

THE LOTUS

ASIAN STUDIES NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2026

BY CHLOE JUNG '27

THE CHINESE OF ITALY A BRIEF HISTORY

This fall semester, I had the special opportunity to conduct an independent academic and personal project in Italy for three weeks, funded generously by Colorado College's Department of Religion, Culture, Power. Approximately 92% of Italy's population ethnically identifies as Italian, and unfortunately for my voracious appetite, this means a significant decrease in the number of Asian grocery stores, restaurants, and dessert shops. It was only after a long period of drought, a dulling of my spice tolerance, and a toughening of my stomach to an endless stream of gluten and dairy, that, on my last day in Italy, I came across one of the two cohesive "Chinatowns" in the entire country. A short train ride from the Renaissance capital Florence lies the small city of Prato, wherein lives Italy's second largest concentration of Chinese Italians, right after Milan. Of course, when I pranced myself over, the last thing on my mind was the influence of Chinese immigrants on Prato's

place by creating textiles and cloths from wool (Afgeh). If you had purchased a shirt or a blanket in Italy during this period, its material was probably straight from the hands of Prato workers. But as the 70s came around, something shifted. The demand was no longer for raw materials but finished products, the items you could pick up ready to wear from the shelves. People wanted their clothes quickly and immediately. As the flow of the economy carried them, Prato's firms followed, but in the background, another demand had been steadily growing: workers. Previously, workers from the rural lands of Tuscany and southern Italian migrants filled this labor deficit but, by the 90s, this deficit began to be filled by Chinese immigrants (Afgeh).

Suddenly, the streets were bursting with new players, new minds, and a new culture. Not to mention new firms. Crowds of Chinese immigrants bought and established new firms, focusing on fast fashion and finished products, and employed other Chinese workers, who were cheaper than Italian laborers. Importing low-cost material from China, these firms made fast fashion the status quo for the town of Prato and the rest of Italy. By 2018, more than 10% of Prato residents were Chinese, excluding the estimated 10,000 Chinese who lived there illegally (Max). Thus, Prato was transformed.

Whether this transformation was a positive change that brought Prato back into relevance or a detriment to Italian tradition and culture depends on who you ask. But all in all, most responses dangle between the two, combining a resentment at being pushed out of their own industry with a quiet respect for the Chinese workers' evident economic success (Max). What occurred in Prato is a different kind of culture shock: rather than going to a new world, the new world comes to you, whether you want it to or not. In this ever-globalizing economy, it is difficult to balance the benefits of a streamlined international trade network with the cultural/industrial mixing (and clashing) that arises from it. You might be able to take a walk in the middle of Prato and find the most delicious Chinese cuisine, all the while old Italian-owned firms are closing their doors for good, unable to keep up with the competition.

The temporal status of a tourist makes current events and issues of this nature easy to overlook, which is the very reason why we must look even closer. I urge all travelers who seek pleasure and entertainment



from their journeys to also observe the impact of said traveling. The continual movement and friction of identities, nationalities, and ethnicities is unavoidable in this modern age. Accordingly, the drastic changes that occurred and are occurring in Prato (and all over the world) should not act as a deterrent, but a tangible possibility of our world. It serves as an opportunity to observe then to decide, do you want this to be our world? Are there other, more harmonious ways for cultures to coexist? Or will one always end up dominating the other?

Afgeh, Saman Sadeghi. "The Little Town of Prato Has Been Taken Over By Chinese Stuff." *Our Economy*, 2016.

Max, D.T. "The Chinese Workers Who Assemble Designer Bags in Tuscany." *The New Yorker* 100, 2018.

textile industry.

If you've ever explored the streets of a major Italian city, you are probably aware of the country's great love of and clever taste for textile goods. From their famous leather purses to their high fashion, Italy has been and is known to carry only the best—careful and traditional in all aspects of manufacturing. Prato itself was once one of the largest textile manufacturing bases in the entire country, but, as we'll see, careful tradition isn't guaranteed to survive in a rapidly growing and globalizing economy. Almost 60 years ago, Prato looked completely different.

While Prato remains a huge player in the Italian textile industry, its role has changed over the years. Before the 1970s, most factories and firms made their



BY CHLOE JUNG '27

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MENGQI MERCY AN



A recent PhD graduate from Johns Hopkins University, Visiting Professor Mengqi (Mercy) An is the newest addition to Colorado College's Interdisciplinary (ID) House. Immersed in the unique intersection of Environmental Humanities, Chinese and Russian Literature, and Gender Studies, Professor An has curated unique course experiences like Block 2's PA250/EV261: Animals, Plants, and Monsters, which utilized the fictional representations of monkeys, opium plants, and trees to derive a sense of the human and non-human. Students in this class spent the day at the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, attempting to narrate experiences from an animal's perspective.

Born and raised in China, Professor An attended Peking University and graduated with a Bachelor's in Economics and Russian Language and Literature. She continued her Russian studies at Peking University, eventually graduating with a Master's in Russian Language and Literature. As aforementioned, she completed her PhD at Johns Hopkins University in Comparative Thought and Literature, looking specifically at Russian and Chinese literature and thought. A particularly unique focus of her graduate studies, and now the topic of her upcoming book, is the active role of the non-human voice within Chinese and Russian literature during the rapid industrialization of the 20th century. In a brief but immensely informative interview with Dr. An, I gained a detailed perspective on the epistemologies, ideologies, and literary theories circulating within Northeast Asia over this period in history, discovered the impacts of "railway imperialism" on the Manchuria/Manchukuo region, and integrated the conversation of eco-feminism through it all.

Beyond the classroom, Dr. An seems to be a Coloradan at heart. A lover of the outdoors, an avid snowboarder, and someone with a refreshing zeal for exploration, she spends much of her time making sure her body is just as active as her mind. Sidenote: she admitted that one of the only drawbacks of her time here was the lack of familiar and quality cuisine. Luckily, she has thus far persevered through the slightly stale and repetitive food scene to find two restaurants that have inspired newfound affection for the Springs. Nana's Dim Sum and Dumplings, located in northern Colorado Springs near USAFA, and Jade Dynasty, a Chinese restaurant in Manitou Springs. Take a taste and let her know what you think!

From her studies in Beijing to St. Petersburg to Baltimore, her commitment to teaching has brought Professor An to Colorado Springs, and we are grateful for the passionate and thoughtful expertise that she brings to the Colorado College campus. During our meeting, she emphasized to me that her door is always open, whether you know anything about Chinese-Russo literary chemistry in 20th century Manchuria or not (I certainly did not). We talked about her dog, Reggie, her reactions to the Block plan ("Innovative environments create innovative personalities"), pop culture in Asia (which she taught in Block 6), and the time she spent abroad in Russia. Her door is open and so is her conversation. If any of these topics or perhaps Professor An herself intrigues you, consider dropping by for a chat. You'll certainly find yourself encouraged and inspired by the intelligence, passion, and earnest teaching spirit that Professor An brings to the table.

BY PERILLA WANG '28

A RECAP OF THE 2026 LUNAR NEW YEAR CELEBRATION

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Amid a timely winter snowfall, the Chinese Student Association hosted its annual Lunar New Year celebration on March 6, 2026. Approximately 70 students, faculty members, and community members gathered in Bemis Great Hall to bid farewell to the old year and welcome the new, inspired by the auspicious saying that “a timely snow promises a bountiful harvest.” The atmosphere was warm and festive.

The Lunar New Year, as one of the most important traditional festivals in East and Southeast Asian cultures, symbolizes a new beginning, reunion, and hope. Likewise, this event showcased the diverse charm of festival culture and the vitality of cross-cultural communication through a rich and varied program arrangement.

The evening party kicked off with a lively opening Dragon Dance performance. The dynamic dance moves and the rhythmic drumbeats quickly ignited the

atmosphere. Subsequently, the Indonesian Gamelan music program “Gamut & Taman Sari” was presented by the Indonesian Gamelan Tunjung Sari and the Water Lily Flower team. With unique Southeast Asian traditional instruments and melodies, it offered the audience a distinctive cultural experience.

Next, the Fashion Show jointly presented by CN 404 Group, Adjunct401 and Edric Xu, through diverse clothing displays and stage performances, demonstrated the integration of cultural elements and contemporary expressions, drawing applause from the audience. The lottery that occurred during the intermissions further enlivened the atmosphere and enhanced the audience's sense of participation.

The music performance “Four Tour” was performed by Edric Xu and Demi Jin. With their delicate and warm singing, they brought the stage closer to the audience and became a major highlight of the night. Subsequently, “GO! x Fashion Cortis Mashup” brought by CCKD, with its dynamic arrangement and distinct rhythmic presentation, once again drew the on-site atmosphere to a climax.

In the cultural expression session “CPC New Year's Greetings,” the Language Department Cultural Program Coordinators conveyed New Year's blessings and festival greetings through the combination of language and culture.

The second half of the program was equally wonderful. “Sun Will Never Set” presented by CN Adjunct 103 Group showcased youthful vitality and stage tension through an infectious performance. The “Chinese Idioms” presented by CN Adjunct 205 Group introduced Chinese language and culture in a lively and interesting way, allowing the audience to deepen their understanding of Chinese culture in a relaxed atmosphere. The raffle at the end of the event once again ignited enthusiasm by

the crowd, bringing the entire evening to a perfect close.

The event site was decorated mainly in red, incorporating traditional elements of the Spring Festival, symbolizing auspiciousness, joy, and prosperity. While enjoying the program, the audience also gained a deeper understanding of the cultural background and traditional customs of the Lunar New Year.

It is worth mentioning that it happened to be snowing that day. Heavily. In Chinese culture, the saying “A timely snow promises a good harvest” implies a bountiful harvest and good luck in the coming year. This snowfall added a beautiful symbolic meaning to the beginning of the New Year and also made the entire celebration more festive and ritualistic.

This event was jointly supported and organized by CSA, the Chinese Program, ASU, CCSGA and the Asian Studies Program. It not only showcased the charm of multiculturalism, but also provided a platform for communication and connection for members of the campus community.



BY THE LOTUS STAFF

SENIOR CAPSTONE AND PROJECT PRESENTATIONS SHOWCASE ANOTHER GREAT YEAR FOR ASIAN STUDIES

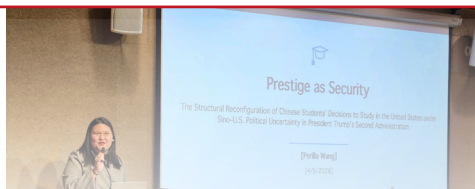
On Thursday, April 9, students and faculty gathered for the Asian Studies Senior Capstone and Project Presentations. Since the program did not have any senior graduating majors this year, Asian Studies chose to do things a little differently and include not only senior minors but also students who had attended a conference with Asian Studies support as well as one of the Gaylor Prize recipients from this past year. The event was a rousing success, with more than two dozen members of the campus community in attendance to celebrate and honor the work of Asian Studies students this year.

The presentations were as follows:

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Manny DeAngelis (Asian Studies/Religion '28) and Aiden Blaha (Asian Studies/Sociology '27) gave a presentation about their trip to the Association for Asian Studies 2026 Annual Conference, held in Vancouver, BC from March 12th-March 15th. [Another student, Christine Byen (Economics/Asian Studies minor '27), also attended the conference, but is currently abroad and did not attend this presentation.] Manny and Aiden shared their experiences at the conference, including pictures and samples of the program. Thanks to the successful trip by students this year, organized in part by Visiting Prof. Mercy An, the Asian Studies program hopes to send students to the conference next year as well! On that note, the next Association for Asian Studies Conference will be held in March 2027 in Boston, Massachusetts.



Perilla Wang (Political Science '28) presented her preliminary findings on her research supported by the Gaylord Student Prize. Titled "Prestige as Security: The Structural Reconfiguration of Chinese Students' Decision to Study in the United States under Sino-U.S. Political Uncertainty in President Trump's Second Administration," Perilla discussed her findings around the reasons why Chinese students choose whether or not to study abroad in the U.S. in this time of changing political tensions and struggles for international students. Those of us in the Asian Studies program look forward to hearing more from Perilla on her fascinating and well-researched project!

The final presentation of the day was by Haley Goetting (Biochemistry/Asian Studies minor '26), who



represented Asian Studies graduating minors. Haley's project, "Fashioning Identities: Gender, Modernity, and Visual Culture in Meiji Japan," showcased changes that occurred in Japanese fashion during the late 1800s as Japan's relationship with the West expanded and changed. Haley's project, undertaken over the course of several years, was expansive and fascinating, highlighting everything from changes in dyes to the impacts of gender and economic status on the changes in fashion. Special thanks also go to Prof. Tamara Bentley in Asian Studies and Art History for her support of Haley in this project. Those of us in the Asian Studies program are deeply proud of the work Haley has done with this project and are grateful to her for sharing her findings!

Below is a truncated version of Perilla Wang's ongoing research on Chinese students and their decisions to study abroad in the U.S., which she presented at the Asian Studies Senior Capstone and Project Presentations on April 9, 2026.

BY PERILLA WANG '28

STATUS AS SECURITY

THE STRUCTURAL RECONFIGURATION OF CHINESE STUDENTS' DECISIONS IN YANGTZE RIVER TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES UNDER SINO-U.S. POLITICAL UNCERTAINTY IN PRESIDENT TRUMP'S SECOND ADMINISTRATION

Introduction

Since 2018, the first term of President Donald Trump, China-U.S. relations have entered a period of strategic competition, during which the issuance of student visas has become a means of national security governance (White House, 2017). As one demonstrative example, Presidential Proclamation 10043 was issued in 2020. The proclamation clearly stipulates that U.S. visa applicants with Chinese passports who are related to the 'Military-Civil fusion (MCF) strategy' will be restricted from entering the country. However, to what extent the students' background can be considered to be militarily-relevant is vaguely defined. In turn, this policy has increased the unpredictability of visa results for relevant students and shaped their long-term study abroad plans. In May 2025, U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, remarked that the U.S. will further intensify visa revocations for students in STEM majors, particularly Chinese students. Therefore, Chinese international students are caught up in the escalation of geopolitical tensions of the invisible Cold War between the United States and China (Lee, 2019).

Lin (2019) points out that Chinese students' enthusiasm for studying abroad has declined significantly due to policies announced by the Trump first administration. Through in-depth interviews with 11 Chinese postgraduate students studying in the United States, Hou (2024) adds that students have experienced stereotyping, as well as exclusion and xenophobia during the academic year. Under this scenario, the United State of America is no longer the first choice for Chinese students. According to data from Common Application, since the 2017-2018 application season, the number of undergraduate applicants in China has been on a downward

trend. To be more specific, Chinese first-year applicant volume declined by approximately 5-8 percent between the 2017-18 and 2018-19 cycles. Additionally, the report from Institute of International China (2019) shares that in the fall of 2018, 48 percent of colleges reported lower enrollment of first year students from China.

In 2025, President Trump committed to his second term. The application history of Chinese students did not repeat the trend studied during President Trump's first administration (Common App, 2025)—in fact, unlike between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019, there was no significant decline from the 2024-2025 application season to 2025-2026 application season. The steady volume of Chinese student applications in 2025 is a puzzling trend. Despite ongoing political uncertainty and restrictive policies on visa issuance, Chinese applicants have shown an unexpected passion for applying to universities and colleges in the U.S. This phenomenon calls for more nuanced explanations as to why students make their decisions given the political uncertainty and U.S. visa politics.

Argument

In this research, I argue that although the number of Chinese applicants remains constant, the current administration under President Trump does impact whether they decide to enroll once they receive the offer. I curated a dataset from 55 Chinese senior high school students currently in the college application process. Notably, they share a similar background of high education and high-income families in China. However, their decision to enroll once receiving offers varies. Some mention that they will only accept offers from high-ranking institutions due to the changing visa policies under the Trump administration, particularly for STEM

majors. This shows that although political uncertainty does not impact the number of Chinese student applicants, it does reduce their incentives to receive a U.S. education from non-high-ranking institutions (Common Application, 2025). For this generation of students, status acts as security; institutional prestige functions as a necessary buffer against the volatility of U.S. visa politics, making enrollment a viable risk only at top-tier universities.

Data Collection

The dataset combines 34 in-depth interviews and 21 online survey responses from Chinese high school students navigating the college application process. Participants were asked about key decision-making factors, including tuition, university rankings, and political uncertainty.

The dependent variable measures ranking concern (0 = not concerned, 1 = concerned, 2 = very concerned). The core independent variable captures intended major (STEM = 1; Humanities = 0; Arts = 2). Control variables include parental education (0 = high school or below to 3 = PhD), family environment (open vs. traditional), personality traits (self-motivated, risk-taking), and perceived political uncertainty. Additional controls account for parental overseas experience, employment in foreign-related sectors, and only-child status.

Results and Data Visualization

This research has two major findings. First, descriptive data reveals the pattern of Chinese students who apply to U.S. colleges showing similarity in their social assets and risk tolerance. I conducted video chats with senior high school students in China, who had decided to apply to U.S. colleges, based on the method of snow-ball sampling.

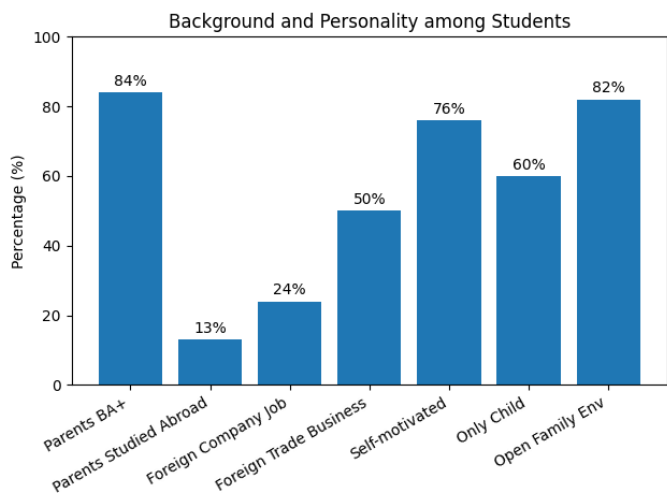


Figure 1. Background and Personality of Student Applicants

As the data suggests, geopolitical volatility has failed to curtail the aspirations of Chinese students coming from privileged families, who are willing to take risks and show self-motivation. The pursuit of U.S. education remains a steadfast ambition among high-resource families. Therefore, students who choose the United States as their option for further education have already undergone a strong pre-screening process.

After finding that the sample backgrounds are highly similar, this paper uses a regression coefficient plot to compare which factors can still distinguish students' emphasis on rankings among applicants' family background, personality traits and awareness of political uncertainty. This leads to the second major finding – STEM major students care about college rankings the most and they tend to reject offers based on the college's prestige in the U.S.

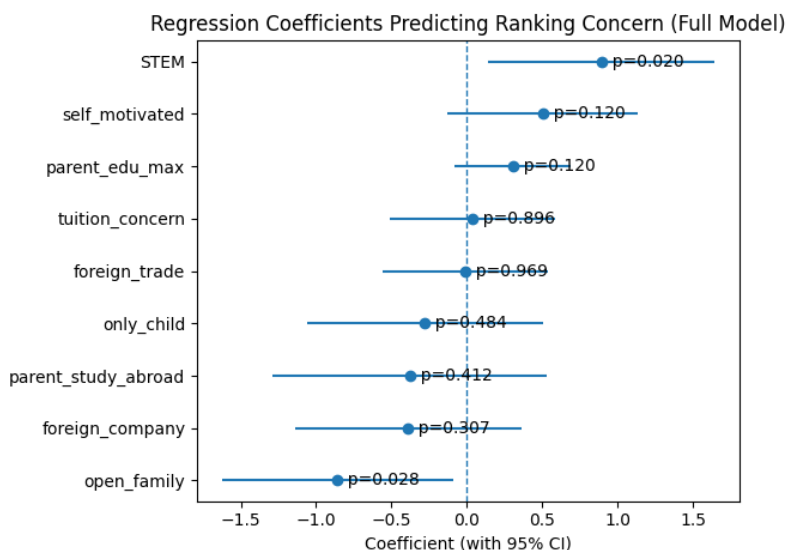


Figure 2. Regression Coefficients Predicting Concern for College Ranking

According to Figure 1, it is important to note that a majority of these students come from well-educated family backgrounds and share several common personal and familial characteristics. In terms of personality traits, 76% of the respondents identified as strongly self-motivated, suggesting that students who proceed to the overseas application stage already possess a high level of internal drive. With respect to family educational background, 84% of the students come from families in which at least one parent holds a bachelor's degree or higher, indicating that the decision to pursue overseas education is closely associated with family educational capital. However, only 13% of parents have direct overseas study experience, suggesting that while first-hand international exposure among parents is limited, families are often internationalized through indirect channels. This pattern is further reflected in parents' occupational backgrounds: 50% of families are engaged in foreign trade-related businesses, and 24% of parents work in foreign-funded companies, pointing to a relatively high degree of international orientation through occupation. Finally, 60% of the applicants are an only child, and 82% report having grown up in an open family environment. Taken together, these characteristics suggest that this group of applicants is structurally well-positioned to interpret uncertainties associated with visas or international politics as manageable challenges rather than decisive barriers. This indicates the combined influence of family education, occupational exposure, and household cultural openness.

Figure 2 shows the regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals of each explanatory variable for the value students place on rankings after controlling for multiple family background, personality traits, and awareness of political uncertainty.

This figure reveals that STEM majors exhibit a significant positive correlation with the importance placed on university rankings ($p = 0.020$), featuring the largest coefficient and most stable confidence interval among all variables. The open family environment shows a significant negative correlation with the importance placed on rankings ($p = 0.028$), indicating that students from open families placed less value on university rankings. Parental education level shows a positive trend with self-motivation, but its confidence interval spans zero, failing to reach conventional significance ($p \approx 0.12$); coefficients for other background variables (such as tuition concerns, parental study abroad experience, foreign enterprise or foreign trade background, only-child status) are close to zero with wide confidence intervals, indicating no stable association.

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DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS?

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SCAN FOR MORE INFO

Questions? Contact Profs Fanny Zhang (fzhang@coloradocollege.edu), John Williams (jwilliams@coloradocollege.edu), or Aaron Su (aaron.su@coloradocollege.edu).

Call for Contributors

Contribute to *The Lotus*!

The Lotus is a student-run publication of the Asian Studies Program at Colorado College. Our goal is to help the community gain new perspectives on Asia and the Asian diaspora, as well as share information related to Asian Studies programming and activities on our campus.

We are also excited to make The Lotus a platform for showcasing the works and talents of our student body. We are now accepting contributions from our fellow students related to the study, appreciation, and celebration of Asian and Asian diasporic cultures, identities, and experiences.

We will consider the following contributions for publication in our future issues:

- Your travel stories and experiences of work and study abroad in Asia!
- Your creative works, including creative writing (poems, short stories, essays) and artwork (photographs, illustrations) related to or about the cultures, identities, and experiences of Asia and the Asian diaspora!
- Your reviews of books, films, television, and music related to Asia and the Asian diaspora!

Send your contributions for consideration to theLotus@coloradocollege.edu with the subject "**Student Contribution.**" Please include your name, year, and a short (no more than 100 words) bio about yourself along with your submission. We encourage contributions from all student backgrounds and perspectives!

Selected contributions will be featured in our student newsletter, and selected contributors will receive a small gift of appreciation.