

AAS 307

Interview Summary

Anqi Li

Shangqing Zheng

### **Final Project: Interview with Tani Barlow**

#### **SECTION ONE**

- **Person Interviewed:** Tani Barlow

- **Interviewee's title or position:** George and Nancy Rupp Professor of Humanities and Professor of History

- **Date, time, and length of interview:** 04/11/2018; 3:10 PM; 37 minutes

- **Your objective in conducting this interview:** The objective for the interview was to learn about her career as a professor of Humanities and a scholar of Chinese History and further understand women's roles in US-China relations.

#### **SECTION TWO**

- **Pre-interview Research:** First of all, we googled her name and found that Tani Barlow is a professor at Rice University. Secondly, we went to the University's department website and looked at the description of her area of interest, research and teaching, and list of her publications. Thirdly, we found and downloaded her CV on the department website. On her CV, we found information about her education, teaching positions, fellowships and honors, publications, and professional activities. Then, we searched the books of Tani Barlow and read the descriptions and the abstracts. Finally, based on her position at the university and previous experiences in China, as well as the interview question guide provided by Professor Christoff, we

conducted eight questions and sent to her on April 8th, two days before the interview. We received her feedbacks immediately. She provided a couple of place names so we could spell correctly. Finally, we finalized our interview questions and settled a time with her for the interview. On April 10, at 3:10 PM, we started our interview via Skype in Professor Christoff's office.

### **-Interview Questions**

1. Where and when were you born?
2. What inspired you to pursue a career in Modern Chinese history and Women's Studies?  
Did you have any familial influences that affected your decision?
3. We know that you have been to Nanjing University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University as a visiting Professor, how would you describe your experience in China?
4. What is your favourite city in China?
5. What are one or two of your proudest professional accomplishments?
6. We found that there is a new book written by you coming up, could you tell us a little bit more about this book?
7. I will be doing Gender Studies for my graduate studies . Do you have any suggestions for prospective students who want to pursue a career in Humanities?
8. What is your favorite part of your job as a professor?
9. Could you compare the Chinese students to American students and their ideas of women in society?
10. What do you think are the differences between teaching graduate students and teaching undergraduate students?

11. What do you see as the major challenges of this position?
12. What is a current project of yours?
13. What's your future plan about developing Asian women studies as a professor?

### **SECTION THREE**

1. Did you get complete answers to your questions? Explain

Yes. Professor Barlow did answer our questions completely. We structured our interview based on the prepared questions about her family, early career, experience in China, position as a professor, and publications. We also had many unplanned questions for her such as the questions about the cities in China and comparison of American students and Chinese students, but she answered all the questions precisely. She answered the questions about her books and her teaching experiences most detailed since her proudest accomplishment is writing books and the most enjoyable part is teaching. We prepared both probing questions and open-ended questions and she answered each of them completely and offered much additional information.

2. Was your interview structured, unstructured, or mixed? Explain

We both believe that our interview was mixed and most parts were well-structured. We followed the interview instruction steps by steps. Firstly, we sent her our planned questions after we did many research and two days before the assigned interview date. We also made a list of the orders of which question for each person to ask which made the interview more structured. Although we settled our interview time two hours before the interview began, which was a little rush, we started our interview very well. We both introduced ourselves and started asking our introductory question. However, after asked several questions, we both thought there were more interesting and meaningful questions that we should ask. Therefore, we both asked some unplanned

questions, which might make the interview less structured. However, we still followed our planned structure to ask questions that we interested in. Overall, the interview was well-structured and little bit mix-structured.

### 3. What probing questions did you use? Explain

Our fifth and sixth questions actually are the probing question, the question asked by Shangqing “We found that there is a new book written by you coming up, could you tell us a little bit more about this book?” and the another question “what’s your future plan about developing Asian women studies as a professor?” In order to discuss her new book, she would have to discuss her research and biology first. We found that Prof. Barlow really like to share the written experience and some key points in her new book. We also asked her to talk about her career as a Professor of Humanities and Professor of History. She told us about her future plan, which continues to make connections with feminists across national boundaries.

### 4. Explain your team approach. That is, who did what?

For the pre-interview research, we divided our work into different sections. Anqi has gone to the Rice University’s website and looked on Professor Barlow’s recent publications and conferences. Shangqing has downloaded Tani Barlow’s CV for her education and teaching experiences. After we collected our information, we met and discussed which parts were particularly interesting and useful for the interview. We also conducted our interview questions based the VHP interview questions list. Therefore, we divided our interview questions into five sections. The first section was the introduction. The second section was biographical details. For this part, Anqi designed our first and second question: “Where and when were you born?” and “What inspired you to pursue a career in Modern Chinese history and Women’s Studies? Did you have any familial

influences that affected your decision?” The third section was the early career. Shangqing came up the third question: “We know that you have been to Nanjing University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University as a visiting Professor, how would you describe your experience in China?” The fourth section was her professional experience. For this part, we asked: “What are one or two of your proudest professional accomplishments,” “We found that there is a new book written by you coming up, could you tell us a little bit more about this book,” and “What do you see as the major challenges of this position?” The last section was her reflection, which was for our interviewee, Professor Barlow, to develop her own discussion based on her interests.

5. Did the interviewee give you any documents or references to articles to read, or did she mention other people for you to talk to (or research)? Explain

Our interviewee, Tani Barlow, gave us references both before and after the interview. Before the interview and after I sent her our interview questions, she provided us a couple of place and people names so that things are spelled correctly. Here is the information: “I was born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1950. My parents were Claude Abner Barlow (1921-1995) and Alice Voorsanger Barlow (1924-2010) and my mother was Jewish. I have three younger sisters. Gayne Barlow-Kemper, Dika Jewell and Naomi Barlow d'Abrosio all of them still living. I grew up primarily in California, mostly in the towns of Lodi, Hayward, and then Palo Alto. I have worked at the University of Missouri, Columbia; San Francisco State University; University of Washington and now Rice University”. (Tani Barlow) Moreover, during the interview, she also mentioned her father’s uncle’s name and her father’s name and she told us that we can find their name online. After the interview, when she was editing our transcript, she added links about her father’s uncle (<https://archive.is/8t1FU>), her book(<https://www.dukeupress.edu/positions>), as well as her husband’s name, Donald Mingdah Lowe.

#### **SECTION FOUR (30 points)**

**Insert your interview notes/write up here. Remember to be accurate and concise. Consider what was said, any emerging trends your interviewee mentioned, different interpretations, and recommendations for follow up interviews.**

Anqi: Where and when were you born?

PB: I was born in 1950, in Madison, Wisconsin, which is in the U.S. Midwest. My parents got married there and, after I was born, they took the little baby and went to the West Coast, Oregon and California.

Shangqing: What inspired you to pursue a career in Modern Chinese history and Women's Studies? Did you have any familial influences that affected your decision?

PB: Yes, there were a lot of family influences. My father's uncle, his name was Claude Heman Barlow and my father was named after him, so my father is Claude Abner Barlow. Claude Heman Barlow was a medical missionary in Shandong province, worked as a doctor there. (<https://archive.is/8t1FU>) He worked with intestinal parasites, which infected farmers through their feet. He lived there for many years, so I always heard about my uncle Claude and also I met uncle Claude when he was 95 years old. He was a very strong guy. Also Claude Heman Barlow inspired my father to go to China in 1947, so this was just before the Civil War in China, and my father was came from a rural background, so he was pro-peasant ...he was pro-Mao Zedong and wanted justice for farmers and land reform. He went to China through the United Nations in a program that was specifically for helping farmers. He spent one year in China and he came back and married my mother, Alice Voorsanger. So, when I was growing up, I have always heard stories about what a great guy Chairman Mao was and also that the farmers had stood up and this was a great thing. In my family this a was very positive thing. Also, when I grew up, I lived in Northern California in the Bay Area, so during the years of my being a teenager, there was a lot of interests in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. These were all factors in my decision to pursue Chinese studies.

...

You asked about how I got into Women's studies and I forgot to answer that part of your question. I am a historian right, I'm a historian of women and Chinese modern women. When I got super interested in studying history, Women's Studies was very new. So I thought, oh this is a good job at a university that I liked a lot, University of Washington, so I think I'd apply for it. That is how I got a job in Women's Studies.

Anqi: We know that you have been to Nanjing University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University as a visiting professor, how would you describe your experience in China?

PB: Well. I started going to China in the 1980s. I married a Chinese man, Donald Mingdah Lowe, so in the 1980s, we went to China and met his family. After that experience, in the 1980s, things started to change a lot. But I got even more interested, so I kept going back. So, in the 1990s, I went to China very regularly for research and also to see relatives and to make friends. I liked that way of life. Also China was not so well-developed, so there was a lot of time where you could just sit and talk to people. And the libraries were very open, so I got a lot of research

done. When I got to be senior in my profession, I was invited for these formal relationships like being a visiting professor. When I went as a visiting professor, we didn't know what exactly to do, because in China now there are something called Institutes of Advanced Studies. All over the world we have Institutes of Advanced Study at research institutes and, in the 2000s, China was building these to advance Chinese scholars and to host international scholars. So I just went and used the library and made friends and did projects. It was a very pleasant experience. I still go to Nanjing University regularly because I have a lot of friends there.

Anqi: So, I want to know that which city you like the best in China?

PB: Well, it changes over the years. Because my teachers all came from Beijing, when I was a student I learned about that way of life, so I really like Beijing food and Beijing dialect.

Anqi: I come from Beijing.

PB: You come from Beijing then you know that I mean! I used to like to go to Beijing and I wanted to go to Beijing all the time, because I could go to libraries there and I felt culturally comfortable. But as Beijing got more polluted, all the old things changed, it wasn't comfortable, and it got expensive. So I don't go there anymore. I still go to Shanghai, because of the library and our family lives in Shanghai. But now Shanghai has gotten too big, so . . . . because I have a very close associate at Nanjing University, now my favorite city is Nanjing. The pace of life there is nice and it is less expensive. I still prefer Beijing food but I can get any kind of food now anytime, anywhere.

Shangqing: I also like Nanjing a lot, especially Qin Huai He and Fu Zi Miao.

PB: Yes, me too.

Shangqing: I will be doing Gender Studies for my graduate studies in Chinese University of Hong Kong. So, do you have any suggestion for students who want to pursue a career in Humanities?

PB : Tell me more about your question, it is very broad.

Shangqing : There are many students interested in history, sociology, or gender studies. However, sometimes they would find the process of study very challenging.

PB: Well. I would recommend humanities for the method, not always the content. When you taking an advanced degree, say a Master's or PhD, then you learn how to read a lot of evidence, and summarize and analyze the evidence. Now, if you decided to go to a university, of course you have to learn this. But no matter where you go after your BA or BS, you can use this kind to skill, say in a business or at a newspaper, or online journalism, or any number of jobs. Being able to condense and summarize what you have read...

In the longer term we know after President Trump goes away soon (I hope) the relationships between China and the United States will improve. So those who have English and Chinese and study Chinese topics have an advantage. I think that more and more of my students understand how important it is to know about China. Because you two have studied in the United States and you are bilingual, these are all employable skills. That's about practical things. But about less practical things, there is a lot of...how do I say this...inaccurate information about China circulating in the United States, a lot of it. And I have feeling that inaccurate information about the United States is circulating in China. So as you study both sides, you can contribute to being more reasonable in the relationship. Instead of letting people be racist, for example in China, right? They always think of Americans as white. Well, we are not all white, really. And by the time you are my age, the whites will not even be the majority population. So people need to start thinking about the United States in a more reasonable way. You will be a part of the more positive scholarship about both China and the United States, so I strongly recommend you to pursue this.

Anqi: The next question is, what are one or two of your proudest professional accomplishments?

PB: That's very difficult to answer. I'm very proud of writing books. Very very proud. Because that's the most difficult thing I did. I also proud of journal that I founded and I edit it. <https://www.dukeupress.edu/positions> It involves a lot of people, so I can extend positive influences by helping other people to publish their work, and I like that very much. Those are two things I'm very proud of.

Shangqing: I found that there is a new book written by you coming up, could you tell us a little bit more about this book?

PB: The simplest way to say it is that...this book says that when in the modern period all over the world people learned about biology. When they learned about biology, they started thinking about women in a different way, particularly because biology is linked to physiology, which is a study of our sexual reproduction. So people began to learn about hormones, for example. And they finally understood about sperm and the ovum or egg. Finally they truly understood that to make a new human being requires an equal portion from men and women. Now, there are many theories about this discovery because it's a very, very modern discovery, very modern.

As people began to think about it, they took an evolutionary idea about how human beings came into the world. The evolutionary idea is based on what we called sexual selection and natural selection. The struggle for dominance, that's a natural selection, but the sexual selection is about how will you choose the best person to procreate with. This is the secret of mammals, so I show how Chinese social scientists discovered this along with everyone else, because they were reading what everyone else in the world was reading. They created theories using these new ideas about biology and physiology. Also, at the same time, there was a change in consumption practice, so what we see is a new consumer world. Advertising professionals connected these scientific ideas about sexual selection and the consumer idea and they said that if you brought new products, then you could get a better mate and have better children.

*In the Event of Women* looks at two basic forms of new knowledge, visual, commercial, advertising, and new social theories and it shows that Chinese intellectuals and consumers in the 1920s and 30s were very similar to French and Japanese and Korean, pretty much every society all over the world. Everyone said, oh my! Women are not secondary to men at all! It takes two equal sexes for mammals to make babies. This happened in the urban areas. I'm a historian of thought, so I claim that this was a super big change, Actually people had never thought about women in this way before, so that is why this book is called *In the Event of Women*. It took a lot of historical factors and a big realization to declare that women are not what we thought in the past. That is the "event" part.

Shangqing: Do you have any other project that you want to share with us?

PB: Yes. So my next book is called *The Logic of Society* and I will continue to investigate the roots of Chinese sociological thinking, what we called social theory. One of the other modern things in thinking all over the world is the idea of society. Before the 19th century, people didn't think so much in terms of joining the society. They thought of themselves as living in the family, right, all over the world, not just China. So people lived in the family, or in the town, or in the group, or in the lineage. These are all very concrete ways to think about yourself in relation to other people.

Society is an abstract idea and society is a new idea so now we believe that people live in the society. My question now is how can we end up thinking that people live in the society. I think I can show you how people thought in the past. All human beings live in a big thing called "society" It's not about husband and wife, or father and son, it's about citizens. There are two basic kinds of humans in society-- men and women. So in this way, when you have the concept of society, then equality becomes a possibility. Because you are not just somebody's mom, you're not just somebody's wife, you are really just a female living in the society. You may get tortured by a male living in the society and a lot of sexual oppression or male dominance and all of that. But we know that we're basically equal and that's why we can struggle for equality.

Anqi: What is your favorite part of your job as a professor?

PB: The most fun part is teaching. Because you never know what students are thinking. I stay the same and I get older, but my students are always the same age. Each generation is different. I learn different things from my students.

Anqi: Could you compare the Chinese students to American students and their ideas of women in society?

PB: Well, I think the first you can say, I think my students would agree, that students who come from China (or any part of the Chinese world) believe that it's really important to have strong relationships with other people. They easily form groups. They easily communicate with classmates or with the professor and have some expectations that the professor will help. My American students don't have these assumptions so they don't connect to other students easily. They often don't get to know other students, they don't eat together, they don't have parties together; they just go to class. I have to keep re-introducing them to each other.

Now, when it comes to teaching courses about Chinese women history, my Chinese students tend to be more patient, they tend to be more patient about what...ok, here's a good example, which we discussed in my classes recently. I have a student and he has a sister and the sister got married for love and divorced and I asked him if he thought his sister would get married again, and he said sure, why not. Then, I asked if everybody was mad at his sister. I knew the answer: He said not really. The point was that the sister didn't want to be alone, that's not why she divorced the husband. She just did not like her husband. She kept her primary relationship with her own family and she's very close to her own family, even though they were not happy that she got divorced. This is an example of an ordinary family orientation.

So it's very important for students to understand that Chinese *individuals* have a strong sense of self, but to retain that sense of individuality they are not throwing off their families. They might not "leave the family." Maybe they want to keep their relationship with the mother and father, even if the mother and father are oppressive. Now, for my American students, they are *individualists*. And it's a very difficult position for them because some of the differences are beyond their experience. When they read a story they might ask: Why doesn't the woman hate her father because he refused let her marry? We have to ask when was she living. In the 1920s, ok, what would happen if she ran away with her lover? What would happen if she said no to her father? What would happen if she married against her parents' wishes? The point here is that my American students see independence as a break while the Chinese students tend to see it as an *ongoing negotiation with their family*. Relative and complete autonomy for young people are two versions of independence. Neither one is wrong, neither one is right. Does this make sense to you?

Anqi, Shangqing: Yes, thank you!

Shangqing: What do you think is the difference between teaching graduate and undergraduate students?

PB: Well graduate students can be much tougher. But also graduate students 100% want to be in school. They come to the professor and they want to study, so it makes teaching much easier. Undergraduate students may take a course in Chinese studies because they're curious, or they have to satisfy some kind of requirement and they take a class because it is not full. They not very committed to learning about China. They don't really care. That makes my job more difficult because I have to give them reasons why they need to know new things about a foreign country. You have to show them, not just tell them.

Shangqing: What do you think is the major challenge for this position, as a professor?

PB: What's kind of challenge?

Shangqing: Like, what do you think is the most difficult part, such as teaching, researching ...

PB: Ok, I see. Well, I chose this way of life and I really like it. Although things are difficult, and I often work too hard. I like this way of life, so I don't have any sense that's it too... Oh, it's always difficult because often students and non-historians have to learn about what we

professional historians are actually doing. Plus there is no limit to what you must do when you are working in the human sciences.

If you study chemistry or become a physician, it's challenging, but unless you become a professor of medicine or chemistry there's a limit, right? You know chemistry and you apply the chemistry and you get a job as a chemist or doctor. But for scholars of history, there's no end. You are never finished, because that's the way human life is: It's never finished. So, there's always a feeling that you haven't done enough. That's a very common feeling among people who are historians. As for real world problems, I think right now, the biggest one is institutional, and that is a problem for my Chinese, as well as my American colleagues. We are no longer clear about the institution we work in. Is the university a training school, a corporation, a privatized form of knowledge only for elites? If our students are just a product, that's makes teaching much more difficult. If the school only certifies competence but discourages students from asking questions, then the teaching is very difficult. In chemistry it would be easy because you either pass or you fail, right? Organic chemistry, if you're not good at it, you are not going to medical school. It's really simple. But what if I have to teach about the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)? How do we study that? If I don't have a whole semester, how can I even give a small insight for my students into such a big, big event. Or, "Reforming and Opening Out"? Or your generation? How do Chinese people in your generation live compared to your parents, grandparents and great grandparents? Everything happens so quickly, life gets quicker yet the university is becoming more limited and expensive. So we are more and more, as scholars and teachers, we worry that you are not getting a good education. Also it's very expensive. It should be free.

Anqi, Shangqing: Yes, I agree!

Shangqing: I have my last question: I have heard about a term called Herstory, comparing to History. How do you understand this term?

PB: Well, this idea of Herstory happened when I was very young, maybe I was not too much older than you are. So this idea is that it should be a Herstory.

We have a lot of debates of this problem. Let me ask you: Could you tell the story of women without including other stories? Well, sure, you can. It means that you have whole bunch of problems, like how people defined women in the past. What do we do with women who perform as women but they have penises? If you want to write Herstory then who doesn't belong? Who gets to be the person written about? To be a part of Herstory, do you have to be born with the body of a woman or could you be a transwoman or a gay man who feels comfortable dressing and acting like a woman? Does a Transwoman belong to Herstory or History.

Although Herstory might be useful, it has two basic problems. The first is where you draw the line between who is a real woman and who cannot be a woman. The second problem is that women and men live together, along with indeterminate sex people, trans, masquerades, effeminate and butch people, so this complicates what would be considered an easy distinction between History and HerStory. Because a lot of students have never thought about this issue, I think putting HerStory into the discussion is useful. There's more history, and the history of woman, history of man, children and old people. And interaction between women and economic

and farming, producing value. And women producing children, culture and so on. So, HerStory is a useful beginning of longer conversation. I don't believe in a separate HerStory. That's my opinion.

Anqi: So, my last question is what's your future plan about developing Asian women studies as a professor?

PB: Well, I don't have to do much of anything. Because when I was a very young professor, there only four or five professors with this focus. But now, there are hundreds of us. And now, not just in the United States, but all over China we see growing interest in Chinese women's studies and also the study of women everywhere... women's history, women's studies, sexuality studies, sociology of woman, etc. About every month, I get letters from young feminists, asking me to participate in their activities. Maybe write a paper for her book, maybe read their articles, to know about what they're doing. Sometimes I can, but sometimes I am too busy. I plan to continue being a public intellectual on these matters and to interact with young feminist scholars. In December 2017 I went to India, to talk about my book. I also met very wonderful, smart Indian feminist scholars in the graduate school. People love to meet. So I hope that, in my senior career, I continue to make connections with feminists across national boundaries.

#### **SECTION FIVE (25 points)**

##### **Your analysis: What aspects of the interview did you find to be particularly meaningful?**

We felt that the interview as a whole was meaningful to us. Firstly, we learned a lot of historical background and facts about early missionary work from Professor Barlow's father and her father's uncle's experiences in China. Since many of our class materials were focused on US-Asian relations from the late 19th century to early 20th century, Professor Barlow's discussion about her family was meaningful and informative. Moreover, Professor Barlow as a scholar who studies Chinese history, has been to China many times during different time periods and as different positions. She started going to China since the 1980s when China was not well-developed but easier have communication with others. Professor Barlow also discussed her experiences as a visiting professor since the 2000s when China began to build Institutes of Advanced Study at research institutes. This part reminded us our class lectures on how Western women missionaries lived and studied abroad. Furthermore, as a professor of Humanities and History, Professor Barlow also responsible for teaching American students about Chinese history and US-China relations. She explained the differences between American students and Chinese

students by telling a story about a young Chinese woman and her family. This part made us thinking about cultural diversity which we have discussed in class. Overall, the whole interview with Professor Barlow was inspiring and meaningful for us to see an outstanding American female scholar dedicated her life to US-China studies and Women's studies.

#### What aspects were not useful?

Overall, We think the most part of interview aspects are useful and can connect with what we learned in Women and Asian Studied. However, discussing the difference between teaching undergraduate and graduate students was not useful to the theme of the interview. She said that graduate students 100% want to be in school. They come to the professor and they want to study more about Asian woman studied, so it makes her teaching much easier. Undergraduate focus more on Chinese studies because they're curious. Except for this part, we think other information she brought us was useful.

#### What more would you like to know?

We asked every question that we thought would be useful and interesting. Professor Barlow answered them very detailed and also provided much additional information to us. However, we would rather like to know more about how she thinks about U.S.-China relations developed over times and her travels in different Asian countries. For example, we know that Professor Barlow has visited India last year and met many Indian feminists so we would like to know her experience in India and how she thinks about the connection between American feminist and Indian feminist. Since Professor Barlow has engaged in US-China relations and women's studies for many decades, there would be many useful questions for us to ask.

#### What other in-class presentations did you find particularly useful? Explain

We both found that all of our in-class presentations very interesting and useful. There were a lot of meaningful interviews about how foreign-born women develop their career in the United States and how western women professionals dedicate their life in Asia.

In particular, Yawen and Joshua's interview with Sarah Park and Laura and Mariko's interview with Rosemarie Barnett were very interesting and meaningful. Yawen and Joshua had an in-person interview with Sarah Park which we believe would be more effective to notice the nonverbal cues and easier to engage with the interviewee. Sarah Park's story was fascinating since she talked about her religion and family which we did not involve in our interview. The video before their presentation was very clear for us to learn about the background story. The other presentation that we found very useful was Laura and Mariko's interview with Rosemarie Barnett. Rosemarie Barnett is an Indian-American who got her MBA and went to Law School. She coped with a lot of gender bias during her self-fulfilling career. Moreover, her words were extremely assertive and passionate to empower the young generation.