



## Committee on Regional Studies – East Asia

### Newsletter

February 2021

#### Letter from the Chair

Dear Alumni of Harvard University's Regional Studies East Asia (RSEA) Program,

As I write this note it is February 12<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the Lunar New Year being celebrated throughout East Asia. At this time last year, we were welcoming in the Year of the Rat, and in that note—written in January—there was just a short, but ominous, mention of the arrival of COVID-19. We already sensed that dangerous days were coming, but little did we know what a devastating impact it would have on so many lives (including the passing of some long-standing friends and supporters of RSEA). Given the losses and challenges we have faced over the past year, I am sure everyone was eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Ox and were quite happy to watch the Rat of 2020 scurry away. We should have suspected that the Year of the Rat would bring problems (the financial crisis of 2008 was also in the year of the Rat!) since the Rat is a kind of trickster who earned its place as the first animal in the zodiac by tricking the Ox. All of the animals of the zodiac were invited to join a party held by the Jade Emperor, with the order of their arrival dictating the order they would appear in the 12-year cycle. The Ox was well on his way to being the first to arrive, but the Rat tricked the Ox into giving him a ride. Then, right when they were about to arrive at the destination the Rat hopped off the Ox, ran ahead, and became the first guest. The Rat certainly had its way with us this past year, but the Lunar New Year is a time for a fresh start on things and the Ox is traditionally associated with hard work. We will all be happy to have the Ox as our companion in 2021, since we know the hard work that lies ahead as we try to recover from the pandemic and hopefully begin to make our way back to some sense of normalcy in 2021.

With that hope in mind, the RSEA Admissions Committee has been working diligently to select the next cohort of students. While many graduate programs have faced drastic cuts to their admissions numbers this year, RSEA—thanks to the ongoing support of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard—has been able to plan for an incoming cohort the same size as in previous years.

RSEA is off to an active Spring term with the upcoming annual **Harvard East Asia Society (HEAS) Conference** which, like all events, will be held virtually this year. All of the G2 students are also hard at work on their theses and final projects. Completing a thesis during a normal year is hard

enough, but this year's G2s have faced incomparable challenges (library and archive closures, the inability to travel abroad for research, etc.). We have been amazed and encouraged by their resilience and creativity in the face of all the obstacles.

If anything, this past year has demonstrated more than ever how it is dedicated people who ensure the success of the RSEA program (from students and faculty to staff and alumni). As RSEA adapted to the unprecedented impact and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Professor Alexander Zahlten (Director of Graduate Studies), Rose Cortese (Program Administrator), and Harriet Wong (Staff Assistant) all worked exceedingly hard to adapt to the necessary changes to the program's operations and they all deserve a special word of thanks. All of us also appreciated the RSEA Alumni who participated in the first ever virtual RSEA Alumni Panel that was held this past Fall (see below). We all look forward to the day when we can resume our in-person interactions but, for now, we hope to see you at one of our virtual events and that you all remain safe and healthy.

James Robson

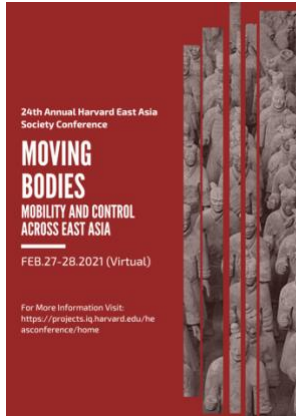
James C. Kralik and Yunli Lou Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations  
Chair, Committee on Regional Studies East Asia

### **RSEA Student News**

The RSEA program welcomed thirteen new students in Fall 2020. While we could not be together on campus, we were excited to gather everyone for online orientation meetings as they settled into the program from their home locations. The new cohort participated together in the RSEA proseminar, a Fall survey course designed to introduce students to several members of the faculty working on East Asia. The RSEA proseminar course worked well in the remote format and enabled the students to get to know each other.

Since March 2020, Harvard has held all classes remotely. Though difficulties abounded due to technology and vastly different time zones, our students have adapted well. Second-year RSEA students are hard at work completing their thesis projects and making plans for their futures. We applaud our students' persistence and resilience during this challenging pandemic year.

During the Fall semester a number of RSEA students got together for online social events, such as game and movie nights and a Halloween party. The series of events was planned and hosted by second-year Hannah Baek to offer a fun way for students to connect outside of classes.



First-year students continue to lead HEAS, the Harvard East Asia Society, and are busy preparing for the [2021 HEAS Conference](#) to be held the weekend of February 27-28 as a virtual event. The theme of this year's graduate student HEAS Conference is *Moving Bodies: Mobility and Control Across East Asia*. See the [HEAS Conference website](#) for details.

**Congratulations** to Yuchan Kim who is set to graduate in March, having completed his AM degree requirements in three semesters. Yuchan wrote an outstanding thesis titled "*The Deadly Art of Survival: Elite Purges in North Korea*".

## RSEA Events

### 2020 RSEA Alumni Panel

The annual [RSEA Alumni Panel was held virtually](#) for the first time. The October Zoom event was enjoyed by current students, faculty members, and many alumni. RSEA Chair Professor James Robson greeted participants joining from afar and across time zones. GSAS Dean Emma Dench gave welcoming remarks on behalf of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Six RSEA alumni panelists reflected on aspects of their RSEA experience that have shaped their career since they graduated, and shared words of advice for current students. Thank you to everyone who participated in this annual RSEA community event, and special thanks to our 2020 alumni panelists:

Jack Meng-Tat Chia (AM '11) Assistant Professor, History & Religious Studies,  
National University of Singapore;

Jessica J. Lee (AM '08) Senior Research Fellow for East Asia, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft;

Bin Ouyang (AM '12) Associate Director of China Programs, Asia Society, and former journalist;  
Julie Sheetz (AM '12) Chief of Staff for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs, Office of the Secretary of Defense;

Maiko Takeuchi (AM '07) Member of the Panel of Experts on North Korea, United Nations Security Council;

Judith T. Zeitlin (AM '83) Professor of Chinese Literature, Department of EALC and

the Committee on Theater and Performance Studies, University of Chicago.

### **Alumni-Student Chats**

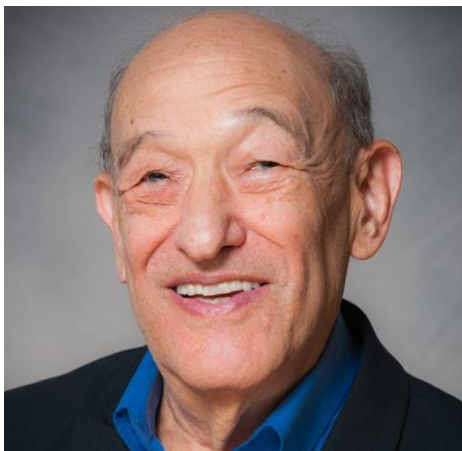
In November, RSEA students had the opportunity to meet informally with Da In Choi (AM '19) over Zoom. Da In is currently a PhD candidate in the Gender Studies department at UCLA. Before beginning her PhD, she worked in development at an educational nonprofit in Boston and for a reproductive justice start-up in Seoul. We are grateful to Da In for generously giving her time to share tips and encouragement. Please contact us if you are interested in talking with current RSEA students.

### **75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**

Next academic year 2021-22 will mark the 75th year of the RSEA Program. The program dates back to 1946, when renowned China scholar John King Fairbank launched a full-time seminar leading to a master's degree known as Regional Studies China; the seminar was later expanded to include Japan, Korea and Vietnam, and became the A.M. program known as Regional Studies East Asia. As we plan to celebrate this milestone we look forward to the participation and support of many RSEA alumni around the world. We welcome your suggestions and will keep you informed as planning continues.

### **Faculty News**

We are deeply saddened by the passing in December of Ezra Vogel, Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences, Emeritus. Professor Vogel was an inspirational teacher, mentor, and friend of many RSEA students and graduates during his long and influential tenure at Harvard. See the Fairbank Center's piece about [Ezra F. Vogel, 1930-2020](#) and collection of [tributes](#), and the [Boston Globe obituary](#).



We are equally saddened that Richard Cooper, Maurits C. Boas Professor of International Economics at Harvard and an advisor to many RSEA students, passed away in December. We send sincere condolences to his wife, Jin Chen (AM'02), an alumna of the RSEA program. See the Economics department's [In Memoriam: Richard N. Cooper, 1934-2020](#).



### Alumni News in Brief

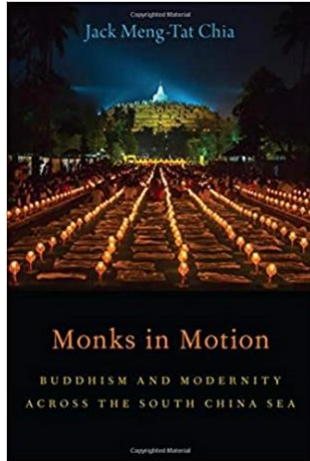
**Alexis Agliano Sanborn's** (AM '13) documentary [Nourishing Japan](#) won the best short film award at the 2020 Toronto Food Film Festival.



**Keung Yoon Becky Bae** (AM '14, PhD '20) is a Postdoctoral Research Scholar in the Center for Korean Research at Columbia University's [Weatherhead East Asian Institute](#). Becky's primary research focuses on the interaction between media production and the state in Korea, starting from the colonial era for a longitudinal perspective on recurrent patterns of film and media regulation and promotion.

**Matt Brazil** (AM '87) produces a new quarterly newsletter focused on research about Beijing's espionage and influence apparatus, titled [China Espionage Research Updates](#). [Matt Brazil](#) is the author of *Chinese Communist Espionage: An Intelligence Primer* (2019), a Contributing Editor of SpyTalk, and a Non-resident Fellow at The Jamestown Foundation.

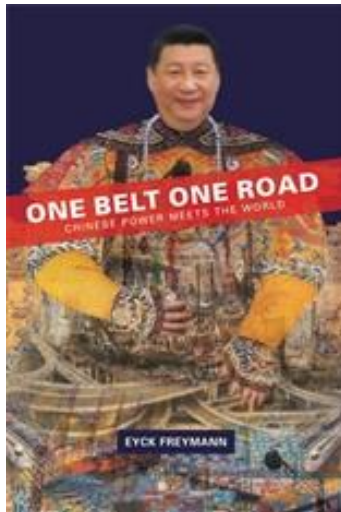
**Jack Meng-Tat Chia** (AM '11), Assistant Professor of History and Religious Studies at the National University of Singapore, published a new book, "[Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity Across the South China Sea](#)" (Oxford University Press, 2020). Chia gave a [book talk for Harvard Asia Center's Southeast Asia Fall Lecture Series](#).



**Mable Chan** (AM '93) is taking a break before launching Season 6 of her [One in a Billion](#) podcast due to her full-time commitment as a COVID Contact Tracer for Partners-in-Health in Massachusetts. Previous podcast series include [“Rock the Boat” - Asian Ambition Series](#) and [True Colors - “Finding Humanity in Emergency”](#).

**Da In Choi** (AM '19) has begun a PhD program in the Gender Studies department at UCLA. Da In's research interests include care labor and migration, reproductive justice, social movements, and critical empire studies.

**Eyck Freyermann's** (AM '18) first book [One Belt One Road: Chinese Power Meets the World](#) was published by Harvard University Press in November 2020. Eyck is currently a DPhil candidate in China Studies at the University of Oxford.



**Amy Grantham** (AM '20) is joining the Australia National University's Doctor of Philosophy: Culture, History and Language program, majoring in Asia and the Pacific, which she will be undertaking her PhD studies part-time alongside her work at Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

**Oliver Kerr** (AM '13) has a new position as Country Lead, USA, at Aurora Energy Research, Ltd.

**Jihwan Lee** (AM '20) is entering law school in Korea.

**Jonas Rüegg** (AM '16), PhD Candidate in the EALC Department at Harvard, wrote a summary of [Adventures on the Maritime Frontier: Minamoto no Tametomo on the Island of Women](#) for the Harvard Yenching Institute's Library Highlights.

**Kailin Weng** (AM '16) has a new position working for Etsy.

**Send us your news!** We love hearing about the new ventures, positions, publications, relocations, and life milestones of our RSEA alumni. Please write to [rsea2@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:rsea2@fas.harvard.edu) with news you'd like to share with the RSEA community.