

SUZANNE WILSON BARNETT: AT A TURNING POINT



In 1998-99, its seventh year, the ASIANetwork continued on a trajectory of increased visibility and responsibility as an advocate of excellence in undergraduate teaching and learning with a focus on Asia. The consortium advanced existing initiatives in curricular and program development and secured a modest but important grant from the Japan Foundation, in addition to setting up further grant applications in service to the ASIANetwork educational mission. The annual conference in Tacoma, Washington, was the largest ever but still was small enough for conversation about ideas leading to renewed intellectual exchange at and across ASIANetwork member institutions. The transition of the ASIANetwork Executive Directorship from Colorado College to Augustana College fell into place to the credit of all concerned, both individuals and institutions. The consortium continued to inspire new possibilities for strengthening Asian studies programs in liberal arts colleges. In some respects, the 1998-99 experience supports the view that ASIANetwork has become a resource for the promotion of liberal arts education itself as well as of the study of Asian life and thought.

THE BOOK AND THE WEBSITE

1998-99 saw the progress of two projects supported by the second Henry Luce Foundation grant to ASIANetwork; a book about Asia in undergraduate education in the colleges, and the ASIANetwork website, launched the previous academic year. The book, *Asia in the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Case for Asian Studies in Liberal Arts Education* (forthcoming, M.E. Sharpe, 2000), involves six chapter authors and two co-editors in an effort to highlight and exemplify the possibilities of the study of Asia in the cultivation of both critical thinking and broad perspective. The book project moved ahead dramatically with benefit of a meeting of authors and editors in Colorado Springs in June 1998 to air individual participants' visions

of assigned topics within wider discussion of teaching and learning in the liberal arts. This meeting was the basis for a revised prospectus and the preparation of chapters toward completion of the manuscript in late summer 1999.

The ASIANetwork book will have much to offer Asianists at ASIANetwork member institutions who have interest in its revelations of how Asian regions have functioned and might function in the liberal arts, but the book's appeal should extend beyond faculty in Asian studies. The book reveals a pattern whereby "Asian studies" has developed not at the fringes of undergraduate general education in the liberal arts but as part of this kind of education, which promotes high-order thinking from multiple perspectives. As well, the book suggests the way the multi-disciplinary study of Asia has been important to conversation about ideas and values that is the stock-in-trade of liberal arts colleges.

The ASIANetwork website, www.ASIANetwork.org, located at St. Olaf College, is a means of making the consortium accessible in a broad sweep. In 1998-99 the ASIANetwork Board produced a set of statements to govern the chain of command by which postings would find their way to the site and to promote the wise use of the site. Central to the website is up-to-date information about the consortium's activities, including the annual conference and grant-funded programs for which faculty and students from member institutions might apply.

THE TACOMA CONFERENCE

With over 215 registrants and over seventy colleagues from over fifty colleges and universities on the program, the Seventh Annual Conference at the Sheraton Tacoma Hotel set an ASIANetwork record. The conference initiated a pre-conference tour, in this case an effort to explore appropriate venues in the history of Asian Americans in the Pacific Northwest. Keynote speakers Leonard Andaya (University of Hawaii) and Gerald Larson (Indiana University) set a tone by examining how individual lives intertwine with cultural patterns and historical change across oceans and seas.

Among highlights of the conference was the plenary session convened by Timothy Cheek (Colorado College) on "Books That Change the Way We Teach," which allowed its four participants to take ideas and arguments and follow out their pedagogical possibilities. Breakout panels, as usual, fell into different categories, including professional or curricular development along with intellectual and scholarly concerns that have implications for the classroom. One panel featured participants in the two-summer ASIANetwork Ford Faculty Curricular Development Seminar on China, and another featured the first ASIANetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows reporting on the results of their work in Asia in summer 1998.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TRANSITION

At the Tacoma conference the Board officially approved and announced the planned transition of the ASIANetwork Executive Director from Marianna McJimsey

(Colorado College), the pioneer holder of this important central position, to Van Symons (Augustana College) effective September 1999. Over a period of months early in 1999 the officers of the Board worked out this transition, and the smooth transfer revealed strengths of the consortium, its member institutions, and ASIANetwork faculty colleagues. Conference attendees expressed overwhelming admiration for Marianna McJimsey, who managed the increasing complexity and visibility of ASIANetwork with intelligence, grace, and style for more than six years. Conferees also expressed hearty welcome to Van Symons, well known in ASIANetwork as a former Board member and Chair. This transition spotlighted the contributions made by Colorado College to the growth and development of ASIANetwork and also the good will and organizational strength of Augustana College, where a team of faculty and staff will provide support for the new Executive Director.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

In 1997-98 Elizabeth Bentzel Buck (East-West Center, University of Hawaii) accepted the Board's invitation to join the ASIANetwork Council of Advisors. The Board's Executive Committee met as usual with Advisors during the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies.

The Japan Foundation grant will assure a prominent Japanese studies component at the ASIANetwork an-

nual conference near Chicago in April 2000. Toward this objective, one of the two keynote speakers will be William LaFleur (University of Pennsylvania), a specialist in Japanese literature and religion.

Early in 1999 The Henry Luce Foundation announced the Luce Fund for Asian Studies, which over a four-year period will support the initiation of about 40 new junior faculty positions to strengthen Asian studies programs in selective liberal arts colleges. The dynamism of ASIANetwork was a factor in the emergence of this remarkable new program, and in turn the educational mission of the consortium stands to benefit from the contributions of colleagues at member institutions renewed and expanded by Luce-funded professorships in Asian studies.

CONCLUSION

The future of Asia in undergraduate liberal arts education is bright but never secure because academic strategies are subject to change depending on conditions at individual colleges. ASIANetwork may itself be like a small business, thriving but vulnerable. Whatever the turns of academe the consortium already is an indelible part of educational innovation and development with emphasis on the liberal arts. It also will exist forever as an arena of outstanding service and stewardship, often unseen, by both individuals and institutions.

Future issues of *ASIANetwork Exchange* will include information on:

- Publications about Asia by ASIANetwork colleagues
- Special Asia-related events (lectures, concerts, etc.) at ASIANetwork member institutions
- New and visiting faculty members
- Electronic and other media resources
- Other items of interest

Please send all information by November 1, 1999 to Anne Prescott, *ASIANetwork Exchange*, Augustana College, 639 38th St., Rock Island, Illinois 61201. We welcome your submissions!

ASIANetwork seeks to:

- 1) Promote curriculum development and design, both for individual courses and for infusing Asian Studies across the liberal arts curriculum.
- 2) Advance inter-institutional cooperation in foreign study programs, in grant writing, in building a national Asian Studies student honor society, and in other areas of concern.
- 3) Enhance faculty development, through curriculum workshops and through two-way faculty exchanges with colleges and universities in Asia.
- 4) Provide the services of a network of consultants for member schools wishing to establish new programs or to evaluate existing ones.
- 5) Exchange information on new programs, grant and funding opportunities, and job openings.
- 6) Share cultural and public affairs programs such as concerts, speakers, art exhibits, and film series.
- 7) Encourage dialogue about Asia through the newsletter, the *ASIANetwork Exchange*, the website (<http://www.asianetwork.org>), and its annual conference. Prepare a definitive book on Asian Studies at liberal arts colleges.