that some of the most popular platforms, including YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, are driven by algorithmic recommendation systems also presents a crucial opportunity for ethnographic exploration as algorithms profile and tailor content different viewers see. Drawing on the algorithmic recommendations made to a YouTube profile tailored to represent a 'typical' person with an eating disorder, this paper explores the content and discourses shared within YouTuber ‘eating disorder stories’ from the perspective of a struggling viewer. It examines the kinds of information viewers are receiving, and discusses the implications of this form of information-sharing given the entanglement of commercial interests and algorithmic recommendations in content creation. It argues that conflicting interests between financial and algorithmic success on the one hand, and genuine care on the other, ultimately lead to the sharing of information and ideas about eating disorders that stand to harm viewers far more than they help. To illustrate the ways algorithm-driven social media affects health experiences, this paper also offers the term “algorithmic recoveries” both as a useful descriptor and as an invitation for future research.

Syrian War and the Politics of Fear

Jonas Elbousty

In this presentation, I explore how my interlocutors have engaged with and navigated the politics of fear, the devastation of war and its aftermath, and how these experiences are articulated in their poetry. Themes of conflict, repression, anguish, and fear emerge as recurrent topics that my interlocutors have shared with me on multiple occasions. Drawing on extensive ethnographic material, I examine the role of poetry as a means of survival and resistance. Experiences of fear, violence, and displacement have shaped my interlocutors' emotional and mental states, often leaving them with severe and long-lasting effects resulting from traumatic episodes. Poetry is the sole outlet serving to process their harrowing experiences, and "is one of the few media through which they are able to describe the phantoms that haunt them and their sense of loss" (Olszewska 2015: 211).

In this talk, I examine how fear have profoundly affected my interlocutors under the repressive regime of al-Assad, discussing how this authoritarian regime has systematically weaponized fear as a tool to suppress dissent and consolidate power. Drawing on Lisa Wedeen's concepts of "authoritarian apprehensions" and Achille Mbembe's concept of Necropolitics. I argue that al-Assad regime enacted a form of power that regulates the everyday lives of Syrians through the deployment of fear. This mode of governance, as articulated by my interlocutors, seeks not to silence dissent but also to normalize compliance as a part of everyday life. Fear and terror have fundamentally shaped the identities and lived experiences of the poets I engage with. I thus explore how fear and near-death experiences function not only as a tool of political control and repression but also as a defining and constitutive force that impacts how my interlocutors understand themselves and their art of poetry.

On Attunement and the Lyric Essay

11:00AM-11:45:00 AM

Oral Presentation Session

This panel explores the problem of thinking anthropologically at this transitional time, when our attunements to what is possible have become radically unsettled (Berlant 2022). To write and think as anthropologists and therefore as instruments of contact and attunement between different worlds (Meyers 2025), our contributors will work through the generative uncertainties arising between conceptual and imagistic ways of knowing by using an interstitial form of writing, the lyric essay (Tall and D'Agata 1997).

Some recent examples of the lyric essay in adjacent disciplines include *Citizen* (Rankine 2015) *The Years* (Ernaux 2008) and *Argonauts* (Nelson 2015). The lyric essay—in its

capacity to move between prose and poetry, empirical argumentation and open-ended contemplation, and experience and expertise—is positioned to respond to the world in a way that allows for this attunement to generative uncertainty. As a mercurial form, the lyric essay can be difficult to describe, but some of its key qualities are being mosaic in structure, meaning that fragments of the essays speak to each other but do not necessarily follow a linear logic, and often features a multi-layered voicing and a formal estrangement of the eye/I through immersion into particular experiences of evocations. While some works in anthropology have explored the relationship between lyrical writing and uncertainty or fragmented time (Robert Desjarlais’ *The Blind Man*, Adrie Kusserow’s *The Trauma Mantras*, Lochlain Jain’s *Malignant*, Lauren Berlant and Kathleen Stewart’s *The Hundreds*), little work has been done that directly explores the lyric essay’s potential for anthropological knowledge production.

The presenters will each explore mobilizing the lyric essay through attention to relationality, violence and the boundaries of knowledge in our current time, and they do so by tracking glitches in the reproduction of late liberalism across Amman, Arequipa, Barcelona, Dharamsala, and the West Bank. Across these geographies and in its compression, the colloquy mobilizes the lyric essay as form in order to explore temporal shifts and existential gaps in late liberalism and in forms of colonial violence, and the question of conceptual knowledge held in suspense when confronted with particular images in an beyond fieldwork.

Organizer: Wesley Brunson

On Doves and Crows

Marie Odgaard

Amman – Assisi – Amman – Nishapur – Assisi – Amman. Whilst linear temporality is shattered, the doves and crows take us between otherwise separate locations in time and space. By following the birds through cities in which I locate memories of encounters with (the limits of?) ethical life, I seek to use the essay to grasp at being spatially and temporally unsettled by beauty and violence in its extraordinary, pristine and ordinary forms.

Listening with Nyingje

Harmandeep Kaur Odgaard

Nyingje, a Tibetan word, translates as “compassion”. It can also be an expression of pity or sympathy. Someone walks past a disabled beggar on the streets of Dharamsala and whispers “nyingje” to themselves. Another utters it as an attempt to cultivate compassion for someone they are attempting to forgive. In this contribution, I reflect upon nyingje as embodied among two of my Tibetan friends who provide care for stray animals in

Dharamsala, northern India. Instead of holistically explaining it as an emic or analytical concept with the help of Buddhist philosophy, my reflections on nyingje are rooted in real-life moments when this word is uttered silently or out loud, to listen to compassion as an embodied sensibility and ethics, often keeping people up at night out of worries or fears.

Suffering in the Gap

Ramzi Nimr

In an essay on Jean-Louis-André-Théodore Géricault, John Berger reflects on the way that a portrait of a nameless “kleptomaniac,” discovered in an attic in Germany, came to represent the artist’s oeuvre at an exhibition at the Grand Palais in 1991. One explanation of the force of this portrait, Berger contends, is that it demonstrates the artist’s “creative attention” to the interiority of the man being represented—an interiority that had likely never been given so much as a passing consideration. Through this looking, the artist is ultimately able to close a distance between the painter and the sitter—that is, as two human beings—while rendering another kind of distance visible. This second distance is a gap, a void, a vacuum that seems to reside somewhere in the face of this nameless man—a space that exists, painfully, between words and their ability to communicate pain, between a life lived and the capacity of existing narratives to give sense to that life, and between the promise that used to be implicit in suffering (that it would spur us toward realizing its end) and what Berger sees as the barren character of “modern” suffering. It is in this gap where suffering is, where madness floods in—and not, crucially, to be found simply in the “facts” of a situation or a life itself. Bringing together moments from fieldwork at a Palestinian psychiatric hospital from 2022-2023 and my own encounters with psychosis years earlier, this essay means to write into and from the “gap.”

Discussant: Todd Meyers; Chair: Alonso Gamarra

Society for Cultural Anthropology

BREAK

12:00PM-12:45:00 PM

Flash Session 10

1:00PM-1:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

Spoken Quechua in Everyday Interactions in the Southern Andes

Margarita Huayhua

In the Andes, there are more than 8 million speakers of Quechua. It is considered an official language in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia along other indigenous languages. Across these

countries and within each country Quechua varies; many of these varieties are mutually intelligible as it was my experience speaking Quechua in Riobamba, Potosi, and Cuzco. Despite Quechua's recognition as an official language, speaking Quechua does not guarantee an equal footing among participants. For instance, in everyday face-to-face interactions Quechua-dominant speakers and Spanish-dominant speakers evaluate each other through a pattern of linguistic and paralinguistic behavior and act according to such evaluations. In these interactions, hierarchical relations emerge in which one party subordinates the other. A hierarchy that is reinforced by participants use of different registers of Quechua: Villagers spoken Quechua and urbanities spoken Quechua as happens in the village clinic and Quechua households in the southern Andes.

Homeless - and Haunted by the Promise of Divine Love in Seattle

Paul Blankenship-Lai

In 2016, I asked a Christian “street minister” in Seattle a question. “If you were going to do ethnographic fieldwork with people who live on the streets, like I am about to do, what would you want to learn?” He spoke from his heart: ‘I’d want to understand why it is so hard for people experiencing homelessness to feel unconditionally loved by God.’

Ben wanted homeless people to feel loved by God. That’s why he became a street minister. Like many religious leaders who practice “spiritual care” with the unhoused, Ben had faith that feeling loved by God would help homeless people feel at home in the world—and get “unstuck” from street life (Graham, 2017; Mejido, 2021).

For the next five years, I spent time with people who live on the streets of Seattle—especially young adults often calling themselves “street kids” to name the culture of resistance they forge and distance themselves from more stigmatized homeless populations. I kept Ben’s question alive as I practiced “deep hanging out,” wrote more than 1,000 pages of field notes, and took hundreds of photographs.

This “flash presentation” will be a short letter to Ben—and diverse religious leaders who provide spiritual care to people who are homeless. I will answer Ben’s query about why it is hard for people who are homeless to feel loved by God and demonstrate that many people on the streets are wounded, haunted by a seemingly failed promise of a personally loving God. I will also work with the late Pope Francis’s Fratelli Tutti to explicate and remedy an unrecognized cause of global homelessness—the ordinary, affective cruelties of Christian discourse.

This letter is written by a Christian theologian trained as an ethnographer to (i) advance the conversation between anthropology and theology (Robbins, 2020; Lemons, 2018), (ii) deepen our evolving understanding about homelessness (Hopper, 2002), (iii) and help

liberate people from unnecessary social suffering through anthropology (Scheper-Hughes, 1995).

Economic Sovereignty and Financial Justice: An Emerging Theme in Amazonian Indigenous Territorial Governance

Louisiana Lightsey

Globally, Indigenous territories comprise nearly half of the planet's undegraded and ecologically intact landscapes. In the central Ecuadorian Amazon, over 90% of the primary rainforests of Pastaza Province are located in collectively titled Indigenous lands. The successful conservation of these ecosystems is due in large part to Indigenous efforts to defend their lands and lifeways from industrial extraction and urban development. Yet it is state and local governments, and not the Indigenous communities themselves, who receive financial remuneration for conserved rainforests through programs such as REDD+ and carbon markets. In cases where protected area managers and NGOs garner funds for collaborating with local communities, autonomous Indigenous governments have little power to self-determine how such funds will be spent. In recent years, Indigenous organizations in Pastaza Province have begun to protest against such financial injustice and are taking measures to foster economic sovereignty for their constituent communities. In this presentation, based on 18 months of doctoral fieldwork, I examine this emerging theme in the politics of Indigenous territorial governance by focusing on PAKKIRU, the governing organization of the Kichwa Nationality of Pastaza. Elected representatives of PAKKIRU are raising awareness about this problem and attempting to remediate it through various mechanisms such as traveling to international Indigenous climate finance workshops, passing resolutions to regulate collaborations with NGOs, organizing carbon market information sessions, and participating in conferences on Indigenous economic sovereignty. While international environmental institutions now recognize the crucial contribution of Indigenous governance for the conservation of nature, it is still state governments that reap the economic benefits and determine local access to financial channels, prompting Indigenous organizations to take matters into their own hands.

“Some come, others will stay”: Brazilian Im/migrant Children's Co-Authoring of Critical Consciousness in Dual Language Bilingual Education Classrooms

Mariana Lima Becker

This presentation is based on a multi-year ethnographic study about how transborder children (ages 5-8) with ties to Brazil and the United States embody and co-author critical consciousness in elementary classrooms, particularly in the context of a Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) program (Portuguese/English) in Massachusetts. Leveraging a decolonial transborder approach (Gallo, 2021; Gallo & Adams Corral, 2023) to foreground

children's lived experiences and narratives related to critical consciousness formation, this presentation draws on field notes of classroom observations collected over three school calendar years (2018-2021) and interviews with DLBE teachers and students. Data analysis suggests that the im/migrant children leveraged spatio-temporal liminal zones of classroom life—that is, less supervised spaces and times during formal instruction—to draw on their varied experiences within and across national systems. In these liminal zones, the focal children embodied an in-betweenness of both countries, critiqued mononational expectations, and opened spaces for sense-making around issues of pressing relevance for their lives that remained invisible during instruction, such as documentation status and border crossing. Findings also indicate that bilingual classroom teachers were aware of students' transborder narratives but consistently evaded opportunities to engage the children in conversations about immigration due to fear of pushback from parents and the school leadership. This study bears implications for the education of im/migrant children in the U.S., stressing the need for pedagogies of border thinking (Cervantes-Soon & Carrillo, 2016) aimed at giving these students opportunities to recognize and cultivate their knowledges. This study also calls on migration and education scholars to attune to children's knowledges, subjectivities, and actions on various scales as essential to understand and support their critical consciousness formation.

Flash Session 11

2:00PM-2:45:00 PM

Flash Presentation Session

Circling Back: A Native Cyclical Time Response to Hauntology

B Qavvik Croyle Johnson

Hauntology disrupts linear time, but it does not quite embrace cyclical time. It instead merely collapses linear time, as one might fold a ribbon, and briefly places a pin through the layers. This pin, I argue, should be situated as something which pierces the spool of cyclical time, not just momentarily bridging between times, but acting as a directive to look at times which are already connected by their place in cycles. Using archival materials from the University of Minnesota Morris, and the agricultural and boarding schools which occupied the same space, in conjunction with author-produced paintings, I seek to demonstrate that the founding and re-founding of institutions on this land is key to understanding how cyclical time can be engaged to form a connection with the ghostly. Further, this connection can be used to form an approach to hauntological analysis that centers Indigenous spiritual and ontological conceptions of time, place, and living.

Lab-grown meat: the historicity of meat-eating and anticipating alternative futures

Stephen Merritt

The alternative-protein industry imagines futures where new foods replace traditional animal products. Plant-based alternatives currently exist alongside new ways of producing meat and milk without animals that borrow from tissue engineering and other allied scientific disciplines. As they emerge, these foods offer insight into the historicity of meat-eating, namely how ideas at the nexus of technological progress and human carnivory explain the past but also shape certain imagined futures. Archaeologists identify technological innovations that drive dietary evolution and assemble inferential claims drawn from ancient evidence into a narrative temporally oriented toward the present with respect to how people eat animals (stone tool butchery, animal domestication, refrigeration, global transportation, etc.). Alternative-meat innovators deploy similar ideas about technological progress and eating animals as they imagine futures for their companies, products, or humanity in general. My observations from events organized by the Good Food Institute highlight the ways individuals and organizations (entrepreneurs, scientists, investors, corporations, laboratories, think tanks, regulating agencies) imagine and anticipate futures. In various ways, these actors prefigure views of the future that are open to technological solutions to global crises but are simultaneously constrained by political economic forces and the historicity of meat-eating

Richer Representations, Obscure Visions

Yun Xie

The development of computational photography in China is charged with the simultaneous configuration and concealment of gender and class, the two major axes constructing the hierarchy within the sociotechnical system. In this presentation I show how tech workers and consumers in Shenzhen, China's emerging tech hub, co-produce expectations about what and how to see through the lens of phone cameras in gendered and class terms. Computational photography is the algorithmic technology used in smartphone cameras and photo-editing apps to construct, enhance, and transform digital images. While image pipelines aim to produce richer representations of reality than what bare human eyes can see, I argue that they render potentially obscure visions of the relations behind their making. My doctoral research interrogates what becomes visible and what gets opaque in the production of computational photographs. My ethnography delineates the sociotechnical system of computational photography and is based on twelve months of fieldwork in 2024-25. During a four-month internship at a leading Chinese Android phone manufacturer, I performed daily participant observation of how people in the company conducted user research and designed imaging pipelines that sought to satisfy users' photographic tastes and needs. I interviewed people who work in different realms in the

industry to investigate the industrial logics and labor hierarchies. I conducted online and offline participant observations on how young Chinese women take, edit, view, post, and comment on portraits on social media. I participated in camera marketing activities, photographic courses, and group photo-shooting activities to contextualize women's portraiture production as a genre of photographic practices. As computational photography products in China features facial beautification algorithms, I conducted interviews with women in beauty salons to understand the aesthetic regime that conditions how women see and are seen.

The Haunting of Erasure: Lessons Learned from a Native New Orleanian

Saira Mehmood

This flash presentation uses autoethnography to explore the erasure of labor, memory, and institutional commitment through the lived experience of a native New Orleanian. I reflect on my time at the National Institutes of Health, where I worked on diversity-focused initiatives: grants and partnerships aimed at equity, representation, and systemic change. Today, that office no longer exists. The grants have been eliminated. In their place: silence, denial, and the unsettling sense of having labored toward a future that was quietly abandoned. Through a decolonial lens, I consider how institutional erasure operates not only through defunding and restructuring, but through acts of forgetting—of people, of histories, of intentions. These hauntings echo broader patterns in New Orleans, a city layered with visible and invisible traces of displacement, resistance, and spectral survival. How do we account for work that is erased from the record? What persists when official narratives deny our presence? And how might we resist being ghosted by institutions through counter-memory, testimony, and storytelling? This presentation insists that erasure is never complete—and that what was meant to disappear still speaks.

Zuriaake's "Li Gui": Abjection, Gender, and Horror Aesthetics in Chinese Black Metal

Qian Sun

In 2019, Chinese Black metal band Zuriaake (Corpse Lake) released their EP, "Shenting" (Resentment in the Ancient Courtyard). One of the songs, "Li Gui" (Evil Ghost), added vocal samples from Tuva singer Sainkho Namtchylak, symbolizing a female ghost that frequently appears in Chinese folk tales. However, both the song's original Chinese title and the English translations leave the ghost's gender ambiguous. Thus, the use of female ghost figures suggests the cultural habitus of Chinese horror subjects. While most research on Zuriaake focuses on the band themselves, their "Chineseness," the choices of instruments and lyrics, and hermit ideological attitude (Zhao, 2023; Norman, 2024), this study explores intersections of gender identity and expressions of Chinese horror in black metal music.

In this study, I examine the representation and resignification of the female voice in subcultural music of Chinese black metal. Through the lens of Julia Kristeva's "abjection," I argue that the ghost suggests a rupture of the boundary between life and death, and the ghost's female identity represented by Sainkho's voice exacerbates this rupture and constructs a "monstrous feminine" (Creed, 1993). Moreover, the choice of female voice comes from the Chinese cultural habitus of the femaleness of the ghost. Through digital ethnography, I analyze music, videos, and public online interviews to discuss the symbolic continuation of the female voice in folklore and its representation in musical contexts. Ultimately, I demonstrate how this female voice in masculine-coded black metal music amplifies the subculture's rebellious connotations and the trauma of females.

[‘To remove a thorn, use a thorn’: My life as a scarecrow, an apotropaic defender against COVID-19 in Cambodia](#)

Maurice Eisenbruch

Apotropaic practices—rituals or objects like amulets to ward off disease—have been vital in Theravāda Buddhist communities during epidemics like smallpox, plague, and cholera. Drawing on ethnographic research with 180 informants, this article examines Cambodian ritual scarecrows, or /tiij moon/, as apotropaic objects in response to COVID-19. It explores three threads: (1) lay and Buddhist theories of contagion through agents like the /rumbal/, expressed in idioms like the puppeteer sprinkling germs by night; (2) apotropaic practices, including substitution rituals, rooted in the Khmer idiom 'use a thorn to remove a thorn', /banlaa mut yook banlaa cəh/; and (3) the life cycle, with milestones like 'coronation' as Vessavana, controlling yakkha ogres in epidemic spread, and reciting the Āṭānāṭiya paritta to curb epidemics; maintenance; and retirement when saturated with risk. Scarecrows embody Vessavaṇa's power through ritual animation. These practices integrate with public health measures through expressions like 'magic added to one's life', /ʔaakum psəm ʔaayuʔ/, enabling action amid pandemic fear.

I propose an ontological model structured as a loom, weaving three threads: (1) the cultural construction of contagious illness and epidemic spread, (2) apotropaic defence practices aimed at neutralising contagion, and (3) the lifecycle of apotropaic protective objects. These threads are recursively entangled into a ritual fabric that addresses existential rupture, reorders moral space, engages the sentient materiality of ritual agents, and channels continuities with early Buddhist cosmological understandings of contagion and protection.

BREAK

3:00PM-3:45:00 PM

How to Publish in Anthropology Journals: A Workshop with an Editor of American Ethnologist

4:00PM-5:45:00 PM

Workshop

American Ethnologist (AE) publishes articles that combine ethnographic specificity with original theoretical thinking. Led by one of the journal's editors, this workshop will outline the basic elements of successful submissions to AE and other anthropology journals. Topics covered will include choosing the right journal for your article, the relationship between ethnography and theory, how to turn a dissertation chapter into a stand-alone article, managing peer review feedback and multiple revisions, estimating turnaround times, and working through the final stages of copyediting and production. While many of these topics are relevant to publishing in a wide range of anthropology, or other social science, journals, the editor(s) will also tailor their remarks towards the criteria they use for AE .

Workshop Participants: Jesse Hession Grayman, Waipapa Taumata Rau – University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand