

## Zachary M. Howlett

Yale-NUS College, Division of Social Sciences (Anthropology)  
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### PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

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Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Yale-NUS College, Singapore, 2017–present.

Academy Scholar, Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 2016–17 & 2018–19.

### EDUCATION

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#### **Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, USA**

PhD, Anthropology, August 2008–August 2016.  
MA, Anthropology, May 2011.

*Doctoral dissertation title:* “Fateful Action: Hierarchy, Transformation, and Ideals of Merit in China’s National College Entrance Examination.”

*Dissertation committee and qualifying examinations*

**P. Steven Sangren** (chair): Sociocultural anthropology, Chinese ethnology, popular religion, gender ideologies.

**Magnus Fiskesjö** (minor member): Sociocultural anthropology, historical anthropology, Chinese ethnic relations.

**TJ Hinrichs** (minor member): History of imperial China (960 to 1911 CE).

**Petrus Liu** (examiner of additional field): Modern Chinese intellectual history (nineteenth century to present).

#### **Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian Province, China**

Research Affiliate, Department of Anthropology, 2011–2013.

#### **Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany**

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) Postbaccalaureate Research Fellow, 1998–1999: Conducted sociolinguistic research on German-language address/deixis.

#### **Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA**

BA, German Studies, *magna cum laude*, 1998.

Foreign exchange: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany (one year).

### RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

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- Sociocultural anthropology.
- China and overseas Chinese.
- Education and social inequality.
- Migration and urbanization.
- Marriage and gender.

**PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS**

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- 2017 “China’s Examination Fever and the Fabrication of Fairness: ‘My Generation Was Raised on Poison Milk.’” In *Emptiness and Fullness: Ethnographies of Lack and Desire in Contemporary China*, edited by Susanne Bregnbæk and Mikkel Bunkenborg, chapter 1, pp. 15-34. *Integration and Conflict Studies*, edited by Günther Schlee, vol. 2. New York: Berghahn Books.

**Book in Progress**

*Fateful Rite of Passage: The National College Entrance Examination and the Myth of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China*. (My manuscript was workshopped by five senior scholars and an academic press acquisitions editor at a Harvard Academy author’s conference on April 7, 2017. Based on the feedback from that workshop, I finished revising my manuscript over the spring and summer of 2018 and submitted my revised manuscript to an academic press in August 2018.)

**Articles in Progress**

“Counterfeit Boyfriends and Ghost Brides: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and Delayed Marriage in Contemporary China.” (This article is a first foray into my second book project. I intend to workshop the article in several conferences and workshops in the 2018/19 academic year and submit it for publication before the summer of 2019.)

“Fateful Rite of Passage: Or, What the National College Entrance Examination in China Reveals about Merit and Meritocracy.” (I presented a short version of this paper at a Harvard Center workshop on meritocracy in Shanghai, China, on May 15-16.)

“The Battle Cry of the ‘Losers’: Perseverance, Ressentiment, and Forbidden Desires in China’s National College Entrance Exam.” (I plan to adapt this article from a section of my book manuscript that I had to cut.)

“Is Female to Male as the Humanities are to the Sciences? Cosmology, School Curriculum, and Gendered Divisions of Labor in the People’s Republic of China.” (This article also derives from material that I cut from my book manuscript.)

“‘Post-Examination Syndrome’ in Contemporary China: Anomie and Alienation in China’s ‘Lost-and-Confused’ Generation.” (A further spin-off from cut portions of my book manuscript.)

“Fateful Trials of Merit with Chinese Characteristics: Gambling, Divination, and High-Stakes Examinations.” (This article is based on data from my dissertation field research that I did not include in my book.)

**GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, AND AWARDS**

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- 2016 Hu Shih Fellowship in Chinese Studies, East Asia Program, Cornell University.
- 2015 National Academy of Education/Spencer Foundation Dissertation Fellowship Finalist.

- 2011–12 Mellon Foundation/International Institute of Education (IIE) Graduate Research Fellowship (awarded to replace the Fulbright-Hays DDRA Fellowship following 2011 Congressional budget cuts).
- 2009–14 U.S. Department of Education Jacob K. Javits Fellowship (four-year fellowship to support PhD studies).
- 2009 Lam Family Award for South China Field Research Grant, Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies, Cornell University.
- 2009 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (declined).
- 2008 Cornell University Sage Doctoral Fellowship.

## CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION AND INVITED TALKS

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### *Panels Organized*

- 2018 “The Intimate Life of the State: Demographic Transition in East Asia.” An oral presentation panel organized for the American Anthropological Association 117<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting (“Change in the Anthropological Imagination”). Sara Friedman, discussant. San Jose, USA. November 16.
- 2017 “The Politics of Truth after the Fact: Shifting States in a Post-Fact World.” A 12-member (triple-session) panel co-organized with Gerry Groot, University of Adelaide, for the AAS/ASA/ASAANZ 2017 Annual Meeting (“Shifting States”), Adelaide, Australia. December 12.

### *Invited Talks and Conference Presentations*

- 2019 “Counterfeit Boyfriends and Ghost Brides: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and Delayed Marriage in Contemporary China.” A paper to be presented on the panel “Shifting Marriage Patterns in Asia: Love, Law, and the New Middle Class,” organized by Nancy Smith-Hefner. Denver, USA. March 21–24 (exact date TBA).
- 2018 “Counterfeit Boyfriends and Ghost Brides: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and Delayed Marriage in Contemporary China.” A paper to be presented on the panel “Demographic Transition in East Asia” for the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting (“Change in the Anthropological Imagination”). San Jose, USA. November 16.
- 2018 “Counterfeit Boyfriends and Ghost Brides: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and Delayed Marriage in Contemporary China.” Yale-NUS Gender Cluster Workshop. October (TBA).
- 2018 “Counterfeit Boyfriends and Ghost Brides: Education, Rural-to-Urban Migration, and Delayed Marriage in Contemporary China.” A paper to be presented at the conference “Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage,” organized by Marcia Inhorn and Nancy Smith-Hefner for the Yale MacMillan Center, Yale University. September 27-29.
- 2018 “Fateful Rite of Passage: The National College Entrance Examination and the Myth of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China.” A paper presented for the

- Meritocracy in India and China Workshop organized by the Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute and the Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Harvard University. Harvard Center Shanghai, Shanghai, China. May 16–17.
- 2017 “Beyond Cynicism and Performance: False Confidence and State Secrecy in China’s National College Entrance Exam.” A paper presented on the panel “The Politics of Truth after the Fact: Shifting States in a Post-Fact World” for 2017 AAS/ASA/ASAANZ Annual Meeting (“Shifting States”), Adelaide, Australia. December 12.
- 2017 “Fateful rite of Passage: The National College Entrance Examination and the Ideology of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China.” Asia Fellows Seminar, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. April 24.
- 2017 “Fateful Rite of Passage: The National College Entrance Examination and the Ideology of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China.” Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies, Weatherhead Center, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. March 28.
- 2017 “Fateful Rite of Passage: The National College Entrance Examination and the Ideology of Meritocracy in Post-Mao China.” Yale-NUS College, Singapore. February 6.
- 2016 “Geographical and Contextual Variation in Attitudes toward Education Policy: The Negotiation of Front-Stage Secularism with Backstage Religiosity in Chinese Public High Schools.” A paper presented for the invited session “Theater, Performance, and Spectacle in Educational Policy Research” at the American Anthropological Association 115th Annual Meeting (“Evidence, Accident, Discovery”), Minneapolis, Minnesota. November 19.
- 2016 “Hope and Indeterminacy in Fateful Ritual: China’s National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) and Political Legitimacy.” A paper presented on the panel “The Politics of Ritualization and the Ritualization of Hope” at the 2016 Association for Asian Studies in Asia Conference (“Asia in Motion: Horizons of Hope”), Kyoto, Japan. June 26.
- 2016 “Gambling for Merit: Chinese Lottery Games as Instruments of Moral Self-Cultivation.” A paper presented at the conference “East Asia and Tomorrow’s Anthropology,” organized by the Society for East Asian Anthropology of the American Anthropological Association, Hong Kong. June 19.
- 2016 “China’s National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) as a Fateful Rite of Passage: ‘A Great Army Crossing a Narrow Plank Bridge.’” A public lecture delivered for the Cornell Contemporary China Initiative, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. February 22.
- 2015 “Legitimacy and Indeterminacy in Social Ritual: China’s National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) as a Fateful Rite of Passage.” A paper presented for “The Politics of Ritualization and the Ritualization of Politics in East Asia,” a panel organized by Andrew Kipnis and Huwy-min Lucia Liu for

the American Anthropological Association 114th Annual Meeting (“Familiar Strange”), Denver, Colorado. November 20.

### **PUBLIC TALKS AND COMMUNITY OUTREACHES**

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- 2013 “The College Entrance Examination and Chinese Meritocracy—Reality or Ideal?” Public lecture at a rural Chinese high school. Guoguang High School English Department, Meishan, Fujian Province, China. June 13.
- 2012 “*Zhong-Mei daxue jiaoyu de kuawenhua bijiao*” [A cross-cultural comparison of college education in the United States and China]. In English and Chinese. Public lecture at Zhangzhou Normal University, Zhangzhou, Fujian Province, China. February 23.
- 2011 “*Gaokao yu Zhongguo shehui de zai shengchan*” [The College Entrance Examination and social reproduction in China]. In Chinese. Presentation at the Doctoral Student Salon, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian Province, China. December 20.
- 2011 “*Cong renleixue shijiao lai kan Gaokao yanjiu*” [Anthropological perspectives on researching the Chinese College Entrance Examination]. In Chinese. Presentation at the Graduate Student Workshop, Department of Anthropology, Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian Province, China. November 18.
- 2010 “The Chinese National College Entrance Examination.” Ithaca High School Mandarin Class Speaker’s Bureau. Outreach organized by the Cornell University Einaudi Center for International Studies. Co-delivered with Weifeng Chen, a visiting scholar from China. Ithaca High School, Ithaca, New York. November 9.
- 2010 “Chinese Wedding Traditions.” Outreach organized by the Cornell Einaudi Center for International Studies. Candor Middle School, Candor, New York. February 22.

### **FIELDWORK**

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- Dec 2017 Completed three weeks of fieldwork in China. This fieldwork had two goals. First, I conducted follow-up research for my current writing projects. Second, I conducted exploratory research for my next book project on delayed marriage and demographic transition.
- 2016 Fujian Province, China. Four weeks of summer fieldwork.
- 2014 Fujian Province, China. Four weeks of follow-up dissertation research.
- 2011–13 Fujian Province, China. Two years of multi-sited fieldwork on the National College Entrance Examination (Gaokao) in a rural town, backwater prefectural capital, and large city.
- 2010 Fujian Province, China. Two months of summer fieldwork.

2009 Shanghai, China. Two months of summer fieldwork.

**ACADEMIC SERVICE**

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- 2018–19 Committee on Faculty Affairs. Elected junior faculty representative for the Social Sciences Division. Working with senior faculty to assist in revising Faculty Handbook.
- 2018 Cross-Cultural Awareness Programme. Attended full-day training with faculty and staff to improve cross-cultural communication and team trust. April 23.
- 2018 Diversity Hiring Best Practices Proposal. Co-sponsor of successful proposal to implement diversity hiring guidelines for the Division of Social Sciences by following best practices at institutions with successful track records of improving diversity in faculty hires.
- 2017–18 Yale-NUS Social Sciences Division Postdoctoral Fellowship Search Committee.
- 2017– Anthropology Major Website. Responsible for revamping and maintaining the website in collaboration with a student associate and under the supervision of the Head of Studies.
- 2017 Participated on informational lunch panel organized for CIPE for Yale-NUS undergraduates interested in going to graduate school, September 20.
- 2016 Harvard University postdoctoral fellowship information session panelist. Served on a panel discussion advising current Harvard doctoral students on application strategies for postdoctoral fellowships. September 15.
- 2015 Cornell University graduate-student orientation facilitator. Nominated to be one of 80 graduate students, faculty, and staff across the university to facilitate orientation workshops for incoming graduate students. August 24.
- 2015 Cornell University Language Resource Center. Gave a recorded interview on language-learning strategies for an online course module. February 6.
- 2014–15 Cornell University Department of Anthropology Graduate Admissions Committee, graduate-student representative.
- 2010–11 Cornell Anthropology/Feminist Gender and Sexuality Faculty Search Committee, graduate-student representative.
- 2009–10 Cornell Anthropology Graduate Student Association, vice-president.
- 2009–10 Cornell Anthropology Colloquium Committee.

***Presses for Which I Have Reviewed Book Manuscripts***

Cornell University Press

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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### ***Head of Course at Yale-NUS***

Modern Social Through (required Common Curriculum course for sophomores)

Language, Culture, Power

Anthropology of China

Anthropology of Education (Spring 2018)

### ***Capstone Theses Supervised at Yale-NUS***

2018 Lee, Mark Wenyi. “Making Play Professional: How Competitiveness Affects the Video Game Play Experience.”

2018 Zhang, Jane. “Dare to Be Different”: An Ethnographic Study of Female Instagram Influencers in Singapore.”

### ***Independent Studies Supervised at Yale-NUS***

Fall 2017 Representations of Gangsterism in Singapore

### ***Head of Course at Cornell University***

Fall 2015 Limits of the Human: Apes, Aliens, and Artificial Intelligence. First-year writing seminar, Cornell University. Independently developed and supervised the course, which was ranked by student feedback in the top 25 of over 180 first-year writing seminars across the university—a pool that includes classes taught by tenured faculty as well as by graduate students.

### ***Guest Lectures***

2016 “The Civil Examination and the Emergence of the Scholar-Gentry Elite: Mobility and Political Legitimacy during the Tang–Song Transition.” A guest lecture for the survey course “Imperial Chinese History,” Cornell University. April 4.

2014 “China’s Culture of Meritocracy: Historical Continuity and Change.” A guest lecture for the undergraduate course “History and Myth: The Rise of China,” Cornell University. November 13.

### ***English as a Foreign Language (EFL)***

2011–13 Volunteer English teacher at under-privileged rural and urban high schools in Fujian Province, China. Instructed classes of 50 to 60 high-school students in English while conducting doctoral dissertation fieldwork.

2005–08 Founding partner and senior curriculum designer at Business English Pod, Shanghai, China. Helped to grow the business into a global leader in business-oriented online EFL training materials.

2003–08 Freelance EFL instructor in multinational and joint-venture companies based in Shanghai, China. Developed, tailored, and delivered courses in English business communication, with a focus on writing and presentation skills.

2002–03 Senior EFL instructor for Informatics Professional Development Center

(IPDC), Shanghai, China.

1999–2000 English lecturer, Wenzhou Medical College, Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. Taught English to classes of 50 to 60 undergraduate students. Conducted outreaches to local rural high schools.

1998–99 Business English trainer at Siemens, Berlin, Germany.

### ***German as a Foreign Language***

Spring 1998 German language teaching assistant, Department of German Studies, Brown University. Independently led discussion and review sections in introductory German.

## **LANGUAGES**

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### ***Mandarin Chinese***

- Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) Advanced Level C (i.e., “Band 9”), passed October 2007: An advanced comprehensive certification of linguistic competence (reading, writing, speaking, listening) administered under the auspices of the Beijing Language and Culture University for non-native learners of Chinese with over 3,000 hours of classroom training. Sufficient language-level certification for admission to social-science postgraduate programs in China.
- Able to read and translate scholarly materials and imperial-era vernacular literature with reference materials.
- **Experienced conference interpreter:** Served as an English-Mandarin conference interpreter in negotiations between U.S. and Chinese businesses (2007–9) and at an academic symposium (“Globalization and Comparative Humanities,” jointly sponsored by Cornell University and East China Normal University, Shanghai, China, July 31–August 2, 2009).

### ***German***

- Advanced proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing.
- Able to translate scholarly literature.

### ***Scandinavian***

- Proficiency in spoken **Danish**; reading proficiency in **Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian**.
- Able to translate scholarly materials from all three languages into English.
- Able to read and translate **Ancient Icelandic** with reference materials.

***French:*** Reading ability sufficient for bibliographic research.

***Arabic:*** One year of intensive college study.

## **MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS**

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American Anthropological Association (AAA).

Society for East Asian Anthropology (SEAA).



*Zachary M. Howlett*

*CV*

Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE).  
Association for Asian Studies (AAS).