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Gerard Hogan

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## From “Chinese Exclusion” to Chinese Inclusion: Poetic Justice in Central Washington University Library

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*ABSTRACT. This article describes a library's successful community engagement project that served to promote Chinese language and culture education in a small rural university town. To celebrate National Poetry Month, the James E. Brooks Library of Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg, Washington, hosted a series of bilingual poetry readings. To provide proper context, this paper also examines the interwoven historical background of Washington State and CWU, along with their relationships with Chinese people. The poetry programs were planned and carried out by a broad range of participants, including language-learners, native speakers, CWU students, faculty, librarians, international students, visiting scholars, and local community members. Participants from these various constituencies assisted in selecting poems in the original Chinese language along with their English translations. Poetry is a form of communication that is freighted with beliefs, values, traditions, mores, customs, and other expressions of cultural significance. Much of the effect of poetry is conveyed through emotion, sound, rhythm, assonance, alliteration, and other means, which do not necessarily require the listener to have mastery of the language or vocabulary of the original poem. Readings were held in the library's Academic & Research Commons. The programs were free and open to the general public. The audio recordings and images have been loaded to CWU's institutional repository and made available as streaming podcasts on Ellensburg (WA) Community Radio.*

**“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.”  
– Martin Luther King, Jr.**

### **I. Introduction**

In April 2016, the Central Washington University Library hosted a literary event, featuring readings of Chinese poetry in the original Chinese along with an English language translation of each poem. The program was an inclusive and collaborative effort from its inception. Attention to detail was paid to the selection of poems representing the vast range of Chinese poetry through the ages. Great care was devoted to the process of selecting appropriate translations of each poem.

## II. Historical Background: Chinese in Eastern Washington

The latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Pacific Northwest of the United States was a time of immigration, settlement, and development. During these same decades of development and settlement of the West, the area now known as Washington State transitioned from being part of Oregon Territory to its own Washington Territory, and eventually Washington State. Many Chinese people were among the new immigrant influx. “The first mass immigration to the United States by the Chinese came with the discovery of gold in California in 1848.” (Simmons, 2007, p.1). The emigration out of China was prompted by several factors. Conditions in China in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century were harsh due to numerous social and environmental factors, including rapid population growth, depletion of natural resources, soil erosion, and widespread starvation.

Chinese migration to Washington Territory began in the 1860s. Many of the newcomers were gold-miners and laborers who had worked their way north from the California gold rush. Regarding this northward immigration to the territory, according to Chin and Chin (2013), “The Chinese who began appearing in significant numbers in the 1860s were primarily working east of the Cascade Mountains” (p.9). They were heading inland, east from the Puget Sound area, to the dry, resource-rich, and newly-opened inland Northwest.

At that time, white miners who had arrived earlier were beginning to move on to other areas such as British Columbia. This presented opportunities for the newly arrived Chinese. “In 1864, hundreds could be found along the Columbia River” (Chin & Chin, 2013, p.10) in Eastern Washington Territory. Chin and Chin (2013) report that, by 1870, as many as 1,500 Chinese, twice the number of whites, mined the rivers of Eastern Washington. “The Chinese searched the banks of every river and creek east of the Cascades” (p. 10).

Centrally located in the territory, on the dry, eastern side of the Cascade Range, was the town of Ellensburg. Ellensburg was founded as a trading outpost in 1870. It was the future home of Washington State Normal School, which later evolved into what is today’s Central Washington University. The early trading post soon attracted settlers, ranchers, and farmers. In addition to mining in this region, the immigrant Chinese filled other roles as opportunities arose and as labor was needed –construction, fishing, canning, and agriculture. “Some of these Chinese eventually made their way to Ellensburg.” (Simmons, 2007, p.2). As has been well-documented throughout the Western states and territories, the Chinese also provided a major workforce in the construction of railroads.

Perhaps the best example of the critical role the Chinese played in the construction of the Northern Pacific is the work that took place near Stampede Pass in the Cascade Mountains.... In July 1886, Hale, Smith, Burns & Co. made an agreement with Chinese agents for the provision of 1,500 men to work between Ellensburg and the summit.... By the time the Northern Pacific Railroad was completed, some 15,000 Chinese had labored to clear the land, construct bridges, and lay down thousands of miles of tracks. When there weren’t enough Chinese to do the work, shiploads were recruited from China and the men were sent directly to the work sites. (Chin & Chin, 2013, pp. 23-25).

### III. Chinese Exclusion and Persecution

According to Simmons (2007), historical accounts of the early history of Ellensburg and the Kittitas Valley focus on the stories of Euro-American settlers. “When it comes to many of the non-white residents of the town, these historical accounts are often silent or significantly prejudiced. The Overseas Chinese are one major example of such treatment...” (p.2). According to Simmons, the fact that the majority of the Chinese in Ellensburg had immigrated to the US before the 1880s was due to the enactment, in 1882, of the Chinese Exclusion Act, which made it illegal for Chinese to immigrate into the US.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, its subsequent amendments, and the later Geary Act of 1892 severely restricted or prevented Chinese immigration to the US into the 1940s. Anti-Chinese sentiment had increased in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. States, territories, and municipalities were enacting more restrictive laws on Chinese labor, behavior, and living conditions. Many felt that the Chinese were stealing jobs, willing to work for lower wages, and failing to integrate into the local culture. In May 1882, Congress passed “An act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.” (Chinese Exclusion Act, 1882). The introductory clause of the act read: “Whereas, in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof...”

The passage of this law and its prohibition of Chinese immigration did little to diminish cries to oust the Chinese who were already here. Persecution and attacks against the Chinese continued for decades. Anti-Chinese riots occurred in several locations in the West, including in Seattle in 1886. One year after the Seattle riots, 25 Chinese miners were attacked at China Camp, not far from Ellensburg in Kittitas County; in that same year, 31 Chinese miners were massacred on the Snake River. (Chin & Chin, 2013, p.56). Chin and Chin also reported on a full-scale riot among railroad workers near the summit of the Cascade Mountains, after which most of the Chinese dispersed, “...but 300 of them quit and made their way south to work on a still-uncompleted Oregon and California road.” (p.24). Similarly, in 1893, about forty miles south of Ellensburg, “...a group of anti-Chinese described as ‘hobos’ attacked Chinese laborers at the Carbough Ranch near North Yakima...” (Chin & Chin, p. 57)

Simmons’ (2007) research found no evidence of violence against the Chinese living in the town of Ellensburg itself, but she did cite significant examples that prove extremely racist views towards the Chinese. One newspaper account from the *Ellensburg Capitol* blamed a Chinese laundry for a local family’s ringworm outbreak; a marriage announcement in another issue of the paper lamented that “...the girl should really know better than to marry a Chinese man” (p. 15). Newspaper editorials typically used derogatory language and voiced complaints that “...the Chinese were taking work away from Americans.” (pp. 15-16).

News and newspaper advertisements in the region continued to show evidence of racial prejudice and the discrimination against the Chinese. In Ellensburg, an 1898 advertisement for the New Gem, which promoted itself as “A First-Class Restaurant at all Times”, boasted that it had “No Chinese Employed.” (The New Gem, 1898, p.4). Several years later, a similar ad for a different restaurant proclaimed, “Try a meal at the American restaurant. No Chinese at this place.” (American Restaurant, 1901, p.5). In the days leading up to the 1902 celebration of Independence

Day, the “Local News” column of the *Ellensburg Dawn* newspaper listed brief trivial announcements such as “There was a snake show in town this week .... Let everybody come to town on the Fourth....Many hundred tons of hay have been cut this week .... Chet Shoudy is visiting relatives in Roslyn this week ....” An odd item on this same list, clearly indicative of the common sentiment of the time, read “...If you wish to patronize a hotel that employs no Chinese help, try the Grand Pacific.” (Ellensburg Dawn, 1902, p.3)

Anti-Chinese sentiment did not abate in the decades following the enactment of the Chinese exclusion acts. Aside from the outright war on the Native American Indian population, the persecution and discrimination against the Chinese included some of the most ferocious displays of racism in the history of the settlement of the Western states and territories. “Humiliating, berating, harassing, beating and murdering of Chinese were so commonplace that newspapers seldom bothered to print stories about these events. Among the hundreds of lynchings in the West, the majority of those lynched were Chinese.” (Chin, p.59) Chin went on to explain that “...hundreds of towns in the West had ousted their Chinese, either through angry mobs that forcibly rounded them up or, by passing laws that made it impossible to remain.” After these widespread anti-Chinese campaigns, the Chinese tended to concentrate in urban “Chinatown” neighborhoods where they remained small, segregated, and isolated groups.

#### **IV. History of Central Washington University and Its Connections to China**

Central Washington University is the 21<sup>st</sup> century form of an institution founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Established in 1891 as Washington State Normal School, its early growth and development were concurrent with those turbulent times of immigration and settlement. The school’s purpose was to educate future elementary and junior high teachers for the newly-established state. Classes were held at the local public school until 1894 when the normal school’s first building, later named Barge Hall in honor of its first principal, Benjamin Franklin Barge, was completed. The normal school became Central Washington College of Education in 1937, Central Washington State College in 1961, and Central Washington University in 1977. Through numerous renovations, Barge Hall remains standing today and houses university administrative offices.

Central Washington University is now a comprehensive, public, four-year university that provides programs to more than 13,000 people at eight locations across the state. The main campus of CWU remains in Ellensburg, a small town near the geographic center of Washington State. Recent estimates from the US Census Bureau calculate Ellensburg’s population as under 20,000. To this day, the local population is quite homogenous, with nearly 86% of inhabitants reporting as “white only” (United States, Census Bureau, 2017). In contrast to the local resident population, the university has emphasized and cultivated an environment of diversity and inclusion. For academic year 2017-2018, Central Washington University had 451 international students from 54 different countries with China and Taiwan among the top five countries or regions. (Central Washington University. Office of International Studies and Programs, 2018.) At any given time throughout the year, CWU hosts numerous visiting scholars, many from China. In 2018, for the fourth time in five years, CWU earned a Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from *INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine*. (Central Washington University. Department of Public Affairs, 2018). The need to strive for diversity is an implicit recognition of the effects of past inequalities and injustice.

As has been made clear, the Chinese were indisputably victims of widespread and long-term discrimination.

Noteworthy among CWU's connections to educational institutions abroad is the relationship with Anhui University in Hefei, China. It is one of the University's oldest and most long-lasting international partnership and was initiated surprisingly soon after China's reopening to the world. Following the Cultural Revolution, and after Chairman Mao Zedong's death, Deng Xiaoping led his country through far-reaching reforms. Improving relations with the outside world was one of the major shifts outlined in Deng's program of reform. In early 1979, Deng made an official visit to the United States, meeting President Jimmy Carter in Washington, D.C. Very soon thereafter, officials of CWU and Anhui University began communications and negotiations with the intent of establishing a partnership. This resulted in a joint resolution, signed in December 1980 "...to provide for better communication between the peoples of China and the United States of America." (Central Washington University. Office of the President. International Programs, 1980). Thus it was in the spring of 1981, 99 years after Congressional passage of the "Chinese Exclusion Act," a delegation of CWU officials, led by CWU President Donald Garrity, visited Anhui University. As was hopefully expressed in the 1980 resolution, exchanges of scholars, administrators, professors, and students have continued through the decades. CWU now has many more partnerships and exchange agreements with other universities in China and other Asian countries.

## **V. Outreach Efforts at Central Washington University Library**

The James E. Brooks Library serves the main campus of Central Washington University. The library has its origins in the early years of the founding of Washington State Normal School when its first principal, Benjamin Franklin Barge, donated his personal book collection. It was housed, along with all the classrooms, offices, and activity spaces, in the normal school's sole building, completed in 1894, and later named Barge Hall. Over the next century, the institution and its library continued to grow. (Heckart, 2007). Today's library was built in the mid-1970s, and is named in honor of the late James E. Brooks, former university president and ardent library supporter.

There is growing recognition of the importance of library services in ensuring the success of students, and, as evidenced by the research literature, this is especially true for international students. "Academic librarians can be key figures in campus efforts to support these students as they adapt to the U.S. academically and socially." (Click, 2018, p. 153). As Bordonaro stressed, international students need and deserve our support, and that this can be a win-win situation for all parties. When academic libraries provide a welcoming environment for students whose first language is not English "...in helping them, we help ourselves. We become more educated about the world's citizens and we can be seen as players in campus-wide efforts to promote and foster internationalization" (Bordonaro, 2006, p.240). Amsberry's research on international students' use of academic libraries has shown that

...the primary barrier for these students is language. Communication with library staff in the classroom and at service desks is a major concern for international students whose first language is not English, and anxiety about communicating can even cause students to avoid using the library. (Amsberry, 2008, p.354)

Library programming that addresses those language differences can serve to ameliorate the situation.

The Brooks Library's bilingual poetry program, which is the culminating focal point of this article, grew out of the library's commitment to outreach and engagement. The administration, faculty, and staff of the Brooks Library recognize and embrace the benefits of outreach, as evidenced by the library's recent creation of the position of Student Engagement and Community Outreach Librarian. Bilingual poetry readings seemed like an ideal format to consider. Such programs could be entertaining and informative while showing appreciation for language and cultural differences.

In his poem "The Waste Land", T.S. Eliot wrote:

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
Memory and desire, stirring  
Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot, 1922)

Since 1996, April has also been celebrated as National Poetry Month. Established by the Academy of American Poets, it is the largest literary celebration in the world, with tens of millions of readers, students, teachers, librarians, booksellers, and publishers, highlighting poetry's important place in our lives (Academy of American Poets, 2018). In the ensuing years, librarians at CWU have regularly celebrated National Poetry Month with readings, exhibits, and resources from the Academy of American Poets.

To celebrate National Poetry Month in 2016, the Brooks Library organized a series of bilingual poetry-reading programs. Prominent and popular among the offerings was the April 7, 2016 program, featuring selections of Chinese poems read in both Chinese and English. Librarians reached out to CWU students, faculty, staff, and to the Ellensburg community to involve a wide range of collaborators. Great attention was paid to the selection of poems to represent the deep centuries-long tradition of Chinese poetry. Various translations of poems were considered. The intention was to choose an English version of each poem that respects the original Chinese poems.

## **VI. Challenges of Poetry Selection and Translation**

Billy Collins, former US Poet Laureate, lamented that too much emphasis is placed on the "meaning" of a poem, to the exclusion of its many other pleasures, which include rhythm and sound. (Mudge, 2016). One needs not necessarily understand the "meaning" of a poem in order to appreciate the poem. This echoes the sentiments of Archibald MacLeish, poet and former Librarian of Congress. MacLeish expressed it more concisely and poetically in the final lines of his poem "Ars Poetica":

A poem should not mean  
But be. (MacLeish, 1926)

Regarding the translation of poetry from one language to another, Gary Snyder, a prolific author, poet, and translator, professed:

My method of translation is –first, to understand the poem thoroughly on a linguistic level.  
Second, by an effort of concentration to project the "picture" of the poem inside my mind,

like a movie –to see what’s happening. Third, to write down, in my own language, what I see happening. Fourth, to check that back against the original language and to be sure they line up. (Leed, 1986, p.178)

More specifically, in regard to the translation of Chinese poetry, Liu Yang pointed out that ...vast differences between the Chinese culture and the western culture also finds its way into the poetry of these two languages and is the most striking in poetry, which challenges generations of translators who desire to introduce Chinese culture to readers abroad. (Liu, 2010, p.171)

Liu described in more detail the specific differences which cause difficulties for translation. These include rhyme scheme, rhetoric, cultural connotations, concepts of time, religious connotations, wordplay, and allusions. “However, good translators,” says Liu, “are capable of varying their translation strategies with the contents of different cultural factors to achieve the highest possible degree of cultural communication and minimize losses” (Liu, p.183).

## **VII. Conclusion**

With all these considerations in mind, the planners and participants of the Brooks Library’s “Bilingual Chinese Poetry” program, with broad representation from the campus and the community, met often to discuss the selection of poems, the appropriate translations, and other details of the program. The recitation of Chinese poems is often accompanied by music, so the planners and readers selected musical recordings to accompany some of the readings during the program. The event was held in the library’s Academic & Research Commons (ARC). The ARC is a highly visible and accessible space inside the first-floor entrance of Brooks Library. The program was free and open to the general public. The program was widely advertised in the local community through posters, announcements, and social media. Tea and Chinese snacks were provided for attendees. A visiting Chinese scholar, who is a graphic artist and calligraphy expert, voluntarily decorated a large number of paper fans to be given away at a drawing during the program.

The success of this program inspired the library to plan bilingual poetry programs in other languages. Librarians and participants expressed interest in continuing the tradition. International students and scholars, who must struggle daily to cope with living and studying in English, expressed appreciation for an opportunity to share their own culture and language. Overall, this was deemed as a success in regards to community involvement, diversity, integration of international students into campus life, and discussions of topics as varied as linguistics, geography, and culture. The audio recording of the program lives on as a podcast on Ellensburg Community Radio at <https://soundcloud.com/eburgradio-org/jdpp-39-chinese-poems> and as an event in CWU’s institutional repository, ScholarWorks@CWU at [https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/lib\\_poetry2016/1/](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/lib_poetry2016/1/) (Chinese poetry reading).



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## Appendix A

Central Washington University, Office of the President, International Programs. (1980, December 4). Joint resolution between Anhui University, Hefei, Anhui Province, People's Republic of China, and Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington, United States of America. Central Washington University, Office of the President, International Programs, Anhui University, 1980-2001. (RG 014-05-65, Box 5, File 5, Folder 3). Central Washington University Archives, Ellensburg, WA.

  
**CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY**  
ELLENSBURG, WASHINGTON 98926

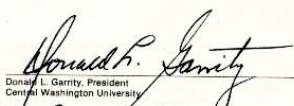
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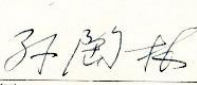
**Joint Resolution between Anhui University, Hefei, Anhui Province, People's Republic of China, and Central Washington University, Ellensburg, Washington, United States of America.**

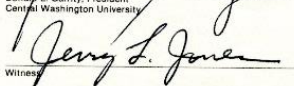
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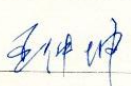
Anhui University agrees to exchange with Central Washington University, administrative staff, scholars, professors and students, in order to develop more meaningful relationships between the two universities. It is the intention of the signatories of this document to provide for better communication between the peoples of China and the United States of America. We resolve to make every reasonable effort to bring about the following:



1. The exchange of scholars, teachers, who are to pursue advanced studies, and students between the two universities. This process will begin as early as January, 1981, but no later than December, 1981.
2. In the initial phase of the program, each university will be prepared to accept no less than three: scholars, or teachers, or students. This number will be increased as soon as grants and aids, scholarships and other financial support, make it possible.
3. Transportation to the host institution will be the responsibility of the institution of origin. Necessary expenses incurred by the visiting scholars, teachers and students will be arranged through the host institution.
4. Upon acceptance of this agreement, each institution will provide the other with a detailed description of the academic programs available to scholars, teachers and students who participate in the exchange.
5. Prior to the final designation of any scholar, teacher or student each institution will provide the other with the following information concerning the applicant: academic background, scholastic records, letters of application, letters of recommendation, and any additional information (i.e., two pictures) that will provide the host institution the maximum data concerning the scholar, teacher or student. Both universities will designate only individuals academically qualified for the participation in the program. Each institution reserves the right to approve the individuals nominated by the other. Scholars, teachers and students who are highly competent in the language of the host institution will be provided special language instruction in the area of their speciality. Each institution will develop a program for beginners so that those less competent or knowledgeable in the language of the host institution can prepare for further study. Each institution will provide competent interpreters for those scholars who are not conversant in the language of the other.
6. The host institution will seek, whenever feasible, appropriate on-site experience in industries, technologies, laboratories, agricultural experimental stations, farming, medical facilities, research institutions, etc., so as to enhance technological understanding while the student or teacher is in the host country. The host institution will assist in making these arrangements during summer breaks and at the end of the study period. The expenses of this additional educational experience will be provided by the host institution, or grants and aids obtained through mutual cooperation. The host institution will undertake to arrange for teachers and students to study at the other colleges and universities, research institutions or special laboratories, when the host institution does not have faculty or programs to meet their needs.
7. Each institution will exchange, whenever possible, books, journals, teaching materials, scientific papers and research reports, films, tapes, and other academic information, and seek to assist scholars, teachers and the students to return to their institutions with books and journals and, in some cases, scientific instruments that will enable them to better use information and abilities gained during the course of study.
8. Faculty sponsors will be provided at the host institution for consultation. Host families will be arranged or other arrangements made for holidays, vacations and other appropriate occasions so that life outside the university in the province or state may be experienced.
9. Where the individual is a professor or scholar with lecture capabilities, or teachers or students gifted in communication, opportunities to speak and lecture will be arranged.
10. This agreement shall remain in effect until written notice is given by either party, 180 (one hundred and eighty) days prior to date of intended termination.
11. In witness whereof, this Resolution has been ratified by and on behalf of both parties this 4 day of December, 1980.

  
Donald L. Garrity, President  
Central Washington University

  
Sun Taolin, President  
Anhui University

  
Witness

  
Witness

## Appendix B

Chinese Poetry Reading. (2016) [Program]. James E. Brooks Library. "National Poetry Month Readings: Chinese Poetry (Audio)" (2016). Brooks Library National Poetry Month 2016: Bilingual Poetry. 1. Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/lib\\_poetry2016/1](https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/lib_poetry2016/1)

# Chinese poetry reading

## 中国诗歌朗诵

April 7, 2016 – Brooks Library ARC

1. 陶渊明 (365-427): 《归园田居一》  
Tao, Yuanming: Returning to My Home in the Country  
左宏琴 Readers: Hongqin Zuo & Tom Dell
2. 常建 (698-756): 《题破山寺后禅院》  
Chang, Jian: A Buddhist Retreat Behind Broken-Mountain Temple  
林上海 Readers: Shanghai Lin & Jampa Dorje
3. 李白 (701-762): 《长相思一》  
Li, Bai: Endless Yearning (1)  
张治 Readers: Zhi Zhang & Jampa Dorje
4. 杜甫 (712-770): 《春夜喜雨》  
Du, Fu: Spring Rain  
杨焰 Readers: Yan Yang & Damian Day
5. 苏轼 (1037-1101): 《水调歌头》  
Su, Shi: Prelude to Water Melody  
程洁 Readers: Olivia Cheng & Viviane Kasisavanh
6. 李清照 (1084-1156): 《一剪梅》  
Li, Qingzhao: To the Tune "Cutting a Flowering Plum Branch"  
刘元曦 Readers: Yuanxia Liu & Gerard Hogan
7. 徐志摩 (1897-1931): 《再别康桥》  
Xu, Zhimo: On Leaving Cambridge  
王奇雯 Readers: Vanessa Wang & Paulus Pimomo
8. 海子 (1964-1989): 《面朝大海，春暖花开》  
Hai, Zi: Looking out to sea, warmed by the spring air  
熊亦春 Readers: Sue Xiong & Sean Lind
9. 戴望舒 (1905-1950): 《雨巷》  
Dai, Wangshu: The Alley in the Rain  
陈俞松 Readers: Warren Chen & Gerard Hogan

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