

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
ARTS AND SCIENCES PRESENTS

# MASTER'S SYNTHESIS COMPETITION

*12 Master's students from across GSAS present  
their thesis research to a generalist audience  
in three minutes using only one slide.*

**Thursday, May 5, 2022**  
**2:00 - 4:00 PM ET**  
**555 Lerner Hall**



# EVENT HOSTS

## **RACHEL BERNARD**

Director of Graduate Career Development,  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

## **FRANCESCA FANELLI**

Associate Director of Graduate Career Development,  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

# GUEST SPEAKER

## **CARLOS J. ALONSO**

Morris A. and Alma Schapiro Professor in the  
Humanities, Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and  
Sciences, and Vice President for Graduate Education

# JUDGES

## **BRIAN BOYD**

Lecturer, Department of Anthropology; Director, Museum  
Anthropology MA Program

## **ALYSSE JORDAN**

('10MA, Sociology) Managing Director of Library and  
Research Service at the Council on Foreign Relations

## **MATT SANDLER**

Program Director of MA in American Studies at the  
Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

## **TRACY ZWICK**

('11MA, Modern Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies)  
Art Historian and Writer



# FINALISTS

*in order of presentation*

**HANBYEOL KOO** International and World History  
*Old China to New China: How and Why the People's Republic of China Replaced the Republic of China in South Korea in 1992*

**COLTON KLEIN** Art History and Archaeology  
*The Turpentine State: An Ecology of Painting in Minnie Evans' Airlie Oak*

**ANNA LIA MARIA SODDU** European History, Politics, and Society  
*How do Europeans' climate change attitudes relate to their anti-immigration sentiment?*

**MARCUS TAN** East Asia: Regional Studies  
*Panda Diplomacy: A Study of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse*

**SANYA DHINGRA** South Asian Studies  
*Hindu nationalism and the politics of medicine in Narendra Modi's India*

**ALICE YAN** Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology  
*Table for Two: Bears and Salmon*

**SHUO HUANG** Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences

*Friend or Foe? How FinTech Is Drastically Changing the Chinese Banking Industry*

**YI DENG** East Asian Languages and Cultures  
*Faithful Birds of Sorrow: A Tale of Loyalty and Revenge from Edo Japan*

**EMMA WILBUR** Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe: Regional Studies

*"The first discrimination is working as a domestic servant": The Impacts of Migrant Domestic Labor on Personhood, Kinship, and Affective Condition Among Turkmen Women Migrants in Istanbul*

**FITSUM MEHARI** Global Thought  
*Chinese Development Finance to Africa: Trends and Implications 2000 – 2017*

**YVONNE PITTS** Sociology  
*Do Black Lives Matter in Corporate America?*

**CHRISTIAN JUNGHANS** Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional Studies  
*From Crisis to Miracle to Reality: Medellín's Reinvention*



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# RESEARCH ABSTRACTS

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## **Yi Deng, East Asian Languages and Cultures**

Advisor: Haruo Shirane

*Faithful Birds of Sorrow: A Tale of Loyalty and Revenge from Edo Japan*

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Faithful Birds of Sorrow (Utō yasukata chūgiden) is a yomihon (“book for reading”) by Santō Kyoden published in Edo (now Tokyo) in 1806. Commercial publishing flourished, despite the constant threat of censorship from a government increasingly concerned with the values imparted by literature. *Faithful Birds of Sorrow* is a historical fiction featuring the children of Taira no Masakado, who declared himself the New Emperor in the East before his death in 940 CE, and who, according to legend, became a flying head whose curse still haunts Tokyo. During the Edo period, his children’s unsuccessful attempts to resurrect their father’s rebellion became a popular theme in fiction, theater, and art. This is not the first, but is one of the most influential versions. What did Kyōden borrow from history and genre, and what did he innovate? How did he use this theme to conform to, or subvert, the expectations of the time?

## **Sanya Dhingra, South Asian Studies**

Advisor: Sudipta Kaviraj

*Hindu nationalism and the politics of medicine in Narendra Modi’s India*

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Over the last eight years, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Hindu Right-Wing government in India has been seeking to organize and promote Ayurveda—an indigenous form of medicine—as part of its larger agenda to reclaim Indian culture. In the process of nationalizing diverse and inherently decentralized forms of indigenous medicine and health practices, the government is actively patronizing a homogenized form of Ayurveda, which represents upper-caste Hindu health traditions of India. In my thesis, I show how rather than reinvigorating India’s marginalized health

practices, which have been fighting off existential threats from modern medicine since colonial rule, this homogenized, capitalist-friendly Ayurveda could further marginalize India's diverse indigenous health traditions in favor of one hegemonic, politicized health system. To dismiss this push for Ayurveda as "unscientific," as the Indian liberal elite often does, would be to unsee the interplay of ethnonationalism, decolonial politics and capitalism at play in this phenomenon.

## **Shuo Huang, Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences**

Advisor: Waseem Noor

*Friend or Foe? How FinTech Is Drastically Changing the Chinese Banking Industry*

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There has been significant debate over the benefits and costs of financial technology (FinTech). While FinTech companies compete with traditional banks, threatening their profitability, they can also increase their efficiency and stimulate innovation. To help balance financial stability and efficiency, policy makers must understand how FinTech affects the traditional financial sector. This research identifies three channels through which FinTech affects the profitability and credit risk of banks: knowledge spillover, business stealing, and cooperation. Using bank and FinTech data from China between 2011-2018, the empirical results of this study are fourfold. First, banks with the highest exposure to FinTech competitors are twice as profitable as banks with an average exposure, without increasing risk. Second, FinTech enhances a bank's market power and business scope, increasing profitability. Third, Fintech's profitability impact is greater for geographically diversified banks and small banks. Fourth, FinTech reduces credit risk for large banks, but not for small banks.

## **Christian Junghans, Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional Studies**

Advisor: Gustavo S. Azenha

*From Crisis to Miracle to Reality: Medellín's Reinventio*

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Medellín can count on a captivating narrative: once embroiled in a civil war caused by drug trafficking and cartel-driven violence, Medellín has gone through an outstanding reinvention. With the expansion of national military and policing forces, crime rates in the city began to decrease and the city transitioned from the "most violent city" to one of the most innovative metropolises in the world. This transformation was even dubbed the "Medellín Miracle" and received several awards for megaprojects such as the metrocables. But what or who caused this trend reversal? Medellín's revival is due in no small part to avant-garde leaders who focused on the reconstruction of the city. The scale of the violence became a unifying force for a generation of governmental, entrepreneurial and civil actors, who designed a well-articulated policy mix that stimulated economic growth, social inclusion and equality, and thus created a better future for the city.

## **Colton Klein, Art History and Archaeology**

Advisor: Elizabeth Hutchinson

*The Turpentine State: An Ecology of Painting in Minnie Evans' Airlie Oak*

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Born in 1892 near Wilmington, North Carolina, Minnie Evans was a second-generation descendant of enslaved persons forcibly brought from Trinidad to the United States in the early nineteenth century, likely to work in southeastern North Carolina's longleaf pine forest, which was the global capital for the turpentine industry during the 1800s. The art that she produced in "The Turpentine State" was profoundly influenced by the afterlife of slavery in these landscapes and by the Wilmington white supremacist coup of 1898—the

only successful coup d'état in American history. Departing from existing scholarship, this thesis examines a singular painting, *Airlie Oak*, which the artist sculpted from dried paint made malleable with turpentine. My analysis interprets Evans' stylistically atypical and uncommonly site-specific representation of Wilmington's oldest tree as a long-term spectator to the rise of turpentine, the destruction of longleaf pine, the horror of lynching, and the lasting trauma of political insurrection.

## **Hanbyeol Koo, International and World History**

Advisor: Lien-Hang T. Nguyen

*Old China to New China: How and Why the People's Republic of China Replaced the Republic of China in South Korea in 1992*

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Although the Republic of China (Taiwan) and South Korea had been one of the closest allies to each other since WWII, South Korea terminated its amicable relationship with Taiwan in 1992 by recognizing the People's Republic of China (China). This symbolizes the end of the Cold War in East Asia, given that South Korea and Taiwan had been the vanguards of anti-communism in East Asia. This research project investigates how and why South Korea chose China over Taiwan in 1992, focusing on political and economic reasons. Politically, South Korean northern policy and China's one-China policy enabled the two countries set diplomatic relations. Economically, China's reform and opening-up and its following economic growth played a vital role in facilitating the normalization of China-South Korea relations. In doing so, this project analyzes official documents, interviews, memoirs, and newspaper articles published in China, South Korea, and Taiwan.

## **Mehari Fitsum, Global Thought**

Advisor: Kevin Funk

*Chinese Development Finance to Africa: Trends and Implications 2000-2017*

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China's meteoric rise in the global political economy and its potential implications are generating much interest in international relations research and the policy space. One region where this phenomenon can saliently be observed is in its engagement with Africa. China has emerged as a new and significant source of "comprehensive development finance" to Africa. What are the effects of Chinese development finance to Africa? The essay supports the view that this is largely a positive development. It also highlights how the nature of this engagement, through misperceptions and skepticism owing to the opacity of Chinese finances, is being distorted. The essay uses a newly published dataset which identifies almost 6,000 Chinese-financed projects in Africa between 2000-2017. It systematically examines the trends in regional distribution and sectoral allocation and finds strong statistical evidence which substantiates the essay's thesis and advances knowledge on China-Africa relations. It also evaluates the validity of optimistic and pessimistic arguments assessing aspects of their engagement and finds a pragmatic perspective can more accurately explain the relationship. Furthermore, using empirical evidence from the analysis, it underscores the importance of the engagement's political economic implications.

## **Yvonne Pitts, Sociology**

Advisor: Thomas DiPrete

*Do Black Lives Matter in Corporate America?*

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Following the police killing of George Floyd and the subsequent protests in summer 2020, many companies made public statements pledging to develop initiatives to support marginalized people both within and outside of



their organizations. This study seeks to determine Black Lives Matter's influence on organizational behavior and how organizations responded to the social movement. My research includes racial demographic data of five major technology companies before and after summer 2020 and companies' public statements in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. Results showed that Black Lives Matter had a positive influence on company behavior towards philanthropy and consumer support and a marginal influence on organizational change. By using a critical race theory framework, I argue that companies' responses to the Black Lives Matter movement were for impression management and virtue signaling to maintain the support of Black consumers and allies of the Black community.

## **Anna Lia Maria Soddu, European History, Politics, and Society**

Advisor: Tsveta Petrova

*How do Europeans' climate change attitudes relate to their anti-immigration sentiment?*

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According to World Bank estimates, climate change could cause 216 million climate migrants by 2050 if no further action is taken. As the number of climate migrants is projected to increase drastically in Europe as well, the related policies will highly depend on European population support. This paper aimed to fill the research gap in the current literature concerning how climate change attitudes relate to the broader European anti-immigrant sentiment. We expected that European respondents who are more sensitive toward climate-change issues also hold more positive attitudes toward immigrants. A sense of moral obligation might arise among Europeans since the large amounts of greenhouse gases released to sustain their energy consumption are the main drivers of climate change, which, in turn, unevenly affects poor developing countries, and in some cases, forces them to migrate. We used a multiple linear regression to

detect correlations between these attitudes and measured attitudes toward immigration by looking at the respondents' perceived economic and cultural threats of immigration and their support for refugees. Climate-change attitudes were measured through respondents' support for climate policies, climate change beliefs and feelings of responsibility toward other people and the environment. The results corroborated our hypothesis as they showed a significant positive correlation between people's willingness to support climate policies and their attitude to be more open toward immigration.

## **Marcus Tan, East Asia: Regional Studies**

Advisor: Andrew J. Nathan

*Panda Diplomacy: A Study of Chinese Diplomatic Discourse*

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When pandas are loaned to zoos in other countries, it is often assumed that China is trying to improve its diplomatic relationship with the other country—hence giving birth to the widely accepted concept of panda diplomacy. However, there has been surprisingly little academic scholarship on this practice, and in particular no scholarship addressing how China itself interprets panda loans. In my thesis, I thus study diplomatic statements by Xi Jinping and Chinese foreign ministry officials. Through my research, I found first that China has explicitly attached a diplomatic function to its loans of pandas, and hopes to use it to build “people-to-people” friendship with other countries. Second, I argue that Chinese diplomatic discourse is especially romantic and emotional—partly because of the unique capacity of the Chinese language to express emotional nuances, and partly because China is projecting itself as a grand cultural dynasty in its foreign policy.

## **Emma Wilbur, Russia, Eurasia, and Eastern Europe: Regional Studies**

Advisor: Firat Kurt

*“The first discrimination is working as a domestic servant”:  
The Impacts of Migrant Domestic Labor on Personhood,  
Kinship, and Affective Condition Among Turkmen Women  
Migrants in Istanbul*

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This thesis explores how the dynamics of migrant domestic labor shape the self-understanding and identity of the women who perform it. It draws upon original ethnographic data from eight semi-structured interviews conducted with Turkmen migrant women in Istanbul, all of whom do live-in domestic care work. Highlighting the economic, legal, and affective precarity associated with life as a Turkmen migrant woman and critically engaging with the work of feminist political economists who theorize domestic labor, my first section establishes a causal relationship between migrant domestic work and embodied experience. The next section explores how entanglements of labor, precarity, and personhood manifest in my interviewees' lives. The demands of domestic labor promote independence and self-reliance as desirable and necessary characteristics. Familial obligation—and often maternal obligation specifically—serves as a primary motivating factor for migration, while transnational migration and its associated precarities also actively shape the dynamics, structures, and possibilities of family relationships.

## **Alice Yan, Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology**

Advisor: Marina Cords

*Table for Two: Bears and Salmon*

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Each year, Pacific salmon from the ocean swim upstream to lay their eggs in freshwater. Brown bears feast on the migrating salmon. Through this predator-prey interaction,

nutrients are transported from the ocean to river and terrestrial ecosystems. Understanding this “keystone” relationship is critical to securing the health of the entire landscape. My thesis is the first study of the relationship between bear presence and salmon abundance in small streams. Previous research has focused on bears catching salmon at waterfalls. However, they are not representative of bear-salmon interactions, which in fact occur primarily in small shallow streams. My study site comprises six small streams in Bristol Bay, a salmon-rich watershed in southwest Alaska. It is often presumed that bears and salmon are positively correlated. I hypothesize the opposite: that a few dominant bears monopolize the most salmon-abundant streams, while the many remaining bears are relegated to the streams with less salmon.



# JUDGE BIOS

## **Brian Boyd**

Lecturer, Department of Anthropology; Director, Museum Anthropology MA Program

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Brian Boyd is Lecturer and Director of the Museum Anthropology MA program in the Department of Anthropology. He is also Co-Director of the Center for Palestine Studies, and Co-Chair of the University Seminar on Human-Animal Studies. He works on the prehistory and politics of archaeology in southwest Asia, with a focus on Palestine. He also writes on critical human-animal studies, museum anthropology, gender/queer theory, and sound studies. His current fieldwork takes place in the Palestinian Territories, where he co-directs a Columbia University/Birzeit University community archaeology/museum project.

## **Alysse Jordan**

('10MA, Sociology) Managing Director of Library and Research Service at the Council for Foreign Relations

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Alysse Jordan is currently Managing Director of Library and Research Services at the Council on Foreign Relations. An information professional with over 20 years of experience in major research libraries, Alysse holds BA and MILS degrees from the University of Michigan, and an MA in Sociology from Columbia University. Her research interests include social policy, urban sociology, and organizational leadership.

## **Matt Sandler**

Program Director of MA in American Studies at the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity

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Matt Sandler has a PhD in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia. He previously taught at Louisiana State University, Gettysburg College, and the University of Oregon. His first book, *The Black Romantic Revolution: Abolitionist Poets at the End of Slavery*, was published in 2020. He is an active member of the Bigger 6 Collective, a group devoted to decolonizing the study of nineteenth-century culture, and is also co-chair of the Columbia University Seminar in American Studies.

## **Tracy Zwick**

(GSAS '11MA, Modern and Contemporary Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies) - Art Historian and Writer

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Tracy Zwick is an art historian and writer, having contributed to catalogs and magazines including *Art in America*, *Cultured*, *ArtReview* and others. Tracy is also an attorney. She most recently served as Managing Attorney for Pro Bono at The Door, where she worked directly with the city's most vulnerable young people, assisting in their efforts to adjust their legal status and overseeing the hundred of cases The Door placed at New York's most prestigious law firms with pro bono counsel.

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