Kaushik Bagchi is an ASIANetwork Ford Faculty Development Seminar on China participant. During Year One, 1997 of the seminar, he and nine ASIANetwork faculty members spent three weeks at St. Olaf College under the leadership of seminar director, Richard Bodman. In July 1998, Year Two, the seminar members traveled to China. In this article, written before his departure for China in July, Bagchi reflects on the influence of the seminar thus far on his teaching.

Bagchi teaches “Economic and Business History of Japan,” Comparative History of Colonialism in East and South Asia,” “Survey of Premodern East Asia,” “Twentieth Century Asia,” “Cross-cultural Trade in Asia,” “Modern Japan in Film,” and “World History.”

In about a month from now, ten of us, college professors from different disciplines, will travel to China to learn about the country first-hand. After a week in cosmopolitan Shanghai, we will travel to Inner Mongolia, where we will spend a night on the grasslands in a yurt (a traditional Mongol tent) and eat a crow holding vegetables in its mouth (an oat noodle dish). From there we go to Beijing, eat Peking duck (finally, since I have never tried it so far), and return home.

Our journey began a year ago in less exotic surroundings, with a three-week intensive seminar on China at St. Olaf College in Minnesota. Our group included Bob Tallitsch, a biologist interested in traditional Chinese medicine, Guru Rattan Khalsa, a chemist who teaches an interdisciplinary course on global ecology, and Charles Almy, a geologist, who by the end of the seminar teamed up with Dave Goldblatt, our philosopher, to produce a multimedia presentation on Chinese landscapes and paintings. Dave Pasto was there to learn about Chinese theater and opera. Other disciplinary backgrounds in the group included political science, English, German, and psychology. I teach Chinese history, world history, and interdisciplinary courses in the honors program and an introductory first year seminar at my college. I am the only Asianist in my department and was participating in the seminar because I have had no formal training in Chinese history and culture. My primary research and teaching interests are in the areas of colonialism (in South Asia and East Asia), and postcolonial and Third World history.

China Seminar impact

The principal impact, I believe, of attending the seminar with this diverse group has been to make my courses more multi-faceted and thus more exciting for my students. The format of the seminar also fostered this approach. To me, this makes perfect sense since the goal of the seminar is not to produce China specialists, but to raise the level of interest and awareness about China among the participants, which they then transmit to their students and the curriculum at large.

Our seminar started each morning with an hour of Chinese language lessons. In the afternoon we had another conversation class, and in our “free time” we organized writing and calligraphy sessions. Back at Goucher, I have introduced my students to the Chinese characters I am learning, to their excitement and delight. When things get dull, we put our books aside and practice stroke order and philosophize on what the characters mean.

In the past year, I have also found myself frequently discussing and showing Chinese landscape paintings in my classes, another “gentlemanly” interest I acquired at the seminar. Slide shows by experts, a guided visit to the Chinese art section at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the project by Charles and Dave all fueled this interest. To students used to more excitement, landscapes by Chinese literati were a little dull at first, but judging by their comments and papers, they were also eventually hooked. I am now exploring the possibility of working with a colleague from the art department to put together a one or two-week segment in my East Asian history course dealing entirely with Chinese landscapes.

Computers as teaching tools

Another new thrust that the seminar gave to my courses was in the use of computers to enhance teaching and learning. At the seminar itself I began
designing a web resource page on Chinese history, I also put together a humorous presentation on the sayings of Chairman Mao. At Goucher, I immediately put my students to work on similar projects. I also continued to develop my skills by attending workshops and have, for better or for worse, acquired a reputation as a big "technology user" on campus. While I had my initial reservations about spending time on computers in a seminar on China, my anxieties have since disappeared. Although the web still cannot replace books and journals, I discovered that there is material there of a different and often more exciting kind. My students love, for example, the site for Mao badges and caps. And being able to click and see pictures, hear music, and get the latest information on what's happening in China has boosted the level of student enthusiasm in my courses.

**Bold approaches**

At the recent ASIANetwork conference in Chicago, there was an animated discussion in one of the sessions on whether these ongoing faculty development seminars (of which the China Seminar is one) produce people capable of teaching competently at the college level, or whether they produce dilettantes. Guru Rattan, my colleague in the China group, provided an appropriate reply: conventional approaches, she said, are no longer providing answers to the issues the world is facing today. New interdisciplinary perspectives and "bold approaches" from people who are not experts in the traditional sense are precisely what are needed to prepare our students for the world they will work in. There is therefore no harm, she correctly argued, in jumping into a field such as Chinese studies and experimenting with new ideas. That, I believe, is what we did last summer and what we will continue to do this July.

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**BEING THERE: IMPROVING TEACHING THROUGH RESEARCH/RESIDENCY IN ASIA**

**1998 ASIANetwork CONFERENCE PANEL**

**Michael R. Drompp**

History, Rhodes College

Michael Drompp, Panel Chair, teaches "Asian Societies: Past and Present," "The Origins of Chinese Civilization," and courses on Inner Asian history and Japan. His area of expertise is the history of China and Inner Asia from the sixth to the tenth centuries. Drompp is particularly interested in political and cultural interactions between the nomadic pastoral peoples of Inner Asia and the Chinese during this period.

The panel examined the question of how research and/or residency in Asia can play a role in teaching courses in Asian Studies. Our aim was to present some ideas in order to facilitate discussion which proved lively. The three panelists found that they shared similar thoughts, some of which are described here.

**Diane Clayton, Library, Hamline University**

Diane led a study-abroad program in India, which equipped her with fresher and more accurate information about circumstances and issues there through newspapers, journals, observation, and conversations with academics. Observing her students on-site, she identified those topics that were most appealing to them and also expanded her own areas of knowledge through the research that her students carried out. The excitement of student returnees who were guests in her classes at Hamline spurred enthusiasm in those who had not traveled to India, and showed the latter the impact of such experiences.

Authenticity was an important theme in Diane's presentation. She argued that on-site experience provides one with an authentic voice – a "reality check" – that is not possible to acquire in any other way. Her experiences in India provided her with stories and illustrations to use in making important points, such as the need to combat essentializing tendencies through real experiences (in regard to the theme of Hindu-Muslim conflict, for example). Finally, time in India allowed her to improve her cooking skills for use when