

Bringing Asia Home: Curriculum Changes and Minor Developments

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For some time, I have been one of a small number of faculty trying to increase interest in and exposure to the non-Western world, specifically East Asia, on my campus. The circumstances have not made it easy for me, or, I suspect, for many of you. Roanoke College is a small liberal arts college in southwestern Virginia, with a student body of around 1,750-1,800, and a faculty of about one-hundred. It is affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. There are few courses that focus on the non-Western world as well as few non-Caucasian students and staff. While in both curriculum and population, there has been considerable diversification since I came to the college thirty years ago, contemporary visitors to our campus would notice the “whiteness” of our campus and its curriculum. This paper is about one faculty member’s attempt to meet the challenge of increasing knowledge, or at least awareness of, East Asia on campus, and about the important role of funding in the process.

I am among the majority on my campus in being European by ancestry and discipline: my own training is in European, specifically English, medieval history. But when I was hired in 1975, it was with the understanding that I would offer a course in East Asian history. And, on the basis of a year-long course I took in college and the ability to research a topic (!), I developed a semester-long course, first offered in 1976. The course was offered annually from 1977 to 1986, then again in 1988-89, and then not again for nine years. In the mid 1980s I also developed for the January short term a course on Asian Civilizations to A.D. 1600, which I taught several times.

In 1988-89, the college began to implement a new core curriculum. As the first “general education director,” I was charged with guiding the creation and development of the new courses. One of my concerns was to encourage faculty to incorporate non-Western materials into the new courses. A generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, supplemented by money from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education and a college endowment for faculty development, supported a series of workshops and short courses to prepare faculty to teach the new core humanities courses. Non-Western components were included, though they were rarely the main focus. Subsequent general education directors, using college funding, have made available programs, which though more limited, have increasingly focused on non-Western topics.

This is one important way funding has supported the development of non-Western expertise on campus. However, I’m not sure how much these faculty development activities have actually increased the exposure of students in classes to non-Western materials. To promote this I suspect

it important to require that participants provide evidence of development (and use!) of a curriculum unit as a product of a faculty development workshop (though this may be possible only when participants receive a stipend).

Funding affected teaching and learning about East Asia at Roanoke College in another way when in the summer of 1996 the faculty learned of the opportunity to participate in a Leadership Development Seminar in China sponsored—and funded—by the Lutheran Educational Conference in North America (LECNA) and the Lutheran College China Consortium (LCCC). Two of us, a colleague in Psychology and I, joined the group. I returned from this experience with a renewed commitment to teaching East Asia. I began again to teach East Asian history; indeed within two years I split the existing course into two, Early and Modern East Asia. I also decided to try to encourage study in East Asia, in part in gratitude to LECNA and LCCC for the wonderful experience they had provided. I developed a new concentration (an interdisciplinary minor) in East Asian studies. This was passed by the faculty in the spring of 1997. (For the catalog description of the concentration, see the Appendix.)

The initial purpose of the concentration was to encourage students to study in East Asia, particularly in the LCCC’s semester in Hangzhou. I knew from listening to students that they saw courses abroad as “extras,” courses which usually didn’t “count” towards their major or required core courses. If they could come back from a semester with most of the units counting toward the fulfillment of requirements, I thought they might be more open to overseas study. But I realized that the concentration had to have requirements which could be met on campus, also. Thus the concentration in East Asian Studies, designed after study of what other small liberal arts colleges required in similar programs, had to be structured around courses available on campus. The requirement of two courses in an East Asian language can only be met on campus by taking Japanese (which has been offered since the mid 1990s). The other requirements include a Political Science course (Comparative Political Systems: Asia), at least one East Asian history course, and two other courses. Given the paucity of relevant courses on campus, it was decided that one of the six courses, but only one, could be a course with a broad global focus which would at least incorporate East Asian material. Since many of the courses with a global focus are already housed in Business Administration and Economics, I hoped this would make the concentration more attractive to Business Administration majors (not only one of the larger majors on campus, but a major with an obvious reason to encourage students to gain East Asian expertise). Independent studies or internships represent other ways to acquire course credit in the concentration. (Five students have used independent study on an East Asian topic as one of their six courses in the concentration.)

What students have been attracted to the concentration, and how many have been encouraged to study in East Asia? These students, both graduates and those currently in the program, are identified in Table 1:

Table I

Students in East Asian Studies Concentrations at Roanoke College
 (Each row represents an individual student.)

Year of graduation unless otherwise indicated	Major	Independent Study on East Asian topic	Experience in East Asia: study or work	Further study or work experience in/on East Asia
1998	History	History (two units)	JET instruction After graduation	MA, Syracuse, Japanese history
1999	Religion		Studied at Hangzhou	
	Philosophy			
	International Relations		Summer language study in Japan	
2000	International Relations			[Works for Smithsonian International Tours office]
2001	History (didn't complete)			
	History (didn't complete)			
	Religion	Religion	Teaching English in Manchuria, 03-04	
2002	Religion			
	International Relations	Inter-disciplinary	Studied in Hangzhou	Grad school, U Hawaii, Asian studies
	International Relations		Studied in Hangzhou; Church mission work in SE Asia after grad	[Grad work in International Relations in Australia]
	International Relations	History		
2004	International Relations			
2003/04 in progress	International Relations		Study in Hong Kong (ISEP), 03-04	
	International Relations		Planning study in Kansai Gaidai, fall 04	
	Environ policy (dropping)			

In the seven years that the concentration has been in existence, eleven students have graduated with the concentration; while two others were in the concentration for a while, they did not complete all the requirements. Currently there are three students in the concentration, of whom one is about to drop. Note that as Table 1 reveals, International Relations is the department providing the most students (eight). Religion and Philosophy, which since the Spring Term of 1999 has been offering occasionally a course on the Religion and Philosophies of China, and before that regularly offered a course on Living Religions of the World, has provided four; History has provided three. All three of these majors offer one or more courses in Asian topics, and they are the only majors to do so. There is thus a possible correlation between the students' opportunities for exposure to Asian material in the major and interest in signing up for the Asian Studies concentration. A causal relationship is not inevitable, though, since both behaviors may simply reflect an initial interest in the wider world leading students to choose major courses on Asian rather than American or European topics, and to be interested in the concentration.

An important connection between these three majors and the appeal of the East Asian studies concentration may be that students in these majors can benefit from the College regulations which permit students to count up to three major (or other required) courses towards a minor or concentration, as well. Perhaps this is why, of the approximately a dozen students a year who take Japanese to meet the foreign language requirement, only those who major in international relations, history, or religion have signed up for the concentration.

It seems obviously significant that the one student I have had in the concentration from outside of these three majors, an Environmental Policy major, is an Asian-American, the first I have encountered in the concentration. (And I should note that she has decided to drop the concentration.) I suspect that if Roanoke had a larger number of Asian-Americans in the student body, they would also be an important source of recruits for the concentration.

Although the number of students in the concentration has not been large, the program has provided opportunities and encouragement not available before. The concentration may tend mainly to enable students already interested in East Asia to put an additional label on their diploma. However, at the least it encourages these students to take East Asian courses in disciplines they might not otherwise encounter. Moreover, the existence of the concentration has led to regular offerings of East Asian courses in the departments of History and Religion and Philosophy which otherwise would probably be less frequently offered. It also encouraged the College to support the offering of Japanese in the late 1990s when enrollment was low.

One quarter of the students who have signed up for the concentration have studied in East Asia. Since fall 1999, when the records of the current Director of International Education were first compiled, five students have studied in East Asia: one in Hong Kong (2003-4), one in Japan at Kansai Gaidai (2002) and three in Hangzhou (in 2000). These

represent 3.3% of the 151 students studying off campus since 1999-2000. Three of these five students in East Asia have been enrolled in the concentration. Although I do not have college-wide data for study in East Asia before that, from my own records I know that three more studied in Hangzhou in the fall of 1997. One transferred immediately to a school where she could major in Chinese studies; one was a recent graduate in business administration; the third returned to Roanoke to be a religion major and to complete the concentration.

From the perspective of the importance of funding, study in Hangzhou presents a pretty suggestive pattern. Twice recently, groups of Roanoke College faculty traveled in China on trips funded in whole or part by grant money. The trip in 1996 was funded almost completely by LECNA; in 2000 six of us were able to go to China because of the inexpensive nature of the trip, a result of the planning and organization of Zhimin Lin of Valparaiso University, a leading figure in the LCCC, and with some financial help from Roanoke College. Both times, students went to study in Hangzhou soon after the faculty trips. (Table 2)

Table 2: Study in Hangzhou

Faculty Travel in China	Communication	Students Study in China
May/June 00: 6 Roanoke College Faculty on LCCC trip to China	00-01 returnees talk with individual students	Fall 01: 3 Roanoke College students study in Hangzhou (LCCC program)
May/June 96: 2 Roanoke College Faculty on LECNA/LCCC trip to China	96-97 returnees talk to campus about their experiences	Fall 97: 3 Roanoke College students study in Hangzhou (LCCC program)

The first time that students responded to the experience of the faculty, I wasn't surprised. The two of us who had traveled in China in 1996 gave a lot of presentations about our trip to the College community throughout 1996-97. Since Roanoke College had just joined the Lutheran College China Consortium, it could now send students to study for a semester in Hangzhou. Moreover, the Director of International Education was very supportive of the LCCC program. Thus, the opportunity to study in China was widely advertised, evoking a real excitement about it on campus; and making it reasonable that students would be interested in studying there in the fall of 1997.

It did intrigue me, though, that the next time Roanoke sent students to Hangzhou (the fall of 2001) was after a second group of Roanoke College faculty returned from traveling in China (in the summer of 2000). This time there was less formal discussion of China than had occurred after following the earlier faculty trip.

Several of the faculty who went on the trip did bring political scientist Zhimin Lin from Valparaiso University to Roanoke to lecture on contemporary China in February 2001, but though his presence may have confirmed the students' interest, it did not create it.

The students were two international relations majors (both in the concentration) and an English major, for whom the semester in Hangzhou was a life experience unrelated to his other work on campus. Based on my knowledge of the

three students, I hypothesize that the key factor in their decisions to study abroad was individual contact with faculty members.

Although the numbers of students who opt for enrolling in the concentration or study abroad are not large, they do represent students taking advantage of opportunities which did not exist before. The concentration came into existence as a direct result of one faculty member being funded to travel in China; the six students Roanoke College has sent to Hangzhou might well not have chosen to study in East Asia without prior contact with faculty who had traveled there. The lesson of this tale is not, I'm sure, new to this audience: the more faculty members experience Asia firsthand, the more students will learn secondhand about the region, and the more students will be inspired to gain firsthand experience of their own. And—as we all know—funding is a necessity to support such faculty travel.

Appendix

East Asian Studies Concentration

Description:

Students from *any major* interested in developing a specialization in East Asia may earn a concentration in East Asian Studies by successfully completing (with a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.0), either in an approved program in East Asia or on campus, at least six courses. Of these courses, two must be in an East Asian language (Chinese, Japanese, or Korean), one must be in East Asian history, and one must be in East Asian politics. The other two courses are to be taken from relevant courses on or off campus, including special topics classes. One course may be from an international perspective (see East Asian Studies advisor for list of courses available.) An internship or independent study focused on an East Asian topic in any department is also advisable; the topic must be approved by the East Asian Studies advisor as well as the relevant department.

Interested students should contact the East Asian Studies advisor as soon as possible for help in identifying appropriate courses either on campus or overseas.

Requirements:

Two units of East Asian language (Chinese, Japanese, or Korean)

One unit in East Asian history

One unit in East Asian politics

Two other courses may be chosen from:

- 1) East Asian history (second course)
- 2) special topics courses focusing on Asia or East Asia

- 3) Religion/Philosophy 218: Religion and Philosophies of China
- 4) internship
- 5) independent study
- 6) courses with an international perspective: (you may take one of the following to meet the requirement): Buad 211: Intro to Global Management; Buad 333: Global Marketing; Econ 237: Comparative Economic Systems; Econ 247: Global Trade and Finance; Poli 231: International Politics; 232: International Organizations; Religion 130: Living Religions of the World (if you have *not* taken Religion/Philosophy 218: Religion and Philosophies of China.)

Current East Asian Studies Advisor: Dr. Susan Millinger, West Hall 317 (ext. 2411)



Sharing ideas and conversation at the 2004 ASIANetwork Conference in Lisle, IL.
Photo provided by Marsha Smith.