1. Personal Information

Applicant’s name: Yuting Yin

Degree sought: MA

Field of study/major/minor/concentration: Medical Anthropology

Expected date of graduation: May 2015

Faculty advisor(s) (who have served as your mentor or mentors for this proposal): Dr. Elanah Uretsky, Dr. Neely Myers, Dr. Richard Grinker, Dr. Barbara Miller, Dr. Sarah Wagner

2. Title of the Project and Abstract

Project Title: Inside a Hidden Disorder: Illness Narratives about Eating Disorders in Mainland China

Abstract of the Project (provide a summary description of the project’s goals, location, methods, and relevance to anthropology) [80 word maximum]:

This project aims at eliciting and learning from the lived experiences of people with eating disorders in Mainland China by collecting their illness narratives. The focus of this study is to examine the possible barriers to mental health care and social support based on patients’ subjective experiences. By contextualizing patients’ illness narratives, I will explore the meaning behind their social suffering to generate an anthropological reflection on available treatment methods, etiological explanations and support systems in contemporary China. (78 words)

3. Language Skills

Does the proposed project involve the use of a “field language”? Yes

If yes, state what the language is and your degree of fluency in speaking, reading, and writing it: Native speaker

4. Description of the Project (describe your overall research goals, what the project is generally about, and where you will conduct the research and why) [250 word maximum]:

Recent years have witnessed a rapid social transformation in China. The country’s rising economic power has brought unprecedented material wealth to some Chinese people, along with a “mental health” burden that is barely conceptualized in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). In
TCM, the concept of “mental illness” is absent because epistemologically, there is no mind-body dualism. The country’s first mental health law was passed in May 2013, sparking media interest and drawing attention within the general population. In this emerging social context, eating disorders is one problem that requires a better understanding. Hong Kong psychiatrist and anthropologist Sing Lee (2011: 187) has noted that the increasingly popular notion of “working out” the individual body and the emergence of fitness clubs in urban Chinese cities have brought an increase in eating disorders among young Chinese women. Yet, this phenomenon is still understudied by anthropologists.

My project aims at understanding the subjective experience of eating disorders in Mainland China through people’s illness narratives. It will take place in Peking University Sixth Hospital (Institute of Mental Health). As one of the leading mental health institute in China, the hospital runs the country’s only specialized eating disorders treatment program. Based on my previous interviews with people diagnosed with eating disorders in China, one focus of analysis in this study will be exploring the factors that have motivated or prevented them from seeking help, and how could we, as family, friends and mental health professionals improve social support for this population. (246 words)

5. Significance of the Project to Anthropology (in this literature review describe how the proposed research relates to other anthropological research on the topic, and/or region as relevant; use American Anthropological Association style for works cited--no footnotes) [500 word maximum]:

My research will contribute to the existing literatures on eating disorders around the globe by adding the data from Mainland China. By investigating the lived experiences of people diagnosed with eating disorders, we can understand more fully the ways biomedical knowledge about eating disorders and the Western media are changing Chinese notions of body image, power, gender, and agency in post-socialist Chinese society.

Eating Disorder Around the Globe

Eating disorders, which used to be considered as a culture-bound syndrome that is generated and sustained by Western cultural values, are a growing problem in Asian countries including Mainland China. Anthropologists have explored the complexity of eating disorders on a global level. By considering the social context of this illness both in Western and non-Western societies, anthropologists have compiled a complicated picture of eating disorders in various cultures (Anderson-Fye 2004; Becker 1995,2004; Grange et al. 2004; Gremillion2003; Lee 1995, 1996, 2001; Lester 1995,1997,2000,2004,2007; Pike & Borovoy 2004; Warin 2010).

These literatures emphasize different dimensions of eating disorders. Yet, the majority of studies involve either an acculturation model (e.g., Becker 2004) or a gender model (e.g., Gremillion 2003). An acculturation model is one that takes the rise of eating disorders around the globe as a consequence of acculturation dominated by the West. A feminist model often takes eating disorders as a manifestation of body politics that involves gender inequality. This kind of explanation, though, might be true to some extent, risks the danger of totalizing the rise of eating disorders around the globe as a consequence of Westernization or gender inequality if they do not address other complexities. Lester (2004) has pointed out the problematic underlying assumption behind the popular mode of acculturation, i.e., only Western culture “travels,” while other cultures remain passively stable. To avoid similar essentialism and understand the complexity of eating disorders in a specific local context, my project is designed to access
patients’ subjectivity and the socio-historical context of their sufferings in order to address the interplay of power, structure and agency.

**Anthropology of China**

My project will also draw heavily on literatures on the anthropology of China. Literatures on mental health issues in China have shed light on both sociocultural and economic or political aspects of mental health (Guo 2011; Kleinman1986; Lee 2011; Wu 2011; Phillips 2013). My project will dialogue with this body of literatures by discussing problems, including: “somatization” as an illness expression among Chinese people (Kleinman 1986), mental illness stigma (Guo 2011) and cultural and structural barriers to access mental health care (Lee 2011). In addition, more general anthropological works on Chinese contemporary society will help me to interpret patients’ illness narratives. For example, Yan (2012)’s work on individualization in contemporary Chinese society inspires me to reflect on the relationship between individualization and mental health issues; Li Zhang (2013)’s ongoing research on psychological counseling as a middle-class relish and a state project of cultivating the “self” will be of great help for me to understand barriers to mental health care in China. (497 words)

6. Methods (clearly outline or list your research questions; describe the data you will collect and how you will collect it; discuss your analytical methods; and show how the data will address the research questions) [300 word maximum]:

**Interview**

In this project, I will interview 30 people who have experienced eating disorders adapting the McGill Illness Narrative Interview (MINI). Narratives play a central role in medical anthropology as they illuminate the personal experience of suffering. Sufferings, although experienced on an individual level, are also “social sufferings” because they are derived from structural inequality, injustice and violence beyond an individual’s control (Kleinman et al., 1997). While illness narratives cannot convey the full lived experience considering its “first personal givenness” (Zahavi 2003), narratives are often constructed by subjects and anthropologists to reconstruct lived experiences and create meaning in an inter-subjective relation. Narratives are one of the crucial ways for us to understand the experience of others.

My interpretation of the narratives will focus on Chinese people’s help seeking behavior. The following questions will be specifically addressed:

1) What are the help-seeking patterns among Chinese people who are experiencing eating disorders?
2) If passive help-seeking model among Chinese people as is stated in the literatures (e.g., Cheung1981) can be supported by my data, what are the possible explanations for it?
3) How do stigma, cultural beliefs, or practical structural barriers, such as a scarcity and low quality of mental health care services affect their help seeking and illness experience?
4) What can we do, as family, friends and mental health professionals to improve the support that we could offer for people who are experiencing eating disorders in a local context?
Participant Observation

To contextualize the narratives, I will spend time observing interactions between patients and doctors in the hospital setting. Furthermore, I will spend time outside of the hospital to observe patients’ everyday life. I have already explained my methodology in the first email that I have written to the clinical section director Xueni Li. Ms. Li expressed no opposition to it. (300 words)

7. Research Ethics (describe how you will ensure that your research project is conducted in accordance with anthropology guidelines and the guidelines of your particular field within anthropology, and in the case of “Human Subjects Research,” according to the criteria of GW’s Institutional Review Board. For the former, consult the Web site of the American Anthropological Association (http://www.aaanet.org). For the latter, discuss requirements with your faculty mentor and/or with Professor Barbara Miller, the IRB rep in the Anthropology Department. Most student projects involving living humans fit in the IRB category of “excluded” meaning that IRB forms do not need to be submitted, if they follow AAA ethical guidelines in terms of informed consent and avoidance of harm to participants, do not involve medical topics and do not identify particular individuals. In some instances, IRB approval does need to be sought, usually in the “expedited” category.” Information on these categories is also available at http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human/aboutus/html) [150 words maximum]:

I have reviewed the AAA code of ethics and taken the Social & Behavioral Research training course required by Institutional Review Board at The George Washington University online. An IRB protocol has been submitted to GW Human Research Office on February 19th and has received pre-review feedback on February 28th.

Since January 2014, I have been working with Xueni Li, the clinical section director for eating disorders treatment program at Peking University Sixth Hospital to prepare research proposal, recruitment material and other documents for IRB application at Peking University Sixth Hospital. This process is ongoing.

8. Research Product (discuss how you will use and present your findings including, for example, a presentation at a professional meeting, a film, a museum exhibit, a publishable paper, a thesis) [150 words maximum]:

I will present my research product at the annual conference for Cotlow award recipients. I will submit an abstract of this research to the 56th annual conference of the American Association for Chinese Studies, which is to be held by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, The George Washington University on October 10-12, 2014. If the opportunity arises, I also plan to present my findings at the 2014 National Eating Disorders Conference to be held in San Antonio, TX on October 16-18, 2014. Furthermore, I will build my culminating project for my master’s degree based on the product of this research. I will also learn from my findings and write accessible articles on a Chinese independent blog for people who share common interest on mental health issues (http://www.jsxljk.com). In the future, this research will also be developed into a more comprehensive project on eating disorders by conducting multi-site fieldwork in China and America. (150 words)
9. **Timetable** (briefly describe the schedule of your research activities week-by-week or as appropriate):

Week 1: Arrive in Beijing and get in touch with Ms. Xueni Li, the eating disorders specialist at Peking University Sixth Hospital, solicit her suggestions for doing participant observation and recruiting patients. Get familiar with the hospital setting and their treatment program. Participate in some activities if it is possible. Introduce myself to doctors and patients. Let them know more about my research.

Week 2: Continue to learn more about patients by spending time together, joining their activities and continue participant observation.

Week 3: Begin initial interviews with two to three patients if they are willing to talk. Continue participant observation.

Week 4-9: Continue interviews with additional participants and participant observation as above.

Week 10: Conclude interview and prepare for coming back to U.S.

10. **Budget Amount and Projected Expenditures**

   **Total Amount Requested:** $1800

   **Projected Expenditures** (list the expenditure categories for your project, for example, transportation—international, domestic, local; room and board; and research supplies). Funds from a Cotlow award cannot be used for tuition, academic fees, or for purchasing equipment such as a laptop or camera [awards range from a few hundred dollars to $1800]

   Round trip airfare from DC to China: $1600
   Expenses for meals, transportation and accommodation: $200

11. **Staff** (if others are to participate in the project as researchers or research assistants, please give their name and qualifications): N/A

12. **Outside Financial Support** (list any other sources of funding for the project, either obtained or applied for, with amounts and restrictions): I have applied for Sigur Center Summer Field Research Grant. The size of the grant is up to $6,000. Those selected for the grant must submit four blog posts (two written posts and two video blog posts) throughout the course of the research as well as a fifth, more extensive blog written post upon completion of the project, giving an overview of their results, and present their findings at a roundtable discussion during the following academic year. The result of this application is now pending.

13. **References Cited/Select Bibliography** (list the sources you have cited in the proposal and/or used as background research. Use the style defined by the American Anthropological Associa-
tion [see http://aaanet.org]; list a minimum of 10 sources cited to a maximum of one page; more than 10 references are expected in proposals submitted by MA and PhD students).

Anderson-Fye, Eileen P.

Becker, Anne E.

Cheung, Fanny M.

Le Grange, Daniel, Johann Louw, Alison Breen, and Melanie A Katzman

Gremillion, Helen

Guo, Jinhua

Kleinman, Arthur

Kleinman, Arthur, Veena Das and Margaret M. Lock.

Lee, Sing


Lester, Rebecca


Phillips, Michael R.

Pike, Kathleen M., and Amy Borovoy.

Warin, Megan

Wu, Fei

Yan, Yunxian

Zahavi, Dan
2003 Phenomenology of Self *In* Kircher, Tilo and David, Anthony, eds., The self in neuroscience and psychiatry, Cambridge University Press.

Zhang, Li
2013 The Rise of Therapeutic Governing in Postsocialist China, paper presented at The 112th American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting

14. Permits (demonstrate that you have, or are seeking, any necessary permits such as a research permit, a research visa, an antiquities permit, letter of welcome from an institution, etc. Attach copies to this proposal).

I am holding a F-1 student visa to study in U.S. I will renew my visa for coming back to U.S. during my summer in China.

I am welcomed by Ms. Xueni Li, clinical section director of eating disorders treatment program and Ms. Yueqin Huang, director of the Division of Social Psychiatry and Behavioral Medicine at Peking University Sixth Hospital to conduct my research at their hospital during summer. I am now working with Ms. Xueni Li to prepare research proposal for IRB review at their hospital in order to get the final permission to conduct research.