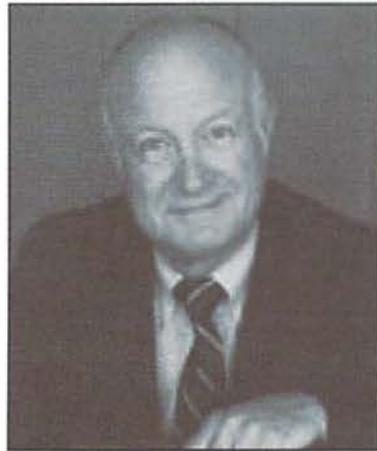


## *From the Board Chair*



Dear ASIANetwork Colleagues,

There is a serious rift within our organization between the romantics (read “philosophers”) and the realists (read “historians”). Under the leadership of then board chair Joel Smith, the victory of the romantics played itself out last spring at Hickory Ridge with a beautifully orchestrated “tenth anniversary celebration” of ASIANetwork’s founding. True, the matriarchs and patriarchs did have their initial exploratory gatherings in 1992, but in reality, the organization was not officially incorporated until 1993. This fact makes the upcoming spring conference hosted by Furman, coincidentally my home campus, the most reasonable occasion for celebratory activities. The realists have now taken charge. Appropriate comments will be made at the truly appropriate time. You will not want to miss this rectification campaign.

Joel Smith did provide us a stimulating opportunity to contemplate what we have achieved during the life of our group. As an historian, I always enjoy listening to founders ruminate about their original vision and comment upon how that vision has been expanded over time. Several of our consortium’s pioneers were present at Hickory Ridge to share their memories as well as their thoughts about our future development. We all have much to celebrate, but it is clear we are faced with a number of significant challenges.

### **Selected Accomplishments:**

We have grown dramatically over the years, having reached a high of over one-hundred and fifty member institutions. In recent years our programs have benefited significantly from the generosity of the Luce and Freeman foundations. Our partnerships have been mutually beneficial, since ASIANetwork has provided creative, energetic personnel to assist these foundations in deriving maximum value from the resources they have devoted to enhancing mutual understanding between Asia and the U.S. Both of our current bene-

factors have financed the hiring of new colleagues at several ASIANetwork institutions. Potentially these scholar-teachers, many of whom are new Ph.D.s, will enrich us all through their participation in our consortium. With our emphasis on undergraduate teaching, we in turn have much to offer young scholars new to the profession.

Through Freeman Foundation funds administered by ASIANetwork, an impressive number of undergraduate students have been given the opportunity to experience Asia first-hand in the company of their faculty mentors. I have great appreciation for the value of this particular program. My first direct encounter with Asia soon after finishing my undergraduate education completely changed my own career path. Since I began teaching, few of my professional experiences have rivaled the delight I have had working with students on-site in China and Japan. ASIANetwork has been continually energized by the renewed enthusiasm of our colleagues returning from Freeman-supported summer collaborative research projects. One of the highlights of our recent annual spring conferences has been the chance to hear students report on their research findings as well as recount their adventures in Asian discovery. If you have not taken advantage of these presentations in the past, let me urge you to do so at our 2003 conference.

ASIANetwork’s oldest partner is the United Board for Christian Education in Asia. The United Board has steadily brought Asian scholars to our campuses. Each year a selected group of these individuals attends our spring conference. Informal conversations with United Board scholars often include fascinating accounts of their American experiences as well as new insights into their own cultures. They often remind me that we learn much about ourselves when we live and study abroad. The United Board also continues to provide opportunities for American scholars to teach on Asian campuses.

One of ASIANetwork’s outstanding services has been to

provide community for Asianists who teach on campuses where few other faculty members share their professional interests. Not all of us are in a position to take advantage of the grant opportunities provided through ASIANetwork, but we can all use the personal and professional contacts available through the consortium to enhance our work with undergraduate students. As an undergraduate teacher I have been informed, inspired and energized by the ideas and encouragement I receive at our annual conferences. Networking has indeed been the greatest benefit I have personally received from participation in the consortium.

Our first "decade" has given us much to celebrate; however, it is clear we are faced with several challenges.

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

Maintenance of our membership represents a critical concern. As we continue to seek funding from various sources, our efforts are clearly enhanced by the strength of our membership. While new institutions affiliate with us each year, we are losing our connection with some long time member campuses. Some of this attrition is due to a particular pattern of involvement with ASIANetwork. On some campuses the consorcial link has been nurtured by one particular individual. The membership committee of the ASIANetwork board has observed the tendency for some institutions to lose contact with us when the key campus contact person retires or takes a position elsewhere. Granted, many of us serve on campuses where there are few colleagues in Asian studies. However, where feasible, it is important for those of us who are active and are enjoying the many personal advantages of our institution's membership to make certain others on our campus are sharing in those benefits. Broadening involvement on our individual campuses is the best way to guarantee the continued long-term health of the consortium as a whole. Bringing our colleagues to an annual spring conference is the most effective means of helping them see the multiple ways our group can assist Asianists who teach undergraduates.

The faculty members funded by the recent Luce and Furman hiring initiatives need to be integrated into ASIANetwork. Many of these individuals are young scholars in their early years of teaching. Their involvement will benefit all sides. Toward that end I will be organizing some special activities for these individuals at our 2003 spring conference. Let me urge those of you who gained one or more of these new colleagues to encourage them to attend.

A significant amount of the board's collective deliberation time during the 2001-2002 term was devoted to the discussion of financial matters. We are trying to establish a "contingency fund" that will support our future consorcial administrative requirements. This effort has not been enhanced by the general economic climate, but your board members have worked hard to serve as good stewards of the resources in our care. The financial condition of ASIANetwork is discussed each year at the general business meeting typically held on the Sunday morning of our spring conference.

The growing complexity of our financial affairs has added

to the already significant load shouldered by Van Symons, our executive director. While consulting with many of you, the board has particularly sought the experience and creativity of Suzanne Barnett to help us think through possible administrative alternatives to our current structure. She leads a special task force charged with exploring possible ways to reallocate the responsibilities that have steadily accrued to the vital position held by our executive director.

This summer Paul Watt, vice chair of the board, has been coordinating the efforts of several ASIANetwork colleagues in fashioning a grant proposal which aims to make the fabulous Asian art collection of the Cleveland Museum more accessible to our classrooms. Hopefully this initiative will provide opportunities for teams of faculty members to develop study materials useful to a broad spectrum of disciplines.

### **Annual Spring Conference, 2003:**

My colleagues and I at Furman hope you will all join us in Greenville, SC for next spring's ASIANetwork conference. Please make plans now to come south on the weekend of April 11-13. I am counting on azaleas and dogwoods to be near their peak bloom. We are arranging a pre-conference tour of the area to help interpret the region's history as well as to highlight the increasing presence of Asians within the local community. As a Texan who has taught at Furman for twenty-eight years, I believe I can honestly say the upstate of South Carolina will surprise you.

As your board chair I am also responsible for the general conference program, so I want to take this opportunity to solicit panels and presentations. We will be quite fortunate in having two outstanding keynote speakers. Last spring Henry Rosemont graciously took the place of Eliot Deutsch who was to have addressed us during the Friday night session. Professor Deutsch will be joining us this coming spring along with Carol Gluck. These two outstanding scholars will anchor a general program I sincerely believe will be both stimulating and informative.

Whether you are a romantic or a realist, I think you will agree that ASIANetwork is having an exciting year. As you consider the various challenges and opportunities mentioned above, contact me or another member of your board with suggestions that will help us choose the most effective courses of action. We are most importantly a network.

*Jim Leavell*