

SECTION I: LOLA



Person Interviewed: Sophie Richardson

Interviewee's Position: Sophie is the China Director at Human Rights Watch. She is a graduate of University of Virginia (from which she earned her PhD), Hopkins-Nanjing Project, and Oberlin college. Sophie has also written numerous articles for various news sources, as well as authoring her own book, *China, Cambodia, and the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence*.

Date, Time, and Length of Interview: The interview was conducted on November 17, 2016 at 8:25 AM. It lasted 49 mins long.

Your objective in conducting the interview: Our objective was to get to know Sophie Richardson more. Not only did we want to see her role in U.S-Asian relations but we wanted to know her as a person. We asked a series of questions that answered who she was and what she stands for. Through the questions, we got to know more about her work with Human Rights Watch as the China Director. We learned how as a women, she plays an important role in trying to infiltrate improved human rights standards in China. She is truly and inspiring women that is now seen as a role model for all three of us.

SECTION II: LOLA

As part of the pre-interview process, we looked up as much information as we could find out Sophie Richardson. We read her biography on the Human Rights Watch page, her Twitter account, her LinkedIn, as well as videos of other interviews she has previously given. We also did research on China and The Human Rights Watch's role in China. Most of the questions we wanted to ask dealt directly with The Human Rights Watch and her role in it, because the three of us have an interest in international relations and politics. The other questions dealt with her role as a woman, because we wanted to get a better sense of her importance for the class discussion.

We also wanted the interview to be friendly and make it conversational so we wanted to ask her questions with her own life in context and opinion. For example, one of the questions asked was what she felt the elections and Trump winning president-elect meant for The Human Rights Watch.

SECTION III: LOLA

1. Did you get complete answers to your questions?

Not only did we get complete answers to questions, but Sophie also answered many of the questions we hadn't asked yet. She gave very complete and detailed answers causing us to actually decrease the amount of questions we had to ask.

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

Our interview was unstructured. We asked her a slew of questions without any real order. We wanted the interview to be conversational and wanted to make Sophie feel comfortable so we chose the questions we felt matched the moment.

3. What probing questions did you use?

One of the probing questions we asked Sophie was on her thoughts on the recent election results and what it meant for the Human Rights Watch.

4. Explain your team approach (if applicable). That is, who did what?

Each group member did their own research on Sophie Richardson and created questions of their own based on it. We later combined the questions and during the interview took turns asking our questions. For the presentation and post-interview work, we divided the work needed to be done equally amongst each other.

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

Sophie did not need to refer us to documents or references, as she was very knowledgeable in her work. She also kept the conversation light and friendly, and thus did not require us to read anything. However, we still did research on her and on China in order to be prepared.

SECTION IV: YALDA

Sophie Richardson Interview (Transcription):

Lola: [00:04:26] What about the human rights watch really attracted to you, what made you want to be apart of it.

Sophie: [00:04:35] Oh, that's a great question, I sort of became aware of human rights watch fairly early on in life. I think when I was still in college. I think it was because I got interested in China, I became interested in human rights while I was in college and my senior year, I was given the choice to either write a senior thesis or doing a similar kind of project, and because I was a part of a student group that did a lot of work on things like academic exchanges with Asia and raising awareness about various Asia issues, instead of doing the thesis, I opted to design and run a week long class about Tibet because there was nothing in the curriculum about it. I think that was probably where I first picked up a Human Rights Watch report, although then HRW was still known as Asia Watch, this was before different groups came together and became a single organization. While I was on my way a year after I graduated to Nanjing, I think that was where I first met the guy that was then the head of all of the China work who was based in Hong Kong. I think I sort of only had the most tenuous grasp of what he actually did all day but I was like I want to do that. Because he was meeting with dissidence and this was not so long from Tiananmen and people were still coming out of the country and he was interviewing them and documenting what had happened to them. So I got to know some of the people who worked for

HRW particularly when I was living in Cambodia in the mid 1990s, I met the guy who has now been my boss for the last 10 or 11 years, a guy named Brad Adams and I think throughout the course of a couple of different NGO's, well I was a part of a certain NGO when I first went to Cambodia, then I left that NGO and went to grad school and while I was in grad school, I started doing some consultancy for HRW. I think it is everything from the face that it is unbelievably interesting material. The organization's work is based on a set of standards that I believe in very deeply. I can't imagine working at an organization that didn't also do work on the U.S and I say that both as an American at this particular moment time, but also to really reinforce the idea that rights are universal, that is non-negotiable and you hold everyone on the same standard. But it is also a great place to work in that, there is huge room for creativity, there are a lot of wonderful collaboration across the organization. It is an incredible platform to speak from, the organization's name is quite a calling card and what that demands of us as staff people is that we really know what we are talking about all the time. So it's about the standards. It's about you know sort of enormous collaboration and creativity across the organization. You know on any given day I'm talking to my colleagues who work in other regional programs but also thematic traditions. You know we've got projects going about LGBT rights. We've got projects going about the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. So I'm talking to my colleagues in those two separate programs. You know and the organization's name is quite a calling card. And we have to be you know that that means that we really have to be on the ball all the time but it also means that we can get very senior levels of attention. China is an exception in that regard because the government just doesn't really engage with us at all. But you know it's a pretty remarkable platform from which to speak. So you know these things about it that are quite appealing.

Yalda: [00:01:17] So my question would go down is so in relation to the current results of the election, my question is do you think the Trump administration is going to handle human rights in what way do you think they're going to be handling it.

Sophie: [00:01:44] What is the right way of saying this. I sort of have multiple responses to that.

Sophie: [00:01:55] I woke my son up some morning after to explain to him what had happened, he cried for an hour and he said "but mom it's a woman's turn. And what's going to happen to us now". Here's what I said at a gathering in sort of China hands in D.C. yesterday which is that it is damn hard to advocate for human rights when you are credibly alleged to have violated them yourself. When in the course of your campaign that you have shown it creepy enthusiasm for torture abuse of law enforcement practices, intrusive surveillance, grotesque discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities and women. I could keep going.

Sophie: [00:02:44] You know even if we find ourselves in a situation of sort of benign neglect of the government agencies that we rely on primarily the State Department you know it's going to be very easy for the Chinese government which is sort of eternally on the lookout for hypocrisy coming from the U.S. as a reason to just dismiss criticisms. You know they've got more material to work with then they'll know what to do for the next four years. You know and then there's a distinct possibility that you know I sort of have these horrific nightmares about Trump and Xi Jinping comparing notes on you know. So how did you go about designing your registry of Muslims? Which form of torture do you prefer, waterboarding or electric shocks? Right it means we have you know we have just a massive hole in you know the international architecture for human rights defenses. And let me be very clear. There was plenty the Obama administration got wrong there was plenty. Every U.S. administration got wrong. You know I could rattle off my complaints about the Norwegians if you like but this is an entirely separate matter. I mean one of Trump's only comments during the campaign about human rights was to say he's one of the debates I think and he said something like "well who were we to talk about human rights". But it wasn't in sort of that thoughtful self-reflective way of saying we need to get our own house in order. He was essentially saying Screw it. This is not a priority for us. And you know I think it's going to be an enormous challenge for organizations like ours if the U.S. either just sort of vacates the field or happily engages in committing abuses itself. So there's a nice cheerful answer

for you. For me you know the idea that somebody who bragged about sexually assaulting somebody is now at the helm of government. It's just astonishing

Yalda: [00:04:57] The thing that came out I generally thought that OK this is going to impact the elections in a negative way. But I saw a statistic where 97 percent of people who were devoted to him said that, that video didn't really matter and didn't really persuade their opinion in any way which was unfathomable for me. It just shows like how devoted if people are actually to them and.

Sophie: [00:05:21] I saw a woman the other day wearing a t shirt that said something like Mr. Trump you can grab me wherever and whenever you want.

Sophie: [00:05:35] So my son is in sixth grade and he was supposed to have been doing a project with his class about the elections. It's a great project. I would have loved doing this when I was his age. You know they actually had to understand what the candidates' platforms were on the different issues. To watch the debates all these sorts of things and for the Access Hollywood video came out, the school canceled the project, which I thought was a stupid thing to do. And he of course wanted to know why and he'd heard about the video. You know he's 11 and in 5th grade. They talk to each other. They watch TV. They hear these things, right? And you know my husband and I were debating about how to handle this because parents are given some curveballs like this.

Sophie: [00:06:24] And so it was later in the week I think that the first lady gave a marvelous speech at the University of New Hampshire. And so we decided to do was have him watch both. So we watched them together and talked about what is good about one and what was really wrong with the other, partly because you want to leave people with a sense of what you know responsible thoughtful public discussions on these kinds of subjects ought to be. And all I can say is Michelle and 2020 please.

Sophie [00:07:00] She's the first lady I would march in her army any day. Anyway we've digressed.

Kofi: [00:07:08] So working with the Human Rights Watch, I'm sure like you experience a lot of a wide variety of things. And so I'm wondering like how do you balance your regular life in the job in the HRW.

Sophie: [00:07:20] It's just a big mess. Kofi, I'm not going to lie to you. Well there are a couple of different things that make it all possible. First of all it is that you know I have a gorgeous marvelous smart supportive partner who cares about all the same things I do. So it's without which it would not be possible. And while my son hates it when I'm away he also you know I mean it's different now than when he was really little because he sort of understands what the point is that he sort of OK with that plus it means he gets to eat a lot of pizza. But I also think different divisions at HRW function in somewhat different ways. The HRW division is the largest. Now at least with the regional division, there are about 35 of us all up and we are flung all across the globe. And you know my boss is a wise creature in that you know he believes very firmly that you know we need to we ask people who work really hard. We need to do our best to accommodate the rest of their lives. And so we are very flexible about where people work from about what hours they're working about travel about vacation and stuff like that. You know he doesn't care where I'm standing so long as I'm getting done what I need to do. And I think that flexibility makes it possible for us to retain really good people who know that sometimes they're just going to be madly madly busy at various points. You know my own personal pathology is to I tend to get up incredibly early in the morning I'm usually up and working by about 4:00 4:30 because that lets me log a couple of hours before going to the gym, which is essential for my sanity and then sort of getting the rest of the house up and moving. But it also means that if I need or want to punch out sort of mid-afternoon to have that time and just with my son and to kind of protect evenings as family time, that's the best way to do it. A good chunk of my job involves editing and that's the kind of work that you really just want to do when it's completely quiet. The phone is ringing. But the other advantage to getting up quite early is that many of the people I

supervised are sitting 12 or 13 hours ahead of me in Asia by virtue of my being up really early. It means that they and I can have a couple of sort of normal business hours for them to overlap so that they can go have a nice normal evening with their families and their kids. You know I'm not going to lie to you there's a lot of juggling. But you know HRW I think is flexible enough to help make that work for people. And you know the piece in a way that's hardest for me as traveling just because when I'm gone I'm really really gone. And I don't want to have to travel unless it's really necessary. But there you have it. Everything else is kind of manageable and I really don't want to talk to anybody. I'm not married to her or related to you after about eight o'clock.

Lola : [00:10:43] So to take this on a more political tangent.

Sophie: [00:10:47] Sure.

Lola: [00:10:48] Many activists and human rights defenders have been persecuted by the Chinese government for fighting for the things that they believe in. So as a fellow activist, have you experienced any hardships? And if so, how do you try to overcome these obstacles in order to do your job.

Sophie: [00:11:04] Oh God. Relative to them I have no problems, not a one. You know I've worked with people who have you know I was sitting in a room yesterday with people who have you know survived horrific torture then separated from their families. One activist I work with a lot we adore was actually born in prison. His mother was considered a counter-revolutionary and was detained in the early 70s and he was actually born in jail, which he loves to joke about. He has a well-developed sense of humor. You know one has moments when it's overwhelming to stop and contemplate what's happened to people. And I am constantly in awe of people who manage to get up and put one foot in front of the other and become very effective advocates. I've had the tremendous pleasure in the last year or so to get acquainted with a lovely young woman who is about the same age as you guys and Angela Guei whose father is the last of the five Hong Kong booksellers who's being detained in the mainland. And she's actually from Sweden but is going to university in the UK. And you know this is somebody for you know for nothing in life had prepared her for the experience of her dad being disappeared. He's the one who was taken from his condo in Thailand and taken back to the mainland. You know and yet she is this unbelievably you know like you guys she's this unbelievably articulate smart thoughtful poised person who has very quickly become an incredibly effective advocate for her dad's case. I mean doing everything from briefing governments to pulling together Websites and writing letters. You know working with her members of Parliament to make sure they are asked questions. All these sorts of things. But she's also 22 you know and she has a pretty complicated family situation even beyond her dad's case. And I've end up spending a lot of time just talking to her. And I think almost as kind of how you get your aunt or uncle or a professor you really close to or you know to just navigate the incredible anxieties and the emotional hardship of having a family member who is detained somewhere on the other side of the earth and knowing that there may not be much you could do about it. I'm also part of an effort internally within HRW is that for us to do a better job of looking after one another in terms of our mental health and our ability to be resilient and withstand stress. You know I also you know I have colleagues who work in other parts of Asia in Pakistan or in parts of Thailand for example where there are active conflicts and I'm mostly spending my days you know in very civilized settings relatively speaking and they're dealing with you know people in horrifically wounded or in combat or. You know. Civilians who've been targeted. We're getting better at learning how to look after one another or look after ourselves. I think we're not quite where we ought to be. Anyways that's sort of a perhaps a more philosophical answer to that question. But I think gives you some sense of what we wind up dealing with on a daily basis.

Yalda: [00:14:48] So my question is where do you see Human Rights Watch the rights as the China director in 20 years. Where would you like to see it going?

Sophie: [00:14:55] Well I'd love to put ourselves out of business. It would be nice to become an irrelevance. Sadly I don't think that's going to be the case especially given the direction of

political travel in China which is if anything increasing our collective workload not decreasing it. And you know what I would love 20 years from now is to be working more and more directly with groups inside the mainland because you know the one I think one of the real human rights success stories to the extent there is one over the last 10 or 15 years in China is the rise of domestic civil society and its efforts particularly on human rights issues. They're taking it in the neck right now in terms of NGO's is being shut down activists being locked up and you know it's hard to see where that trend goes. But the impulse and the community are there and it's a question of whether we can in a longer term really work with them. I'm perpetually envious of our colleagues in places like India for example who can work much more directly and openly with domestic organizations. That's where I would love for us to be I could be horribly wrong and the situation could be much more restrictive. Much depends on what Xi Jinping decides to do for the next couple of years and then who he hands off to, if in fact he does.

Kofi: [00:16:26] All right. So my question to you is what are some of the accomplishments you received through the Human Rights Watch that you were especially proud of and have been most impactful?

Sophie: [00:16:58] I mean look there's nothing like meeting somebody you helped get out of jail and get out of the country. That's a pretty mind-boggling experience. When I was still working Asia-wide was a very well known Vietnamese activist whose case we've worked with for years and years and I think this is maybe just before Obama's first visit to Vietnam and the Vietnamese finally decided to release her. And she came to the U.S. partly because her daughter, both of her kids had settled someplace in California and they had come to see us periodically. And so when this activist was freed and came to see us in D.C, she showed up and you know we had a lovely conversation and she had been out of Vietnam at that point for probably about a month or six weeks you know and so she had started to you know see doctors and get therapy. Was eating better. You know and going through these initial steps of rehabilitation. But she was still very careful in how she spoke to us and so it was a very it was a very emotional conversation but it was so very formal and at the very end of this evening she pulled out a picture that had been taken easily five or six years earlier of me and her daughter, that the daughter had managed somehow to get to her when she was in prison in Vietnam and she said I've been keeping this all this time and thinking about what it would be like to actually come and meet you and you're sitting there thinking, You're excited about meeting you? It's rather the other way around. But you know I think we've made a little bit of a dent in you know some of the worst aspects to certain kinds of laws or regulations in China and or at least driven the government to recommit rhetorically to things like you know some of the obligations under the criminal procedure law that in principle should allow evidence obtained through torture to be churn out of court. You know there are some minor game. And I think we can say that we were a part of them. And you know it is good to see the machinery respond. One of the things I try not to think about too much is what our colleagues who work in considerably freer environments are able to accomplish. You know like what kinds of relationships they can have policy makers and what can be achieved. Because if I stop and think about that too much it just makes China so depressing. Just in terms of how who able to actually have a conversation with I mean the government doesn't really engage us at all. And when you know the overwhelming majority of recommendations you're making are to a government you know that you can't get anybody to sit down and talk to you rationally about what those changes ought to be. It's frustrating.

Lola: [00:20:00] So our class is specifically about women in US-Asian relations. So my question to you is, as a woman who holds such an impactful position in the Human Rights Watch, do you feel like women can make a difference when it comes to in terms of the rights in China?

Sophie: [00:20:21] Oh absolutely. Absolutely. I think some of the most interesting activists and some of the kind of edgiest work is being done by women although you know the distinction I would make for China is not I guess that's less one about gender and more one about age. You know, I mean this is a very sort of crude generalization but you know that the activists who are

now between sort of I would say their early 20s up to about 30 are just sort of a whole different kettle of fish even from people who are just a little bit older. They have very different expectations of what the state can and should do. They literally are just wired to communicate in a completely different way. They are not especially what's the right word here. They're much less concerned about pushback from the government in a way. I don't mean to say that they're not afraid or not scared but you know they were most of them were or are post Tiananmen. So they haven't had that kind of experience and they're also they're not nearly as constrained by I think some traditional social norms and here are talking about people like the wonderful women's rights and LGBT activists who will do sort of mock gay weddings in the middle of cities or sort of performance arty visible protesty type stuff you know where sort of the next older generation is pretty focused on running certain kinds of organizations and providing training and building certain kinds of capacity. But you know I think there's so much to do on women's rights in China that, that community is strong and interesting and quite devoted to making change in the long term. And I think there's some real role models and I'm just trying to imagine you know if one of the issue put that same question to some of the really well-known Chinese women activists I think some of the younger ones would say that they feel the older ones helped sort of paved the way for them. Yeah. There's people doing incredible work on everything from, issues that have nothing to do with gender rights per se. All the way through to you know things like the one child policy or access to hygiene. Or things like incredibly Neanderthal kinds of legal discrimination about things like property rights.

Yalda: [00:23:27] So you have mentioned that you do believe in universal values. Do you think that there can be universal human rights that can be achieved universally and if so, what are some of the things countries can try to solidify human rights in their country?

Sophie: [00:23:50] I think that often people some people who deliberately misunderstand the culture universality to mean that we should all somehow magically come the same and that laws and policies have to be the same everywhere. You know that's not the case. And there are difficult and complicated questions about whether for example Sharia law can be compatible with international human rights standards or not. And that's a big and messy discussion. And you know and often when it comes right down to it what you're talking about or what respect for universal human rights requires is changing certain cultural practices. You know we certainly see that in the debate around things like female genital mutilation. You know some people will say well it's our cultural right to do that. And then there is a discussion about which rights take priority. And I think international law has sort of evolved in that respect to say, first and foremost is you know the right to health and bodily autonomy and asserting an individual preference because cultural rights have so often been asserted as a way of denying individual rights. But I think in the work that I do, that subject largely comes up around for example the Chinese government saying, everything from in China society values group over the individual or you know or as the government has said much more aggressively in the last year or so. We don't believe in universal human rights, we believe in the human rights with Chinese characteristics. You know which is of course a euphemism for whatever that CCP wants, which has nothing to do with Chinese characteristics. And it comes up around whether we as an organization are holding primarily western countries to the same standards which I think we do a reasonably good job of. I think sometimes we get a little bit lost in the weeds on that as we are at the moment a little bit about Trump. But there just shouldn't be a difference between you know the expectations of human rights for you know a kid born in China and a kid born in the United States. You're entitled to the same thing regardless of where on the planet you happen to be standing or where you happen to be born in or what faith you're a part of or what culture are you know that should not be negotiable.

Kofi: [00:27:01] So in your opinion what are some of the biggest challenges that Human Rights Watch encounters in China today?

Sophie: [00:27:09] Well it's actually about the Chinese Communist Party using incredible hostility towards human rights or even the idea of transferring any significant power out of the party and into institutions like you know the media or the judiciary that could help prevent certain kinds of abuses or provide redress for certain kinds of abuses. I think the party is so terrified of losing power that it is unwilling to share it in anyway. It's the subject of an enormous debate amongst China watchers about why the Chinese Communist Party remains this paranoid at a time when it's never had so much power and faces so little organized threat. It's like the guys couldn't lighten up a little bit of argument. But I think it's a set of political beliefs and practices that are so committed to dogmatically insisting that everybody believe the same thing and behave the same way and that any behavior that deviates from that is considered abnormal or problematic. Until there is some alternatives governing force it's hard to imagine the human rights situation changes considerably. The areas where we see some progress or at least some tolerance of activism and engagement around for example the environment or things like product safety because people are tired of buying tainted baby milk formula. Even on those where you see a slightly better response from state. It's not a systemic response. I mean you don't see change being made in a way that's going to last for more than a year or two and on serious issues and you wonder at what point certain parts of the population aren't sufficiently annoyed by that, that there's more of a public response than it's not it's not a regime that really knows how to even deal with that kind of reaction from the public other than sort of co-opting people in the immediate circumstances. Paying off protesters for example or just knocking heads. And again you know whatever reformers may have been floating around Xi Jinping at the beginning of his time seemed to have been pretty successfully sidelined. And it's unnerving to see for example the guy who was the party secretary in Tibet. Up until about six months ago has now been over to Shengcheng where he's already replicating some pretty nasty policies and he is tipped to join the Politburo next year. And that really doesn't bode well I think for the longer term.

Lola: [00:30:24] What effect has the Human Rights Watch had on yourself and your outlook on life?

Sophie: [00:30:32] Holy cow.

Lola: [00:30:34] Sorry. That's a loaded question.

Sophie: [00:30:37] It's just a big one, maybe the way to answer that is just to say I have a lot of trouble imagining working anyplace else from which sometimes makes me nervous. What's the right way of saying this. We lose a lot we don't win very much or at least my particular crew doesn't win very much. But I think we all believed very very deeply that we have an obligation to try and to be able to work at an organization where it's all about fighting the best fight you possibly can. And I think being with kindred spirits is an honor. Maybe that's the best way to answer that.

Yalda, Lola, Kofi: [00:31:39] Thank you.

Yalda: [00:31:46] Is there certain human rights issue that you would like to solve the most in China?

Sophie: [00:31:50] Wow. Boy, let me think about that for a second. Just because the list is so long then. In so long, there are some that are more and less realistic. Wow. All right. Well if I can have a couple. Well let's go with number one is literally removing and this is sort of in the realm of vaguely possible. Number one I think would be removing all of the discriminatory policies and practices that apply to ethnic minorities. And I choose that partly because I think we see globally a very alarming trend towards the discrimination of groups of Chinese government uses that to further strengthen its own position. But you know while it's not an enormous number of people all up I think positive steps to end discrimination wind up having transformative effects in other ways and doing that requires changing laws. It requires rolling back certain kinds of policies. It requires fighting you know previously marginalized voices into certain kinds of discussions. I think it's also frankly in China's national security interests to radically overhaul its policies in Shengcheng. I think it is doing such a thorough job of systematically alienating that population at

a time when you know the potential consequences are not small is a really stupid thing to do. You know the first time I became aware of any sort of ISIS commentary about China I just like oh my god, you know you have you have created exactly what you said you didn't want. And so I think that's incredibly important. I think rolling back all the restrictions on civil society you know and the use of these just ludicrous charges about disturbing public order or you know that are just ridiculous. I think it can easily be demonstrated that independent civil society groups are not only you know not a threat to the country but are essential to solving certain kinds of fairly pressing issues. Normalize the idea of activism on political issues outside the government. I think there are obvious gains there where the government is for society at large. What would number three be? All right if you're trying to think of transformative ones let's go with a credible transparent public re-examination of Tiananmen. You know that is just the open wound that won't heal. And that to provide some accountability for that to answer the question that's a family member to honestly state however completely disingenuous it may be but for the state to explain it's case public and to allow for some visibility into a very high level government thinking would also have a pretty significant effect. You know people want to know why the government does what it is and you know that's where the Open Government Initiative came from you know on paper. That's a very weak tool. So I think to really open up about one of the most sensitive issues of the last 25 years or more would be a pretty bold step, so I will go with those three.

Yalda, Lola, Kofi: [00:36:56] Thank you.

Kofi: [00:36:57] So my question is, are there any defining moments or challenges you encountered throughout your career that could have changed your career path.

Sophie: [00:37:09] Well if Human Rights Watch never given me a job or if I never met Brad (Her Husband). Yes and no. There are ways in which academia was tempting for kind of the relative calm and stability of it. But I honestly think I wouldn't have lasted long. There are certainly days when each of us thinks oh god this is just never going to get any better. Let's go do something else for a living. And then you're embarrassed to have thought that when you look around you and see what people are dealing with they don't really get a choice to give it up and you sort of snap out of it. It gets maybe the better way to answer that is to say that there have been a couple of just unbelievably surreal moments along the way. You know I attended on HRW's behalf, the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize ceremony for Liu Xiaobo. You know which is I mean it's a deeply weird thing to have a party for somebody who is in prison. It's sort of a kind of a multi day thing. There is the awards ceremony dinner and there's a concert and there's sort of all this stuff going on and it's pretty mind-boggling. You know I attended the state dinner with Xi Jinping at the White House last September you know and stood there in the receiving line with Obama and Xi. I spoke to them later that night and told them they're both doing a shitty job. You know I think I mean there are moments that are sort of strange in the sense that they provide you know as was the case and Oslo, for of this powerful sense of solidarity a kind of global recognition of your cause and then there are these moments that are very sort of these very high octane, glossy, political affairs in which you really feel like you're kind of getting used. And so you know the pressure is on to make it clear to the people who matter in that room, that you're going to argue your case regardless of whether you're sitting in a congressional hearing or wearing three inch heels and standing next the first lady. Then the next day, that morning you've been standing in a room full of Chinese activists. You know a protest outside the White House.

Yalda, Lola, Kofi: [00:40:10] That is all our questions, thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to speak to us, we really appreciate it.

Sophie: [00:40:25] It was no problem at all.

SECTION V: KOFI

In the interview there were a lot of different things that we found valuable both regarding information connected to our class, about women in US-Asian relations, as well as Sophie's personal opinions and thoughts. In relation to the class and US-Asian relations she showed us how relevant she had been in working with China and the government, and even though the process is slow. She certainly has made progress and created a better situation for many people. One of her personal messages she shared with us was her belief in the importance of taking a gap year or some time off after school. She explained how important she thinks it is to disregard the pressure towards just getting any education or any job because there is a social pressure to do so, and rather take some time off to figure out what you really want to do. Because this is a choice about what you want to do in life and it is not something you can change with ease at any given time. This message really stuck with us, since this is something we all have been considering for a while, which we all are doing now. In addition to this we found it very meaningful that she used references to where we are from and also being very genuinely curious about us as individuals. She complimented us a lot and was very open and positive which created a great interviewing environment. After the interviews we all were really excited and happy, and it is safe to say we all regard her as a role model for everything she is doing and has done.

In our honest opinion there was nothing that struck us to not be useful. First, looking at the fact that we had the chance to have an interview like this we regarded as a great experience in itself. As a student it is a valuable experience to interview and pick the brain of someone working in an area you are interested in so you can find out if this really is something you wish to pursue in life. Second, she inspired us with her persona, the things she has done, and opened our eyes up to some ideas we might not have thought of without this interview.

The interview gave us a lot of information because of our choice of making it unstructured and putting an emphasis on open ended questions. We wanted to create a candid atmosphere of conversation where she could express herself freely so we could get as much information as possible. Looking at the result we were definitely successful in this aspect of the interview, and got more information than we were expecting and that our questions demanded. However, it would be interesting to have gotten to know a little more about her experiences in the field.

Kofi:

There were many good in class presentations and with that we were able to see many interesting interviewees. In particular I believe it was important that we were able to see all the different images and stories each of the interviewees represented and interpreted, as well as how they all impacted US-Asian relations and the students that interviewed them. I really enjoyed the variety of the different women and how their impacts and interactions were very varied on the spectrum of US-Asian relations. **Mailyn Morin Slater** was interviewed by her granddaughter which I found really fascinating. It gave her story a personal touch and made it easier to relate to. Her personal experiences through her many journeys really reflected the importance of travelling and experiencing different cultures. It was interesting to hear how different her experiences in Japan was from her experiences in Afghanistan. In particular I found the importance of knowing a language before you go somewhere very relevant and interesting, as she had learnt Japanese before travelling to Kyoto which helped her in getting better relationships. As we have learnt through many instances in class where missionaries as well as other colonizing agents have trouble with the language barriers which in many cases complicates these complex relationships. I believe it is important to identify and understand the different barriers in order to be able to create the best circumstances for work and relationship building. In my opinion this is certainly relevant and important to learn in US-Asian relations as well as other relations. With **Jane Larson** I found it interesting how she had come so far without any higher education. It was inspiring to see how impactful her family had been on her journey and how she used these traits to create her path and

do what she believed in. Her way of documenting Chinese history and sharing it is in my opinion very effective and relevant. It is important that people dedicate themselves to their culture and take the time to document history before it disappears with the winds of time. The presentation about **Jumaina Siddiqui** I found particularly intriguing because of the way she utilized her background to moderate between the muslim and the “western” culture. This is an important area in which people know and understand both sides and have sufficient knowledge to teach other people. It is also important to travel to different places to create and encourage political involvement. Especially with her experience of the “western” world and how equality and democracy often times have come significantly further than in developing nations which she visited. Using her multiculturalism and understanding of the importance of equality, she empowered other people through showing them what she had experienced on her journey. As we spoke about and learnt in class that women often are subject to the patriarchy and the fundamental male dominant cultures that rule many nations in Asia. Women are seen as the caretakers and responsible for the business of the home. It was interesting to see how she worked on breaking the glass, and how she can use this to encourage and empower particularly women in developing nations. With the presentation on **Hodei Sultan** I really enjoyed hearing her inspiring story, and how she transitioned from a refugee and gained a position where she now is able to train and empower women in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was interesting to see how she was separated from her culture when she came to the United States, but later reunited with her identity after the occurrence of 9/11. I also found it interesting that she was so passionate about peacebuilding and conflict resolution, because this is something I am greatly passionate about as well. She seemed very intelligent in her methods, in particular I noticed the fact that she works on creating conversation in the unstable areas of Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq, which I believe is essential in bettering the conflict situations, not only in that region, but in other regions around the world as well. I really enjoyed the experience of the interview, it was very valuable in my opinion. I felt all the class presentations reflected this value, and it was easy to see that our fellow peers also enjoyed the process and the project. I also found that throughout the presentations many of us had chosen the same format with an unstructured interview and several open ended questions in order to create a more flowing conversation and room for more information gathering, which I noticed was very successful for us as well as for other groups. The biggest message that I left with was the importance of taking the time to learn a language in order to open doors and breach cultural barriers. I firmly believe that the native people of a place will certainly respect and acknowledge you more if you have taken the time to acquire the knowledge of their culture and language. It reflects openness and interest for another culture than your own, and perhaps this is what is needed to create better dialogue between nations and people around the world.

Yalda:

All of the in-class presentations on the various impeccable women in U.S- Asian roles were very interesting. It was inspiring to see all the strong female occupations these women had. The first women that stood out to me was **Hodei Sultan**. She was relatable to me because she was from Afghanistan, like myself. I am very interested in learning more about U.S- Afghanistan relations and she does work in this field. As mentioned in class, she currently coordinates and provides oversight in the development and planning, financial management, and gender programming outreach for the Afghanistan and Pakistan program. Her goals and missions are something that I would very much like to pursue in the future and that is to educate, empower and train women from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Due to the many years of conflict in Afghanistan, a lot of Afghan women do not have a voice and I think it is extremely encouraging that she tries to create opportunities for their voice to be heard. The second women that I liked was **Jumaina Siddique**. She is a program officer for South Asia at the U.S institute of Peace. The reason why she sparked an interest for me was because of her strong U.S-Asian relations role. She worked on programs that focused on political party development, election observation and increasing the participation

of the young and women in the political process. The fact that she has tried to reform these situations in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan takes a lot of guts. I say this because those countries in particular have had a long history of men and women being treated very differently, so I think it is great that she is trying to break the glass ceiling. I think she is a great example of bridging the gap also. All of the women were great but these two women really stood out to me.

Lola:

While I found all of the women to be influential in their own ways, I did have some favorites. I believe that Alice Young was one woman who really stood out. As a lawyer, I found her interesting because I am interested in going to law school. Alice Young is particularly important for US-Asian relations as she works hard to represent Asian Americans and works to make sure their voices are heard. She represents a link between the two cultures and as a lawyer, she has a platform in which she can directly help other people. I also found her inspiring as she promoted women to take part in government and politics. As a political science major, I think it is important for everyone to be able to understand how their governments work and to be able to take part in it. As an Asian American woman, I feel she is a perfect role model for the class. I also felt that as a woman, she is very inspiring for all that she has accomplished.