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**ASIANetwork** is a consortium of about one hundred fifty North American colleges which strives to strengthen the role of Asian Studies within the framework of liberal arts education to help prepare a new generation of undergraduates for a world in which Asian societies will play more and more prominent roles. The unique teaching mission of the undergraduate liberal arts institution poses special opportunities and challenges in the development of Asian Studies. ASIANetwork seeks to encourage the study of Asian countries and cultures on our campuses and to enable our students and faculty to experience these cultures first hand. In a time of fiscal constraints, ASIANetwork facilitates conversation among faculty and administrators concerning the development and strengthening of Asian studies programs, as well as ways to foster collaboration among institutions.

The **ASIANetwork EXCHANGE**, A Newsletter for Teaching About Asia, is published three times a year. The newsletter, an important venue for communication among members, prints, for example, the speeches of ASIANetwork Conference keynote speakers, course syllabi, and reflections by faculty and by students of study-abroad programs.

We welcome submissions of materials which support the above goals. **Deadlines** for submission of materials are **August 1** for the Fall issue, **November 1** for the Winter issue, and **February 1** for the Spring issue. The editors reserve the right to edit all materials submitted for publication.

Materials may be submitted electronically to ANExchange@augustana.edu, or disks may be sent to Marsha Smith, ASIANetwork EXCHANGE, Augustana College, 639 38th Street, Rock Island, Illinois 61201. For further information contact the editor at the above e-mail address or by telephone at (309) 794-7270.

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Dear ASIANetwork Colleagues,

At each spring and fall ASIANetwork board meeting, much time is devoted to discussions about the programs and services we offer members institutions. Individuals on the executive committee, the development team and various other committees of the Board continue these discussions throughout the year.

As a result of these conversations, there is broad agreement within the board about past programs and services that we believe we ought to sustain and about new initiatives we judge worthy of serious exploration. In the former category fall such programs as the faculty development program, supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation, that combined preparatory study in the U.S. with travel and study in one of several Asian countries, and the Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows program, which supports collaborative research in Asia for a faculty mentor and up to five students. We continue to believe that the ASIANetwork Exchange, which is published three times a year, functions well to inform members of ASIANetwork activities. Our website, www.ASIANetwork.org, will play an increasingly important role in getting word out to the public as well as members about ASIANetwork programs and, through our new on-line member directory, in enabling members to locate and stay in contact with one another. We will continue our ASIANetwork Consultancy Advisory Program, first funded by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, which brings consultants from long-established Asian Studies programs together with member institutions seeking to strengthen Asian Studies on their campuses. Finally, we believe that the Annual Conference, held each spring, is an invaluable forum for highlighting new developments in Asian Studies, for discussing the development of Asian Studies on our campuses, and for enabling members to renew and deepen personal contacts. The collegial atmosphere of our Annual Conferences is something we especially prize.

As we have looked to the future, members of the board have continued to seek out innovative and effective ways to aid faculty in enriching and enlivening the Asian Studies courses we teach, and we have often taken note of the new global context in which not just Asian Studies, but all of the academic programs offered at our schools, now exist. These discussions have led us to consider the development of new programs in two areas. Let me touch on them only briefly here.

The first deals with the development of resources in the field of Asian art for use beyond the art history classroom. After more than two years of discussion, the board believes that the preparation of learning modules involving richly contextualized, high-quality treatments of Asian art could be brought into the history, literature or religion classroom on CDs or via the web. Further, we have the sense that many of our colleges have fine collections of Asian art—that are largely unknown to the world and that could serve as the basis for developing this resource. If your school has significant Asian art, we would like very much to learn more about it.

The second program under consideration explores the links between Asian Studies and the field of Asian American Studies. Members of the Board have noted that faculty and students at our schools encounter Asia not only in the countries that have been included under that rubric but in Asian communities that have grown up in the United States during the 19th and 20th centuries. For many of us travel and the media have diminished the cultural meaning of political
boundaries, and individuals and communities have taken on transnational identities. Consequently the board is considering ways in which a faculty development program might enable colleagues at our institutions to explore both the Asian roots of immigrant communities in the U.S. as well as the U.S. communities themselves.

The spring 2004 ASIANetwork Conference, which will take place from Friday, April 2 through lunch on Sunday, April 4 at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center outside of Chicago, will give us an opportunity to consider these possibilities together. You can find a more complete description of the program in this issue of the Exchange, but let me note briefly the major sessions. Laurel Kendall, Curator, Division of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, will be our keynote speaker on Friday night. An expert on Korean society, Laurel also served as curator at the Museum's recent exhibit on Vietnam. Her presentation will focus on contemporary Vietnam as viewed through the artifacts that she and her colleagues in Vietnam selected for this exhibit. On Saturday morning, Roberta Martin, Director of the Asia for Educators Program at Columbia University will lead a session on "Museum Resources for Teaching about Asia." On Saturday night, the focus shifts from Asian art and artifacts as a window on Asian cultures to the topic of the Asian diaspora in the U.S. Vasudha Narayanan of the University of Florida and a past president of the American Academy of Religion will give a slide presentation on the Hindu diaspora in the United States. Finally, let me note that, while not related to the themes discussed above, the Sunday morning plenary session will focus on the crisis on the Korean peninsula; we are delighted that the well-known Korea expert Bruce Cumings of the University of Chicago will join us for that session. There will, of course, also be the full-range of panels by ASIANetwork colleagues, some of which will relate to the sessions mentioned above.

I hope that you will plan on joining us for the spring conference. I also hope that you will communicate with ASIANetwork Board members about the program initiatives currently under consideration or about other programs and services that you would find valuable. You can find the e-mail addresses of all current Board members elsewhere in this issue.

Paul B. Watt

Announcing a New Program: Understanding Contemporary Islam

The American University of Beirut (AUB), in partnership with the Council for International Exchange of Scholars, announces a new program, Understanding Contemporary Islam. The program aims to increase the understanding between Americans and people from Islamic countries by sending scholars from the Muslim world to U.S. universities and colleges that lack extensive academic programs on Islam and Muslim society but that wish to introduce or expand such offerings. For periods ranging from six weeks to an academic year, these eminent scholars, selected from a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences, will teach, interact with the wider community, and serve as resources on Islam.

U.S. colleges and universities are invited to submit proposals to host a scholar under the Understanding Contemporary Islam program of the American University in Beirut. In making selections, AUB will give priority to institutions that do not have extensive academic programs or courses on Islam or Muslim societies. Undergraduate liberal arts colleges, minority-serving institutions, community colleges, and other state or private institutions are encouraged to apply.

Application deadlines:
- September 15, 2003 for short-term programs in the January to March of 2004 period and for one-semester programs beginning in January, 2004
- November 1, 2003 for programs beginning April 1, 2004 or later.

Application materials and further information can be found at www.cies.org/uci or by e-mailing uci@cies.iie.org.

Plan to attend the Spring 2004 ASIANetwork Conference which will be held at Hickory Ridge Conference Center, Lisle, IL

April 2 - April 4
In last spring's issue of *The ASIANetwork EXCHANGE*, I took the opportunity to recognize and thank a small group of talented individuals who have served and now serve as a Council of Advisors to ASIANetwork. In this fall’s issue, I wish to recognize nine stalwart men and women who have served, and one additional person who now serves, as the board chair for the consortium. I have been blessed to know them all, and to work with them in one capacity or another, on a range of ASIANetwork initiatives. My interaction with each of them on a personal basis has been one of the great joys I have experienced while serving on the board or as the executive director of our consortium. They are all quite incredible people, and their commitment to ASIANetwork was and is unwavering. All have sought in their year of service to leave the consortium just a bit stronger than when they accepted their chairpersonship, and all have succeeded, most far beyond their expectations.

Past and current board chairs, their institutional affiliations, and their year(s) of service as board chair are as follows:

- **Paul Watt**  
  DePauw University  
  2003-04
- **Jim Leavell**  
  Furman University  
  2002-03
- **Joel Smith**  
  Skidmore University  
  2001-02
- **Jim Lochtefeld**  
  Carthage College  
  2000-01
- **Stan Mickel**  
  Wittenberg University  
  1999-00
- **Suzanne Barnett**  
  University of Puget Sound  
  1998-99
- **Van J. Symons**  
  Augustana College  
  1997-98
- **Madeline Chu**  
  Kalamazoo College  
  1996-97
- **Greg Guldin**  
  Pacific Lutheran University  
  1995-96
- **Tom Benson**  
  St. Andrews Presbyterian College& Green Mt. College  
  1993-1995

Any past board chair will tell you that their year of service was perhaps the most challenging of their academic career. However, they hang on, knowing that they have but twelve months to leave their mark on ASIANetwork, and that there is a capable vice-chair ready to accept the chairpersonship after their departure. Sometimes, but not always, these individuals have managed to secure a course release time, not funded by the consortium, from their college administrators to free up time to direct ASIANetwork. However, this release time is not nearly enough.

Board chairs quickly discover that they are responsible for not only helping run the day-to-day affairs of the consortium, but also with: 1) planning and conducting two board meetings, 2) fostering oversight of development activities, 3) monitoring the selection of student and faculty participants in foundation-financed ASIANetwork-administered summer programs, 4) working with the publicity and membership committees to sustain ASIANetwork membership, 5) assuring that new postings are made in a timely manner on our web site and that the web site is being effectively managed, 6) encouraging the editorial staff of our newsletter to see that three issues of *The ASIANetwork EXCHANGE* are produced in timely fashion, 7) monitoring ASIANetwork finances, and 8) most daunting of all, planning and running our annual spring conference.

Fortunately, from the time of ASIANetwork's inception, its members and especially those serving on the board have shown an incredible willingness to volunteer their services. As a consequence, board chairs seem always to have a ready group of colleagues eager to undertake challenging tasks. Lately, I have witnessed, as I do every summer and early fall, colleagues working with great earnestness to assist our current board chair, Paul Watt, identify and invite two keynote speakers for next spring's conference. At the same time, they are organizing a pre-conference field trip for those wishing to see Asian sites in the Chicago area, two plenary
sessions, a fine arts interlude performance for the late Saturday afternoon, and sixteen panel sessions for our four breakout periods. It is simply amazing to watch all this occur as ASIANetwork prepares to host its 12th annual conference for the approximately 200 associates who annually attend.

One thing that has quite amazed me as I have worked with ASIANetwork board chairs has been their ability to leave their particular mark on the consortium in the face of their ongoing crushing responsibilities. One developed the idea of creating a "Cache of Lore" for the board, which is an ongoing record of board decisions about important financial, development, membership, and other issues that can subsequently be accessed. Knowing that institutional memories tend to be short-lived, the "Cache of Lore" serves, along with board minutes and our by-laws, to provide the historical memory of important board decisions to help shape future discussion.

When time and circumstances demanded such, two consecutive board chairs helped create a development sub-committee and asked two former board members, Cathy Benton (Lake Forest College) and Stan Mickel (Wittenberg University) to serve on it. Cathy and Stan have worked to help rationalize our development process, from generating grant ideas, to formulating board and non-board committees to write the grants, to producing an impressive portfolio document to accompany proposals at the time they are presented to foundations, and most importantly, to discovering foundations that have an interest in funding the initiatives that we create.

More recently a board chair took the initiative to create two sub-committees to begin the process of ascertaining what the needs of ASIANetwork might be as it transitions to a new headquarters following the selection of a new executive director after my five to six year term expires. Suzanne Barnett (the University of Puget Sound) chaired one committee which has already completed its work and developed impressive documents that help define both the current strengths of ASIANetwork and the challenges facing the organization in future years. Working with these documents, the other committee is already generating a list of candidates to become the next executive director.

The opportunity to work for ASIANetwork, and through the consortium with the above mentioned board chairs, not to mention well over two dozen other board members, has enabled me to interact with truly exceptional persons who exhibit both a passion for Asia and minds disciplined by study in a broad range of other fields in the humanities and social sciences. Board meetings, though demanding on all participants, are incredibly productive and fulfilling, and the time spent by board members working one-on-one with others is deeply satisfying. I believe that all who serve ASIANetwork come away from three years of service to the consortium not only grateful for the chance to strengthen the consortium and thereby the study of Asia on our campuses, but perhaps equally appreciative of the opportunity to interact in such a meaningful way with board associates.

I, more than anyone else, have been given the opportunity to work one-on-one with a different board chair each of the past several years. The experience has been simply wonderful. Each of these persons has skillfully discharged her/his responsibilities, but more than that, each has been wonderful to work with. Each has, of course, brought her/his own personality to the chairpersonship, and that has been what has made working with various chairs so engaging. Be it the wisdom of Paul Watt, the good humor of Joel Smith, the grace and gentle spirits of Jim Leavell and Jim Lochtefeld, the sheer energy of Stan Mickel and Suzanne Barnett, or the vision of Tom Benson, Greg Guldin, and Madeline Chi, I have come to deeply admire each and cherish the time spent with all of them. ASIANetwork has been blessed to have such leadership.

Van Symons
2003 ASIANetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellowship Recipients
Teodora Amoloza, Illinois Wesleyan University
Program Director

In Spring 2003, 57 students and faculty mentors comprising 12 research teams from ASIANetwork member institutions were awarded the fellowship grant that would support collaborative research in six Asian countries for at least three weeks during the past summer: five to China, two to Japan, one to South Korea, one to Taiwan, one to Thailand and two to Vietnam. However, because of the SARS situation in Asia, all ASIANetwork administered travels to Asia were postponed (see related announcement). We congratulate the following faculty mentors and their students, and we are very hopeful that they will be able to carry on their projects during the 2003-2004 academic year. Congratulations and good luck to all!

Baldwin-Wallace College, Haesook Chae, Department of Political Science, South Korea:
• Tiffany Lynn Carwile, '04, Political Science/International Studies and Scott Damberger, '03, International Studies, Anti-Americanism in South Korea, and
• Dylan S. Davis, '03, Psychology, English Teachers in South Korea.

Bard College, Jeffrey Sichel, Department of Theater, Crichton Atkinson, '05, Theater; Rebecca Chernoff, '03, Theater; Hunter McClamrock, '04, Theater; Corey Sullivan, '03, Theater; and Joanne Tucker, '05, Theater; China: Exploring Communication in the Absence of a Shared Language: A Cross-Cultural Production of The Good Person of Sichuan.

California Lutheran University, David Del Testa, Department of History, Vietnam:
• Michael Barker, '03, History, Missionary Intelligence: Political Work of American Protestants in Colonial and Post-Colonial Vietnam,

Daemen College, Baohui Zhang, Department of History and Government; Laurence Benham III, '04, History and Government; and Nicole Grabski, '04, History and Government/Secondary Education; Taiwan: Taiwan's Democratization and Its Implications.

Hartwick College, Linda S. Swift, Department of Biology, Thailand:
• Amy Bateman, '04, Biology, Determination of Water Sanitation Consumed by 0-5 Year Olds,
• Colleen Didas, '04, Biology and English, Recording of Feeding Practices in the 0-5 Year Old Group and Pregnant Mothers,
• Kristin Hardman, '04, Biology, Determination of the Nutritional Status and Family Lineage of Children 0-5 Years of Age,
• Melissa Huizinga, '04, Biology and Chemistry, Relationship of Fluctuating Asymmetry and Growth Stunting, and
• Andrew Jones, '04, Biology, Determination of Parasitic and Pathogenic Intestinal Infections.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Jack Harris, Department of Sociology, Vietnam:
• Gwynne Decker, '04, Asian Studies, Global Business, Traditional Culture, and
• Danielle Faul, '03, Biology, Emerging Technologies, the Global Economy, and Pre-Natal Care.

Illinois Wesleyan University, Abigail Jahiel, Department of Political Science; April Guthrie, '03, Environmental Studies and Music; Caleb Stevens, '03, Political Science; and Andrew Sur, '03, Political Science and International Studies; China: Towards Sustainable Development in the Chinese Countryside.

Simon's Rock College of Bard, Christopher Coggins, Division of Social Studies; Nicholas Ballenger, '03, Politics,
Law and Society; Kristen Garringer, '04, Geography; and Tessa Hutchinson, '03, Asian Studies; China: Sacred Landscapes, Eco-Cultural Tourism, and Nature Conservation in Northwest Yunnan.


Trinity University, Randall L. Nadeau, Department of Religion, China:
- Bianca Abate, '05, Chinese and Marketing, Gender in Chinese Buddhism,
- Kyle Brillante, '05, Biology, The Mosuo: A Matriarchal Society in Southwest China,
- Elizabeth Hugetz, '05, International Studies and Chinese, Women in Chinese Education,
- Arthur Merschat, '05, Chinese, The Female Artist in Chinese History, and
- Randall Robinson, '05, Chinese and International Business, Gender and Business Institutions.

Warren Wilson College, Dongping Han, Department of History and Political Science, China:
- Sarah Cox, '04, Mathematics, Examining Mathematics Teaching Techniques in China: What Can the United States Learn?
- Paul Edmonds, '04, Asian Studies, Daily Religious Observance in Rural China,
- Theo Ellezam, '05, Alternative Health and Medicine, Traditions of Healing: Ancient Medical Practices in Contemporary Rural China,
- Erin McVey, '05, Biology, The Barefoot Doctors in Rural China: A Look at the Changes in the Last Twenty Years, and
- Soren Norris, '03, Psychology, A Comparison of the Prevalence of Anxiety and Depression between Urban and Rural Chinese High School Students.

Whitman College, Akira R. Takemoto, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Japan:
- Diana Kusunoki, '05, Asian Studies and Lisa Johnson, '05, Asian Studies, Courtly Elegant: On the Tea Rooms and Gardens at the Yabunouchi Residence, and

2003 ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia Summer Institute
Norm Moline, Augustana College
Program Director

In June, 2004, ASIANetwork will sponsor the last of its College-in-Asia Institutes, funded by the Freeman Foundation. The institute originally was scheduled for the past summer, but it was postponed because of the SARS outbreak in Asia. The same ASIANetwork member colleges and universities selected for the 2003 program will participate in the summer 2004 Institute. They are: Baldwin-Wallace College, Barat College of DePaul University, Carthage College, Coe College, Drury University, Goucher College, University of Redlands, University of Washington at Tacoma, Wartburg College, and Wheaton College. Each school will send two representatives: an Asian studies faculty member and a college administrator.

The three-week institute is designed to support the training of these administrator-faculty teams to develop and manage their own Term-in-Asia programs. Through on-site visits and briefings in East Asia, it utilizes the Augustana College fall overseas term as a model. This program has introduced up to eighty students from a full range of major fields to Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong S.A.R. and China and their cultures once every three years since 1974. Professors Norman Moline and James Winship, who have directed Augustana's programs for many years, will direct the institute.

After learning about this model, visiting Asian sites, and meeting with potential contact people in these countries, participants are better able to develop in-house study-in-Asia programs that fit the circumstances of their colleges or universities. Fifteen ASIANetwork colleges and universities have already participated in previous summer institutes. Subsequently, many of them have developed a new Asian overseas experience or expanded an existing program, achieving the primary goal of the institutes, which is to provide more on-site experiences in Asia for undergraduates.
Announcement Regarding Freeman Foundation-Funded Programs

Due to the SARS outbreak last spring, the Board of Directors of ASIANetwork, with the approval of the Freeman Foundation, decided to delay all Student-Faculty Fellows and College-in-Asia Programs scheduled for the summer of 2003. It was determined that if travel advisories in Asia were lifted, some programs scheduled for the summer of 2003 could be run during the 2003-04 January Interim, with the remaining ones conducted during the summer of 2004. As a consequence, no new Freeman programs will be funded this year.

The 12th Annual ASIANetwork Conference
April 2-4, 2004
The Hickory Ridge Conference Center
Lisle, Illinois

The spring 2004 ASIANetwork conference will be held at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center located just outside of Chicago in Lisle, Illinois. The conference will run from Friday, April 2 through lunch on Sunday, April 4. Please set aside these dates on your calendar. Registration information will be sent out later in the academic year. In addition to the full range of panels by ASIANetwork colleagues and friends, there will be several events and sessions worthy of special note.

On Friday, the day will begin with a pre-conference tour of Asia-related sites in the Chicago area led by Norm Moline, Professor of Geography at Augustana College. With the exception of a visit to the Art Institute of Chicago, the tour will include all new sites and will run from approximately 9 a.m. until 4 p.m.

The conference itself begins with dinner on Friday evening and the keynote address by Laurel Kendall, Curator, Division of Anthropology at the American Museum of Natural History in New York, on Asian art and artifacts as a window on Asian cultures. Laurel served as curator of the Museum's recent exhibit on Vietnam and is co-editor of the exhibit catalog (Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit, 2003). Vietnam will be the focus of her presentation. Laurel is also well known for her studies of Korean society.

A theme related to Laurel's presentation will be explored in a Saturday morning plenary session led by Roberta Martin, Director of the Asia for Educators Program at Columbia University. The topic of the session will be “Museum Resources for Teaching about Asia.” Roberta hosted an outstanding workshop on this topic at Columbia University in the spring of 2003 that brought together educators from major museums, faculty at several colleges and universities, and foundation representatives.

On Saturday evening, we are pleased to welcome Vasudha Narayanan, Professor of Religion at the University of Florida and past president of the American Academy of Religion. Vasudha will give the second keynote address of the conference on the subject of the Hindu diaspora in the U.S. Vasudha has published studies of the Vedas as well as treatments of Hindu devotionalism and Hindu perspectives on ecological problems. Her book, The Hindu Traditions in the United States: Temple Space, Domestic Space and Cyberspace, will be published by Columbia University Press this year.

Finally, the Sunday morning plenary session will take up the topic of the crisis on the Korean peninsula as well as its impact on the region and on U.S. policy. We are delighted that Bruce Cumings, Professor of Korean History at the University of Chicago, will join us for this session. Bruce's many publications on Korea includes Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History (1997). We are grateful for the generous support that the Korea Society has provided for this session.

Please plan on joining us for these sessions and the numerous opportunities the conference provides to gain new insights into developments in the Asian Studies field, to renew friendships, and to meet new colleagues. Complete information about the conference as well as registration materials will be mailed to all ASIANetwork members and also posted on our website at www.asianetwork.org by mid-January.
Keynote Address: Comparative Philosophy: Past, Present and Future

Dr. Elliot Deutsch, University of Hawaii at Manoa

In the kind letter of invitation I received to present this keynote address, I was told that it would be ideal if:

"you could review the role played by the Hawaii program, the journal Philosophy East and West, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, the various East-West Philosophers' Conferences, and other activities you have been involved in with an eye toward what should be done in the future. This could be a kind of professional autobiography... It would be wonderful if you [could also] include issues of substance, such as central philosophical themes that you have dealt with over the years."

Well this is a very tall order indeed. I will, though, attempt first to report on the various activities of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, including a brief history of the East-West Philosophers' Conferences and the journal Philosophy East and West. I will also remark on a special project that is currently underway in my department. Second, I will address the general theme of what comparative philosophy is and what I think it ought primarily to be and, in this context, discuss in outline form a major theme that has occupied my attention in recent years, namely that of cross-cultural rationality, focusing here on the topic of the purported universality of human reason.

Let me begin with the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, seeing as several of you here have been active members for some time. In the opening remarks I made at the First International Research Conference in Asian and Comparative Philosophy sponsored by our Society and held in Hawaii in August 1984, I sketched very briefly something of the history of the Society. I noted that the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy was organized in the Spring of 1968, some thirty-five years ago, at a breakfast meeting held in Philadelphia with approximately thirty founding members attending. In my initial announcement of and invitation to this organizing meeting I stated that "The purpose of the proposed Society will be to serve the professional interests and needs of scholars and teachers who are involved in Asian and comparative philosophy and to encourage the development of these disciplines in the academic world."

This statement of purpose was nicely elaborated upon by Karl Potter, the first president of the Society, who proposed that a long-range goal of the Society was "that Asian philosophy should eventually be treated without apology and without distinction within philosophy curricula in American university and college departments. The parochialism of American philosophers is still deplorable, although small beginnings have been made. But few American philosophy teachers are trained in Asian philosophy, and too many of them consider Asian philosophy as unchallenging, or even non-existent."

To this end, the Society has sponsored approximately 125 panels at meetings held in conjunction with the Association for Asian Studies, the American Philosophical Association and the American Academy of Religion. The topics of the panels ranged across the entire spectrum of philosophical issues and problems. In 1984, under the leadership of Gerry Larson, the Society held its first major research conference on the theme "Interpreting Across Boundaries." Some 175 scholars from 14 countries...
participated in that conference, the selected proceedings of which were edited by Gerry and me and published by Princeton University Press. Subsequent research conferences were held in New York, in India, in Missouri, again in Hawaii, and next month one will be held in California.

The journal Philosophy East and West, of which I had the honor to be editor between 1967 and 1987 and which is informally affiliated with the Society, has grown nicely over the years with subscriptions now over 1500 and with orders from libraries all over the world. As some of you know, it is now ably edited by my colleague Roger Ames. Incidentally, when Roger and I were in China in 1985 we were pleased to learn how important the journal was regarded there, for it was one of the first to be banned and burned during the Cultural Revolution!

The Society has also sponsored a monograph series published by the University of Hawaii Press which has proven to be very successful. Several of the monographs have required four or more printings. I edited the series for the first years, Henry Rosemont for a couple of decades, and now T.C. Kine III and John Schroeder of St. Mary's College of Maryland. Several of our members have also published introductory texts in philosophy that have incorporated and integrated non-Western materials. In addition to the panels, conferences, and monograph series sponsored by the Society, a newsletter, the Forum, has been published under the initial editorship of Carl Becker and David Shaner, and most recently by Jeffrey Timm and currently by Michael Barnhart. It has developed into an important clearinghouse of information for our field.

Our Society has also cooperated with colleagues in England, Japan, Israel, Germany and Australia in the formation of Associations for Comparative Philosophy in these countries and with the East-West Philosophers' Conference program sponsored by the University of Hawaii.

During the past decades, the East-West Philosophers' Conference program—supported incidentally entirely by the local Honolulu business community—has maintained its tradition going back to the 1930s and has developed and expanded into many new directions. After the demise of its founder Charles E. Moore in 1967, major conferences were held in 1969 on the theme “The Alienation of Modern Man,” directed by visiting professor Abraham Kaplan, and in 1989 I had the honor of directing the Sixth East-West Philosophers' Conference on the theme “Culture and Modernity: The Authority of the Past.” The invited participants came from many countries, including for the first time Russia, and countries in Africa and Latin America. Invitations were also accepted from a large number of leading philosophers from the U.S. and Europe (e.g., Richard Rorty, Arthur Danto, Richard Bernstein, Alasdair MacIntyre, Hilary Putnam, Richard Wollheim, Agnes Heller, Karl-Otto Appel).

A number of smaller conferences on themes such as “The Development of Logic East and West,” “Law and Morality,” and “Aesthetics East and West,” and a medium-sized one on Wang Yang Ming and a rather large one on Chu Hsi, which was organized by the late Wing-tsit Chan, were also held during the ‘70s and the ‘80s. As a spin-off from the 1989 conference, regional conferences on themes related to culture and modernity were held in Russia, India and Australia.

As some of you may know first-hand, a Seventh East-West Philosophers' Conference was also held in Hawaii in January 1995 on the theme “Justice and Democracy.” In a rather novel and important development, we brought Professor Marietta Stephanian of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences to Hawaii to direct this conference, which turned out to be very exciting and rewarding. An Eighth East-West Conference, co-directed by Marietta and Roger Ames, was also held on the theme “Technology and Human Values” in January, 2000: a fitting topic for the new millennium. Approximately 150 renowned philosophers and experts in other areas of culture and technology from over thirty-five countries participated in the meeting. The proceedings of these conferences going back to the 1930s have been published by the University of Hawaii Press and have commanded a great deal of attention. I am pleased at this time to announce that a Ninth East-West Philosophers' Conference, to be directed by Roger Ames, will be held in Hawaii in the summer of 2005 on the general theme “Education and Its Goals in a Global Context.”

As far as other projects currently being undertaken by our department, I would call attention especially to one of these. As a departmental project, a group of us (Arindam Chakrabarti, Vrinda Dalmiya, Roger Ames, Graham Parkes, Steve Odin, Tamara Albertini and myself) have contracted with Blackwell Publishers (Oxford) to prepare a series of new source books in Asian philosophy. The major ones still in use today go back to the ‘60s. The initial volumes will be on Indian, Chinese, Japanese and Islamic philosophy. Taking into account the distinctive features of the individual traditions, the volumes will work within a problem-oriented framework, which is to say, the primary source materials will be organized with respect to specific issues that are addressed in the respective traditions rather than simply chronologically by schools. As something of a first for philosophy departments in the world, the various faculty involved have agreed to put all royalties received into a special account to support our graduate students.

Well, the time has come now to address the question: What, then, is comparative philosophy?

Comparative philosophy—or what we might today better call “cross-cultural,” “trans-cultural,” or simply “global” philosophy—has throughout its history and development exhibited a rich diversity of aims, methods and styles. Let me briefly sum up a few of the most enduring of these and then set forth some features of what I take to be its most vital intentionality, namely to contribute to creative philosophical thinking.

One of the enduring aims of comparative or cross-cultural philosophy has been to make evident the basic cognitive and evaluative presuppositions of traditions other than one's own (historically, mainly Asian), with the expectation that one can then attain greater clarity and
understanding about the presuppositions that inform one’s own tradition. We come to know ourselves better philosophically, it is believed, in and through the recognition of other alternative conceptual schemes, values and ways of organizing and making sense out of our human experience. The major Asian (and today as well many other non-Western) traditions are studied, then, as they reveal distinctive “ways of thinking” and as they may be contrasted with each other and with various Western forms. This has been comparative philosophy in its broadest cultural modality. In its earliest phases, a deeper agenda was also at play, which many comparativists today regard as a rather naive one, which was to bring about a general synthesis of what was thought to be the best in different traditions and attain a certain universal accord among philosophers wherever they are found. This approach occupied the attention of many of the philosophical pioneers in the field during the early to middle decades of the last century.

Other workers in the field have also taken a rather universalistic approach by way of seeking to uncover topologies of philosophical thinking that can reveal general patterns of thought in both the East and the West. Empiricists, rationalists, theists, idealists, and so on, can be seen to have developed similar positions in diverse traditions, with the differences noted between them also being instructive.

This approach was tied in some ways to the growing sophistication in the scholarly study of non-Western philosophical traditions where, with enhanced linguistic skills, many important technical texts were translated into English and other Western languages and widely disseminated.

Another approach to comparative philosophy that has been prominent in recent decades is somewhat more piecemeal and works against the background of twentieth-century Western analytic philosophy. Attention gets focused on issues in epistemology, philosophy of language and logic where, it is thought, a careful and sophisticated reading of non-Western texts can enrich Western treatments of these issues; in short, that contemporary Western philosophers can have much to learn from the styles of reasoning, the notions of truth, and analyses of the uses and functions of language from traditions different than their own.

This approach may be seen to be part of a larger comparative enterprise which we might call the “problem approach.” Whether it be in ethics, metaphysics, aesthetics or any other branch or area of philosophy, the driving idea is that we can identify philosophical problems that cut across various traditions and employ the resources of those traditions to enable one to deepen and broaden one’s own philosophical understanding and work. In a book on Indian philosophy published over thirty years ago, I stated what I still believe to be the most exacting and exciting approach to comparative philosophy. “We are aware now,” I wrote then, “that there is much of intrinsic philosophical value and interest in Asian thought and that consequently this thought need not be cast merely in the mold of an historical (or exotic) curiosity. Students ought to be able to study Asian philosophy for the purpose of enriching their philosophical background and enabling them to deal better with the philosophical problems that interest them.” I went on to say, and would now soften considerably, the somewhat universalistic language employed, that “Without losing sight of the distinctive and sometimes unique characteristics of a tradition, one ought to be able to concentrate attention on the tradition as it is a response to a series of universal questions and problems, and with the express intention that these responses will influence one spontaneously in one’s own thinking.”

Today we have, it seems, become more circumspect in our understanding that philosophical problems, as well as the answers given to them, are highly contextualized and that one of the significant creative functions of comparative philosophy is to examine how one’s initial formulation of a specific problem can itself be reformulated in the light of alternative possibilities professed in other traditions. We have also come to realize that the very idea of philosophy may mean rather different things in different cultures and that we have much to learn from these other conceptions. This brings me directly to comparative philosophy as creative philosophy.

The creative comparativist faces a number of formidable tasks, the first of which is precisely that of understanding and interpreting the philosophical achievements of other traditions. This calls for a complex and subtle hermeneutic. To begin with, the question must be asked whether or not, just because certain similar-sounding terminology is being employed, the same philosophical problem is in fact being addressed in different cultural traditions. We are, I think, compelled to recognize that there are cultural-philosophic presuppositions that largely influence the formulation of specific philosophical problems in both substance and style, and that these problems in their specificity, are not universal.

We also have emerging in this context the interesting question: Do we have the same philosophical problem in two or more traditions when what counts as a solution to, or resolution of, the problem may differ radically? The answer, I think, is both “yes” and “no” — the two being applicable at different levels of analysis and experience. Let me explain. There must surely be a sense in which differences in presuppositions and differences in criteria of intelligibility and the rest make for a real difference in the very philosophical problems being addressed. Put simply, East Asians, South Asians, Westerners frequently are talking about different things in their various treatments of philosophical problems. And yet, at a deeper level, we do find, and philosophically we are compelled, as it were, to believe, that there is a common core of human experience, a range of possibilities that cuts across differences in cultures and indeed differences (by gender, class, education . . .) between individuals in the same culture, a range that gets articulated in diverse ways but which nevertheless serves as a kind of “deep grammar” of experience — what my good friend Henry Rosemont calls “homoversals.”

In any event, we do need to recognize in strong hermeneutical and pluralistic terms that we inevitably bring
our own “prejudices” or predispositions to interpret and judge what is initially alien to us as these are informed by our cultural and personal experience. We need then to develop, through letting as far as we can the other tradition speak to us in its own terms, a negotiating process, as it were, between our prejudgmental forms and patterns and the content and conceptual structures of that tradition. We aim thus to alter our prejudices in the light of that negotiation or encounter. We thereby seek, and sometimes attain, understanding of another tradition in terms of what we share and what we find distinctive—for better or worse—in it, but always within the altered background framework of the integrity of our own philosophical being.

This requires, then, a kind of contextualized translation whereby we seek the meaning of key terms and concepts in the manner in which they initially function in the other tradition. Special attention may be given to the basic metaphors which inform particular ways of thinking, or to concepts which serve both as theories and as guides to a particular way of life—and from these inquires to uncover features of our own culturally-informed presuppositions which may be called into question. From this questioning, it is anticipated, we may attain an openness to develop new and better forms of philosophical understanding.

Notes


2It has also become something of a commonplace now in comparative studies to note that one approaches another culture not only from within the general prejudices of one’s own cultural background, but quite specifically from where one currently stands philosophically within that background: for example, it is quite apparent that German Indologists of the last century, such as Paul Deussen, read Indian thought through the lens of Idealistic metaphysics, and that in our own times Western readings of Asian traditions have often been highly analytic in character. And also from East to West: one has only to read several texts of the Kyoto School of Japan to see how their interpretations of Western thought were highly colored by various Buddhist values and concepts that deeply informed the thinkers of that school, such as Nishida and Nishitani. Every generation, it seems, writes anew the history of its own culture and inescapably that of others relative to the fashions and interests of its times.


Teaching Comparative Philosophy:
David Shaner, Chair, Furman University
Peter Groff, Bucknell University
Charles Ess, Drury University

Teaching “Introduction to Philosophy: A Comparative Approach”
Peter Groff
Bucknell University

Let me begin with a full disclosure: I am a Nietzsche specialist rather than an expert in any particular area of Asian studies. I have, however, since my undergraduate studies, cultivated an interest in comparative philosophy, and over the last seven years have had the opportunity to teach a variety of courses in Eastern traditions. I currently teach in the Philosophy department of Bucknell University, a small liberal arts college in central Pennsylvania, where three years ago, I took over responsibility for covering the “non-Western” component of our curriculum. As part of these responsibilities, I periodically teach courses in Islamic, Indian, and comparative philosophy, but one of my regular courses is a cross-cultural introductory philosophy class called “World Philosophy,” the aim of which is to introduce students to non-Western philosophical traditions, along with some key Western figures. Over the last few years, I have experimented quite a bit with this course, while maintaining an overall comparative approach. In what follows I will reflect on what I see as the basic aims of this kind of class, as well as some of the challenges it faces. In doing so, I will also talk a bit about the different models I’ve tried so far, what worked and didn’t. So: first the pieties, then the nuts and bolts.

Theoretical Reflections

Like many “retooled” comparative philosophers, before I began teaching “World Philosophy,” I had ample opportunity to teach a fair number of Western-oriented introductory Philosophy classes. Assuming that a comparative philosophy class is still ultimately a philosophy class, I’ll begin by sketching out some of the aims that were basic to these more traditionally-conceived courses, since I would like to think that they remain pertinent to the East-West comparative approach as well. One of the more modest goals was simply to familiarize students with primary historical philosophical texts. Certainly, exposing students to great writings as well as great ideas can help inculcate in them a love of reading and learning. But an additional benefit of this approach is that students begin to acquire a first-hand
familiarity with some of the most important and influential philosophical systems—systems that are, whether they realize it or not, already at least partially constitutive of their own world-views. The point, as I conceive it, is to get them to recognize the extent to which they are already Platonists, Augustinians, Cartesians, etc., whether they know it or not. In doing so, they will be in a better position to understand the origin of their own worldview and who its architects are, and thus to see, not so much the arbitrariness, but the contingency or optionality of that worldview.¹

But my primary underlying goal has always been to get the students to be more philosophical, to do philosophy. I aim to cultivate in students a disposition towards critical analysis and careful reflection, but also to awaken in them (or perhaps, help to recuperate) a sense of awe, perplexity and concern for the world and their place in it—that is to say, a desire for understanding. And I want them to see that, as interesting as all the claims and systems that they are studying may be, it is the questions that take precedence: e.g., What is the self? What is good? What is knowledge? What is real? And so forth. By fore-grounding the questions to which various thinkers or schools or traditions are responding, the history of philosophy emerges, not as a jumble of arbitrary, perverse, and seemingly unrelated claims, but as a living, ongoing dialogue in which students can participate, from which they can profit, and even perhaps to which they can contribute. When the answers that various philosophers have proffered fall short and seem inadequate, the questions still remain and demand a thoughtful response.²

Not surprisingly, broadening the standard “Intro Phil” class to include non-Western traditions opens the door to additional aims and considerations. Last year’s panel on teaching comparative philosophy dealt with a number of these goals, which I will not attempt to canvass here.³ Instead, I will touch upon three rather modest aims that are particularly important to me. The first is relatively straightforward. On the most basic level, I want students to realize that philosophical thought is not the exclusive province of Western civilization, and hopefully to develop an interest in, and appreciation for, non-Western philosophical traditions.

Second, I aim to disabuse them of the idea that the entirety of world-historical philosophy is essentially homogeneous. The most rudimentary form of this pernicious assumption is the belief that all philosophers East and West are basically saying the same thing, or at least agree on the most important, fundamental questions. Of course it is not unusual, when engaged in the hermeneutic project of trying to understand another intellectual tradition, initially to foreground the apparent commonalities or parallelisms while overlooking the less obvious differences. The problem here, however, is not just that substantive differences get swept under the carpet in favor of similarities, but that the apparent similarities often turn out, upon more careful reflection, to be not so similar after all. As has often been pointed out, when we take a claim that is imbedded in one tradition, with its own particular language, history and set of concerns, and restate it within a new context, it can function in a strikingly different way and take on new meanings.² This can admittedly be a productive process: the history of world philosophy is rife with interesting examples of creative crosspollination between different traditions.⁴ But when the aim is to understand a tradition on its own terms, emphasizing the primacy of apparent commonalities can all too often result in distortion and misrepresentation.

One thing I have noticed over the last few years is that when the myth of homogeneity is rooted out, it tends to re-inscribe itself in more subtle and less conspicuous forms. Here one finds the worse of Orientalism: the temptation to see Eastern thought itself as something monolithic or generic, as though there is some philosophical reason why, for example, Indian and Chinese philosophy ought to be lumped into one category and set over against European thought.⁵ Indeed, intellectual traditions within geographical boundaries are far from homogeneous: one finds an astonishing range and diversity of viewpoints within the Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions.⁶ Consequently, it seems to me crucial that students of world philosophy see them first and foremost as traditions of dispute. That is to say, one should expect to find substantive differences and reasoned disagreement and argumentation within the Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions, even if such dispute necessarily presupposes some underlying agreement about basic assumptions and concerns.⁷ Needless to say, this goes for the so-called “Western tradition” as well, in which it seems to me of its own rich heterogeneity and diversity is all too often caricatured as some great univocal, monolithic entity.

I want to mention one more consideration when teaching a comparative introduction to philosophy course—perhaps more of a caveat than an explicit aim—and that is not to be patronizing in the way we deal with non-Western philosophical traditions. There are, of course, more or less obvious ways in which one could be patronizing. One might, for instance, adopt an explicitly condescending attitude towards non-Western philosophical traditions, which is still sometimes unfortunately found outside the field, although happily but not surprisingly) rarely within the field. But there are more common and subtle forms of patronization. One is to valorize and celebrate a non-Western tradition as providing the corrective to all of Western philosophy’s blunders and a priorities. Another is to always to defend the thinker or text one is teaching against any possible criticism—to come to its rescue, as it were, to make sure it triumphs at all costs. It is important, of course, to make sure that a particular claim or system or tradition is being understood fairly, accurately, and on its own terms. The hermeneutic task of charitable understanding is essential to doing philosophy. But so is critique.⁸ If one wants students to take Indian and Chinese philosophy seriously as philosophy, one must take its truth claims seriously—seriously enough to engage with them critically, ask hard questions and expect serious, resourceful answers. If we encourage students to “play hardball” with Plato or Descartes once they have an adequate, charitable
understanding of their claims, but then protect Sankara or Xunzi from the same kind of engagement, we are hardly doing them any favors.

Of course, one might argue that I myself am reinscribing the myth of homogeneity when I make any such normative claims about what philosophy demands of us. For everything I’ve said so far throws us back upon the question of what philosophy is in the first place, of how it should be defined, and who should define it. As Robert Solomon has pointed out, this is “one of the most virtually self-effacing and one of the most obnoxious [questions] that philosophers tend to ask.” It is virtually self-effacing “insofar as it questions, with some misgivings, its own behavior, the worth of the questions it asks, and the significance of the enterprise itself,” but it is obnoxious “when it refuses to question its own behavior as the exclusive standard to delegitimize any other activity that dares to call itself ‘philosophy’.” The challenge here, it seems to me, is to chart a middle course between what I will call the ‘Scylla’ and ‘Charybdis’ of cross-cultural philosophy. Let us think of our Charybdis as the Western provincialism that arrogates to itself a kind of monopolizing “neutrality” or universalism, a phenomenon Daya Krishna has aptly characterized as “the imposition of the standards of one dominant culture over all the others and the evaluation of their philosophical achievements in terms of them.” When we take this route, philosophical traditions such as those of India and China will at best seem to offer us what Carine Defoort has described as “primitive or naïve forms of familiar Western concepts, insights and discussions that are themselves never called into question.” But the Scylla that threatens us on the other side is the impulse to dissolve the boundaries between philosophy, religion, myth, and traditional received worldviews altogether, by redefining philosophy so broadly and nebulously that it becomes a kind of vague place-holder for all belief systems and practices.

The question is how one negotiates these dangers in a comparative introductory philosophy class. I begin the first day of class by asking the students in my World Philosophy course what philosophy is, and teasing out of their responses at least three distinct senses of the term. I typically get several students who initially define philosophy as a kind of “worldview,” or set of beliefs and values, that an individual or collective body might hold. This ordinary language usage of ‘philosophy’ as a way of looking at the world I designate as \( \Phi_1 \).

Usually at least one or two students will also emphasize the more processive sense of philosophy, as something one does rather than something one has, and I designate this as \( \Phi_2 \). This is the more specific, technical sense of philosophy, as an activity of critical reflection and analysis. I emphasize the continuity and difference between \( \Phi_1 \) and \( \Phi_2 \): what we all come into the class with is \( \Phi_1 \); what we’ll be doing over the course of the semester is \( \Phi_2 \)—that is, asking basic, fundamental questions about things we typically take for granted, finding the points at which our received worldviews fall short or break down, and recalibrating them so that they will give us a more adequate account of the world.

The raw material upon which \( \Phi_2 \) works is thus the inherited, ostensibly unexamined worldview of \( \Phi_1 \).

But what about the historical texts we study over the course of the semester? These constitute philosophy in a third sense (\( \Phi_3 \)): the great philosophical stances and systems that we study are the provisional products of \( \Phi_2 \)’s critical inquiry. One can see the continuity between \( \Phi_1 \) and \( \Phi_3 \) (they both involve worldviews of some sort), but also their distinctness, inasmuch as \( \Phi_3 \) encompasses considered answers to fundamental questions that were never explicitly posed by \( \Phi_1 \). This is how Plato or Sankara or Xunzi’s philosophy can be seen as an extension of, and yet importantly different from, students’ garden-variety ‘philosophies of life,’ not to mention traditional, received worldviews.

One idea that emerges from these preliminary considerations on the first day of class is that philosophy never happens in a vacuum. It is always parasitic upon some received worldview, which is always imbedded within a particular cultural and historical context. Thus the raw material upon which \( \Phi_2 \) works can differ dramatically, giving rise to radically different claims, different methods, different canons of intelligibility—even different questions. The twenty-four thousand dollar question is: is all philosophical activity (not only the “answers,” but also the “questions” themselves) determined by the cultural and historical context within which it emerges? Or can it, to some extent, extricate itself from this stupefying, rise above and go beyond it? Obviously, I have my own views on this (I probably wouldn’t be doing philosophy if I didn’t subscribe to the possibility of at least a weak form of transcendence), but I try to pose this as a genuinely open-ended question that we will return to throughout the semester. This, in short, is how I try to frame the subject matter so that our comparative examination of cross-cultural philosophies doesn’t fall prey to the ‘Scylla’ and ‘Charybdis’ I mentioned earlier.

Practical Considerations

The biggest challenge an introductory World Philosophy course faces is: how does one responsibly cover such a broad topic, without having the course ultimately lapse into superficiality and incoherence? Clearly, it is impossible—or at least inadvisable—to attempt to cover all the myriad philosophical traditions. Geographically and historically, the range is simply too great. From the beginning, I decided that I would impose certain constraints on the range of traditions I would attempt to cover.

In my first version of World Philosophy, I may have over-reacted to this problem somewhat. I chose to look at only two traditions—European and Chinese philosophy—and even there, restricted my focus to what is sometimes called the “Axial” period. In effect, my first version of World Philosophy was a comparative introductory course that restricted itself to classical Greek and Chinese philosophy. I chose only two figures within each tradition, each of whom mapped out radically distinct philosophical positions. For the Greek component, we read Plato’s Republic in its entirety...
and Lucretius’ *On the Nature of Things*. For the Chinese component, we read Confucius’ *Analects* and the *Zhuangzi*. The advantages of this approach were that the students got a fairly in-depth, substantial introduction to a few major figures in two different traditions and were able to set them up in a sustained dialogue with one another. The major drawback was that it lacked sufficient breadth, both within and between traditions. At most, it hinted at the remarkable diversity and heterogeneity of world philosophical thought.

For my second version of World Philosophy, I took a somewhat different tack. I decided to branch out to three traditions—European, Indian and Chinese—and to take a more inclusive historical approach as well (no longer limiting my focus to the Axial period). I chose an anthology this time as the main text. In spite of the fact that World Philosophy is a relatively new niche, a number of good anthologies are already on the market. I opted for Eliot Deutsch’s collection, because the historical selections seemed well chosen (considering the inevitable limitations of such an enterprise) and were supplemented by some helpful explications by contemporary specialists (e.g. Deutsch, Halbfass, Datta and Potter, Wing-Tsit Chan, Herbert Fingarette, Roger Ames, and Mary Tiles).16

Employing the anthology turned out to be a useful learning process for me, because it gave me a good provisional sense of which figures and traditions would work well in such a course, and which wouldn’t. The inclusion of various Indian *darsanas* also convinced me that it’s not enough to focus on foundational texts like the *Rg Veda*, the *Upa[nisads]*, and the *Bhagavad-gita*, but that students ought to have a sense of the kind of rational disputation and system-building that goes on in the various schools. Based on the feedback I got via class participation and course evaluations, the students seemed to like the arrangement of this particular course, perhaps because of the variety, diversity and fast pace (the fact that we covered a different figure almost every day of class held their attention fairly well). My own feeling, however, is that it was just too much too fast. I wanted to slow down a bit and recapture some of the depth and careful reflection of the earlier class.

Consequently, for World Philosophy ‘Mach 3’, which I taught this last year, I used a mix of complete works, along with two source books of Indian and Chinese philosophy: Radhakrishnan and Moore’s seminal collection of classic Indian texts, and Ivanhoe and Van Norden’s more recent anthology of classical Chinese philosophy.18 The former still does the trick, although the translations are somewhat dated. I was particularly happy with the latter, though, since all the translations have been standardized into pinyin there, minimizing the linguistic confusion typically generated by having to switch back and forth between the Wade-Giles and pinyin romanization systems. This way, we had the opportunity to work through considerably larger chunks of representative texts in a more sustained manner, some of them in their entirety. Instead of reading short excerpts from a different thinker for each class meeting, we read several Platonic dialogues (the *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Phaedo*), Descartes’ *Meditations*, sizable selections from the *Rg Veda*, the *Upa[nisads]*, the *Law of Manu*, and the *Bhagavad-gita* (in its entirety), key Carvaka, Buddhist, and Vedanta texts, and finally, substantive portions from Confucius, Mozi, Mencius, Laozi, Zhuangzi, Xunzi, and Han Feizi. Luckily, I had the opportunity this last year to supplement our study of European, Indian and Chinese philosophical traditions with a series of lectures that I organized on the Islamic philosophical tradition. Over the course of the academic year, five specialists in the field of Islamic philosophy gave talks on campus. I assigned short extra-credit response papers to the students in my classes, and we discussed the content of the talks a bit in class. This at least gave students a taste of the sort of questions and claims one finds in that tradition.

**Conclusion**

On the whole, I am happy with my current model of the introductory World Philosophy class. The only major change I’m making next year is to replace Descartes’ *Meditations* with Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, so as to get a greater representative diversity in the section on European philosophy (while still giving them some preparation for our major’s required 200 level course in Modern Philosophy). But some aspects of the class still need tinkering with. One problem is making the shift from European to Indian philosophy, which has become something of a ‘crisis moment’ in the class. What makes this transition particularly jarring is that I end the European section with an epistemologically uncompromising modern text—in this case, Descartes’ *Meditations* (a two-week tour through all six of them, with some material from the “Objections and Replies” worked in as well)—and begin the Indian section with excerpts from foundational *sruti*. The inevitable culture shock students will experience here is exacerbated by a profound shift in the form and content of the material we’re looking at: we move abruptly from Descartes’ methodological skepticism—his insistence on certainty as an essential criterion for knowledge and his demand for airtight arguments rooted in first-person authority—to the mytho-poetic expression of philosophical ideas in the *Rg Veda* and *Upa[nisads]* (presented in the form of a kind of “revelation” or authoritative testimony). This has the unfortunate effect of reinforcing traditional stereotypes about the “mystical,” non-rational East, and students sooner or later raise the question of why we are reading this material in a philosophy class—how can this count as philosophy? Even when we move beyond foundational texts to the various *darsanas*, many students remain troubled by key aspects of Indian philosophy that seem not to fit the European mold: its soteriologico-religious dimensions, the centrality of testimony as a source of knowledge, the concepts of *sanssara*, *karma* and *moksha* as ‘non-negotiables’, and so forth.

I initially tried to anticipate this challenge with a preliminary spiel (which in retrospect seems perhaps too defensive); now I just wait for the question to emerge naturally out of our readings and discussions. Apart from drawing
attention to the ways in which Indian philosophy is indeed philosophical, I have found there are several ways to address students’ doubts. One tactic is to point out the ways in which philosophy and religion are not always so easily separable in Western thought. Two of the Western texts we read—Plato’s Phaedo and Descartes’ Meditations—demonstrate this fairly clearly (and Hellenistic and Medieval philosophy certainly wouldn’t provide us with many exceptions), but I think a case could even be made that this pertains to the vast majority of modern Western thought as well, despite our protestations to the contrary.

Another strategy is to raise the question whether knowledge has in fact always been viewed as an end in itself in Western thought. Again, there are myriad examples where this is obviously not the case, and many others where the apparent sovereignty of theoria can be at least problematized upon closer examination. But whatever our answer to this question turns out to be, one still faces the more fundamental question whether knowledge should in fact be considered an end in itself.

There is at least one more strategy I use to address students’ initial concerns about the philosophical quality of the Indian tradition. While they may see concepts like samsara, karma and moksa as inadequately examined dogmatic assumptions, I draw attention to the less obvious non-negotiables that the Western philosophical tradition has taken for granted. I can point out, for instance, that although the class wanted to question and dispute almost every claim Plato and Descartes made, they all bought Descartes’ cogito intuition hook, line and sinker—along with his subsequent claim that he is a “thinking thing.” Which is to say that they all bought into substance metaphysics implicitly. The section on Buddhism can be an epiphany at this juncture of the class. As we work through the doctrines of no-self and emptiness in particular, you can virtually see light bulbs go on.

Engaging in cross-cultural philosophy, students can begin to see the ways in which some of their own most fundamental assumptions are questionable—as I put it earlier, it gives them the leverage to recognize the contingency and optionality of their own worldview. If philosophy involves the attempt to reflect critically upon our most fundamental assumptions and recalibrate them so that they more effectively capture the phenomena of our developing experience, then the critical study of another tradition’s most probing questions and carefully considered answers turns out to be more than just icing on the cake—it plays an essential role in the basic task of philosophy. In today’s increasingly interconnected, multicultural global society, to do philosophy properly, one will have to do comparative philosophy.

Notes

1 A complementary aim is to give students a sense of “portable” general philosophical positions: e.g., monism, dualism, pluralism, idealism, materialism, empiricism, rationalism, ethical theories that prioritize intention vs. those that focus on consequences vs. those that emphasize the cultivation of virtue or character, and so forth (while philosophy is not simply about a bunch of trans-historical, trans-cultural “ism’s, these categories can be provisionally useful all the same).

2 See Timothy Cheek’s, Erin McCarthy’s and Charles Ess’ articles in ASIA Network Exchange, Winter 2001. All three contributors rightly emphasize the ways in which a comparative approach to teaching philosophy can contribute to the cultivation of democratic world citizens.


4 For an examination of this phenomenon in the Greek and Islamic philosophical traditions, see Oliver Leaman’s “Introduction” in History of Islamic Philosophy, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, pp. 5-8.

5 One could make the argument that Indian philosophy actually has more in common with European philosophy than with Chinese. For a discussion of the philosophical commonalities between Indo-European philosophies, as opposed to classical Chinese philosophy, see Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr.’s introduction to their Anadeets of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998), particularly pp. 20-35 (“Metaphysics, With Reference to Language”). Ames and Rosemont offer what might be seen as a variation the Whorf-Sapir hypothesis, arguing that Indo-European languages have imbedded in them, as it were, a certain ontology of “things” or “substances,” as opposed to classical Chinese, which is bound up with an ontology of processes or events.

6 In the Indian tradition, for example, one finds the classical distinction between āstika (orthodox or “yea-saying”) and nāstika (heterodox or “nay-saying”) darsanas, which revolves around the question of the legitimacy and authority of the Vedas. But even within these distinctions one finds a remarkable diversity. Under the rubric of the nāstika darsanas, for instance, one finds the fatalism of the Ajīvikas, the materialism-empiricism-hedonism of the Čārvakas, the perspectivism and spiritual-ethical titanism of the Jains, the rigorous anti-foundationalism of Madhyamika Buddhism, and the idealism of Yogacara Buddhism. Even under the rubric of the āstika darsanas, where one might reasonably expect a greater degree of homogeneity, one finds a plethora of schools that focus primarily on different concerns: logic (Ndyāya), ontology (Vaibhavika), spiritual discipline and liberation (Yoga), cosmology (Śāṅkhyā), hermeneutics (Mimamsā), or some combination thereof (Vedānta), as well as a rich diversity of philosophical positions (e.g. pantheistic...
monism, dualism, pluralism, etc.). The same is certainly true of Chinese philosophy. For an excellent overview that brings out the diversity of classical Chinese thought, see A. C. Graham, *Discourses of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1989).

8The well-known debate between Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas about whether the fundamental gesture of philosophy is hermeneutical or critical in nature illustrates this duality nicely. For a clear overview and thoughtful adjudication of this debate see Paul Ricoeur, “Hermeneutics and Critique of Ideology,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 63-100.


10Solomon, “‘What is Philosophy?’: The Status of World Philosophy in the Profession,” p. 100.


14This strategy was inspired by William Ernest Hocking’s preliminary discussion of “What Philosophy Is” in *Types of Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1929), pp. 3-23.

15Using Lucretius as a representative Greek thinker may seem somewhat odd, insofar as he was a Roman of the first century B.C.E. However, his philosophical poem *De Rerum Natura* is arguably the clearest and most forceful articulation of Epicureanism, an influential Greek naturalistic school of philosophy.


18For a pithy defense of the philosophical quality of Indian *darshanas*, see Krishna, “Comparative Philosophy: What it is and What it Ought to Be,” pp. 75-77.


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**Teaching “Philosophy of Religion: A Comparative Approach”**

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**Introduction**

This past spring, buoyed by the positive results of reshaping an Introduction to Philosophy course along comparative lines (Ess, 2001), I attempted to likewise reshape an upper-level philosophy of religion class using a comparative format. Unlike introductory courses—however, for a range of important historical and cultural reasons, philosophy of religion is more distinctively Western in its basic orientation, assumptions, and defining questions. Consequently, it is much more difficult to approach such a course comparatively: indeed, I had to modify the course considerably so as to completely drop some elements that had defined a traditional philosophy of religion course. Nonetheless, I'm happy to report that both student comments and final evaluations indicate that the course was successful.

In the following, I first review my rationale for attempting to teach philosophy of religion in a comparative way, followed by a brief description of the course structure and texts. I then offer a central exercise designed to highlight the value of approaching philosophy of religion from a comparative perspective redefined so as to revise its traditional Western starting points—namely, a critical analysis of the *Analects* of Confucius. I share here student comments.
on this exercise as a way of demonstrating the extent to which the exercise "worked" or didn't!

I very much hope these experiences will be of use to others interested in taking up comparative approaches in philosophy of religion.

Why Comparative Approaches in Philosophy?

A first reason for a comparative approach in teaching philosophy is its pedagogical effectiveness. One of the central goals of philosophy, in my view, is to help students make articulate the otherwise tacit assumptions that underlie their worldview. I roughly define this as their basic beliefs about reality, identity (i.e., who they are as human beings, including gendered beings), values, and a "logic" that broadly determines whether diverse elements of their reality [e.g., male/female, humanity/nature, humanity/divinity relationships] are structured in primarily a dualistic and oppositional fashion and/or a complementary, non-dualistic fashion. The point of doing so is to not only help students become more self-aware of what they assume and believe—but thereby, to also make these basic assumptions, as now explicit rather than implicit, "available" to be critically considered, perhaps reshaped, even rejected, in the further, lifelong process of taking responsibility for and constructing their own worldviews. In the traditions of Western liberal arts, this process is central to becoming fully human—in particular, of becoming a "virtuous" or "excellent" human being. Briefly, such critical reflection and construction are part of the "growing up" process as imaged in Plato's allegory of the cave: but this same process can be seen as endorsed in (at least some readings of) religious story (such as the 2nd Genesis creation story which, for Jews and early Christians, represents precisely an intended process of moving from child-like dependence to adult autonomy), epic poetry (beginning with the Gilgamesh epic and, later, the Odyssey), and so forth. At the same time, of course, this process, is at work in non-Western traditions as well—including Confucian thought (Ess, 2003).

Since the time of the PreSocratics, if not the era of Gilgamesh, we have known in the West that this process of making inarticulate assumptions articulate is dramatically helped along by first-hand encounters with peoples, languages, and ways of life resting on a worldview different from one's own. In this "cultural shock" is "ontological shock"—the recognition that what one has believed and assumed all one's life is not necessarily shared by all other human beings. In anthropological terms, such encounters (usually) force us to recognize our ethnocentrism—and, ideally, move to a new position of epistemological humility, in which we acknowledge that our worldview is just that, a limited set of beliefs and "how we do things," one that is not universally shared by others. Finally, precisely such encounters with "the Other," force us to make articulate how we differ in basic beliefs, practices, worldview, etc., and thereby bring to the surface a whole range of assumptions defining our worldview that otherwise lay tacit, because they are unchallenged within the familiar lifeworld of our own culture.

Hence, by taking up a comparative approach in teaching philosophy, we provide our students with such encounters with "the Other," and thereby, it is hoped, occasions for redefining their cultural and ontological perspectives to help them make explicit their otherwise tacit assumptions, and thereby to move them along in the process of critical examination and (re)construction of their own worldview.

Second, there are important reasons supporting a comparative approach from within the framework of philosophy of religion itself. That is, a central issue in traditional Western philosophy of religion is the question of religious pluralism, especially as the Western Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) each claim a single, universal God, how do we respond philosophically to the recognition of religious traditions such as Hinduism with its claim of "330 million gods" (Hinduism, 1978) and early forms of Buddhism that deny the reality of any Divinity whatsoever?

These differences, of course, run much deeper. In particular, I wanted us to explore in this course at least two specific case studies that highlight both differences and possible commonalities between Western and Eastern worldviews. The first is the contrast developed by Roger Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr., in their introductory essay to the Analects (1998). Ames and Rosemont make the case that Western Indio-European languages are characterized as substantive and thus categorical languages. These linguistic characteristics can then shape the thematic concerns of Western philosophy (a) to determine what stable material or causal principles (the unchanging stuff or, in Greek, hyle) underlie the constantly changing world of our experience as an appearance resting on such substrates, and, correlatively, (b) to determine our human identity as an ostensibly unchanging, stable self likewise underlying the changing surface of our plural appearances.

In contrast, Ames and Rosemont characterize the classical Chinese of the Analects as "eventful," "processional," and relational in character, so as to be marked with "not a concern to describe how things are in themselves, but how they stand in relation to something else at particular times" (1998, 23).

Hence, they argue, in the worldview of the Analects,

Persons are not perceived as superordinated individuals—as agents who stand independent of their actions—but are rather ongoing "events" defined functionally by constitutive roles and relationships as they are performed within the context of their specific families and communities, that is, through the observance of ritual propriety (li) (1998, 29).

These sharp contrasts—not only at the philosophical level but, indeed, at the linguistic level—present a major challenge to any philosophical effort to subsume Confucian thought...
under the same category of “religion” as it might contain the Western Abrahamic traditions. Indeed, the very effort to categorize in this fashion, Ames and Rosemont argue, is itself an artifact of Western Indo-European linguistic features!

On the other hand, John Cobb, in an excerpt included in our main text (see below), argues for the coherence between Christianity and Buddhism—despite their sharp and well-known contrasts.

Finally, in addition to these particular case studies, several other articles included in our text helped, through such a comparative approach, to move us to a most radical challenge for philosophy of religion. Namely, how far can traditional Western philosophy of religion, especially as rooted in Indo-European languages and the distinctive monotheisms of the Abrahamic traditions, adequately approach and understand Eastern traditions?

Third, such a comparative approach commends itself for directly practical and applied—i.e., ethical and political—reasons. To begin with, it is a commonplace that we inhabit—and our students will inhabit—an increasingly interdependent “global village.” It is ever more obvious that whatever advantages such a global village might offer, it is also leading to more frequent cultural, religious, and political conflicts. The disastrous events of September 11, 2001, and the consequent wars launched by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq are, unfortunately, only the most dramatic face of these conflicts. And, contrary to the utopian hopes of the 1990s, such conflicts will not be eliminated by increasing use of such technologies as the Internet and the web. On the contrary, there is now extensive documentation of the multiple ways in which Western computer-mediated communication technologies embed specifically Western cultural and communicative preferences (Ess and Sudweeks 2003).

Such a world, especially if it is to realize our hopes for peace, prosperity, and greater individual and communal freedom, will require a specific sort of cosmopolitan (citizen of the world), namely cultural hybrids or polybreds who have become sufficiently familiar (“familial”) with the languages, cultures, and practices of “others” to be able to live, engage in dialogue, “negotiate,” etc., in more than their own culture (Ess 2003). To help our students become such global citizens requires precisely that we help them move from ethnocentrism to a humility, respect, and pluralism that preserve and enhance diverse cultural identities and traditions. I hope that comparative approaches in teaching, precisely as they foster such a move from ethnocentrism to epistemological humility and pluralism, will help our students become such global citizens.

If anything, such abilities are needed especially for a generation increasingly immersed in the technologies of the Net, as these provide our students with an access to diverse cultures on a scale and at a speed unimaginable in previous generations. So Beverly Bickel, a close observer of how women in Afghanistan have used the web to develop their own distinctive voice and presence on the web, comments, “The democratic potential of the Net for promoting ‘civic pluralism’ will partly rely on its being constructed by those capable of negotiating global differences, creating multiple, complex meanings and crossing boundaries” (2003).

**Overall Structure: Texts and Core Concepts**

A comparative approach requires considerable modification of the traditional philosophy of religion courses I have previously taught—even with the use of a text intended to support such an approach, namely, Gary E. Kessler’s *Philosophy of Religion: Toward a Global Perspective* (1999). Kessler does a fine job of bringing together classical Western texts with appropriate texts from Eastern perspectives. So, for example, in his opening chapter, “What is Religion?” Kessler includes a useful reading by Nishitani from a Japanese Buddhist perspective. In the same way, his second chapter on “Ultimate Reality” includes selections from *The Tao-te Ching* and Shankara. And so on in chapters three (“Proofs for Ultimate Reality”), four (“Religious Experience”), nine (“Faith and Reason”) and eleven (“Religious Pluralism”). Kessler also provides an excellent introduction that highlights how traditional Western philosophy of religion presupposes specifically Western views on reality, identity, divinity, etc.

To complement the anthologized pieces, I further included Ames and Rosemont’s *The Anecdotes of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* (1998). The goal here is to give students a more in-depth experience with a complete text from outside their own tradition—as well as to have students read the introductory essays on language and metaphysics discussed above.

Finally, in addition to having students read general essays on issues in religious pluralism, I want them to see how individual thinkers and believers have wrestled with these issues in particular ways, i.e., with a view toward the concrete details and practical concerns that define our local, day-to-day existence. Here again I sought a balance between East and West, between non-theist and theist, by juxtaposing Henry Rosemont, Jr.’s *Rationality and Religious Experience: The Continuing Relevance of the World’s Spiritual Traditions* (2001) with Barbara Brown Taylor’s *The Luminous Web: Essays on Science and Religion* (2000). Briefly, Henry’s book seeks to develop a synthesis from a purely rational perspective of the ethical imperatives and sensibilities of the major world traditions, one that, because of its rationality, is further consistent with scientific understandings of the world. In a similar way, but from the perspective of a Western believer, noted Episcopal preacher Barbara Brown Taylor develops a synthesis between elements of Christian traditions—most notably, the doctrine of incarnation, and contemporary sciences, including relativity theory, quantum mechanics, and chaos theory. (The Brown Taylor text is further to be recommended because, unlike many texts from both Eastern and Western starting points, hers is sophisticated enough to both get the science right and not make unwarranted claims of the sort that mar other efforts, specifically, that resonances and analogies between the
claims of science and the claims of faith thereby somehow "prove" the truth of the latter. Rather, she is careful to avoid the various fallacies and missteps involved in such moves and develops instead a much more sophisticated understanding of the irreducible differences and complementarities between science and religion.

Anyone who has taught a traditional philosophy of religion course will immediately recognize that these additions meant that something had to go—at least, if the course were to be completed within the scheduled semester! Indeed: and so I cut out several themes and issues that would be standard in a traditional course, beginning with those questions focused on (Western) monotheistic conceptions of God including rationalist efforts to prove the existence of God, the nature and attributes of God (Does God necessarily exist? What kind of knowledge might God have? etc.). Another major lacuna in this course was the omission of the problem of evil ("theodicy"). While Kessler has a good collection of essays on this issue (his chapter 5), there simply was no time to address this crucial topic.

I should point out that some of these choices were made by the students, i.e., after reviewing the contents of a standard course for them on the first day, I asked them to consider what topics we could drop in order to make room for comparative readings and the additional texts I had chosen for the focus on religious pluralism.

Teaching example: Testing our frameworks (the way is made in the walking of the way...) (Zhuangzi 4/2/33, quoted in Ames & Rosemont, 29).

I also wanted to give the students considerable freedom to explore the topics and issues involved from their own perspectives, rather than primarily rehearse the insights and responses of the recognized authorities. This is in part because comparative approaches to philosophy of religion are relatively new—and hence there are comparatively fewer such recognized authorities to turn to!

One main exercise began by having students develop their own definitions of "religion" in response to reading the selections in Kessler's ch. 1, supplemented with the Ames and Rosemont essay on language and metaphysics, as this helped them understand contemporary critiques of the notion of "religion" as itself a category that emerges primarily in the Enlightenment. I then asked the students to test their definitions against a specific case—The Analects, Bks. 1-10.

I was persuaded that Ames and Rosemont are correct to argue that Western-oriented categories—especially as these traditionally make a sharp contrast between divinity/ultimate reality and "ordinary" experience/appearances, philosophy (as a rational activity), and religion (as involving elements of faith, etc.)—are indeed rooted in Indo-European languages. I anticipated that my students would discover that these categories, at work in their various definitions of religion, would prove inadequate for understanding The Analects. Was I ever wrong...at least, according to my students!

In particular, one student pointed out—correctly—that "Cobb's account of 'ultimate reality' includes 'principles of rightness;' The Analects provide us with such principles, and thus are an account of ultimate reality." Another student likewise cited Cobb to argue that The Analects counted as religion; first of all, as it teaches that "You can get yourself in line with the rightness of the world without being able to comprehend it or speculate about it."

Whatever their instructor might think, for my students, Confucian thought counts as "religion," i.e., a framework that includes an account of ultimate reality, even though Confucian thought does not (a) emphasize developing or understanding a cosmology, nor does it (b) focus on a (monotheistic) conception of divinity as central to its concerns (neither Tian nor the Tao are "God" in a Western sense, etc.).

I was in for a still greater surprise as we turned to the Tao. For one of my students—an accomplished musician and singer—the Tao turned out to be not as inscrutable as Lao-Tzu might have us think! Rather, this student pointed to an analogy between the Tao as described in

Being and non-being produce each other; difficult and easy complete each other; long and short contrast each other; sound and voice harmonize each other (2, in Kessler, pp. 47ff.)

and harmonic overtone singing. In such singing, familiar to most of us as part of Tibetan Buddhist practice, a single human singer produces both a basic tone and an ethereal, "otherworldly" harmonic overtone. So that we could hear, and not simply read and intellectually understand, the point, this student brought to class a recording of Paula Hopkins' "Past Life Melodies" (1992), which concludes with extended overtone singing. Especially for students who had not heard such singing before, the pedagogical impact of hearing these resonances was indeed stunning.

Concluding Remarks

These positive experiences continued as we further explored post-Cartesian conceptions of "reason" as developed in essays by William James, Radhakrishnan, and Marilyn Piety, each of whom in their own way rejects a Cartesian understanding of reason as radically divorced from and thus opposed to emotion, feeling, intuition, sense, body, etc. In doing so, they develop instead a nondual conception of self in which reason and emotion play complementary roles. On the one hand, these recent concepts help us recover pre-Cartesian understandings of reason, most notably Plato's notion of "erotic" reason as developed especially in The Symposium but also in The Republic. At the same time, however, as the inclusion of Radhakrishnan makes clear, this (re)turn further represents a convergence towards Eastern views as more characteristically nondualistic, e.g., specific Hindu notions of intuition, as well as Confucian notions of xin ("heart-and-mind"), etc. Indeed, by the end of the course, my students were able to see that, alongside the multiple intractable differences between Western modernity and Eastern views, there are certainly great coherences and resonances between non-dual Western conceptions (e.g., in
Plato, Kierkegaard, and feminism) and Eastern religions/philosophies.

These experiences suggest that the course thus succeeded in its primary intention of helping students come to recognize both the strength and limits of their own worldviews—event if not always in ways that I would have anticipated. Even better, it helped them learn to think and feel just this sort of complex synthesis, i.e., one that holds together irreducible differences alongside connections in the form of resonances and coherencies. Such a complex synthesis, in my view, is crucial to understanding and living in the world in such a way that allows us—and “others”—to remain firmly rooted in a local tradition, one whose integrity and value is firmly respected and upheld, while at the same time recognizing both the limits of our own worldview and the important ways in which the worldviews and lifeworlds of “others” complement and complete our own.

It should also be clear that such a synthetic way of thinking/feeling sharply contrasts with the unfortunately much more “normal” ethnocentrism that dogmatically holds a single tradition and worldview as the only one legitimate for human beings, and seeks to impose it—by force, if need be—upon “others” seen as somehow lost in an ostensibly inferior worldview and way of doing things. In my view, such ethnocentrisms and their accompanying impulses towards “conversion,” colonialism, and imperialism are among the most significant threats to the possibility of our becoming a more peaceful, genuinely multicultural “global village.” By contrast, I hope that comparative approaches to teaching philosophy, of the sort I have outlined above, will not only help our students achieve both Western (Socratic) and Eastern (Confucian) ideals of excellence as human beings, but thereby help them become the sorts of cosmopolitans who can counter the otherwise ineluctable slide from ethnocentrism into war.

References


Notes

1I also wish to acknowledge here my deep gratitude to Joel Smith (Skidmore College), Peter Groff (Bucknell University) and David Shaler (Pomona College), Eliot Deutsch (University of Hawaii), Erin McCarthy (St. Lawrence University) and Henry Rosemont, Jr.

2Concerning his “principle of rightness,” Cobb writes: The rightness in question expresses itself in diverse ways. There is a rightness of style or form, propriety, appropriateness, good judgement, wisdom. Only in special circumstances is it expressed in clear-cut moral dualities of ‘ought’ and ‘ought not.’ (1977, in Kessler, p. 74)

Keynote Speakers for the 2004 Conference include:
Laurel Kendall, Curator, Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History in New York and
Vasudha Narayanan, University of Florida, Past President of the American Academy of Religion
The Case for Asian Economics in the Liberal Arts Curriculum
Kailash Khandke
Economics Department
Furman University

Thirty years ago, the drive to introduce Asian studies courses into the curriculum must have presented a dilemma, if not a struggle, for most colleges and universities. This dilemma must have been especially apparent at liberal arts colleges. As Linda Lewis and Jonathon Wolff (2000) alluded to in their panel presentations, while heritage learners may provide an impetus for promoting Asian studies courses, is there the demand for such courses on a campus with few Asian-American students? In the recent past, I would imagine that it was primarily Asian scholars who made the case for the introduction of courses in all of the established disciplines; history, political science, sociology, philosophy, religion and economics. Today, a brief perusal of the web indicates a burgeoning of Asian Studies courses and the explicit establishment of the Asian studies major at both large universities and small colleges—liberal arts schools in particular.

Thus when I proposed the introduction of an Asian Economics course at Furman University in 1998, which already has a well-established Asian Studies program, my task was facilitated by the whole-hearted support of the Asianists and the university at large long acclimated to innovations in the field. My fellow Asian studies faculty colleagues were quite pleased to have Asian Economics as an additional course offering for the social science component required of all Asian studies majors.

Why Develop a Separate Economics Course on Asia?

My attempt to answer this question in the section above represents but a partial answer. Given that most of the students have only a limited exposure to Asian studies, I assume that they have even less knowledge about how economics and economic theory in general can be related to the study of Asian economics. I set out therefore to demonstrate how this particular set of countries in Asia presents microcosms for understanding economic development in the context of a rapidly changing global economy.

My starting point in the course is to ask, “Does it not seem reasonable that one needs to have some understanding of how three-fourths of the rest of the developing world lives?” I remind students that India and China, two of the most populous nations in the world, are at precisely the point in their development path of attempting to move from traditional to modern economic societies. Then I ask, who are the students who would typically enroll in this course? A few of them are Asian studies majors, many of whom have been on foreign study in Japan and China, and, more often than not, bring to the course a sound perspective on the nexus between culture and economic development. A few others show interest in the region, and are sensitive to and aware of the fact that Asia is fast becoming a major player in global trade and economics. Many are economics and business majors who need an elective in the major. I find that the latter set of students tends to have only a cursory understanding of Asia that needs to be broadened and deepened.

Other reasons for emphasizing the economies of Asia include:
- Asia's emergence as a global market (which includes the world's second largest industrial economy, Japan, and burgeoning consumer markets in China and India)
- Asia's rising prominence as a trading partner
consumption. Two books that fit very well and serve the development and the policy debate on government one and the other.

- **Asia's emergence as a competitor** (With China's recent entry into the World Trade Organization, the era of Japan-bashing has been replaced by China-bashing. Most of our students are content with the popular images portrayed in the press that nations are in competition with each other and trade with Asia implies fewer jobs and lower wages in the U.S.)

- **The relevance of economics in underlying the geopolitical security in Asia.** (While the United States has withdrawn from Vietnam, nearly 50,000 troops remain in Asia, mostly in Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. With the Cold War seemingly over, recent events in North Korea provide an opportunity to reiterate to our students that politics and economics are interrelated.)

*The General Design of the Course: Books, Articles, Films, and Web Pages*

One is once again forced to confront the limitations of the student audience. Most of the students have had only a one semester introductory course in economics, restricting the choice of texts and articles to materials that address basic fundamentals relating to understanding both economic development and the policy debate on government intervention versus market capitalism in production and consumption. Two books that fit very well and serve the purpose given my outlined objectives are:

- **"The East Asian Miracle: Economic Growth and Public Policy," World Bank Policy Research Report, 1993.** This report makes the case that East Asia (with its eight HPSE's) indeed experienced something short of an extraordinary growth between the period 1960-1995 when compared with other developing regions in the world such as Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa or even the OECD economies.

- **The Economics of Southeast Asia: The Growth and Development of ASEAN Economies**, by Jose Tongzon, 1998. In contrast to the report above, this work, in emphasizing East Asian development rather than the miraculous nature of its growth, illustrates the role of institutions in the development process and the implicit role of economic and political cooperation embedded in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) and in the enhanced trade among the Pacific Rim nations, Canada, Australia and the United States—Asia Pacific Economic Community (APEC). Further, the author, a senior researcher at the University of Singapore, presents a perspective on the process of development in Asia that is first-hand rather than a vicarious account of the development process.

There are a number of articles on Asia available in leading scholarly academic journals in economics and political science, as well as in area or country specific journals. Serial publications like the *Wall Street Journal* and *New York Times* present timely articles on the Asian Crisis (1998-99) and the recovery of Asia in the aftermath of the recession. The trick is to choose an appropriate set of readings consistent with what students should take away from a course of this nature.

As a case in point, Paul Krugman's (1995) classic but controversial paper questioning the very notion of the miracle can be contrasted with Nelson & Pack's (1998) article on assimilation versus accumulation theories on Asian economic growth. I have found the journal *Foreign Affairs* an excellent source for contemporary articles on the political economy of Asia. Nye's (1995) article on the case for enhancing U.S. military presence in Asia is perhaps more relevant today given the North Korean nuclear reactor crisis—a timely topic certain to promote discussion and debate in the classroom. I use such articles to introduce the notion of political economy as a foil to pure development models of the economy. There is value added by placing regional studies in a broad, interdisciplinary framework. Such an interdisciplinary approach helps to better illustrate the historic paths of development in East Asia. For example, students come to understand that Japan would not be the second biggest economic power in the world without the continuing presence of U.S. troops in Japan after World War II.

A host of short country-specific films are available which not only illuminate the transition and development process, but also relate economics to the broader cultural context of the country. These include:

- **China, Change & Challenge: From Poverty to Prosperity.** (50 minutes), Princeton, NJ Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1998.
- **Taiwan: A Force to be Reckoned With.** (30 min), BBC Education & Training.
- **Asian Values Devalued an ABC Australia/Sciences** (39 minutes), Princeton, NJ Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1998.
- **The Japanese Economic Bubble** (40 minutes), a Box Production for Channel Four, Princeton, N.J. Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1993.

The course thus includes the following: lectures, required readings, discussions of assigned articles and films, group presentations and individual and group papers. This multifaceted approach seems to work quite well, giving the students a better appreciation of the economic, political, institutional and cultural changes that have taken place in the East Asian economies over the last four decades.

An aspect of the class that has worked especially well is the group paper. I assign the students to groups of three or four and ask them to choose a country in Asia that they want to study. The paper requires that the group highlight...
the path of development and the stylized economic facts and figures for the Asian country, and identify the sources of growth. Most importantly, the group must discuss explicitly whether or not trade has been an engine of growth in this economy. If their research suggests that trade has not played a major role, I ask the group to discuss what other factors, stylized facts, institutional and political factors have contributed to development and growth.

In a related assignment, I ask the students to prepare a web page on their particular country. I tell the class to assume that we have no knowledge of the country, be it China, Indonesia or Singapore, and that this is their opportunity to educate us on the politics, history, culture and institutions via a visual medium. I deliberately allow this flexibility that represents a departure from economics to better integrate the course material into the broader contexts of Asian studies and the liberal arts as well as to promote interest in language study and study abroad. To the extent that our courses facilitate this, we have done our duty as Asianists and academics. I accordingly place a substantial weight of the total grade on the web page and their in-class presentation.

Is Asian Economics Consistent With a Liberal Arts Mission?

In 1968, Furman established the Asian-African requirement, which mandates that all students are required to take at least one course from the Asian-African Program (these courses are designated with a suffix ‘A’). Furman’s course catalog captures the ethos of this requirement quite well:

The Asian-African program emphasizes major dimensions of experiences from the non-Western two-thirds of humanity. By offering students knowledge of Asian and African civilizations, it provides fresh perspectives on their own cultural heritage and helps them toward a broader and deeper understanding of a rapidly changing world.

In sum, it asserts that no person can be liberally educated without knowing something about a culture other than his or her own. Whether the course I describe above fits the template of the Asian Studies Major in the larger academic community is a little harder to answer. I offer this as a response and observation. A perusal of course catalogs of other schools with Asian Studies majors reveals the following: few schools have an explicit course on the economics of Asia, and even fewer yet have a specific regional economics course on say, China or Japan. Why is it then, that there are a plethora of courses within the humanities and other social sciences? The reason I believe relates to the pace of development of regional studies across disciplines. Traditionally, history emphasizes regional analysis. One can turn the history of China into three courses with considerable ease—for example, ancient Chinese history, 19th century Chinese history and early 20th century Chinese history. Likewise, the fact of widely divergent political ideologies across regions has prompted political scientists to develop separate courses on governments and their role in China and Japan. Further, the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism beg to be included in an Asian Studies curriculum, as do Chinese and Japanese philosophy. The emergence of regional studies in economics (or regional economics as it has come to be known today) is a far more recent phenomenon. In part, regional economics has been slow to develop because economists have been unable to access good data. And good data, after all, is the mother lode of the effective economist. The advent of the internet has greatly facilitated the availability of good and accurate data from the Asian continent, enabling the economics profession to engage in what it does best—undertaking empirical investigations of regional developments.

In conclusion, I will assert that including a course on Asian economics in the curriculum will encourage a broader interdisciplinary understanding of Asia, an understanding prerequisite to meeting future challenges facing America. Former Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley says:

America has much to offer Asia and Asia has much to offer the American people. But we cannot build an enduring and positive relationship on a foundation of ignorance. If all that our children know about Asia is that Play Station Two is built in Japan, panda bears come from China, and Jackie Chan makes movies in Hong Kong, then we have not prepared our children for the coming times. The economic, political and cultural forces at work in Asia right now will have a profound impact on America’s future in the 21st Century. America’s economic future is closely linked to the economies of Asia, underscored by the fallout from the Asian crisis of 1998. Recent diplomatic tensions between the United States and North Korea call for peaceful solutions to ensure continuing economic cooperation in the region. China is no longer a sleeping dragon, and India is no longer mired in the Gandhian politics of socialist ideology. A careful look at the items we regularly buy will undoubtedly reveal that a significant proportion of goods in the U.S. are imported from Asia. Asia is constantly in the news and is a topic for discussion on an almost daily basis. If Asia’s destiny has become so intertwined with American life, we have no choice but to better understand the economies of East and South Asia. I have attempted to make the case here that the costs of developing a course on the economics of the Asian region are not particularly large, but the payoff and benefits from the effort could be potentially large and timely. With a little effort, liberal arts colleges can pursue this challenge and include course on the economies of Asia within their curricula.

Notes
1Paper presented at the 2003 ASIANetwork Conference, Greenville, SC.


The National Campaign on International Education in our Schools, (www.asaiintheschools.org/report.htm)

The End of Growth in Japan: Three Simple Models for Undergraduate Economists
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Introduction
The purpose of this paper is to look at how Asia can be brought into the economics curriculum. Certainly it should rank high on the radar screen for any number of reasons. The Asian financial crisis of summer 1997 is a good example of the trauma wrought by financial instability. China's economy has come from nowhere, the most successful of the "transition" economies. Indeed, it has been the world's fastest growing economy for twenty years, with a quadrupling of real per capita incomes that has transformed the lives of a fifth of the world's population in less than a generation. Even India has outgrown the U.S. and the E.U. the past several years, by a factor of 2 or more. But my background is Japan, and I choose to argue from what I know best.

There is a compelling case for including Japan's economy as a paradigm in any economics course. One impetus is pragmatic, that Japan is "important." It is the second-largest developed economy, after the U.S., and (outside of NAFTA) America's largest trading partner. A second is that Japan poses interesting questions. For example, in the last half-century, it is the only major economy to undergo a full decade of stagnation; only the much smaller Switzerland has experienced something similar. Finally, Japan is the first developed economy to confront deflation since the Great Depression, and with it the collapse of the effectiveness of monetary policy. It thus offers an important contemporary example of a "liquidity trap," a phenomenon that had over time become a footnote in introductory "Principles" textbooks. Obviously this is a selective set, and all three are fundamentally macroeconomic in nature. When it comes to macroeconomics, I believe that if you are to do a good job of linking theory to the real world, you must employ Japan as an example.

Now economists distinguish themselves by employing models, and indeed the classes we teach are typically organized on that basis. Bluntly, we don't structure our courses because something is "important" or "interesting" on its own, but instead seek to instill an analytic approach to understanding the world. However, in a liberal arts environment, we should be constantly trying to cast our vision beyond the presentation of technical material. In teaching economics, the challenge is to fight the bias to present only models. To teach in a liberal arts context, or to teach economics well, requires a willingness to omit material, to cover only part of the text, so as to concentrate on applications and links to problems important, or interesting, or illuminating. The following three examples are presented in this light. At their core lies theory, because that is the surest way to communicate with colleagues in economics. What I hope I accomplish, though, is presenting three real-world examples that feature Japan. Indeed, I will go further, and claim that looking at Japan highlights the centrality of models that a U.S.-centric approach may overlook. Japan has something to teach economists, as well as serving as a tool for teaching our students.

Growth Models: Changes of Stocks in Japan's Economy
"You can't squeeze water from a stone." This is the essence of the "classical" model of growth that would be taught in many introductory classes. If we can understand what is happening to the growth of the labor force and to investment, then we can place an upper bound on growth. In the late 1950s Robert Solow and others plugged in numbers, using data on the stock of labor and the stock of capital (the value of buildings, cars, machinery, roads and other productive assets). To their initial surprise, their efforts explained only about half of U.S. growth; the balance, unexplained sources of growth, were later dubbed technical change. Applied to Japan, this sort of straightforward exercise helps delineate what mattered for, and what limited, growth.

Capital growth is a major component; high investment gave workers more, and better, equipment with which to work. This is not restricted to machinery. In Japan, new houses and office buildings are more comfortable than old—better lit, better cooled. All of this contributes to output
and welfare. Likewise, formal education and skills acquired on the job make workers more productive; however poorly, such inputs can be measured, as can the absolute size of the labor force and changes in hours worked. Finally, research on Japan highlights one-time factors that increased output, the most important of which was the transition from farm to factory.1

Why is this model important? Within the context of macroeconomics, it is the core of the “classical” tradition, which is central to modern treatments of the field.2 But it is also useful for understanding Japan. While high rates of investment boosted the size of the capital stock in Japan over the past fifty years helping per capita output to rise sharply, this process faced diminishing returns.3 As a result, it is to be expected that growth would slow, and (less directly) that investment would fall. This was noticeable by 1970, and widely discussed by contemporary economists, at least inside Japan.4 Starkly phrased, additions to the capital stock are in and of themselves are not, nor will they ever again be, a source of growth. Of course the absolute size of the labor force is also now shrinking, and absent large-scale immigration, this will continue. Likewise, a large proportion of Japanese go on to obtain higher education directly out of high school. This ratio cannot rise much higher, and with the baby boomers entering their mature years, neither will the level of work experience of the labor force expand. Other one-time changes, such as the movement of workers from farm to factory, ran their course long ago.5 In contrast, the current shift from factory to services such as health care will, in my opinion, add comparatively little to growth. In short, absent technical change, we ought to expect Japan’s economy to decline in absolute size. Japan illustrates one of the lessons that Solow and subsequent economists drew from their empirical work: that the growth of the capital stock and of skills must slow over time, and that absent productivity increases, in the long run per capita growth stagnates. This is not necessarily bad. Japan’s labor force is in decline, and its population will soon start shrinking. As a result, the economy can decline in absolute terms with little impact on average welfare. Stagnation is not a bad outcome, and is certainly not a crisis situation in and of itself.

This simple model thus provides an antidote to the natural tendency to focus on the dramatic events of Japan’s economic bubble and its collapse. It is not the whole story, but no model ever is. Furthermore, it offers general lessons, applicable to Asia’s other large economy, China. The accumulation of capital there has even more rapid than in Japan; the shift from field to factory is still in its initial stages, but is clearly an important component of growth. Similarly, average education and experience levels remain low but are increasing. As a result, rapid growth will, I believe, continue for another decade, or so. But as in Japan, demographic slowdown is already guaranteed; the drop in the birthrate that began in 1980 means that China’s population will be shrinking by mid-century. The same model can both elucidate China’s growth today, and predict its future cessation.

The “Bubble”: Flows in Japan’s Economy Shifts in Savings and Investment

A second simple framework highlights factors behind Japan’s “bubble” economy. It consists of two components. One is an analysis of savings and investment flows, an example of the well-known “paradox of thrift,” that an economy can save too much for its own good. The second is to wed this to a simple model of institutional change—and change is hard—applied to Japanese finance.

What is surprising to me is not that a financial crisis occurred, but that it took so long to occur. Furthermore, the factors that underlie Japan’s banking sector problems and bouts of slow growth are not due to factors unique to Japan. The same fate awaits the Chinese economy.

One side of the ledger is savings. For simplicity, let us ignore corporate savings, and instead focus on personal savings. We can then look at the uses of those savings, namely investment. (For non-economists, it is important to stress that “investment” is the construction of new buildings and the purchase of productive assets—an addition to TIAA-CREF is not investment but savings, which can only accumulate and thus contribute more if we cut our current consumption.) Note that decisions to save and invest are made by different individuals, and there is no mechanism to guarantee that an increase in saving will be matched by a compensating increase in investment. Since funds cannot simply vanish, any surplus must end up somewhere. The following clarifies what that means.

As you must know, Japanese households save a lot. But that has not always been the case; before the late 1950s the Japanese were not notably thrifty, and high savings rates did not arise until the 1960s.6 But once the economy began growing, households had many incentives to save. Urbanization and the rise of consumer culture led to saving for the purchase of new goods and housing. Education required funding, too. But above all, savings for retirement was central. Rapid growth is synonymous with a sharp rise in both incomes and the standard of living. As time progressed, this meant that the savings made early in one’s career—which may have seemed generous at the time—in retrospect simply didn’t amount to much. That bank accounts, the primary means of saving, earned little interest did not help matters. Indeed, the savings rate peaked following the first oil crisis (1973), when high inflation eroded the value of bank accounts. Households, however, keep on saving for retirement, twenty or thirty years into the future, not at current growth. Put simply, from the 1970s, Japan has been awash with savings. Where to put it has been, is, and will continue to be a problem, indeed the overriding macroeconomic challenge. Japan has many structural difficulties—Richard Katz is perhaps the most eloquent proponent of this as the source of Japan’s problems.7

Japan was left awash with too much money chasing too few investment opportunities. The numbers are quite stark in magnitude. In 1970 corporate investment was 27.5% of GDP; in 1975, it was 17.9% and falling. While this was partially offset by a decline in corporate profitability, the
swing was nevertheless huge. Where did the savings go? Initially, they went to the government, which ran huge deficits in the latter 1970s; when these were reigned in under Prime Minister Nakasone, growth slowed markedly. This time it was exports to the rescue; the early 1980s were the only time period since the Korean War when the economy was export led. But for an economy of Japan’s size, it is hard for exports to be more than a temporary salve, since to serve as an engine, they must increase faster than the rest of the economy. By the late 1986 they could no longer fuel growth. The bubble came to the rescue; a combination of renewed investment and lower kept the economy going. That, too, was not sustainable. Investment was high with a view to the profits to be made in real estate, and secondarily in the stock market. Underlying this was a general euphoria, that Japanese firms would drive the global auto industry and Japanese banks would dominate world finance. With hindsight, this exuberance was irrational.

Those proved illusory. Consumers saw some of their wealth disappear. More importantly, retirement for many loomed at the same time that income growth ceased. An aging society, widely trumpeted in the media from the 1980s, made it prudent to provide for the future today. Savings did not continue to fall. As a result, Japan could no longer avoid the paradox of thrift: while it is individually rational to save, if no one consumes, the economy must shrink. Despite the return of huge government budget deficits in the 1990s, and investment overseas, the Japanese economy has proved incapable of soaking up these savings. Stagnation resulted, indeed growth failed with excess capacity and chronic unemployment. I predict that China and other high-growth economies will sooner or later face this same dilemma.

All of these changes were reflected in massive shifts in the flow of funds, a shift so large as to overwhelm any financial system. If firms were no longer investing, then new channels had to be developed to allocate Japan’s still-bountiful savings. But other changes amplified this, since not only were large firms borrowing less, but they were able to borrow from sources other than banks. Large banks lost their traditional customers, and were forced to find new ones. That process did not go smoothly. Until the late 1970s, government budgets had run surpluses, or at most small deficits. As a result, there was no market in Japan for government bonds, and regulators made it difficult for private companies to issue bonds. As a result, from 1963, when Yamaichi Securities, Japan’s largest brokerage, failed and had to be bailed out, firms had no direct financing options; their only source of outside funds was the banking system. When the government first began running sizeable deficits after the first oil crisis, the bonds it issued were placed with banks. But by 1979 the volume the government needed to sell grew to the point that banks refused to purchase the full amount, and had to allow the development of a bond market. At the same time, Japanese multinational corporations developed foreign funding sources, such as the U.S. commercial paper market; they also began issuing “samurai” bonds in London. The deregulation of international finance in 1980 abetted this ongoing transformation. So not only were they borrowing less, they were able to turn to non-banking sources.

Leverage allows banks to use a small amount of capital to move a large amount of loans. But it can also be dangerous: bad loans can overwhelm the strength of the system, and push a financial system into crisis. The typical approach to looking at financial problems is to concentrate on individual shocks and the circumstances that contributed to them; that leads to a plethora of sometimes-idiiosyncratic analyses. In contrast, I want to stand this formulation on its head: why don’t financial meltdowns arise more frequently? Two factors stand out when the question is phrased in this manner.

First, over the decades, bankers have learned how to avoid problems encapsulated in organizational structures and operating rules-of-thumb. In the case of the large “city” banks which, national in scope, dominated the Japanese financial system, these included a focus on lending against physical collateral, primarily real estate, and loans to large firms. Many such borrowers were regulated, or were parts of tight oligopolies or otherwise stable industries, and were historically low in risk. Furthermore, during high growth, even firms that were poorly managed do well enough to survive. Real estate prices rose steadily; collateral thus provided a reliable cushion. Banks thus tended to focus on straight loans to support the expansion of borrowers’ ongoing operations; by 1980, they had had a stable set of customers for twenty or more years. These rules-of-thumb were sufficient for forty years; there were no bank failures until the latter 1990s.

Regulation complemented banks’ internal rules-of-thumb. Following the example of the U.S., Japanese regulators tried to watch both the asset and the liability side of the system. They limited the setting up of new branches and otherwise stunted competition among banks, as an indirect tool to buttress the stability of the financial system. If banks could not grow quickly, they faced diminished incentives to undertake risky (but potentially more profitable) lending. Banks were also required to maintain capital reserves, and were regularly inspected by authorities from the Ministry of Finance to check honesty and management. Finally, regulators insured depositors against losses and prohibited banks from offering higher interest rates than their peers. Customers thus had no incentive to switch banks. With competition muted, banks did not even have to watch costs carefully. Indeed, they faced incentives that encouraged inefficiency: labor-intensive services and entertainment—and the purchase of shares in their clients—were the few strategies they could employ to capture share from their rivals.

This cozy world proved a little bit too comfortable: a rapid shift in the flow of funds undermined both internal and external checks. Large firms disappeared as lenders, and by 1980 fiscal restraint under Nakasone reduced budget deficits; banks thus could no longer supplement their loan portfolio with the purchase of government bonds. What were large banks to do? If they couldn’t lend to large firms, they
could try lending to small, or internationally for project finance. In reality, such new business was something for which neither banks nor regulators were prepared.

It is not that banks did not try. To develop expertise, they dispatched staff to the Small and Medium Enterprise Agency. But lending in such markets requires very different skills; compared to large firms, bankruptcy rates are higher among small firms. Stability cannot be presumed; furthermore, small firms were served by credit agencies and other local financial institutions. The better firms already had access to loans, and so the “city” banks picked up less desirable customers, or had to offer loans at prices that, given their cost structure, were not profitable. In practice they seem to have done both. International lending also requires new analytic skills, one that as it turned out neither Japanese nor American banks had. In sum, everything Japanese banks tried tended to sour.

This was accentuated by the use of land as collateral. Once money began to flow easily, and land prices began climbing, the expansion in lending to small firms looked both safe and simple. Credit analysis wasn’t necessary, only a careful monitoring of collateral. Where the money flowed didn’t matter. The monetary policy of the mid-1980s made matters worse. While exports were strong, fiscal retrenchment nevertheless meant slow growth, and interest rates were kept low. That continued with the Plaza Accord of September 1985, a coordinated effort by the major “G-5” economies to depreciate the U.S. dollar. But the yen strengthened 50% over the next year, more than anyone anticipated, prompting interest rates to drop to (then) record-low levels into 1987. That policy was continued after the U.S. stock market crash in October 1987. Easy money was fuel on the fire of bank lending. The more real estate prices rose, the more confident banks were in their lending, and the looser their controls became. At the same time, by their traditional guidelines—bankruptcy rates, collateral, bank capital adequacy—regulators saw no reason to worry.

In sum, organizations were unchanged, and in retrospect they were ill-suited to the new environment. When problems surfaced after 1992, there were no pressures to undertake the sort of restructuring and retrenchment that now appears to have been sensible. Instead, both banks and regulators procrastinated in foreclosing on bad loans and trimming their own branch networks and lending staff. In any case, the story of the excesses of Japan’s “bubble” economy and its aftermath, including the bungling of the subsequent cleanup of the banking system and ill-timed on-again off-again macroeconomic stimulus, has been told many times, and is still unfolding. In sum, thrift has imposed a high price on their economy. In this it will not be unique. Rapid growth in other Asian economies has already produced shifts in their flow-of-funds that undermined tried-and-true rules of controlling leverage, leading to so far fleeting but nevertheless costly financial crises. As these economies see their population age, and investment fall, they too will face the paradox that plagues Japan today. China will be the most vulnerable.

The Aging Society: Liabilities (and Assets) in Japan’s Future

Japan is now on the threshold of one of the most fascinating transitions in human history: natural population decline due to an increasingly elderly population. This is not a prediction; it has in a sense already happened. That is because the size of the adult population twenty years hence is already known, since we know the number of children in the population.

This transition ought to be of interest to all social scientists. There is a small body of literature in anthropology and sociology on cities and regions where the young have moved out. Perhaps that gives some sense of what Japan’s society will soon look like, but in general there is comparatively little work on this topic. Economists are no different. While there is a growing literature on “generational accounting” and on projections of social security costs, it is difficult to motivate researchers to devote their professional lives to predicting the shape of their grandchildren’s world. In contrast, our students have a vested interest in the topic.

As the number of elderly increases, Japan’s savings-investment imbalance will ease. However, this transition is likely to be slow, and it will probably not be until the end of the decade that Japan will see relief from its current surplus of savings. Of course, that will also be matched by a decline investment and slower growth in the capital stock. Both stock and flow analyses suggest that Japan’s economy will show minimal growth for the remainder of our lifetimes.

Here, however, I want to look at the future economy by listing up the liabilities the government has incurred, and its offsetting assets. Japan, like most developed countries, set up a social security system in the early 1960s that includes cash payments to retirees, and it also provides health insurance. This obviously imposes costs as a population ages, though the Japanese health care system is far more cost effective than that of the U.S. However, the cost of provision for the elderly is still higher than for those still in the workforce; costs will rise sharply as the share of the elderly increases, a large future liability that Japan has incurred. Various reforms, such as incorporating nursing homes and care at home, can only pare the rate of increase.

Another contrast with the U.S. is that the current generation is saving. However, output in an economy cannot readily be stored. While investment can increase total future output, health care services are consumed when they are produced. Hence the burden of caring for tomorrow’s elderly ultimately rests upon tomorrow’s workers. An aging society means that this burden will increase, and so the share of the national pie that workers will be able to consume will come under pressure, indeed will fall considerably. The ratio of elderly to those in the working age population is one quick indicator. Currently it is about 27%, by 2025 it will rise to 47%. A declining number of youth will partially compensate, except that reduced costs for education will be offset by (much) higher costs for health care. Indeed, per person costs for the elderly have risen by 33% over the past decade, as modern medicine extended life expectancy. On net, the costs
to those of working age must still rise, and indeed the age structure guarantees that they must rise significantly from a macroeconomic perspective.

Second, the fact that the saving rate is high is of scant benefit. At first glance, some of the costs will be born by the elderly, as they spend. However, this requires that someone else be saving, in order to buy their assets. Indirectly, therefore, those of working age population still bear a burden, since they must reduce their consumption to generate the savings to purchase the assets of the elderly. That choice, of course, is voluntary. In contrast, if current levels of social security and health care support are maintained, then social security taxes must rise to 30% of income, generating an effective income tax rate in excess of 50%. Alternatively, the consumption tax must go from its current level of 5% to 25%, or benefits cut. In either case, this represents a swing of 10% of GDP—a large but not impossible amount.

A shift in taxes of this magnitude cannot help but be politically contentious. What is already certain is that that process will be inequitable: those retiring today will benefit relative to their children. Today's retirees are drawing national pensions and receiving national health insurance. But under the status quo ante level of benefits and taxation, they incurred few obligations in their younger days to support their own parents. Younger Japanese face a different situation: they will have to pay high taxes to provide for the elderly, but will in the most optimistic scenario not receive higher benefits. Realistically, they must expect to receive substantially less than their parents, and already the government is moving both to extend the retirement age and to reduce payouts. How will they react to an environment in which they work to pay taxes, but have to look forward to a less comfortable old age for themselves? Again, this is to my knowledge a novel situation, and we will have much to learn from observing what happens in Japan.

The bottom line seems relatively robust: the Japanese public sector is fundamentally bankrupt. In order to balance assets and liabilities, some combination of increases in taxes and reductions in benefits will be necessary. The normal summation of generational accounting exercises focuses on the generational disparities. The extreme case are the currently retired elderly, who are receiving eight times what they paid in while they were working. Such a disparity clearly is not sustainable under an aging population. Calculations suggest that the current generation is leaving the next generation short by about 10% of GDP.

Again, that is not an insurmountable burden, but it understates the true magnitude of government liabilities. That is because we also should add in the costs of bailing out the financial system within this framework. The banking system is insolvent, with very low levels of capital and bad loan losses of at least ¥25 trillion, or 5% of GDP. Guarantees to depositors mean that the government will ultimately be responsible for much of this. Problems do not end there. The Japanese post office is the world's largest financial institution, with ¥250 trillion ($2.5 billion) in deposits. These funds have been handed over to the government, which has used it through FILP (the Fiscal Investment and Loan Program) to underwrite the construction of toll roads, bridges, and railroads, and to support small business loan guarantees and a host of other programs, including subventions to local government. Many of these individual programs have not only run operating deficits for their entire history, but hold assets of little value: bridges that no one uses are unlikely to ever pay back the bonds issued to cover construction costs. For all practical purposes, the government is liable for this difference. FILP-related losses likely will total ¥75 trillion, or fifteen percent of GDP. In addition, life insurers face many problems, and must unilaterally reduce payouts on policies if they are to remain solvent; since Japanese hold a much greater amount of their wealth in insurance than do Americans, this also needs to be factored in. At the moment, therefore, the liabilities of financial institutions are at least ¥100 trillion, or 20% of GDP, larger than their assets.

While losses of this magnitude certainly can be born, what will be done in practice is unclear. Japan already has (gross) government debt of 150% of GDP, and is currently running a fiscal deficit of 9% of GDP. In the short run that is not a problem, because interest rates are now extraordinarily low. As a result, the government's interest payments on its ballooning debt actually are smaller than they were a decade ago. Nevertheless, the government will need to begin cutting its deficit before the end of the decade. Adding in 20% of bad debt, and another few years of cumulative deficits, and governmental debt will reach 200% of GDP. Such debt can be rolled over, but interest must at least be paid. If interest rates rise to 3% (from the current .75%) then this will increase interest payments by 5% of GDP. Adding all of these up, that is, a 9% of GDP increase in taxes (or decrease in benefits) to eliminate the deficit, a 5% increase to cover the servicing of government debt, and 10% (or more) to cover the costs of the retiring generation—gives an increased burden on today's Japanese youth of 24% of GDP. Japan would move from the low end to the high end of tax rates in the developed world. Tax increases, of course, will also depress what would otherwise be at best slow economic growth.

Conclusions

I have employed 3 simple approaches to look at Japan's economy. One is a simple "growth" accounting, that looks at changes in the stock of the factors of production. Since the labor force is currently declining and will continue to do so for at least another three decades, this suggests slow or no growth into the foreseeable future. Second, the flow of savings in the economy shifted markedly during the postwar era, underlying both the bubble and the current banking crisis. But the "paradox of thrift" that this shift entails also provides a separate impetus towards slow growth, and this too is likely to continue through the end of the decade. Finally, both the government and financial institutions have incurred a vast array of liabilities to the current generation, from promises to provide retirement benefits and health care to promises to make good on deposits and insurance policies.
Currently assets—future tax revenues, and loans to healthy companies and government projects—are much lower than liabilities. The Japanese economy must make good on these amounts in one or another manner, or renege on promises to (future if not current) retirees and savers. Since the starting point is one of high budget deficits and high government debt, that is likely to be a very fractious process.

All of these issues are linked, directly or indirectly, to Japan’s demographic transition. Some of these problems are unavoidable, such as the rise of the dependency ratio of retirees to current workers. But others are in part a consequence of poor policy; financial bubbles are not inevitable, and the burden of thrift need not be so high. Analyzing this is important. The U.S., too, has an aging population, though Europe in general will age more quickly. But the drop in China’s birthrate means that it will soon face the same dilemmas. Hence Japan’s case not only provides useful fodder for standards sorts of economic analysis, but also food for thought for those looking at the rest of Asia.

References


Notes
1W. Arthur Lewis, a Nobel laureate and Princeton professor, first stressed this transition, and later extended the insight to a 2-sector model of development. The initial empirical application of this model was undertaken by Gustav Ranis, a Yale economist, using data from Japan.

2“Principles” texts are disturbing in their uniformity, with many following chapter-for-chapter the seminal 1947 text of Paul Samuelson.

3This is reflected in the aphorism “less bang for the buck,” which here perhaps should be “less yang for the yen.”

4Ironically, one consequence of the “bubble” is that industry after industry—most obvious in the case of commercial real estate and rural resorts—were “fooled” into adding capacity. As a result, the economy has if anything too much capital, and it is not sensible to think that investment will ever return to its pre-1990 levels.

5Technical change increased farm productivity greatly in the 1950s and 1960s; as a consequence it freed up labor that could shift to other sectors at little cost in output. From over 50% of employment in the early post-WWII years, the sector “agriculture, forestry and fisheries” now employees under 5% of the labor force. Technical change in manufacturing is now freeing up resources in that sector.

6Sheldon Garon at Princeton has done interesting work on savings campaigns, which go back at least to the early Showa era (late 1920s).

7See Katz (2003), Katz (1998) and his many op-ed pieces; he was also a contributor and is now the editor of The Oriental Economist.

8This goes against folk wisdom, but in the 1960s and 1970s, increases in exports were offset by increases in imports; the net impact on growth was thus minimal. Furthermore, exports were and remain a small share of the economy. In these two aspects Japan is quite different from the rest of Asia, or for that matter Europe, and instead resembles the U.S.

9I expect that immigration will rise sharply during the coming decade. I believe this might have happened earlier, had the bursting of the “bubble” not led to a premature collapse of growth. Migrants are by nature ambitious, and that does not now lead them to Japan.

10Health care is, as a first approximation, both comprehensive and compulsory. From a U.S. perspective, Japanese health care costs are quite low. However, in contrast to health care, Japanese retirement benefits are more generous than ours.

11One “traditional” way to do this was for children to provide for the elderly; in return, they would inherit the family farm or home—realistic in that 60% of households own their residence. However, this system is breaking down, because the burden of caring for parents can outstrip a family’s current resources, since the children the elderly may themselves be nearing retirement. In any case, the underlying shift—children must reduce their own consumption to provide for the elderly—is the same. A recent attempt by Horioka et al. (2002) analyzes this phenomenon; they find little evidence of a conscious behest strategy in Japan.

12Since there are a wide variety of baselines used, it is not possible to directly compare such estimates. The 10% number is my extrapolation, from the shares of income (or consumption) in the economy. It is consistent with the tabulations in OECD (1997), and roughly comparable to that Dekle (2002).

13I did not detail it earlier, but the return on assets in Japan is a mere 2%, well below either historic levels or the levels of other developed countries.
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