

Paul Chan

Kevin Lee

AAS 307 Final Paper

## **SECTION ONE**

The person we interviewed was Jane Leung Larson. She is a writer and historian. We conducted the interview on Nov, 18 2016. at 3:30 pm. The interview was approximately 1 hour 30 minutes long. We conducted this interview to learn about the work that she has done as a writer and historian in connecting U.S. and Asian cultures.

## **SECTION TWO**

From our pre-interview research, we found out that she has done independent research on the Baohuanghui since 1985. She was one of the founding executive directors of the Northwest China Council, one of the 12 regional China Councils sponsored by the national China Council of the Asia society. Some of her research on the Baohuanghui can be found on the website [baohuanghui.blogspot.com](http://baohuanghui.blogspot.com). On this website, we found some of the presentations and publications that she has worked on. For example, we found a presentation she did about Kang Tongbi, who was Kang Youwei's daughter and most trusted compatriot. Preparing for the interview, we made a list of questions that we would like to ask her during the interview. After that we decided who would ask the questions. The list of our interview questions are seen below.

List Interview Question

1. How did your early life affect your career choice?
2. How did your Chinese heritage affect you when growing up?
3. In your mother's memoir, it talks about your visit to your parent's birthplace in China. How did that make you feel? Did it give you a new sense of Chinese Identity?

4. Were you inspired by anyone
5. Where did you grow up and where did you go to school (K-12)?
6. Were there any inspiring people that moved you to this career?
7. What difficulties did you face in your career as a women
8. What do you look for in the people you research and interview
9. Does your heritage have an impact on your work?
10. Is there any trend you see from the research and people as time pass
11. Has Westernization impacted the work you do on Chinese families significantly
12. Do people from different provinces have different belief or do regions have no differences
13. Is there anything about your work that you would like to talk about that we haven't discussed in this interview?
14. What do you find is the most enjoyable part of your work?
15. How has your work influenced your life?
16. Is there anything that you want people who look at your work to take from it?
17. Is there a message that you want future generations who watch/listen to this interview to hear?
18. How did you find out that your grandfather was a student and follower of Kang Youwei, who would later form the largest transnational Chinese organization, and what was your reaction to that?
19. Did the fact that your grandfather was a student of Kang Youwei affect your childhood?  
Is so how?

20. What was the influence of Kang Youwei's organization the Baohuanghui in the U.S? Do you see anything that was the result of the Baohuanghui's work today?
21. A few years ago, you did a presentation about Kang Tongbi. Could you talk a little more about that?
22. What impression did you get about Kang Tongbi? Do you think that she was a strong female role model? Do you think that she helped you get to where you are now?
23. When you share your work with people, what are their reactions to it? Is your work completely new to them? Is the reaction different between different races?

### **SECTION THREE**

For probing questions, we used point of view questions because we would frequently ask about her opinion on subjects, such as how was her experience when she first went to China. We also asked about her goals like what she hoped to accomplish with her research. We also asked her clarification questions, when we asked her to talk a little bit more about the Kang Tongbi presentation. We then asked questions when she brought up an interesting topic we wanted to know more about.

Our approach as a team to this project was to work together. We both developed questions to ask her and then would take turns during the interview to ask her questions.

We did not always get complete answers to our questions, there were some questions that she never really thought about. For example, if her heritage had any impact on her work. Other questions were not relevant, such as if her grandfather being a student of Kang Youwei affected her because she did not meet her grandfather. There were questions that she gave us a lot of information on such as questions about Kang Tongbi. We did get complete answers to things about her work and most things on her mother's side of the family.

As for the structure of our interview, our interview was a mix of structured and unstructured. We would ask her questions and then would ask to go into detail about what she just said. Sometimes she would describe something that was interesting, so we would ask her to elaborate on it.

Before the interview our interviewee, Jane Larson, gave us her CV before the interview took place. On this CV, were scholarly publications she was in as well as a summary of the work that she has done. This CV was our primary source of information when we were making discussion questions to ask her. On the CV, was also a link to a website about the baohuanghui. The name of the website is baohuanghui.blogspot.com. The following is what we have compiled as our interview notes.

#### **SECTION FOUR**

Interview Notes:

- Came from a mix marriage with a white father whose heritage was swedish, french, english, and chinese mother whose heritage was Chinese.
- Both American. They were both born in the United States.
- Really due to father, highlighting the unusualness of her situation.
- Father made a big deal out of fact she was Eurasian, more than with her two brothers.
- Thinks that he was more interested in her since she was a girl.
- Father emphasized Chinese heritage more than Swedish and English heritage which he de-emphasized.
- Father's family didn't want anything to do with her mother, since she was Chinese.
- Made a big difference, never knew those relatives.
- Basically, her family was her mother's family who were all Chinese. Strongly affected identity.

- More so than with brothers who really didn't go into her field at all.
- All of her Chinese, pure Chinese cousins, except for one, didn't really touch upon anything Chinese American or Chinese.
- Some of them went to China, but her mother was went very early on and she followed the same year.
- Mother had a large influence too. She and her father broke up when she was 5. Was a single mother basically.
- Parents were both journalists, they were both reporters. They met as reporters in Los Angeles. - Her mother was probably the first Asian reporter man or women. She first began her work in 1926. A very strong women, and worked after she and her father split up.
- First went to China around in late 1970's.
- Mother wanted to visit where her parents are from. They were on both sides of this river in Shundaca Shunde in Guangdong.
- She really did not want to meet any relatives. She only wanted to see the space.
- All she did was, collect dirt from the top of a dam. She collected the dirt, and she dispersed it amongst her family in the U.S. in little porcelain vases.
- Did not want to visit her relatives because of the experience of her parents or what she remembered from that or she knew of it. Which was her Chinese relatives wanting money, from the Americans.
- Ultimately Jane Larson did meet them, much later around 1990's.
- They were indeed quite wealthy but they did indeed want her to help them.
- Basically she helped them transfer money so they could buy motorcycles and other things.
- Also met her grandmother's relatives who were quite a different sort.

- Met them through the overseas Chinese affairs office. They tracked down all these people in Guangdong, in Hong Kong and so on.
- Has gone back to see them several times, they are much simpler people than the ones in Guangzhou, but she gets along better with them, happened to become rather close to a cousin in Hong Kong.
- None of her direct relatives went to the Tong village, but some of the more distant relatives did go to the Tong village.
- Her grandfather had a number of relatives and her grandmother had fewer. But many of them were involved with business and some of them were involved with the Chinese Empire reform association as well. On both sides of the family.
- Her trips to China gave her a new sense of identity. Originally went to China not because of any particular desire to. Went because of her mother. She wanted to go to China.
- It was her mission, after 1972 and Nixon going to China. She wanted to go to China.
- Wasn't easy for a journalist to go to China. Mother had to sort of hide that, and the only way that an American can go was through the U.S. China people's friendship association.
- Both joined the friendship association in Portland, Oregon where I lived and she was a member of it in California.
- Her mother got chosen for a activist tour in April of 1976. So, she went during the cultural revolution. There were various things happening in China, but she went with a very different kind of group.
- Later Jane Larson was chosen to go, originally suppose to go in September but then there was a earthquake and Mao died.

- Her trip was delayed until November/December. So she was then interested in normalization of relations and began to work with the Asian society and the League of women voters. To try and organize a conference on U.S.-China relations and normalization in Portland, Oregon.

- She got a lot of support in fact and had a conference after Carter normalized relations. Around March of 1979.

- Many were people who were very active in U.S. China relations like Michael Oksenberg, who at that point was Jimmy Carter's national security person involved with China.

- Various people through the Asian society who were pretty significant. Then mobilized a group of people in Oregon, a few China scholars the few who existed and lots of Chinese Americans and anybody who was interested in China to organize the Northwest regional China council. Happened in 1980.

- Grandfather's connection with Kang Youwei part of the family lore. Something her mother talked about. She couldn't communicate with her grandmother, who lived far longer than her grandfather.

- She never met my grandfather, he died long before she was born.

- Father was really interested in Chinese [history] and he saw the significance even if mother didn't.

- He was a real historian, amateur historian, like her but he really loved history and really valued history and valued artifacts. So when he had tuberculosis they had to move him from Chicago to Los Angeles and when he finally got out of the sanitarium, he went to live with the Leungs.

- Her father got her mother to interview the grandmother. He knew that Tom Leung was an interesting and important man and he of course heard of Kang Youwei.

- He got her mother to do this long oral history on a notebook. Then she typed it all up, those notes, that's what she based her book on.
- He got her mother's siblings and other people who knew Tom Leung to write up their stories or interview them.
- Jane Larson majored in Anthropology because her father encouraged her to that area. But it was more or less looking at history and categorizing people.
- This is where she began to work with that kind of material and began to sort of study Chinese, a very small way.
- Didn't learn Chinese until before went to China. Took some community classes and that's all.
- Did not learn Chinese from mother, but she used Cantonese only for words that she didn't want people to understand.
- Jane Larson was born in Los Angeles. Went to college in Portland.
- Not many asians in part of Los Angeles she lived in. Only until went to college, met other Asians.
- Even then they didn't have any classes on Chinese history, the closest she came to learning about China was a art history class. The professor was very close to this Chinese man in Portland.
- Went to graduate school but dropped out, Majored in Chinese history and Anthropology. It didn't last, so then she said "I'll study this on my own," and did but not very seriously.
- Does not believe had any difficulties because of gender or race, faced more difficulties based on lack of education and status.
- Before she was involved in China stuff, she was involved with other topics such as mental health and the environment.

- When she got into the China field, it was important to gather a group of people for support
- When she was organizing the conference, she came out of nowhere. Met the professors in Portland.
- Had difficulties with the Chinese community because they were very anti-PRC and very Taiwan.
- Got the help of the League of women voters they were strongly for normalization of relations of China.
- It sort of fit into their national platform, so their international committee sponsored the conference. They introduced her to people within the community in terms of funders
- She would later approach the Asia society herself.
- Very wonderful people who believed in her, because they had no reason to believe in me. Wrote these letters with extremely ambitious plans, but they were very good. After the conference.
- They realized they could organize something. So formed the first board of the [northwest] china council. All sorts of people were part of it, it was a really collected group.
- Believes her heritage made it easier, was comfortable with both cultures.
- Went to China many times and ultimately the China council had tours to China. Starting in 1985, so she got to go on a lot of those.
- Other people who lead the organization as executive director since that point, some of them have Chinese heritage some of them have not. But they all have a lot of experience with China.
- Lots of changes in China seen.
- What is significant is working with scholars. Began working on her grandfather's papers. In 1990, went to China and was able to work with various experts on Kang Youwei.

- They were enormously helpful.
- One of the changes she noticed in very recent years is communication with scholars. They can't get into Google, communication is harder than it was. Also there is a hesitation with working with an American on a somewhat controversial topic such as Kang Youwei and constitutional system.
- That is something that is troubling, and she hasn't found a way around it.
- The people when she goes there are wonderful, it's just communications with them when they're not in the same room is hard.
- The Baohuanghai were an exile organization, the United States was really the center of the organization.
- The Baohuanghai was a very important organization. There wasn't anything quite like it since.
- Happened at a time when Chinese nationalism grew and at that time there was things like the Chinese exclusion act. It was Chinese nationalism based abroad. So the organization grew at the same time.
- Kang sort of fed as well as fed into this sense of identity in the United States. People were already aware of how difficult it is to get into the United States and the hostility shown to them.
- There was a feeling that China needed to stand up, they had a government that couldn't protect them, a government that was weak that was backwards. It was sort of an attack on China.
- Kang more or less represented more than anybody this movement against exclusion, for modernization of China and so on. On that basis, he was able to meet with Theodore Roosevelt twice and basically get a change in the exclusion system.
- Did make quite a bit of difference in people's treatment.

- Kang was a very ambitious person. There were a number of things that was happening, there was a newspaper, this bank in New York, a restaurant in Chicago, her grandfather sort of initiated to fund students to come to the United States.
- they had all of these chapters, that haven't been identified yet.
- It was a pretty powerful organization until around 1909 it began to crumble. In part because Kang was so involved in business enterprises and scandals of all sorts took place.
- Kang was a very emotional person, very ambitious, he would sometimes strike back at people like her grandfather.
- Created a great deal of resentment.
- Her grandfather even though he was very instrumental in building up the organization, he was also instrumental in bringing it down.
- It was an overextended business combined with the fact that internationally there was a financial crisis in 1909 that helped crumble the organization.
- People became disillusioned with the Baohuanghui because of the scandals.
- Westernization had no direct effect on her work. People were very friendly to Americans
- Sometimes they would take very surprising views of the United States that she wouldn't understand. They felt that they were being attacked
- Can't say that her own work has been directly affected. Although as she said she there is a suspicion of outside influence especially from the United States that affects her connection with scholars.

Jane said part of working with other people who are passionate about her work is one of the enjoyable parts of her work. It is wonderful to get to know these people and they are great to

work with. She is unable to operate on her own due to the lack of academic background or power. Her lack of a scholarly background is detrimental to her work since she can't work alone. Her book project requires people that are professors and actually have phd in Chinese history. She worked with graduate student in Ukon who does translation. She has met descendents of Kang Youwei, and Kang Tongbi. Kang Tongbi has been part of her research the last few years. Her sister-in-law found photographs and receipts on ebay of Kang Youwei that had a collection of letters, receipts, and photographs . She got contact through auction house to meet buyer, and got scans of letters and photographs in return for transcribing, organized them, writing an appraisal and translating them. The letters were important because they covered where Kang Youwei went during his travels in the US. Most of the collection was sold off afterwards in a Shanghai auction house. Jane tried to get Universities to buy collections, but it was too expensive. She went to visit the house where Kang Tongbi used to lived and original family still lives there. Kang Tongbi was a strong female role model since she founded a few women associations. She was a member of small group of women in barnard college who wanted women suffrage. Kang Tongbi was a very independant and ahead of her time. Her father bought her guns and she enjoyed riding horses and using guns. Part of Kang Youwei's assassinate plan was counting on her . She was trusted above anyone else. Kang Youwei treated his daughters good, did not bind their feet and had them educated. Eldest daughter worked in a newspaper company as an editor. Kang Tongbi was inspiration to women's movement, and went to lecture at various women's organizations. First organization founded by Kang Youwei was anti-footbinding movement. Jane's work specialized in many ways so she was unable to tell anyone since they wouldn't know very much about the obscure era of Chinese history.

There are no emerging trends in her work other than the fact that most of her work require someone with a masters to work with her because she only has a bachelor's degree which bars her entry from some fields. Some recommendations for follow up interview is mostly to ask about her work, networking with other people, her work for other people, and her family. Her family is an interesting topic because they show different types of people from the Asian American group, and how they interact in American society . She has worked with many famous people so she has many connections as well.

The story of the person's life from the interview was helpful as well as the person's career. It gave us context on how the person lived so we could understand the influence on the person and the interviewee's career choice. The weren't any significant parts that can be considered not useful. I would like to know more about her interaction with the people who asked her for help and her work on the China council . It would be interesting to learn about her partnership with other people. The other in-class presentation were helpful in learning the different roles women took in Asian-American relationship. Many of the were similar to one another since they occupy the similar positions, but their starting points were different which made it interesting . The most useful presentations were ones that did not end up in USIP. Those that went into nontraditional fields made it more obvious problems they faced due to gender and status. The women who founded a Japanese theater company defied the traditional role for women in the Japanese theater which was that the majority of the time women weren't allowed to act in the theater. This presentation highlighted how women were restricted by gender and societal structure so they could not pursue the theater profession. Many women were looked down upon in Japan for joining the theater profession compared to men who did not receive such a big scorn. When the theater company went to Japan the result was the men were astonished by

how well the performance was by including women who excelled at their roll compared to those typecasted according to their gender. I also found it interesting that many of the other interviewees didn't believe they were being discriminated against because of their gender. Even during our interview, Ms. Larson didn't feel that she was being discriminated against. But I feel that gender bias definitely played a part in leading to where she was today. For example, her father talked a lot about her Chinese heritage to her rather than her two brothers. In other presentations, I found it interesting that Alexandra Toma found out she was being payed a lot less than her male co-workers. I feel that gender bias is something that you can only see if you are aware of it. Her career path is unusual since most people in general would have pursued a more traditional path instead of being a freelance writer. Her parents were both journalist which was unusual for women, and it did influence her to follow her parents footsteps in a different way. She did not have a career that particularly involves helping people, but writing down people's histories. Helping people is both a male and female impulse, but a different sort of attitude is involved with both. Men seems to have a more self-righteous attitude, while women can be more considerate and caring when they move away from the self-righteous attitude. It is hard to say if she is "generous" or "sweet" with her time, but she did give us a large amount of time. Considering her current situation she did plan a large enough time frame for the interview, and she did do it at home so she was being nice with her free time. I would not have used the same words to describe her as for a man, but for time wise yes.