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## About the Weatherhead East Asian Institute:

Since its establishment in 1949, Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute has been a major center for research, teaching, and publishing on modern and contemporary Asia. The Institute's mission is to train new generations of experts in the Asian humanities, social sciences, and the professions and to enhance understanding of East Asia in the wider community.

## About Soundings

*Soundings* is edited by Preeti Bhattacharji. If you have any questions or comments, or would like to contribute, you can contact her at pb2205@columbia.edu.

## Helping New Immigrants 'Speak Out'

By Christine E. Kwon, CC '10

When asked about her favorite program at Eastern Chinatown's Chinese Progressive Association (CPA), executive director Mae Lee simply chuckles, "Hah—they're all good." In one way or another, the civics and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, immigrant rights advocacy, teen peer mentoring program, Lower East Side-specific environmental activism, and the CPA's myriad other efforts reflect their "good"-ness through their collective promotion of social equality

and justice for New York's Chinese community.

While their goals of "equality and justice" are familiar among community organizations, the

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**"Things are not done just by working hard but also by speaking out."**

— Mae Lee, executive director of the CPA

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CPA nonetheless derives certain uniqueness in not only addressing the specific needs of a specific community but also in the means through which it defines and approaches these goals. Lee says, "We work with

anyone," but the CPA's base in Eastern Chinatown and its direct approach to its work in and among the immediate community means that much of its work focuses on the new immigrants settling the area. Recently arrived from a non-Anglophonic area, these immigrants would ostensibly benefit from English instruction, but while Lee concedes that "some of it is a language barrier," there are other equally—if not more—important challenges at hand. "[The recent immigrants] don't know the whole system, and how everything works." It is crucial that people are equipped not only with linguistic means but also the social skills to operate and

(CPA cont. on page 2)



## Soup Dumplings Worth the Burns

By Hannah Kim, GS '10

The sounds of diners wishing each other a Happy New Year rang throughout the restaurant as I was guided to my table at Joe's Shanghai. Although I chose to visit the restaurant at the odd time of 3p.m., the restaurant was bustling with Chinese people celebrating the Lunar New Year.

I was in the original Joe's Shanghai in Flushing, a famed soup dumpling shop that opened in 1995 and now has sister locations in midtown Manhattan and Chinatown. The restaurant itself is a nondescript Chinese restaurant, with typical red Chinese characters decorating the wall. But the decor belies

the wealth of tasty goodies it offers and, being a longtime fan of Joe's Shanghai, I knew I was in for a treat.

As I was seated, my waiter asked if I'd like to start off with the house special: soup dumplings also known as *xiao long bao*. I promptly put in an order for the crab as well as the pork soup dumplings. I then perused the menu to decide on the main course. I was recommended their famous Shanghai noodles and because I could not do a round at Joe's Shanghai without my personal favorite—baby *bok choy* (Chinese cabbage) in garlic sauce—I ordered that as well.

My *xiao long bao* came out in record time, probably because the kitchen was mass-producing to accommodate (DUMPLINGS cont. on page 4)

(CPA contd. from page 1)

ultimately find success in their new environment.

The CPA therefore provides educational services to help improve people's living and working standards. The ESL and civics classes are not a handout but a hand up. Beyond the requirement that the immigrants participate directly in effecting change in their own

lives, Lee stresses repeatedly that blind effort will not suffice. "You don't get a better job just by working hard," she insists. The CPA's programs focus on education and participation to reflect the philosophy that "things are not done just by working hard but also by speaking out."

Speak out: a bold call to immigrants to involve

themselves more directly within their community, and, perhaps, a challenge to us English-speakers who may function perfectly well within the New York community but have failed to truly step out of the "safe" boundaries surrounding the bubble of Morningside Heights. The CPA serves the immigrant community, but in serving the New York community the volunteers, themselves, can also benefit. Lee recommends that Columbia students looking for involvement in the CPA teach ESL or citizenship classes, or participate in the peer mentoring program, working with high school students. "It's a good way to get involved and really get to know the community," Lee explains. Interacting with the same people on a weekly basis allows the opportunity to "develop a relationship with them" and "learn about community issues."

While she will not call it her favorite, Lee speaks at length about the peer mentoring program, Starting Line Peer Mentoring. It was conceived by two CPA volunteers who wanted to create "a safe place for immigrant high school students to learn English, make friends, [and] learn about New York and their new environment." Lee praises the program not only for its merits, improvements, and expansion but for its origins: "It's very organic ... in a very grassroots way." Social and economic equality and justice for any community stem not from imported organized programs or the efforts of some external group, but from within the community itself.

### Chinese Progressive Association

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The Chinese Progressive Association hosts programs to assist recent immigrants.

## Celebrating the Year of the Ox

By Andrew Scheineson, CC '09

However you celebrated the advent of 2009—joining rousing choruses of "Yes We Can" in a downtown bar or enduring the smarmy commentary of Ryan Seacrest—your Gregorian-calendar-based observances probably can't hold a firework to Chinese Lunar New Year festivities, many of which will be taking place right in your backyard as the world enters the Year of the Ox.

Lunar New Year officially began Monday, Jan. 26, commemorated with 600,000 firecrackers set off in Sara Roosevelt Park to ward off evil spirits. The celebrations, however, will stretch into February, combining traditional practices with modern trends and reaching out to people of all cultures and backgrounds.

The month already kicked off with the 10<sup>th</sup> annual Chinatown Lunar New Year Parade on Sunday, Feb. 1. The Chinatown parade needs little introduction, except to say that over the last decade, what is billed as the "largest winter parade on the East Coast" has become one of New York City's most iconic spectacles. A crush of 400,000 onlookers watched floats, bands, and the occasional dragon dance down the main streets of Chinatown, from Little Italy to Chrystie Street.

Underscoring the multicultural nature of both the Lunar New Year and New York City, dance, music, and martial arts performances throughout the parade highlighted traditions from all over Asia and the Americas. It was an inclusive event, seeking to draw in New Yorkers and tourists alike, and prominently displaying Chinatown's formidable and diverse cultural qualities.

While Lunar New Year is in many ways a celebration of long-held traditions, Chinese culture is hardly static, and as such has continued to evolve and adapt to modern society. Tiffany Chen, CC '10 and president of the Chinese Students Club (CSC) at Columbia, promises that the annual Lunar Gala, to be held Saturday, Feb. 21, will showcase a fusion of old and new styles, including both martial arts demonstrations and a popular hip hop dance team.

Perhaps more than most Lunar New Year festivities held in New York, Lunar Gala caters to a younger crowd. The Gala "is targeted at the undergraduate community," says Chen, and primarily seeks to entertain Columbians of all backgrounds. In addition to prominent hip hop performances, the event has also attracted sponsorships with companies like Red Bull (it is the Year of the Ox, after all).

Unlike New Year's events put on by some campus groups, such as the notably mainland-dominated Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CUCSSA), Chen notes that "our [event] is very Americanized."

Nevertheless, Lunar Gala organizers still dip into their roots, planning line dance, Chinese yo-yo, and traditional instrument performances. Furthermore, the theme of the night, "Can't Stop, Won't Stop," plays on the qualities attributed to the Ox of the zodiac: persistence and steadiness. Each act in the event will also embody stages of a famous Chinese fable, providing rational, carefully-planned order to what promises to be an exciting campus celebration.

**CSC's Annual Lunar Gala**  
**7 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 21**  
**Roone Arledge Auditorium**  
**\$10 General Admission**  
**\$15 VIP**

# The Chinatown Film Project

By Tiffany Tang, CC '09

Neighborhoods rarely have as distinct a status as Chinatowns. You find them in cities across the country, from Boston to Honolulu, set apart from the surrounding city by distinctive architecture and coloring, and often containing a very specific subset of the population.

And yet, so many common perceptions of Chinatown manifest themselves as clichés. One reason for the stereotypes is the way Chinatown is represented in many Hollywood films. Much of what makes Chinatowns unique—the hustle, the crowds, the narrowness of the streets—also prevent filmmakers from capturing accurate depictions of these neighborhoods.

The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) seeks to complicate traditional understandings of Chinatown by organizing the Chinatown Film Project, an on-site and online exhibition of short films relating to the Manhattan neighborhood. The Project originated in New York, but has expanded to include films of Chinatowns from all over, including Mexico City.

Ten of New York's "most exciting filmmakers" will showcase their short films at the MOCA's new location on Centre Street when it opens in the spring of 2009. Featured award-winning filmmakers include Wayne Wang, Miguel Arteta, So Yong Kim, Bradley Rust Gray, and Jem Cohen. In addition to the museum exhibit, a significant part of the project is developing online, as amateur filmmakers from all over the world share their own seven-minute films through MOCA's YouTube Channel.

While the ten central films are still under wraps, behind-the-

scenes interviews with some of the directors can be viewed on the YouTube Channel.

Wayne Wang discusses the inspiration for turning his film into a musical: the working stiffs of Chinatown. "People that you normally don't see when you walk through the main part of Mott Street or whatever," Wang explains. "People who are kind of more behind-the-scenes, who are more, you know, the heart of Chinatown that way."

Sam Pollard approaches Chinatown from more of an outsider's perspective, saying, "When I was asked to do the film, my first two impressions were, well, I should shoot a tea ceremony, and the people that I interview probably won't speak English." He goes on to say how meeting local Chinatown residents changed his perspective: "Basically, they were telling me the same stories, that they were Chinese but they were Americans, you know? ... I said, 'Well, maybe I don't need to do the ceremony. Maybe just to spend time with them as human beings will be insightful enough.'"

The YouTube Channel currently has 37 submissions posted, and the types of films on it are wide-ranging. *Take a Look: New York City* is a documentary short by Kevin Lee that captures the reactions of Chinatown residents immediately after September 11, 2001, and it premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. *Morning Tai-Chi in New York* by Jennifer Tippins offers a snapshot of a woman who practices tai-chi every morning in Thomas Paine Park. *Spofford Alley* by Team Zeitgeist takes the viewer on a walking tour of the back alleys of Chinatown, while providing a twist at the end.

At the launch party for the YouTube Channel in September 2007, MOCA showed *Year of the Fish* by David Kaplan. *Year of the Fish* is



Original Illustration by Sonia Tycko, CC '09

an updated interpretation of the Chinese version of Cinderella. It debuted at the 2007 Sundance Festival and played more recently at the Angelika Film Center. *Year of the Fish* is particularly unique because it was filmed in Chinatown using rotoscoping, a form of digital animation.

Kaplan credited both the small size of the production and the subsequent rotoscoping with allowing a different side of Chinatown to come through in this movie. In an interview with the *The Reeler*, he explained the difficulty of filming shots of Chinatown: "A normal film that went into Chinatown would have to lock off a street [...] and what winds up happening is that there's this sort of artifice that takes hold where they either don't have enough money to hire enough extras—so it looks artificially sparse—

or if it's a bigger film, they can really only do one or two big street scenes. Whereas we were able to shoot anywhere and everywhere and just be able to have the whole of Chinatown operate as our studio backlot."

The distorting nature of rotoscoping created anonymity of people and businesses, allowing Kaplan to bypass a lot of legal red tape. *Year of the Fish* will not be displayed at the upcoming MOCA showcase, but it represents a vital step towards MOCA's ultimate goal of "re-seeing Chinatown through the eyes of filmmakers."

**MOCA's galleries on 70 Mulberry Street are temporarily closed. MOCA will be opening in its new home on 211-215 Centre Street in spring 2009.**

(DUMPLINGS contd. from page 1)

the New Year's celebrants. Each order came with eight steamed soup dumplings on a sheet of Asian cabbage. I placed a soup dumpling in my spoon, pausing to ladle on some vinegar and ginger. The tartness of the vinegar and the sharpness of the fresh ginger added to the meatiness of the dumplings.

As the scent of the soup dumplings wafted up, I tried to remember to be careful because the soup in the dumplings was scalding. But my reminders were to no avail. By the end of the dish, my tongue prickled with tiny, scalded bumps. But they were just *that* good. Though some may hold the soup dumplings with chopsticks, the soup tends to squirt out and spill, wasting what I consider the best part. You could also try waiting until they cool a bit because the soup tends to congeal. But honestly, *xiao long bao* tastes best piping hot.

The Shanghai noodles and baby *bok choy* also quickly joined the table but I found myself rather full at this point. Don't be

fooled by these miniature dumplings—they are surprisingly filling and one order of eight is more than enough for a great meal. Both the baby *bok choy* and the Shanghai noodles were lightly sautéed in oil. The baby *bok choy* looked bland, but it was actually infused with the taste of garlic and was more enjoyable with every bite. The Shanghai noodles were a bit too salty and I was reminded of the Chinese takeout staple pork *lo mein*—another stir-fried noodle dish.

Nonetheless, every visit reaffirms just exactly why Joe's Shanghai is so well known for its soup dumplings. My neighbors at the next table confided: "I used to be a regular here until I moved to Brooklyn, but every Chinese New Year, I make sure to come back to Joe's for *xiao long bao*. It's a must!" I would have to agree.

**Joe's Shanghai**  
**Flushing: 136-21 37<sup>th</sup> Ave.**  
**(718) 539-3838**  
**Midtown: 24 W. 56<sup>th</sup> St.**  
**(212) 333-3868**  
**Chinatown: 9 Pell Street**  
**(212) 233-8888**



To help potential customers avoid burns, Joe's Shanghai offers this comic on its website.

## Upcoming Events at the Weatherhead Institute

**Saturday, February 7, 2009**  
**Hong Sang-Soo Film Series: "Virginia Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors" (2000)**  
4:00 pm  
511 Dodge Hall

**Monday, February 9, 2009**  
**"The 'Unchartered' Territory of Post-Thaksin Thai Politics"**  
*Allen Hicken*, Associate Professor of Political Science, Research Associate Professor at the Center for Political Studies, and Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Michigan  
12:00 PM-1:30 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918

**Friday, February 13, 2009**  
**"Everyday Life in China's New Republic: Evidence from Women's Journals"**  
*Joan Judge*, Associate Professor, Division of Humanities/School of Women's Studies, York University  
12:00 – 1:30 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918

**Saturday, February 14, 2009**  
**Hong Sang-Soo Film Series: "Night and Day" (2008)**  
4:00 pm + Q&A with Director Hong Sang-soo  
511 Dodge Hall

**Monday, February 16, 2009**  
**"The Voyage of the Senzaimaru and the Road to Sino-Japanese Diplomatic Normalcy: A Micro-Historical Perspective"**  
*Joshua A. Fogel*, Canada Research Chair, Modern Chinese History, York University  
12:00 – 1:30 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918

**Thursday, February 19, 2009**  
**"Republicanism, Communism, and Islam in Southeast Asia: Transnational Motors of Nationalist Revolution"**  
*John Sidel*, Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science  
12:00 – 1:30 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918

**Wednesday, February 25, 2009**  
**"Food and Water Security Issues: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead for Southeast Asia and Africa"**  
*Regina Birner*, Senior Research Fellow, International Food Policy Research Institute  
*Alan Nicol*, Research Fellow and Program Director, Overseas Development Institute (UK)  
3:30 - 5:00 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918

**Thursday, February 26, 2009**  
**"Identities at Stake in Taiwan: Indigenous Identity and Rights in Taiwan"**  
*Scott Simon*, Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Ottawa  
12:00-1:30 PM  
International Affairs Building, Room 918