Cotlow Award Application 2011

Department of Anthropology
The George Washington University

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1. Personal Information

Applicant’s name: Rebecca Shelkan Remis

Degree sought: B.A. International Affairs

Field of study/major/minor/concentration: International Affairs major with self-created concentration: International Food Security, Culture, and Sustainability and minor in sociocultural anthropology

Expected date of graduation: May 2012

Faculty advisor(s) (who have served as your mentor or mentors for this proposal): Dr. Barbara Miller, Dr. Robert Shepherd

2. 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: Intermediate proficiency in Mandarin Chinese. I previously conducted an anthropological research project in Yunnan, China using my language skills. This project focused on farming movements of rubber tree production whereupon I lived with rural families conducting interviews and conversations exclusively in Mandarin.

3. Title of the Project and Abstract

Project Title: The Chinese Experience in the Organic Movement: A Case Study of Little Donkey Farm

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

This project will explore the origins of the Chinese experience in the grassroots organic movement. I will conduct ethnographic research with Little Donkey Farm, located outside Beijing, in order to discern the various actors in this emerging movement. Using participant observation, interviews, and surveys I will focus on their Community Supported Agriculture model to study members’ involvements, motivations, and hopes for the movement’s future. This project will contribute to the growing body of research on sustainable movements within China.

Word Count: 79

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]:

...
This project focuses on China’s burgeoning organic food movement comprised of producers, consumers, farmers, and members. According to Paull (2008), from 2000 to 2006, China moved from forty-fifth to second in number of organically managed hectares, comprising 11 percent of the world’s organic land. In order to understand this massive transition from the grassroots level, I will conduct research with Beijing’s Little Donkey Farm.

Through participant observation, interviews, and surveys, I will collect information on producers’ and consumers’ involvement in the movement and its significance to them. These tools will illuminate the reasons behind this growing movement and how it relates to the Chinese experience.

This research will contribute to the limited amount of information on the Chinese grassroots organic movement. To date, much research on China’s experience with organics pertains exclusively to the state and does not delve into the experiences of individuals.

China is an interesting place in which to observe the organic movement due to its agricultural legacy wrought with controversy, hardship, and perseverance. During the 1980s, the government instigated a conversion from conventional to organic farming that is oft perceived as illegitimate by both the farmer and consumer. Therefore, a grassroots organic movement has begun, situated in Eastern China with fertile land and capital to build the infrastructure. Now local farmers and entrepreneurs are taking back decision-making power and reconfiguring the organic movement, as they deem suitable. This transition of power and management is a very fruitful change worth researching.

Word Count: 244

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]:

Introduction
The proposed project contributes to the sociocultural anthropology of China’s grassroots organic movement, an oft-neglected area of anthropological investigation.


CSA in Anthropology
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a recent development; as such, many anthropologists have just begun to investigate this newer entity. A CSA is a producer-consumer relationship whereby consumers pay upfront for a season’s share of products generated by the farm and farmers can make decisions based on this capital. This symbiotic relationship between producer and consumer makes CSAs a popular mode of farm marketing.

There has been little comprehensive work conducted on the CSA sector of the organic movement. Cone and Myhre (2000) studied four CSA farms in the United States to establish attitudes on and motivations for joining. According to this study, Americans joined the CSA not only for the promise of fresh produce but also for the community. These members sought to ameliorate the weakening social ties instigated by modernity by re-embedding themselves in sustainable, communal living.
The China Experience

Historically, traditional farming methods were ecologically conscious but the increasing role of the state in agricultural affairs led to decreased sustainability. While during reforms, agricultural productivity was high, so too was environmental degradation (Ranst and Tang 2001). In recent years, the state established “Green Food,” a vertically integrated organic certification for domestic consumption, and a chapter of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, the internationally recognized organic standard (Zong 2000). These separate entities are overseen by different ministries and establish different requirements for domestic and international dissemination of organic foods.

China, a nation with an extensive agricultural history, has a unique relationship with local foods and environmental movements. Klein (2009) explains that Chinese tradition views no fundamental difference between nature and culture, making the organic movement a strong union of these concepts. In the United States, membership in the organic movement is predicated on sustainability and ethical consumption; however, in China, food safety is paramount. Chinese citizens still value the environment and sustainable living, but China’s precarious food standards drive citizens to organics through different means (Thiers 2002).

Conclusion

The global organic movement is steadily growing in scope and membership. To date, little research has been done on the social components of this emerging movement and even less in the nation of China. In light of the paucity of data on China’s unique position in the organic movement, my proposed research would initiate a discussion on the motivations for Chinese citizens to join organic movements.

Word Count: 497

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]:

My research question seeks to investigate the reasons behind participation in China’s grassroots organic movement. In order to answer this question, I must understand the local actors and their motivations for membership.

Participation Observation: In order to address the research question, I will be affiliated with Little Donkey Farm, located northwest of Beijing. While working with Little Donkey Farm I will live communally with volunteers, work with Chinese farmhands and participate in CSA drop offs. Each of these interactions provides immense opportunity for research.

Study of Members: During my fieldwork, I will conduct structured interviews to learn how each actor in the organic movement (farmers, workers, consumers) first became involved, their perceptions of China’s organic movement and its potential for growth. This will also enable me to understand the organizational structure of the emergent organic movement.

In-depth Interviews: After establishing rapport, I will identify the main actors within this specific farm network. The interviews will be conducted on or around Little Donkey Farm. I will seek oral informed consent from all interviewees and hope to record them to prevent mistranslations. I will focus on the motivation to join the movement and how the leaders and members view both themselves and their goals.
Surveys: I will create a survey to determine if there is a demographic or socioeconomic trend to the organic movement. I will distribute the surveys to members of Little Donkey’s CSA, volunteers, and workers. This survey will be written in Mandarin and include questions to illuminate trends in membership which will help me understand what types of people become customers/members and why.

Working in conjunction with Little Donkey Farm will help establish rapport with both farm workers and their customers, enabling me to ease into my research question.

Word Count: 290

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 word maximum]:

In accordance with the American Anthropological Association’s Code of Ethics, I will conduct my research with full disclosure to participants on the purpose and use of my research as well as to protect their anonymity. I will seek consent from Shi Yan, manager of Little Donkey Farm, to conduct aforementioned research through her organization. Before in-depth interviews, I will receive oral informed consent from participants. For surveys, I will ensure participants understand the use of their information in an ethical fashion. I will prioritize participant safety and security with pseudonyms and protection of gathered materials. For photos and voice recordings, I will abide by AAA rules of consent and obtain contact information of participants. As this project poses less than “minimal risk” to participants, it operates inside the “exempt” category of George Washington University’s Institutional Review Board.

Word Count: 137

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 findings at the 2011 Cotlow Award Conference. I will then use these findings as the basis for my senior thesis paper in the Elliott School of International Affairs in hopes of achieving honors in my department. I also hope to contribute to the scholarly community through the publishing and presenting my findings at appropriate conferences and in relevant journals. Lastly, I hope to use this experience as a foundation for further research into China’s organic social movement.

Word Count: 81

9. Timetable (briefly describe the schedule of your research activities week-by-week or as appropriate):
Please note: This research will take the form of an ethnographic study of Little Donkey Farm as a model for the Chinese grassroots organic movement. For this reason, I will spend the vast majority of my time doing fieldwork at Little Donkey Farm. This is reflected in the timetable below.

Week 1: Fly to Beijing, adjust to and establish surroundings and arrive at Little Donkey Farm

Week 2-4: Conduct research at Little Donkey Farm and its surrounding areas. Aim to pass out and collect 50 surveys. Aim to conduct 10 in-depth interviews with perceived “leaders” of organic movement and other members. Attend farm events, CSA drop offs, and work on the farm itself.

Week 5-7: Continue fieldwork at Little Donkey Farm. If necessary, conduct follow up interviews with farm members. Continue participant observation.

Week 8: Return to the United States and summarize findings

10. Budget Amount and Projected Expenditures

Roundtrip flight from New York City to Beijing, China: $1,400 Internal Travel (busses, metro, and taxis as needed): $25 Housing: $10/day for 40 days: $400 Meals: $10/day for 40 days: $400 Translator ($10/day for approximately 10 sessions): $100 Gifts for informants/refreshments during interview periods: $150 Research materials (tape recorder, notepads): $50

Total Amount Requested: $ 2,525

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 equipments such as a laptop or camera [awards range from a few hundred dollars to $1800]

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 am currently applying for the Gamow Fellowship as well as the Alice Rowan Swanson Fellowship, offered by my abroad program, the School for International Training. If accepted, these would both offset the costs of research. If rejected, I would be willing to personally finance some expenditure. Secondly, I am currently working with Little Donkey Farm to subsidize room and board. If projected budget changes, I will notify the Cotlow Advisory Committee.

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 Association [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).


Goland, Carol. "Community Supported Agriculture, Food Consumption Patterns, and Member

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).