Graduate Program Welcomes New Cohort and New Director of Graduate Studies.

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It's been an exciting and busy start to the year for the Department of History Graduate Program. In September we welcomed six new students who have come to study a diverse array of fields, including modern China, black and indigenous history, and the modern Middle East. In addition, Professor Devin Naar began his term as the director of graduate studies for the department. He takes over from Professor Purnima Dhavan, who has done so much to support students during her tenure.

Two incoming scholars, Yichen Zhou and Oya Aktas, recently shared some of their experiences and thoughts about their first quarter with the department's social media and website assistant, Emma Hinchcliffe. Zhou joins us from Taiyuan, China, to study modern Chinese history with Professor Madeleine Yue Dong. Aktas, who is originally from Turkey, comes to the UW from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to study the modern Middle East with Professor Arbella Bet-Shlimon.

EH: Why graduate school and why history?

YZ: I was drawn to history after discovering an unexpected interest in collecting materials, in building narratives, and in all things that have become the past. While researching my BA thesis, which was an analysis of philosophical discussion in Buddhist logic, I realized that what I actually wanted to uncover was the social backgrounds of the people at the Buddhist academies. That is when I knew I loved history, but I did not really have the chance to take history classes during my undergraduate studies.

OA: I chose to study history at the graduate level because studying history helps us question both the permanence of our
environment and the novelty of moments of great change. I am fascinated by both these questions!

EH: Why did you pick the UW?

OA: I picked the UW because when I visited I fell in love with Seattle and the commitment to public service that the university embodies.

YZ: Intuition and gut feeling told me to join the UW when I received my admission offer. The University of Washington offered a new and exciting start. I also felt how warm and energetic people were here through my interactions with the UW faculty, staff, and students. Also, the research centers for area studies at the UW are quite strong.

EH: How have you found your experience in graduate school so far? Is it what you were expecting?

YZ: I really like our small and supportive community. It seems easier to reach out to people outside of my own primary field than I expected. I also hope to be more active and able to immerse myself in the world of reading, discussion, and creative activities on the campus.

OA: Graduate school has been wonderful so far. At times it has been challenging—there is a lot of work and new information to take in—but my professors and classmates have already pushed my scholarship in ways I had never conceived of previously.