A NEWSLETTER FOR TEACHING ABOUT ASIA
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Table of Contents

From the Board Chair 3
From the Executive Director 4

ASIANetwork Consultancy Program 6

ASIANetwork Conference 2004 Presentations 7

A Tale of Two Museums 7
Laurel Kendall, Keynote Address

Contemplative Education in a Liberal Arts Context: Naropa University’s Approach to Asian Studies 12

Contemplative Education in a Liberal Arts Context: Naropa University’s Approach to Asian Studies 12
Tom B. Coburn

The Practice of Discernment in Contemplative Education 14
Nona Olivia

A Path to Intimacy With Demons: Contemplative Education at Naropa University 15
Andrew Schelling

Returns to Institutions and Individuals from the Funding of Asian Travel and Seminars 18

Interests Realized: A Perspective from Luther College 18
Peter Scholl

China in Small Doses: Benefits & Challenges of Short Term Immersions 20
Lynn Peters

Bringing Asia Home: Curriculum Changes and Minor Developments 23
Susan Millinger

Selling Chairman Mao: Chinese Nationalism and the Cultural Economy of the Late Twentieth Century 27
Steven D. DeCaroli
ASIANetwork is a consortium of about one hundred sixty 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.

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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.
Dear ASIANetwork members,

It gives me great pleasure to greet you at the start of this academic year and to sketch out a few of the opportunities and programming that 2004-05 holds in store for ASIANetwork.

A number of years ago, returning home after my first ASIANetwork meeting, I thought, “This is it—the most useful and enjoyable of all of the professional meetings I have ever attended.” Since then, I haven’t missed an annual meeting. When I ask myself why, several reasons come to mind. The conference is focused, with few distractions and scheduled so as to avoid the exigencies of having to cancel classes for several days in order to attend. It is constructive, with sessions based not only on scholarly content, but also with sessions on relevant pedagogy and programs that are of practical value for one’s home institution.

As important as all of the formal aspects of the conference program, however, is the exceptional opportunity to meet and learn from colleagues who share a focus on undergraduate Asian studies at a liberal arts institution. Over meals, during coffee breaks, and in other informal settings, we share just what is working (and sometimes what is not working) on our own campuses, and that may be the most practical benefit of all.

Plans for next spring’s annual meeting are currently in the beginning phases. You should already have received in the mail the call for panels for this meeting. As many of you know, our annual conference alternates between a meeting, like this past year’s, at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center in Lisle, IL, and campus meeting locations in various parts of the country. Next year, April 21-24, 2005, the ASIANetwork annual meeting will be held in southern California, hosted by Whittier College, located in the hills that ring Los Angeles. A first for next year’s meeting will be the sharing of time, space, and programming with the annual meeting of the Asian Studies Development Program (ASDP) of the East-West Center and the University of Hawai’i at Manoa, ASDP, which sponsors on-site programs and summer seminars and has a strong outreach that borders on our own. We anticipate that joining forces in this way will enrich both the program and the discussions that are such an invigorating part of our annual get-togethers. So, mark your calendars for April 21-24, 2005 and make plans to be there.

Special programs this year include the recently renewed, Freeman Foundation-funded Student-Faculty Fellows Program; the ongoing ASIANetwork Consultancy Program, this year directed by Paul Watt; and a new program, just funded by the Luce Foundation, that will bring a consultant to your campus to explore its holdings in Asian art. Our thanks go to both the Freeman Foundation and the Luce Foundation, for their generous support for the kinds of programming that have distinguished ASIANetwork from the start, and made it tick. Also upcoming, we hope, is the Pearl River Faculty Development Program, expected to run in summer 2005, with funding pending, at this writing. Executive Director Van Symons has more to say about these programs in this issue.

Finally, it is with some satisfaction that I note that our membership has climbed this year to a total of over 160 institutions. Deep appreciation for their efforts goes to Paul Kjellberg and Chia Ning of the Membership Committee, and a warm welcome for the coming year goes out to all new and renewing members.

Joan O’Mara
I am pleased to announce that ASIANetwork recently received word from the Freeman Foundation of their renewal of support for our Student-Faculty Fellows Program. The $1.25 million grant will provide funding for an additional 180 students and faculty mentors to conduct undergraduate research in East and Southeast Asia over the next three years.

In June, we were also notified that the Henry Luce Foundation has funded an Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum project. This $370,000 grant will enable ASIANetwork member colleges to invite art historians and art connoisseurs to their campuses to evaluate Asian Art and material resources. Based on these consultancies, a book will be compiled, along with an accompanying DVD and web materials that will focus on the historical connections between American colleges and Asia as evidenced by these collections.

This fall, ASIANetwork, working with the Hong Kong American Center, will also submit a grant proposal to the Fulbright-Hayes Programs of the Department of Education seeking support to fund a faculty development program to study the rapid social and economic changes occurring in the Pearl River Delta region. If funded, fifteen faculty from ASIANetwork member institutions will spend June of 2005 studying in China.

ASIANetwork is deeply indebted to the Freeman and Henry Luce Foundations, and other organizations as well, for their ongoing support of the consortium. During the last decade, we have secured over $4.8 million to help meet the basic costs of ASIANetwork and to run our various student, faculty, and curricular development programs. Despite our success, raising such resources to sustain ASIANetwork presents the leaders of the consortium with what is perhaps our greatest challenge.

I wish to spend the remainder of the column clarifying the challenge faced in seeking foundation support by commenting briefly on how funding for the Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum proposal evolved.

It is important to note that unlike most non-profits, ASIANetwork has no full-time administrators, and thus no full-time development office. The preparing of grants is, therefore, a highly collaborative process (potentially frustrating to many involved, also amenable to producing solid and well thought out grant proposals). Grant ideas are often suggested by members-at-large and subsequently discussed by board members. When an idea is approved by the board, former ASIANetwork officers or current board members often volunteer to do the actual grant writing. These writers are given solid guidance by our development committee, initially comprised of Stan Mickel (Wittenberg University), and Cathy Benton (Lake Forest College). When Stan’s term ended recently, Marianna McJimsey (Colorado College) joined the committee. The development committee is also charged with the task of locating foundations or other agencies who might consider funding a proposal and ultimately with presenting the proposal to them.

The Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum proposal flowed out of the spring 2001 ASIANetwork conference hosted by John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. Many will recall that the Saturday afternoon session of the conference, held at the Cleveland Museum of Art, gave members the opportunity to view their splendid collection of Asian art. As leaders of ASIANetwork worked with key personnel of the CMA, we agreed that we should
jointly prepare a grant proposal that would utilize digitized images of the CMA Asian art collection along with expert commentary provided by Asian scholars at ASIANetwork member institutions to create discrete study modules on Asian art and culture for utilization in college classrooms throughout the world. Jim Lochtefeld (Carthage College) and Van J. Symons (Augustana College) agreed to prepare a draft proposal, while Cathy Benton and Stan Mickel, as the development committee, worked to locate foundations with a focus on Asian art and distance learning.

Once the initial draft was completed, it was determined that face-to-face conversations were needed to fine tune it before presenting it to foundations. Consequently, in the summer of 2002 ASIANetwork flew Cathy Benton, Jim Lochtefeld, and Paul Watt (the incoming board chair) to Cleveland, where they were joined by Paul Nietupski (a fine scholar at John Carroll University with close connections to the CMA) to meet with our CMA colleagues. A chief concern of ASIANetwork was that costs for the grant had mushroomed to over $1 million because the CMA felt it needed to build staff hires and image digitization expenses into the grant.

That fall, Paul Watt wrote a second much-improved draft of the proposal based on discussions held the previous summer. At the same time, Stan Mickel and Cathy Benton began contacting a number of different foundations to gauge whether they might be interested in funding the project. Through the winter of 2002 and spring of 2003, eight foundations were sent grant prospectuses, and a couple agreed to review the full grant proposal. However, in the end all concluded that the proposal was simply too expensive to fund (remember the stock market had plummeted and foundations were struggling).

As a result, leaders of ASIANetwork asked our friends at the CMA if they could reduce costs for their part of the program. When they were informed that this would not be possible, further affiliation with the CMA was no longer feasible.

At this crucial juncture, Paul Watt and Van J. Symons, by chance, met Helena Kolenda of the Luce Foundation at the Freeman Symposium on Asia in the Curriculum meetings in New York City. Helena and Terry Lautz, also at Luce, had both been involved in a program run at Wesleyan University on The International Context of China’s Christian Colleges, which explored the wide-ranging resources provided by missionary archives at liberal arts colleges. Having discovered the richness of missionary archives at small colleges, Helena suggested a new course of action for ASIANetwork not involving the CMA. She noted that since significant but less widely known works of Asian art are found on the campuses of a great many North American liberal arts colleges, we might wish to help survey them and bring them to the attention of a wider audience.

Upon being apprised in late spring of 2003 about both the nonviability of the joint AN/CMA proposal and Helena’s suggestion that this new course of direction be considered, the Board of Directors unanimously agreed to adopt this new formula. Joan O’Mara, a fine art historian at Washington & Lee University, agreed to conduct online and also on-site surveys of Asian art collections at a number of liberal arts colleges throughout the summer of 2003. She, Paul, Cathy, and Marianna also began to work on a third and final draft of the proposal.

While the spirit of this draft was much the same as embodied in the first two, the new draft stipulated that Asian art would now come from the campuses of liberal arts colleges, and the scholarship related to this art would now be presented as an edited book, entitled Asian Art in the Undergraduate Curriculum, accompanied by a DVD and web-based images of the most significant artwork from the surveyed college collections. In retrospect, this new proposal seems a much better fit for the consortium, focused as it is on the art at liberal arts campuses, relying as it does upon ASIANetwork’s long experience in consultancy work to help discover it, and finally producing a book which is modeled after ASIANetwork’s 2000 publication entitled Asia in the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Case for Asian Studies in Liberal Arts Education.

Still, it took three years of dedicated effort by a dozen or so individuals, all working pro bono, to finally complete a solid grant proposal. Despite this hard work, we are all certain that those of us involved in this project, and also our friends at the Luce Foundation, especially Terry and Helena, will ultimately be well compensated for our efforts as we observe the impact of the consultancy visits on small college campuses and the discovery of the art and material culture that is therein revealed.

Van Symons
The ASIANetwork Consultancy Program

The ASIANetwork Consultancy Program is a service to ASIANetwork member institutions seeking outside advice on how to strengthen the study of Asia on their campuses. Utilizing this service, ASIANetwork can provide suggestions about how to design a consultancy as well as recommending experienced consultants from established Asian Studies programs at liberal arts colleges.

History

The Consultancy Program is the successor of the ASIANetwork Consultancy Program that was originally funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. Over a four-year period beginning in 1994, the Consultancy Program matched paired consultants with twenty-one colleges seeking advice on such matters as how to initiate or strengthen Asian language instruction, enhance library collections of materials related to Asia, develop stronger study-in-Asia programs, locate possible sources of financial and other support, or improve the overall quality of an Asian Studies major. ASIANetwork has continued this program from 1998 to the present; during this period, an additional twenty-one schools have been served.

Opportunities

Consultancy visits often dramatically affect host colleges by helping them better recognize existing faculty, library and institutional assets; by strengthening the community of Asianists on campus; and by enriching the dialogue between college faculty and administrators.

Drawing from a pool of over thirty experienced consultants who served in the program from 1994 to the present, the ASIANetwork Consultancy Program can recommend a list of possible consultants to interested institutions and help with the planning of the campus visit. ASIANetwork charges no fee for this service, although colleges who wish to make use of it should plan on covering the travel expenses of the consultants selected as well as provide consultants with a reasonable honorarium.

The ASIANetwork Consultancy Program is managed by the immediate past chair of the ASIANetwork Board of Directors. For the period from April 2004 to April 2005, interested persons should contact Paul B. Watt, Asian Studies/Religious Studies, DePauw University, Greencastle, IN 46135. Tel. (765) 658-4719, e-mail: pwatt@depauw.edu.

Please Accept our Apologies....


The first error occurred in the typesetting of a Japanese graphic character in Phyllis Larson and Craig Rice’s article Using Handhelds: Learning a Language “Anytime, Anywhere.” The original text provided the correct character, but an inaccurate character replaced it during the editing/printing process.

The second error occurred in Eleanor Zelliot’s article published in the Spring, 2004 Edition. Eleanor writes: “The editing of a very awkward sentence in my article, Relating to the Voices of India’s Untouchables, resulted in a very bad error. The charcoal stove is not called “Bhim” and that idea would be a real shock to his followers. The reference to “Bhim” in the poem Mother is to Ambedkar (1893-1956) whose full name is Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. Thank you for making this correction.”

Please accept our apologies for these errors.
A Tale of Two Museums

Laurel Kendall
American Museum of Natural History

This is the story of how two museums, one in New York and one in Hanoi, collaborated to produce the first comprehensive presentation of Vietnamese culture in the United States. Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit, the product of three years of hard work and intense collaboration between AMNH and the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology (VME) in Hanoi, opened at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York on March 15, 2003. While Vietnam: Journeys touches on the war, its focus is on contemporary Vietnam. While Dr. Nguyen Van Huy, Director of VME, and I were the curators of record, members of both institutions worked together—in Hanoi and in New York—on all aspects of the brainstorming, planning, design, and implementation of this exhibit. Collections and scholarly expertise came from VME, while AMNH was responsible for designing and producing a dramatic and compelling product.

We chose the theme of Journeys because it connotes a wide range of human experiences, from ordinary travel, to the journeys of shamans, gods, and ancestors, to journeys through life itself. Thematically approaching the material in such a way allowed us to present a broad portrait of contemporary Vietnamese life, including a sampling of Vietnam’s 54 ethnicities. Experts on the VME staff were asked to suggest possible “journeys” that could be represented with objects, photographs, and video.

When we began to plan this exhibit, VME researchers were already working with ethnic traders in the market of Sapa town, where the journeys of ethnic traders, tourists, and backpack travelers became stories retold in the exhibit. The journey of ceramics from kilns in northern Vietnam’s Red River Delta to both domestic and global markets emerges as another story. In the street-side toy markets set up during the Mid-Autumn Festival in Hanoi, researchers had observed...
how handcrafted toys, masks, and lanterns were being replaced by cheap plastic imports. The festival became part of a “journey through the calendar year” with the toy market reproduced in the exhibit and animated by video. Thanks to a generous grant from the Ford Foundation, VME researchers were able to conduct additional fieldwork and find further acquisitions for the exhibit. In planning this work, we weighed the feasibility and visual impact of potential journeys against the exigencies of attempting to represent all of Vietnam, north, south, and center.

Major brainstorming sessions took place in Hanoi, and object lists and label copy were reviewed during my several visits there. AMNH conservators Vuka Roussakis and Judith Levinson, trained VME staff, to prepare condition reports and pack the objects that would be shipped to New York. In December 2002, as we neared the finish line, designer Gerhard Schlanzky presented his design renderings for review and critique by the entire VME staff while label editor Lauri Halderman got sign-offs from individual researchers on her edits of their label copy which had been back-translated into Vietnamese. I had already gone through a similar process, a year earlier, in preparing essays for the exhibition book, and working with VME staff as they developed label copy.

Training for VME staff was an important part of this project. AMNH staff offered workshops on exhibit design, label-writing, museum communications, and exhibition photography. In fact, our aim was to turn every work experience into a learning experience. Nine members of the VME staff came to New York to work with us in designing and installing the exhibit and editing the several moving media clips displayed in the hall. Interns received additional training in conservation, registrarial work, exhibit design, and museum education, depending on their backgrounds and VME needs. They also visited several museums in New York, Boston, and Washington and discussed their impressions in a weekly seminar. Most internships ranged from two to six months, but Nguyen Thi Thu Huong, from the VME foreign relations office, spent two and a half years with us as a liaison between the two museums while she earned an M.A. degree in museum anthropology from Columbia University. Not only did Thu Huong translate the constant stream of email between New York and Hanoi, but she also mediated our two institutional cultures and the different constellations of personalities on each side, a culture broker par excellence. Our post-doctoral fellow, Hien Nguyen, also made bi-lingual conversations possible and contributed as a passionate researcher.

VME staff were absolutely essential in ensuring that objects were arranged and displayed properly. A large Thai mortuary tree, collected by Mr. Ví Van An, was assembled, months before the exhibit, in the empty exhibition hall and precisely documented before being disassembled and stored until the show opened. A set up for a Tay shaman ritual was digitally imaged and jpegged to Mr. La Cong Y, an expert on the Tay at VME, a few days before the opening of the exhibit. He approved the arrangement, suggesting that a blue paper elephant be moved further to the left. AMNH preparators went to work securing the objects. The floor of this exhibit was a large Vietnamese grass mat which, on a bi-national shopping expedition, we located in Chinatown, NY. Chinatown-purchased merchandise, identical to those now used in Vietnam, was a source for the many plates, cups, and trays used in various ritual set-ups.

Developing journeys

When we began to plan this exhibit, VME researchers were already working with ethnic traders and artisans in the Sapa market on the Sapa border, in a town that opened to tourist traffic in the mid 1990s, creating a brisk market in ethnic handicrafts. The journeys of ethnic traders, tourists, and backpack travelers became one of the stories we reproduced in the exhibit with manikins in ethnic costume—not as static romantic images—but poised to offer souvenir hats and bags to visitors, much as one would see them on the streets of Sapa.

VME researchers have also been documenting the manufacture and distribution of handcrafted toys and the popularity of new plastic toys during the Mid-Autumn Festival in Hanoi. Toy makers from villages in the Red River Delta have been invited to the museum to put on workshops where city children make their own toys and learn to appreciate these handicrafts as part of their holiday tradition. We were able to tell this story about traditions and changing tastes as part of a journey through the calendar year, a journey that culminates in the celebration of the full moon of the Mid Autumn Festival. We were able to create some of the fun of the Mid Autumn Market. The exhibit included a display of masks, some traditional, some familiar to our audience such as Donald Duck and Santa Claus, and some from Japanese anime and Chinese swordsman movies to suggest the cosmopolitan worldview of a Hanoi child.

Our exhibit included literal and material journeys. Bat Trang village, in the Red River Delta near Hanoi, has been producing and exporting ceramics for several centuries. The only antiquity in the exhibit was a large plate made about 500 years ago in the Red River Delta of Vietnam and subsequently traded to Indonesia from whence, long after, it was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The dish was probably made for common dining in a Muslim family.

VME researchers had also been working in Bat Trang village, documenting the return of a global market for Vietnamese ceramic and a healthy market for domestic wares. In better times, people can now afford to buy large ceramic planters and in the new year season, one can see bicycles loaded with these wares in the streets of Hanoi. Mrs. Nguyen Thu Tuoc and Mr. Nguyen Van Thanh took their bicycle to the river where boats from Bat Trang village dock. The bike was loaded with ceramic and pushed to the market. When everything was sold, they could ride it home. They agreed to sell the bicycle and a full load of wares to VME for the exhibit.
The work on *Vietnam Journeys* meant many journeys for all of us. I’ve lost track of how many visits I made to Hanoi to work with Dr. Huy and his staff in conceptualizing and planning the content of the exhibit, preparing the exhibition book and developing label copy. In 2000, we met with individual researchers who were asked to suggest “journeys” in their areas of expertise and to suggest the objects and photographs that would make the journey visually presentable. After several days of conversation, themes were written on index cards and we “storyboarded” our outline of the exhibit. Sections would be discarded—when no satisfactory material could be found, or added when new opportunities presented themselves—but the basic shape of the exhibit was set in place at that first meeting.

From early on, we realized that to give an accurate representation of Vietnam, we would have to include more information and material on the south and center of the country than VME had in its collections. VME’s strength was in its coverage of the north of Vietnam where festivals could be easily and inexpensively documented in Hanoi. However, effort was made to tell a fuller story. Researchers took on new documentation and collecting, most successfully in our presentation of an exhibit featuring a bride and groom from Ho Chi Minh City. Presentations of the Khmer New Year, a southern pilgrimage, and of a lineage ritual in a southern community were unfortunately cut when we had to reduce the show to accommodate a smaller gallery, and it was my choice (I take full responsibility) to remove material that I considered less well-integrated into the overall story of the exhibit or less well-represented with engaging artifacts. Although the exhibit does include many representations of ethnic minority cultures from the south and center—including the Chinese Vietnamese dragon that greets visitors at the entrance to the exhibit, Vietnamese Americans from the south report feeling underrepresented. Were this exhibit to be organized today, with VME researchers having engaged in southern projects and made good ties with colleagues in southern museums, we could have provided a more satisfactory representation of the south.

**The ancestral altar**

Reproducing an ancestral altar in New York may have been our most challenging task. Ethnographies about China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam all mention the importance of ancestors in East Asian Life. When I lived in a Korean village, I saw ancestor veneration rituals in the household where I lived. I learned first hand that the ancestors were an important presence in daily life and that the ritual obligations of sons to tend deceased fathers and grandfathers—the virtue translated as “filial piety”—was both an emotional and a moral act. But what about Vietnam? The ancestors were very much a part of descriptions of traditional Vietnamese society. When I first visited Vietnam 1991, I encountered many familiar elements of East Asian Culture including remnants of the Confucian tradition—but this was also a society that had experienced a revolutionary transformation. In the years of war, national struggle, and poverty that preceded the opening of the market in 1986, many aspects of traditional culture had been discouraged as wasteful of both time and money, and “superstitious.” I was aware that in China, during the Cultural Revolution and for many years thereafter, people were afraid to openly honor their ancestors. I wondered if this was also the case in Vietnam. It was therefore a revelation to me when I visited a Vietnamese home in a government flat and saw a carefully tended ancestor shrine given a place of prominence in the main room. I learned that in the years of austerity, while people tended to scale back on rituals honoring their ancestors, they had never abandoned them.

A sense of obligation to the ancestors could be seen in the lively market in votive goods, made out of paper to be burned and transmitted to the dead, who could share with the living the expanding horizon of consumer goods made available in the new market economy. Planning the exhibit, one of the VME researchers took me to the home of a votive paper maker, Mr. Tho, in a village in Ha Tay Province near Hanoi. We asked him what sorts of things people were buying and burning for their ancestors, and he pulled his order forms off of a peg so that we could copy them. We placed a large order with duplicates to replace objects that would inevitably fade under exhibition lights, and filled a case with contemporary votive goods. The display includes clothing for all ages of ancestors, a two story furnished house complete with VCR, everyday kitchen equipment, jewelry, a boom box, and the masterpiece, a life-sized Peugeot bicycle that many visitors take for the real thing.

When we began to plan our exhibit, we decided to begin with a celebration of Tet as the auspicious start of a journey though the calendar year. And of course, we would have an ancestral altar. Dr. Huy and his staff described ancestor veneration as perhaps the most important activity of the new year. The altar is cleaned and beautifully decorated for Tet, the ancestors are invited back into the home, served festive food, and each member of the family makes a solenn report to them. We were able to illustrate this in a video of the new year celebration in Dr. Huy’s own home.

Curators dream grandly; in our exhibit, we wanted to show two altars. One would be a very traditional carved wooden altar such as one might see in a home in Hanoi’s old quarter. A very gracious woman, the relative of a member of the VME staff whom I came to know as “Ba Mien” welcomed us on several occasions to study and photograph and measure her altar, something we soon realized we could never reproduce, although in the early stage of this project, there was some fanciful thought on the AMNH side about casting and simulating it in New York.

The second altar we wanted to exhibit would be more modern and improvisational—to suggest that a lived tradition is adaptive. This is the family altar in Dr. Huy’s own home. A close examination of the exhibit video of Dr. Huy’s family’s New Year celebration reveals coffee perking on the altar because Dr. Huy’s father was very fond of coffee.

Like all curators, we had to trim our plans when confronted with the finite reality of exhibition space. We could...
only have one altar. What sort of altar should it be? This question was the beginning of my education. I wasn’t really prepared for the solidity and significance of large wooden altars. In Korea, where I had worked before, the set-up for ancestor veneration is usually temporary and a paper tablet is burned at the end of the ceremony, an arrangement very well suited to a lifestyle where life is lived at floor level, where beds are rolled up and tucked away during the day and meals are eaten off of portable trays. A proper traditional Vietnamese altar, like this one at VME, is an elaborate arrangement—actually three separate tables. In the exhibit, we would have to compromise, as many Vietnamese families do, with an altar that is only one table.

Accompanied by a member of the VME staff, I went to a street in Hanoi that specializes in furniture, ancestral altars in particular. It was just before the Tet holiday and business was booming. But what I saw was of very poor quality and disappointing. However, I did learn something interesting, that the measurements for small, medium, and large altars were standardized in such a way that the numbers of measurement had particularly auspicious properties according to an old Chinese scheme of carpentry. These were not simply pieces of furniture, they were made to bring good fortune into the family.

Toward the end of the day we found a carpenter/carver who did beautiful work and could make an altar to order. There was one problem though. When we asked where he procured his wood, he described a secret forest source that would be gone in ten years. The American Museum of Natural History could not commission such an altar. From this encounter I mistakenly assumed that all of the wood used in ancestral altars was endangered, that it would be ethically irresponsible to buy one. “What are we going to do about the altar?” was a nagging question until the final months of preparation.

I assumed that some sort of furniture could be mocked up—like the altar in our Mother Goddess Temple—to suggest the space occupied by an altar without claiming a literal presence. My colleagues in Hanoi were horrified by this idea—OK for the mother goddess, not good enough for the ancestors. When designer Gerhard Shlansky presented his plans for the exhibit to VME staff in Hanoi, we spent at least as much time discussing the altar as we spent, in total, on the rest of the exhibit. Gerhard presented his design in powerpoint so that it was projected onto a screen and could be readily altered to fit the recommendations of the VME experts.

Everyone acknowledged that customs varied from house to house and that every altar represented a mix of old and new, but absolutely everyone felt that there was a right and proper way to do it, and that was what we had to strive for in representing Vietnam to the world. The altar was described as the spiritual foundation of Viet or Kinh culture. I recognized an old Confucian notion here, the moral imperative to do the rituals properly as an expression of moral and civilized behavior. “Doing” meant not only the conduct of persons but also the proper arrangement of objects in time and space. Doing it right was particularly important in public display. This is a very weighty charge to put upon museum curators and designers.

So we went, as a team—AMNH people and VME people together—to Hang Quat Street where altars of reasonable quality and altar fittings are sold. We found the proprietress of the factory that supplied the entire street. These altars were—fortunately—made not of hardwood but of cultivated jackfruit whose bitter taste discourages insects. We ordered a large altar of the best possible quality. We wanted it to look “antique.” “No problem,” people commission antique-looking altars all the time. One problem was solved.

A proper altar should be framed with elegant calligraphy expressing appropriate sentiments, like the altar at the VME. We had found two couplet boards in the VME storage but the sentiments “The mountain scenery is most beautiful, In the long river a school of fish flies by” were not appropriate for an altar—we hung them outside the enclosure where the altar was set up to attractively frame the doorway.

Dr. Huy asked a skilled young calligrapher to make us some paper couplets. The artist, Le Quoc Viet, accepted the commission and suggested we mount the paper couplets on scrolls. He was back two days later saying that the scrolls were a bad idea, fine for art but improper for a ritual setting. He was uncomfortable about using paper couplets with an elegant altar—carved wood would be better.

Dr. Huy gave up his Sunday to go to the country and buy a set of boards for the exhibit, but he was not satisfied with the sentiments they expressed. Viet, the artist, returned with a set of paper couplets that seemed just right, and Thu Huong—our intern and cultural liaison—triumphantly carried them to New York. So now we had a set of paper couplets that read: on the right, “Through study, tradition is passed on.” the one on the left, “A family tradition of frugality and hard work produces good descendants.” Above the altar, artist has written, “Luck is everywhere in the house. On an auspicious winter morning in the 11th month of the horse year, I bathed and respectfully inscribed this.”

We wanted our altar to not only be ritually correct but to suggest a living altar, adorned not only with the proper ritual objects, but with flowers, food (in museum simulation) and bright red boxes of new year sweets. Everything had to be arranged just so, and our team of experts from Hanoi arranged, discussed, and rearranged many times. Chung cake, the special stuffed and wrapped holiday food, was a special problem. While AMNH preparators can cast anything, they do need a model. Hanoi chung cakes are large and beautifully formed. In New York City’s Chinatown these cakes were either large but bulky and unaesthetic, or beautifully formed but too small for a Hanoi altar. At the last possible minute, Thao Pham, one of our Vietnamese American interns, asked her family in Texas to send us a proper Hanoi chung cake by Federal Express. Our preparators just had time to cast and paint it before the exhibit opened.

To my eyes, the completed altar was a satisfying mix of old and new that carried one of the exhibit’s key mes-
sages: a living tradition is just that, a mix of old and new, and a compromise with spatial and other quotidian limitations. Dr. Huy still wonders if we shouldn’t have used an antique altar and Viet, the artist, still thinks we should have used carved boards rather than his own beautiful calligraphy. When I see the altar, I am reminded of how easily even well-intentioned curators can bumble in setting objects into cases, not realizing that for those who live a culture every day, seemingly casual arrangements can be important assertions of spiritual and cultural values. And when I think of the labor and conversation invested in this small corner of the exhibit, I sense the power of an ancestral presence.

Through our trans-Pacific journeying, AMNH received a crash course in Vietnamese ethnology from several patient instructors, and VME people went home steeped in new ways of conducting teacher-training workshops and improved ways for organizing a museum shop. We saw this exhibition as a journey on the path toward reconciliation and healing between the United States and Vietnam. We have shown that in our present moment, Americans and Vietnamese can work together to produce something wonderful and also have a great time in the process.
Contemplative Education in a Liberal Arts Context: Naropa University’s Approach to Asian Studies

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Contemplative Education in a Liberal Arts Context: Naropa University’s Approach to Asian Studies

Thomas B. Coburn
President, Naropa University

Nine months ago, I assumed the presidency of Naropa University. This came on the heels of twenty-nine years of teaching religious studies and Asian studies, and six years as academic dean, at a traditional liberal arts college. While the reasons for my move were multiple, high on the list was the sense that a Naropa education brings to fruition seeds that are planted in the traditional liberal arts context—seeds that are insufficiently nurtured. Naropa, I sensed, answers questions that are asked, but incompletely answered elsewhere. Much of this has to do with Naropa’s understanding of Asian Studies, as it intertwines with what we call “contemplative education.” The panel today is designed to draw others into exploring this intuition. It consists of four of my faculty colleagues talking about their work. Each of us will speak for ten to twelve minutes, followed by questions and answers. My assignment here is to introduce them with three comments: a thumbnail portrait of Naropa University; a word on how I see contemplative education relating to traditional liberal arts education; and finally a word on Asian Studies at Naropa.

Naropa, established in 1974 by the Tibetan Buddhist meditation master and scholar, Chogyam Trungpa, is based on the model of India’s renowned Nalanda University and named for its 11th century abbot. The metaphor I have used to describe Naropa is to suggest that it sits at the confluence of two rivers. One has its headwaters in classical India, in the experience of the Buddha. The ensuing tradition has flowed over varied terrains, enriching each of them, inducing a contemplative dimension into even as unpromising a tradition as the martial tradition of Japan. The other river has its headwaters in the eastern Mediterranean, not in the experience of a single individual, but in the creative matrix that was classical Greece. The tradition that was born there, the liberal arts tradition, has also flowed over varied cultures, enriching each of them. These two rivers have now come together in Boulder, Colorado. Originally a summer institute emphasizing meditation and the creative arts—linked because the arts are the academic disciplines closest to meditation in how they expand conventional consciousness—Naropa moved quickly to offering credit-bearing graduate courses, eventually to some undergraduate offerings, and now offers full four-year Bachelor of Arts and Fine Arts degrees in nine majors and ten Master’s programs. The University has just over 1,100 students, roughly 40% of them undergraduates, with sixty ranked faculty and twice that many adjuncts. Accredited since 1986, Naropa’s best-known program is probably its writing program, established by Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman as “The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics.” Naropa’s mission statement aspires, among other things, “to offer educational programs that cultivate awareness of the present moment through intellectual, artistic, and meditative disciplines,” “to foster a community that . . . uncovers wisdom and heart,” and that seeks to remain faithful to the Buddhist educational heritage, while also being non-sectarian and seeking to integrate world wisdom traditions with modern culture. One of Naropa’s distribution requirements for undergraduates requires them to take at least three courses in “Contemplative Practices.”

Beyond Writing and Poetics and several degree programs in Religious Studies, Naropa’s graduate programs seek to deepen students’ inner lives and provide them with aptitudes for inserting themselves into some of the “hurt points” of the contemporary world: early childhood education, environmental leadership, and a range of programs in psychology and the arts, all manifestations of the Buddhist virtue of compassion, held in counterpoint with wisdom.

Reminiscent of faculty debates elsewhere over what counts as a distribution course, the Naropa faculty is engaged in on-going discussion over the meaning of “contemplative education.” While much of the substance of what is taught at Naropa derives from the cultural traditions of Asia, I was surprised to discover that the most recent version of the faculty document on “The Role of Contemplative Practice in Education at Naropa University” begins with a quotation from
William James: “The faculty of bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment, character, and will. An education which should improve this faculty [the faculty of wandering attention] would be the education par excellence.” I was also surprised to discover that, just last spring, the administrative staff brought forward a document called “The Path of Contemplative Administration at Naropa University.” Working inductively and collectively, staff members have sought to develop a theory for their administrative work, an event I think may be unique in American higher education. Although most staff members are not Buddhists, their theory is deeply indebted to the Vajrayana Buddhist notion of the five Buddha families and their qualities as a way of organizing the staff’s aspirations for work culture.

My second point. Naropa’s educational experience contributes, I find, to an enlarged understanding of liberal education in the way it helps us address what I believe is the single most pressing challenge for educators in the 21st century: how can we help our students become able to engage constructively with those who are unlike themselves? That formulation of the challenge, I have found, finds ready agreement virtually everywhere in higher education. It accounts for the major emphasis in the academy on promoting diversity in education, emphasizing issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and the like. Countless very imaginative and powerful programs have been developed, doubtless on each of our campuses. While each such program invites the student—in fact, invites each of us—to enhanced reflexivity as well as informing us about our fellow human beings, that reflexivity, in my judgment, stops short of what it can be. Let me put the matter this way. The crux of liberal education for many years has been to lead students into mastery of a particular discipline and to cultivate in them certain fundamental liberal arts skills: reading, writing, research, speaking—all critical skills, to be sure. But isn’t there a missing liberal arts skill in this roster, a skill that is particularly in evidence these days in what Deborah Tannen calls The Argument Culture, now freshly apparent as we enter the election season? That underdeveloped skill in mainstream liberal education, I suggest, is listening—listening to the other in all of his or her “otherness,” and listening to our own innermost selves, to what lies in our hearts, not just in our heads. In a time when conventional resources are scarce in higher education—resources of time, of money, of personnel—a college that systematically helps students develop their inner resources seems to me to hold high promise for an enlarged vision of what it means to be an educated human being, both for the fulfillment he or she finds personally, as well as for his or her ability to engage constructively in the world.

Finally, a word on Asian Studies at Naropa. The situation actually is quite peculiar, with implications both for our own institutional self-understanding and for the familiar discussion, well known in ASIANetwork and beyond, about what we mean by “Asia” and by “Asian Studies.” The fact is that, while Naropa is aptly described as “Buddhist inspired,” and while perhaps somewhat more than a third of our undergraduate courses touch on Asian subject matter in some way, we have no program in Asian Studies. In fact, when, as a new president, I started talking about Asian Studies, I got curious looks from many faculty. Virtually no one, I think, with the possible exception of some faculty in Religious Studies, thinks of him or herself as an Asianist. So we are in the odd position of teaching a great deal about Asia, but without the Asian studies label. What you will hear in a few minutes, therefore, is the brave first effort by some Naropa faculty members to talk about their work to an audience of Asianists, and perhaps, in the ensuing questions and answers, to explore what it might mean for them to think of themselves as Asianists. Conversely, it will be an invitation to the rest of the audience to think of itself as implicitly engaging in contemplative education.

Some of the peculiarity here might be a function of the fact that much of the Asian subject matter we teach at Naropa is easily elided with contemplative material from elsewhere on the globe. I mentioned earlier that Naropa aspires both to be faithful to the Buddhist educational heritage and to be non-sectarian, seeking to integrate world wisdom traditions with modern culture. Where the subject matter is drawn from geographically or culturally seems to be of less interest in the way we at Naropa teach, and have developed our curriculum, than the fact that there are multiple ways to help students deepen their inner lives—and we draw upon many of them. This, of course, immediately raises the question of whether the Naropa curriculum is implicitly “Orientalist,” in the pejorative, Edward Saidian sense of the word, because it romanticizes Asia, imputes to it a fantasized spirituality, and ignores the self-representation of Asians themselves. There is a lot to be said here, but I shall limit myself to two final comments. First, Naropa owes its existence to a Tibetan Buddhist, with a larger-than-Tibetan vision, who intentionally reached out to teach Westerners. A fair number of them, in Trungpa’s day and continuing today, were drawn to this vision of education. They did not invent that vision or project it onto a distant and unknown Orient. They were taught it by a Tibetan himself. The same, interestingly, applies today to much of today’s teaching and researching about Tibet at other institutions as well, more, I think, than is the case with other parts of Asia. Second, while Said requires all who study Asia to scrutinize their assumptions and motives, the fact is that centuries ago Chinese and Japanese pilgrims and scholars discerned in South Asia a compelling spirituality that was quite different from what they knew in their domestic cultures. Might they be seen as forerunners of those at Naropa today who are drawn to Asian spirituality in search of, and finding, something that educates in a more complete way than what they find in more conventional educational institutions?

Now we need to hear from faculty who have actually been teaching contemplative education, and who may have been teaching Asian Studies, for varying lengths of time.
The Practice of Discernment in Contemplative Education

Nona Olivia
Naropa University

In my brief presentation at the ASIANetwork Conference, I touched on two points: first, my teaching at a Buddhist-inspired institution, and secondly, the practice of contemplative education. These two points realize a synthesis in my training as a classicist, odd as that may be for a conference on Asian Studies.

My own training is in Comparative Literature, focusing on the literature from ancient Greece and Rome, with an emphasis on ancient philosophy and drama. My area of expertise is the role and representation of women in ancient religious rituals, particularly the sacrificial rituals that were so important to both Athenian and Roman state religions.

It is clear to me that the classical tradition with its roots in ancient Greece and Rome and the religious traditions from India, specifically Buddhism, have a natural cohesion. Tom Coburn uses the metaphor of Naropa’s contemplative education as a confluence of two rivers—the river of the Greek classical tradition and the river of Buddhist contemplative tradition. I would like to elaborate further in imaging the rivers as bodies of water emerging from the same subterranean sea. While above ground, to stay with the metaphor, they appear diverse, but both emphasize, and necessitate, actually require, Discernment: the ability to perceive deeply into things.

An example of this from the Greek philosophical tradition is in Plato’s Apology. Here, Socrates makes his famous observation that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Ap. 38a). According to Socrates, in order to live a moral and ethical life, we should examine not only what we believe, but also why we believe what we believe. In the Socratic method of philosophy, we examine our minds and see if our thoughts, our perceptions, our behaviors, our biases, are rooted in Clear Seeing, come from some form of truth, or instead are simply rooted in habits of mind. According to Socrates, much of what we believe, that is, much of what we take to be our personal beliefs, are actually conditioned by our culture. And much of what are our personal beliefs are simply habits of mind, habits that are so often repeated that we take them to be true. Coming from the classical tradition, then, examination, questioning, becoming aware, allows us, invites us, to go beyond what we take to be given. In academia, we call this process of examination and questioning, this practice of discernment, “critical thinking.”

In Buddhism, the practice of Discernment, that is, “seeing the way things are,” is a proximate cause of Wisdom. In both the Greek classical tradition and Buddhism, Discernment leading to Wisdom gives rise to Compassion. We can think, for example, of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, urging those with Clear Seeing to awaken the inhabitants of the cave to the shadows of puppets that they take to be real (Republic 29 (514a-521b)). Following these traditions, then, in my classes, I tell my students that I am much more interested in questions than I am in answers. It’s true. Answers often worry me.

I don’t mean to suggest that there are no answers or that we should live in a state of suspended belief, but I hope to urge my students to postpone answering questions for as long as possible. It is necessary to keep questioning in order to recognize how often we solicit and receive the expected answer.

In contemplative education, for example, we try to solicit from our students an examination of “racism,” both ancient and modern, cultural and personal. Through this examination, we inquire into its roots, its subterfuges, its intricate particularities and its numbing generalities. That is, in Buddhist terms, we inquire into its causes and conditions. By this inquiry we may have to contend with the unpleasantness of the investigation, the groundlessness of having no-easy-answer, but through this examination, we are more likely to learn something deeply useful for and about each other and ourselves.

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum says that while this kind of questioning, “….may not get us to love one another, it may get us to stop pretending that we have rational arguments for our refusals of sympathy” (Cultivating Humanity 36).

I have experienced time after time that learning to “think critically,” to practice discernment, allows students to develop what I call the mental and emotional “muscles” that are needed in order to live a morally and ethically engaged life. When students are exposed to the complexities of other people’s lives—whether the issues of cultural differences, social injustices such as racism, or issues of suffering from disease or hunger—the abilities to read and think critically about oneself in relation to others, brings a depth of awareness in which empathy and the desire to help others are natural responses.

In Buddhism we use the term Bodhicitta to mean “the awakened (or better still, the awakening) heart/mind.” In many ancient cultures, the heart and mind are not separated. Ancient cultures saw the connection between the two: in ancient Greek the word for heart and mind is nous, in Latin its animus, and in Sanskrit it is Citta. The heart and mind that are aware is the heart/mind of awakening. The heart/mind that is awakening is aware of the interconnectedness of our global community. Creating people who possess the skills to respond with compassionate action to the similarities and differences of people who make up our global community is the goal of contemplative education.

Sometimes in my classes, my students and I learn about situations in the world that are painful and disturbing—the AIDS epidemic in Africa, for example—and the warfare that can be found somewhere in the world at any given time. We become aware of injustices beyond comprehension, unimaginable suffering, stunning poverty and deprivation. To see these things pushes us beyond our comfort zone. We might want to look away or hope for a quick answer.
Sometimes we find that it is our own country that perpetuates the suffering. (And we may think here of the Greek tragedians, Sophocles and Euripides, whose tragedies criticized the continual wars fought by the Athenians. These ancient tragedies draw poignant and sympathetic portrayals of the victims of war: the women, children, and the slaves. CF: *Troyes, Iphigenia at Aulis* et al). Sometimes we learn that it is a member of the class or community that has suffered a rape, abuse or whose friend or family member is serving in the Iraq War. (We think here of Homer’s *Iliad*, for example, and its illustration of the ruthlessness of war). These discoveries are difficult to endure. However, the awareness of the suffering and the injustices is for our students in contemplative education, a call to compassionate, engaged action.

Some people may think that contemplative education is passive—that teachers simply create a safe container for a person’s true inner self to emerge, some idealized peaceful “inner self,” and to use an expression from somewhere, these students can then “follow their bliss.” Instead, I like to think of education in the terms used by Ajahn Sumedho, an American who has been a monk in the Theravadan tradition for forty years. “The goal of contemplative practice,” he says, “is not to follow one’s heart, but to train one’s heart.” It is the same for contemplative education. As all teachers know, education is a transformative experience (Cf Cicero, “sed pleni sunt omnes libri, plenae sapientium voces, plena exemplorum vetustas: quae iacerent in tenebris omnia, nisi litterarum lumen accederet” Pro Archia).

To conclude: I urge my students to build confidence, courage and strength through their developing ability to be aware of what is—not some idealized state of mind or utopian world view—and I urge them to resist the pressure to think reductively, simplistically, selfishly, that is, to see themselves as excluded or powerless in the face of the world’s problems. Instead, I urge them to unpack the complexities of whatever issues they are confronting to better understand the historical and cultural contexts of those issues so that they can respond with an awakening heart and mind. I suggest then, and only somewhat facetiously, that contemplative education at Naropa, with its roots in both the Greek classical tradition and Indian Buddhism, might be called “applied Asian Studies.”

**A Path To Intimacy With Demons: Contemplative Education at Naropa University**

Andrew Schelling
Naropa University

The question of how contemplative practice fits in with the arts in general, and poetry in particular, has been by turns coolly ignored or hotly contested at Naropa. For many years the MFA in Writing and Poetics at The Jack Kerouac School was the university’s only program that required no contemplative study for a degree. This provoked some irritable grows out of other departments, but little articulate debate—not surprising given that to speak about either Buddhism or poetry is a challenging task. Neither is well understood, or should I say readily understood.

From its earliest days Buddhism was ambivalent about literature—specifically the composing of poems. Like Buddhist practice, good poetry demands arduous, concentrated, long-term engagement along unconventional lines. The evidence suggests that true proficiency or accomplishment in poetry as in Buddhism is so distinct, so individual, and so unpredictable, that only a few people achieve mastery. Moreover, their accomplishments veer into unmapped terrain. This makes proficiency appear unique, if not downright eccentric.

In 1987 the Zen teacher Norman Fischer—himself a prolific experimental poet—convened a gathering of poets who practice some form of Buddhism at Green Gulch Zen Center on the flanks of Mt. Tamalpais, just north of San Francisco. This was surely the first time poets had gathered in the west to discuss what role meditation played in their art. For me the most memorable statement came in Norman’s opening comments. He said, “When you sit down and do nothing, that’s meditation. When you sit down and do nothing, that’s poetry.”

Curiously, when I quoted this back to him some years later a vague look overtook him and he replied that he doubted he’d said such a thing. So another uncrackable little kernel of words enters Zen lore, pithy and anonymous. But if there were not present-day uncertainty concerning what these two activities mean, poetry and contemplative practice, something would be amiss. I think not only of early injunctions in Indian Buddhism against musical instruments and discursive speech. In T’ang Dynasty China Po Chu-i could write:

> Since earnestly studying the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness,

> I’ve learned to still all the common states of mind.

> Only the devil of poetry I have yet to conquer—

> let me come on a bit of scenery and

> I start my idle droning. (Burton Watson, trans.)

In Japan, the forthright Ikkyu (1394-1481), a riveting poet as well as a Zen abbot, declared poetry “originally a work out of hell.” “We must sigh,” he added, “for those taking this path / to intimacy with demons.”

Tongue in cheek those statements may have been, but I think beneath their playfulness stirs an uneasy heart. Here is a story told by the American poet Gary Snyder. In 1956 Gary went to Kyoto. He had received the first scholarship from The First Zen Institute of America, founded by Ms. Ruth Fuller Sasaki to send Americans to Japan to study Zen. Gary arrived at the Shokoku-ji temple.

…I found myself in Japan, at the age of twenty-six, in a Zen temple with Oda Roshi, and in one of our early conversations I timorously asked him, “You know, sometimes I write poetry. Is that alright?”
And he kind of laughed and said, “It’s alright as long as it truly comes out of your true self.” And he said, “You know, poets have to play a lot. Asobi.” … That really flustered me, because the word asobi has an implication of wandering the bars and pleasure quarters, the behavior of a decadent wastrel. I knew he didn’t mean that. So for about seven years while doing Zen practice around Kyoto I virtually quit writing poetry. But it didn’t bother me. Maybe my first exercise was not being bothered by it. My thought was, Zen is serious, poetry is not serious. In any case, you have to be completely serious when you do Zen practice. So I was completely serious, and I didn’t write many poems.

At the end of that period, just before Oda Roshi died, I had a talk with him in his hospital, and I said to him, “Roshi! So it’s, Zen is serious, and poetry is not serious?” And he said, “No, no—poetry is serious! Zen is not serious.” I had it all wrong!

(Jimmy & Lucy’s House of “K” #9, 1989)

Perhaps it is this play (“poets have to play a lot”) that keeps the Jack Kerouac School in the public eye. Sam Kashner’s recent book When I Was Cool, which has received a great deal of attention in venues like the New York Times and on NPR, is only the latest in a series of efforts to “cash in” on Naropa’s Beat legacy. With a kind of arrested fascination America can watch its poetry rebels misbehave on the grounds of a Buddhist college.

Misbehave, or play? Or is it that they are testing the edges of received social practice? This kind of around-the-edges activity has, since the advent of civilization in the West, been one job of the poet. Catullus, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Baudelaire, Gertrude Stein, Allen Ginsberg—we might see these as landmark figures playing the edge since Rome was founded.

In 1483, the Japanese monk and litterateur Ten’in Ryutaku wrote, “Outside of poetry there is no Zen; outside of Zen there is no poetry.” In my curriculum I regularly use translations of Matsuo Basho (1644-1694), the renowned haiku and haibun poet of Japan, who made Ten’in’s words concrete two centuries later. After 2000 years of a kind of wary relationship between Dharma and poetry in Asia, it was at the time of Basho and largely due to his influence that poetry came into its own as a Way. Other disciplines associated with Zen Buddhism were already regarded as ways in their own right, training grounds for satori: calligraphy, painting, archery, flower arrangement, and the tea ceremony.

Basho took poetry, connected it to the Taoist notion of “perfect inutility,” and explicitly made of it a Way not just to make poetry but to refine one’s character, free oneself of delusion, and learn about one’s actual world. “A fireplace in summer, a fan in winter,” he termed it. Perfectly useless.

At what points in my own curriculum do Dharma and poetry meet? First I want to note a crucial discovery of twentieth century Modernist and postmodern writers: that poetry is an open engagement with the blank page, and thus a “score” or precise record of the mobile mind. Its subject matter is no more restricted than that of the mind, and might envelop anything accessible to human nature. Politics, economics, erotica, cooking, natural history, technology, as well as the planet’s heritage of art and religious lore. Its task is to test the edges of received language: not working within the confines of already invented forms, passed on by others, but each poem a unique exploration of the dimensions of the poet’s heart. “A graph of the mind moving,” as Philip Whalen put it.

Naropa includes in its Mission Statement the cultivation of “present moment awareness,” and this would certainly be one of the things I’m speaking about. One writes not of ideas already formulated, but of the forms of thought as they emerge, with all the slip-ups, hang ups, gaps in understanding, and candor. There is of course an anxiety inherent in this.

Anyone who pays much attention to writing knows something of the existential presence of the blank page. To a child-like sensibility this white presence is a yearning delight, crying out for inscription. To the well-civilized adult—when does this come about, with puberty? with a college degree?—it can be a terror, an embodiment of ancient Chaos. Even a rebuke to one’s own mental uptightness.

Certain Asian traditions, led by the classic books of Taoist thought, see an inscrutable gateway (a Mother) that gives birth to forms, to the 10,000 critters of Chinese philosophy. In Buddhism this is sunyata, an emptiness the Heart Sutra declares identical to all things. To any but the bravest, sunyata has a terrible, fearsome, intimidating beauty.

For a writer, the restless, disquieting, anguished, cold roiling in the belly at the sight of the blank page—the place where the teeming forms issue from the mysterious gateway—is a familiar condition. How important to make peace with this state, though we know it puts us on Ikkyu’s “path to intimacy with demons.”

But what are demons? Are they not a kind of concretized projection of human anxiety? I suspect most of this anxiety (and most of the demons) come from the nearly incomprehensible fecundity, food-chain complexity, and erotic surge of the natural, embodied world. All around us creatures are copulating, gestating, hatching, dropping, spawning, in rapturous, polymorphous ways. Creatures are prey- and being preyed upon. They die, decay, ferment, get eaten alive. To study this world is surely to enter Ikkyu’s “path to intimacy with demons.”

So a final point of contact particularly dear to my own practice is what I would term nature literacy or an ecological consciousness. One refreshing quality of most Asian poetry traditions (themselves aligned with Buddhist, Taoist, Shinto, or Hindu sensibilities) is the way non-human residents of the natural world become citizens of standing in the poem. Elsewhere I’ve written about India’s traditions, in which poetry collections serve as almanacs or chronicles of
the revolving year, and a poem can be critiqued on the accuracy of its botanical detail. In Japan the same impulse is evident in the organization of haiku and renga collections. The detailed specifics of natural history contain all the mysteries that animate, fascinate, or terrify, the human heart. Poems carry important lore about our place in the ecological web.

In Western poetry traditions, over many centuries the natural world became so much a list of metaphors that the actual non-human world practically vanished. Think of the rose in English poetry. It is the human heart, it is the female genitalia, it is velvet and voluptuously crimson, yet hides the thorn of love or the worm of lust. “Oh Rose thou art sick / the invisible worm that flies in the night,” and so forth. Where is the palpable rose? Gertrude Stein wrote “rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” and claimed that with that final rose, for the first time in 400 years “the rose bloomed in English poetry.”

I want to return to haiku for a moment. If haiku is, as I believe, a state of alert ecological consciousness expressed in a rigorously fashioned, brief poem, it is a consciousness that highlights at least one precise element of the local bioregion. Here is Basho:

A crow has settled
on a bare branch—
autumn evening.

One of my own:

Dusk.
The wolf survey’s coming
Express Mail.

Poetry serves as a reminder of habitat. Like an almanac or calendar, it conveys distinct information about one’s place in the larger environment. This brings a modern practice of poetry into alignment with the first recognizable human inscriptions, which are probably the calendrical bones found on the tundra of Siberia. Alexander Marshak was the first to suggest that those hand-incised artifacts were pocket almanacs, used to determine when the salmon were running or the caribou migrating. Imagine: you give a circumspect glance at the heavens, take a strong whiff of what’s up on earth, then let your human heart swing into action. How much wiser can poetry get?

Tom Coburn, Nona Olivia, Andrew Schelling, Lee Worley and Peter Grossenbacher at the 2004 ASIANetwork Conference in Lisle, IL.

Photo provided by Jim Leavell.
Interests Realized: A Perspective from Luther College  
Peter A. Scholl  
Luther College

This paper, in keeping with the financial metaphor of our session’s title, provides an accounting of how external funding of Asian travel, seminars, and the like have strengthened Asian studies at Luther College. I will attempt to “audit” my own activities to reveal some of the specific “returns” on these “investments” with the aim of giving others an idea of how profitable such investments can be. To some extent I will also discuss the work of colleagues who have also been enlarging Asian study initiatives.

While Luther offers a number of courses in a variety of departments, it offers no Asian languages and has no formalized Asian studies program. We have at least one well-trained Asianist housed in the departments of religion, history, and anthropology, and we have a number of teachers with some training, experience, and interest in Asia in a variety of other departments—most notably, economics/business, education, and English. Despite our limited resources, from the 1960s until 2000, all first-year students did receive some introduction to Chinese history and culture through a required course called Paideia. Typically, Paideia’s “China Unit” was about three weeks long, and included lectures and readings in Chinese history and literature, focusing most heavily on the period from the eighteenth century to the 1980s.

Teaching in the Paideia course almost every year since 1977 awakened my interest in China. Then, in 1993, I was one of five Luther faculty members who toured China with other college teachers, supported largely by funds from LECNA (the Lutheran Education Council of North America). LECNA sponsored a variety of travel opportunities for college teachers in the 1990s, and their investment greatly stimulated faculty interest and paid dividends in many classrooms at a dozen or more colleges. One specific aim of the LECNA-sponsored travel seminar was to stimulate support for Valparaiso’s Hangzhou Study Abroad Program. Teachers who participated on the tour were encouraged to send students to the program and to consider becoming resident directors.

Three of us who taught the Paideia China Unit received LECNA support and additional funds from our own institution, with the expectation that our teaching would be enhanced by what we learned through the trip and its associated readings and lectures. That expectation was richly fulfilled, and Paideia instruction on China was noticeably enhanced.

This LECNA China group was key in the formation of the subsequently created Lutheran Colleges China Consortium (LCCC), formed to work with Valparaiso University in sustaining its Hangzhou Study Abroad Program. I attended the meeting at which the LCCC was organized and soon set my sights on preparing myself to apply as a resident director of the Hangzhou program. With that goal in mind, in 1995 I started attending ASIANetwork meetings and enrolled in five weeks of intensive Mandarin at Beloit College. I visited China a second time, courtesy of a second LECNA travel/study opportunity, in 1996.

By now I was on my way and was fast becoming the “China expert” in Luther’s general education course, Paideia, taking a greater role in lecturing and curriculum planning of its China Unit.

ASIANetwork provided me with one of the most significant opportunities to become, if not a China hand, at least a China thumb or finger, through my participation in a China Seminar (underwritten by the Ford Foundation) in the summers of 1997 and 1998. Our seminar was led by Professor Richard Bodman, and included ten or so scholars from a variety of disciplines. We spent three weeks in 1997 at St. Olaf College studying Chinese language, history, economics, art, etc. The following summer we reconvened for a three-
week roving seminar in China, staying principally in Shanghai, Beijing, and Inner Mongolia. Participation in the seminar helped flesh-out my meager China credentials. I applied in 1997 for the resident directorship of the Hangzhou program and learned that I was selected in fall of that year. Valparaiso University generously allowed me to sit in on two Mandarin classes during Luther’s January term 1998. I met with a group of twelve undergraduates from the Lutheran consortium (mostly from Valparaiso University) in the summer of 1998, and we flew off for a semester at Hangzhou University.

During my four months as resident director, I led a ten-week tour around the country. We took several excursions, including an extended weekend field trip to study peasant life and culture in central Zhejiang Province. I offered two courses to my American students to supplement their Chinese language courses at our host university (and I studied Mandarin alongside them in these classes). Living there, and working every day with contacts at Hangzhou University, made me feel that I had, at last, advanced beyond the stage of tourist and dilettante.

Back at Luther, I organized classroom visits by Chinese scholars for Paideia and other classes. The scholars all were associated with the Hangzhou Program. In addition, between 1995 and 2000, I helped Luther host three Chinese scholars for extended stays with support from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia. The guanxi gained at home with our Chinese guests paid off when I next led study groups abroad.

In 2001, the longstanding China Unit in the required Paideia course disappeared in the ever-shifting tides of curricular change. I have sorely missed it and have acted to do what I could to make up for its loss. I have offered a January term course called *Chinese Literature and Film* and did what I could to continue recruiting Luther students for the semester in Hangzhou (We have had at least four in that program). I have also helped to guide students who are interested in teaching English in China find post graduation positions. Over the past three years, five students that I personally know have taught English in PRC. Three of them have worked with the Amity Foundation’s education program, also promoted by the United Board.

One decade out from my first academic study trip to China, I finally led a Luther College study abroad trip to China, our college’s first substantial foray into that country. In 2003 I taught a January term study-abroad course, *Chinese Journeys and Encounters*, for credit, in the English Department. We stayed primarily on Chinese university campuses. Our longest stay was nine days at Zhejiang University of Technology. We had other stops at Beijing Foreign Studies University and East China Normal University in Shanghai, before ending our trip with two days, on our own, in Hong Kong. Students read Peter Hessler’s *Rivertown* and other accounts of sojourners in China (both Chinese and non-Chinese), kept journals, presented reports on sites we visited, and wrote reflectively on their experiences in China. Two recent Luther graduates, on break from their teaching duties with the Amity program, visited with our group and even made formal presentations.

Luther graduates Nate Winterhof and Erin Alberty speak at Zhejiang University of Technology to Luther students in January, 2003.
Photo provided by Peter Scholl.

Chinese Journeys and Encounters Classmates in China.
Photo provided by Peter Scholl.

Luther College’s International Studies program paid my expenses, as well as the director of our programs’ expenses, to make a one-week preparation trip in the summer before the J-term course. I have the support and encouragement of the college to repeat this course, or one like it, when our staffing situation permits. Other teachers at Luther also have high hopes of taking classes to China—an Economics and Business study abroad class will visit Hong Kong and Shanghai in January 2005.

I have frequently worked with Janice Yee and her Wartburg colleague, Arthur Lynn Peters, both of them alumni of LECNA trips to China. We have shared ideas and contacts for our respective study abroad trips. Again, the good guanxi or networking connections that are put in place by opportunities such as the LECNA trips and ASIANetwork meetings have continued to produce results long after the initially planned experiences covered by the funding have
ended. Indeed, the most notable dividend of all my China involvements, outside the experience of that land and culture itself, has been the joy of collaborating and working with so many faculty and students from Luther and other institutions, as well as making colleagues and friends from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. I plan to continue “digging to China” in any way I can, including:

- bringing Chinese materials into courses not centrally concerned with Asia
- giving occasional presentations to high school and civic groups
- creating Asia-focused seminars in January under the terms of a new curricular plan
- collaborating with other Asia-focused teachers at Luther in a team-taught courses
- creating new internship and study abroad possibilities in China

In summer 2004 I will actively pursue the last goal by spending a month working with a group called China Service Ventures (http://www.chinaserviceventures.org). With about a dozen others, I will be teaching oral English to Chinese teachers of English in Henan Province. My Wartburg colleague, Lynn Peters, will visit our project this summer, and we hope that the work CSV has organized will open the way for continued internships, jobs, or study abroad possibilities for our students. At the very least, I’m sure I will meet many wonderful new colleagues and students and my teaching about China will be enriched.

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**China in Small Doses: Benefits & Challenges of Short Term Immersions**

**Lynn Peters**

**Wartburg College**

**Investments**

My personal and professional interest in China dates from the summer of 1994 when, in my second year on the faculty at Wartburg College, I was awarded an institutional grant to participate in a summer teaching program at Guangxi University in Nanning. There were no explicit conditions or expectations attached to this grant, but my first international experience was so fascinating and personally-rewarding that I began thinking almost immediately of ways that I might use China travel and study in liberal arts teaching. Two years later I traveled to China again with the support of the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) and the Lutheran College China Consortium (LCCC), which were attempting to promote interest in developing teaching/study programs in Hangzhou. This second venture into China was useful in a number of important ways, enabling me to visit areas of the country I had not seen previously and giving me the opportunity to nurture and deepen friendships I had established earlier in Guangxi. Of particular value was the opportunity to travel and establish supportive relationships with colleagues from colleges and universities with similar interests. Although many of us, as individuals, had an active interest in promoting China travel and study, few were true “China Scholars” or affiliated with institutions having established Asian Studies programs. The challenge for most of us has been to find effective ways of integrating China study into a more general liberal arts curriculum, working with scant resources, marginal institutional support, and untapped student interest.

**Returns**

For the past decade, Wartburg College has offered a broad range of study abroad options (including one in China), but many students have been reluctant to participate in a program that would take them away from campus for extended periods of time. The costs associated with international study, the complexity of arranging needed coursework around a semester or year abroad, and the limitations that such travel places on co-curricular activities make recruitment for long-term programs difficult (although incoming students now seem to be giving international study a higher priority than in years past).

Wartburg’s 4-4-1 academic calendar, however, presents an alternative option for international study during the Mayterm, a 4-week “mini-term” in the Spring when students enroll in a single short intensive course. Mayterm courses are typically creative, experiential, and geared toward encouraging students to explore subjects outside their major. Over the years, Mayterm courses have been developed by several different academic departments that include travel to Tanzania, Guyana, Israel, and various European sites. Working with the co-director of Wartburg’s Global and Multi-Cultural Studies Program (who shares my commitment to promoting interest in China), I developed, in 1999, a Mayterm course constructed around a 24-day visit to China that is now offered in alternate years.

The course, *China in Transition*, was created and offered as an elective option for meeting the “Diversity Across the Curriculum” component of Wartburg’s *Plan of Essential Education*. Courses in this tier of general education are aimed at developing in students a “greater recognition and understanding of the value of human diversity as an enriching aspect of life” and in preparing them for lives of service and leadership in a global and multi-cultural context. *China in Transition* was developed with three specific goals in mind:

1. To expand students’ understanding of the world via an introduction to Chinese culture and society.
2. To acquaint them, via an immersion experience, with the many and profound ways in which all people are influenced by their culture.
3. To encourage students to pursue other avenues for learning about Asia, possibly via more intensive semester-long programs or through post-graduate service and teaching opportunities.

The course initially was limited to twelve participants,
and was led by two faculty working in conjunction with International Programs staff at Zhejiang University of Technology (ZUT) in Hangzhou. Students in the class enter China through Beijing, and after three days of visiting the usual tourist sites in and around that city, travel via rail to Hangzhou, where they spend approximately three weeks at ZUT. Activities during this time include daily lessons in oral Chinese and lectures/lessons given by university faculty and community officials on subjects ranging from Chinese history and law to traditional music, art, and opera. The course includes one and two-day excursions to sites of interest or significance in the vicinity of Hangzhou, including temples and monasteries at nearby Tianti, social service/health care agencies, museums, and the city of Shanghai (approximately three hours away via bus). Students are housed in a hotel operated by ZUT that is adjacent to the campus, located at some distance from the center of the city.

China in Transition has been offered twice (2000 and 2002), and is scheduled again for the 2005 Mayterm. Some alterations to the course have occurred since its inception and others are planned to accommodate shifts in the College’s curriculum but the essential features remain the same.

**Short-Term Courses as Immersion Experiences**

Clearly, short-term courses such as China in Transition cannot provide the same depth as semester or year-long study abroad programs, but our experience has shown that there are ways to structure such courses so that they give students something beyond an ordinary “tourist” experience, in terms of important personal/cultural insights. Some of the more significant elements of the course that appear to contribute to the course in this regard are summarized below.

**Single-Site Location.** One decision that must be made early in the planning of a short-term course revolves around where to take students who are first-time visitors to China. For faculty who are seasoned China travelers, there is a temptation to take students to as many regions, cities, museums, and historical sites as time and budget will allow. Hong Kong or Beijing? The Great Wall or the Li River region near Guilin? Urban Shanghai or the minority villages in Guangxi? Given the limited time available and our principal course goals, we decided not to spend our time traveling around the country but instead opted for a single site where students would have opportunities to observe “ordinary” Chinese life and interact daily with “real” Chinese people. Spending enough time in one city to gain some sense of the rhythm of everyday life has been invaluable as a teaching tool.

For our purposes, Hangzhou presented many attractive possibilities as a site for our course. A medium-sized city in east China, it is large enough to hold students’ interest yet small enough for them to travel about on their own with ease after a few days. It is a relatively modern city that is not inhibiting to inexperienced international travelers who might otherwise need considerable time to feel comfortable enough to venture out on their own. While Hangzhou is replete with sites of scenic beauty and cultural significance, and has a long and rich history, it is not overrun with Western visitors or the tourist industry that caters to them. Students must be cautioned against drawing too many conclusions about all of China based on their experiences in one location, but a medium-sized city such as Hangzhou seems to present a reasonable cross-section of Chinese society in a manageable teaching environment.

**Finding and developing a compatible host university.** Placing students in a university environment during their visit to China greatly facilitates intercultural learning in several ways. Chinese universities are well-positioned to host small groups of American students, having logistical support, teaching resources, and some sophistication in understanding the educational goals of an immersion course. Most importantly, a university provides an environmental context that is central to the daily lives of American students, giving them ample, familiar bases for learning about China via comparison with their own personal experiences.

Many universities in China are eager to host short-term groups; in fact, Zhejiang University of Technology was one of several institutions that were considered as a site for our course. Hosting American college students brings prestige, money, and exciting learning opportunities for Chinese students. We found that smaller universities provided the best match for Wartburg College; in our case, the prestige of a host institution was not nearly as important as its flexibility and willingness to invest the time needed to accommodate our specific needs at an affordable cost. Universities with large numbers of international students and affiliations with multiple foreign counterparts typically are not as interested (understandably) in partnering with a small liberal arts college with only a modest investment in Asian studies.

The nuances of Chinese culture favor the development of long-term business relationships, and academic partnerships should be forged with some commitment to a more or less permanent arrangement. Our initial meeting with staff at ZUT occurred in 1996, and in the ensuing years we have developed a degree of trust and understanding that can overrides barriers of language, culture, and distance.

**Student Learning Partnerships.** The feature of the course that seems to contribute the most to a deeper level of cultural learning has been the matching of each American student with a Chinese counterpart for the duration of our time in Hangzhou. Indeed, course evaluations show that our specific needs at an affordable cost. Universities with large numbers of international students and affiliations with multiple foreign counterparts typically are not as interested (understandably) in partnering with a small liberal arts college with only a modest investment in Asian studies.

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**Student Learning Partnerships.** The feature of the course that seems to contribute the most to a deeper level of cultural learning has been the matching of each American student with a Chinese counterpart for the duration of our time in Hangzhou. Indeed, course evaluations show that our students tend to use knowledge gained via classes, lectures, etc. to reinforce existing opinions about China; personal interaction, especially with Chinese peers, is much more likely to challenge their beliefs and perceptions. The Chinese student partners are usually recruited through the university’s Foreign Language Department in advance and are formally introduced to the American students upon our arrival. A few social events are arranged for the partners but most of their interaction is informal, occurring in the evenings and during “free time.” For our students, these partnerships provide opportunities for friendships and free-ranging conversations unimpeded by formalities; most of them are invited for home
visits, giving them a glimpse, at least, of Chinese family life. Chinese students, in turn, gain the opportunity to hone their English language skills with native speakers. ZUT was a bit skeptical initially at the prospect of allowing student interaction outside of a controlled environment, but it has come to view these partnerships as a unique, valuable learning experience for its own students.

**Pre-Departure Preparation and Individualized Learning**

Careful attention to preparing students for the trip is critical to effective intercultural learning. *China in Transition* participants are required to take a pre-departure seminar course that is aimed at maximizing their readiness for learning once the Mayterm course is underway. There is often a tendency to overload first-time China visitors with more information than they can possibly digest, and it is important to remember that much of what they might encounter prior to the experience of traveling to China will likely be lost simply because they have no real frame of reference. At worst, much of what they read or hear in a short pre-departure course could simply engender or reinforce attitudes and stereotypes that are barriers to real learning. In the best of all worlds, our students would also take a post-visit seminar, where discussions about China and the western perceptions they usually encounter in written records could be examined through the lens of their own experience (limited, though it may be). Presenting too much information prior to the course, however, is counterproductive.

An important goal of the pre-departure seminar is to work through issues of “group process” so that individual idiosyncrasies and interpersonal differences can at least be recognized and (hopefully) managed to some degree before the beginning of the immersion course. All groups pass through identifiable stages of development and require a certain amount of time/interaction before they can function (or learn) optimally. Much of the learning in an immersion course of this type occurs in a group context; allowing participants the chance to become acquainted via exercises and shared experiences, acknowledging leadership and other important roles as they emerge, and creating a sense of shared purpose all help to create a productive environment for supportive intercultural learning.

It is also important to recognize and accommodate individual differences in student interests and capacities for intercultural learning in a short immersion course. Some students, by virtue of temperament or previous experience, eagerly seek out new challenges and opportunities to explore a different culture; others may find simple risks such as riding a bus or purchasing a piece of fruit from a sidewalk vendor to present a formidable challenge. Differences in student learning styles are worth considering, as well. Some will gain more from lectures and formal lessons, while others will benefit from less-structured activities. Course leaders should take these differences into account and assist students in setting individual goals that are challenging, yet attainable.

**Assessment of Student Learning**

Evaluating the success of a short immersion course and gauging its real impact on student participants when post-trip contact with them is limited makes for a difficult task. Some sense for what students have learned can, perhaps, be gained from journals or reflection papers. The following excerpts from *China in Transition* student journals provide some evidence of intercultural learning:

(\textit{This experience} taught me that by being kind, loving, compassionate, etc., you can learn to communicate with other people who may be quite different from yourself. And after you begin to bridge the communication gap, you find that people can be quite similar to yourself…)

The stereotypes I learned concerning China as a child are not at all the reality today.

I came to realize that I take my culture for granted because I’ve never done anything to really broaden my worldview. I felt kind of silly when my Chinese friends would know more about American culture than I did!

I now know what it feels like to be on the “other side,” that is, a foreigner. I think being in that position will make me more sensitive to foreigners in the U.S. I’ll be able to empathize with those who can’t speak English and (understand) how lost they must sometimes feel.

Whether *China in Transition* students have come away from the course with a heightened interest in China is also largely a matter of speculation, but at least two students have returned for additional study, and two of our graduates are now teaching in Chinese secondary schools. The modest success of this Mayterm course has also brought institutional interest and support for additional China-related study, service, and post-graduate placement. The future is bright. While Wartburg College likely will never implement a formal Asian studies program, courses such as *China in Transition*, developed within the framework of the College’s mission and liberal arts curriculum, can be valuable avenues for intercultural learning.
Bringing Asia Home: Curriculum Changes and Minor Developments

Susan Millinger
Roanoke College

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. 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.

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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 seminar 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year of graduation unless otherwise indicated</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Independent Study on East Asian topic</th>
<th>Experience in East Asia: study or work</th>
<th>Further study or work experience in/on East Asia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>History</td>
<td>History (two units)</td>
<td>JET instruction</td>
<td>MA, Syracuse, Japanese history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td></td>
<td>Studied at Hangzhou</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Summer language study in Japan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Works for Smithsonian International Tours office]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>History (didn’t complete)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Teaching English in Manchuria, 03-04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>Inter-disciplinary</td>
<td>Studied in Hangzhou</td>
<td>Grad school, U Hawaii, Asian studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04 in progress</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study in Hong Kong (ISEP), 03-04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04 in progress</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning study in Kansai Gaidai, fall 04</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environ policy (dropping)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Travel in China</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Students Study in China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May/June 96: 2 Roanoke College Faculty on LCCC trip to China</td>
<td>96-97 return talk to campus about their experiences</td>
<td>Fall 97: 3 Roanoke College students study in Hangzhou (LCCC program)</td>
</tr>
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<td>May/June 96: 2 Roanoke College Faculty on LCCC trip to China</td>
<td>Fall 97: 3 Roanoke College students study in Hangzhou (LCCC program)</td>
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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.
Selling Chairman Mao: Chinese Nationalism and the Cultural Economy of the Late Twentieth Century

Steven D. DeCaroli
Goucher College

Introduction

Under Mao, nationalism, embedded in the rhetoric of revolution, was the predominant source of loyalty to the state. With the demise of Maoist leadership following his death, and hastened by Deng Xiaoping’s de-Maoification initiatives of the early 80s, a relative lack of commitment to public, state-sponsored goals has become increasingly apparent among the people of China. For the past twenty-five years the Chinese Communist Party has struggled to establish a new foundation for itself, which, in the absence of revolutionary zeal, could serve the Party as an alternative source of legitimacy. Since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping, at the Eleventh Central Committee meeting, launched the first reform initiative, the Party has staked its legitimacy on its ability to guide China toward economic growth and material prosperity.

In order to get ahead economically China has needed to get along internationally, a course of action that has been accompanied by significant, often unwanted consequences. While the formula, “wealth follows openness,” has guided China’s state policy throughout the 80s and 90s, at the heart of reformist policy there is a worrisome dilemma that has not escaped the attention of Party leadership. On the one hand, the Party must anchor its legitimacy in national pride and foster it through a China-first rhetoric. On the other hand, in order for China to progress economically and thereby demonstrate its competency, the party must continually accommodate its policies to international treaties and regulatory schemes—joining the WTO in 2001 for instance. Consequently, the very thing that would provide evidence of the Party’s successful transition to the modern age, namely, economic growth, demands a genuine openness to the international community that threatens both the political and cultural cohesiveness of the nation. Put simply, when people in Yunnan are wearing Reeboks, watching Friends and drinking Sprite, will the Party’s “democratic dictatorship” suffice?

But, of course, internationalization is much more complex than this and its effects are often divergent. As Jonathan Unger has noted, “the very success of the current thrust to make China rich and strong has begun to feed [a different sort of] Chinese pride”—a pride that is the result not of public programs, but of private ventures. While the entrepreneurial boldness of modern China must be seen as the direct result of early 1990s admonitions to “not be too cautious” in pursuing economic reform (the core principle behind the eighth Five-Year Plan launched in 1991), and was embodied best in Deng’s infamously pragmatic statement about economic growth: that “It doesn’t matter if the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice,” through all of this the Party has actively maneuvered to reclaim this new entrepreneurial pride as its own creation. Attempts to use technological and economic successes to foster national solidarity have been numerous—seen perhaps most visibly, and recently, in China’s space program and the PCR’s successful bid to host the 2008 Olympics. But the pride generated by China’s newfound economic development is broadly viewed internally as less and less the result of state programs, and more as the reward of individual entrepreneurship. It is, in other words, the pursuit of personal wealth and not a desire to “lift the nation” that increasingly motivates these ventures.

The threat posed to Party leadership by increasing individualism is clear: if the economy were to falter the residual, often cynical loyalty that the Party now enjoys would likely evaporate and blame for economic trouble would be placed squarely on the shoulders of a political party that for over a decade now has merely pretended to be socialist. The charade, in other words, would be at an end and with it the leadership of the CCP. As long as annual domestic growth hovers near 9% the prospects of unseating the Party would appear remote, but once the economy begins to stagnate, Beijing’s leadership will become an obvious target. The Party, in other words, is living on borrowed time, and it knows it. As Sameena Ahmad stated in a recent article for The Economist, “Domestically, the government is well aware that its political acceptance derives solely from rapid economic growth, and is willing do whatever is necessary to meet its internal benchmark.” Consequently, as political controls loosen and non-statist social forces assert themselves, the state is losing its ability to define the content of nationalism. As James Townsend observes, “the official gloss portraying a united people striving together for China’s modernization does not jibe with the realities of Chinese behavior.”

In what follows, I will discuss the Chinese response to these domestic changes and to a new set of internal and external circumstances that occurred in the early nineties, including the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and, of course, the mass popular movements of 1989—not only in Beijing but also in major urban centers across the country. Rather than break with the past, as the Soviets had done, the state had to find a way of transforming itself without jettisoning the historical sources of its legitimacy. While the Soviet Union could re-invent itself under the rubric of de-Stalinization, China could not as readily “de-Maoize” since Mao represented both the “Lenin” and the “Stalin” of China.” His legacy could not be expunged without endangering the ideological foundations of both the party and the nation. An array of cultural responses—some engineered by the state, but most produced by non-state actors—arose in the wake of these events. Among these responses, one of the most pervasive, and the one I will discuss here, was the transformation of the image of Chairman Mao. The Party had, of course, utilized Mao’s image for many years, most notably during the years of the Cultural Revolution, but the content of this symbol was
changed. Faced with the dilemma of having to alter its policies to meet the demands of an increasingly market driven world and yet, at the same time, obliged to preserve the continuity of its claim to leadership, the Party effectively redefined the content of Mao’s symbolic representation without altering the form of this symbol, namely, the Mao-image itself. Mao was quickly re-mythologized by the Deng leadership, turned into a patriarchal figurehead whose Marxist, anti-market philosophy—now subject to a degree of official public criticism—was replaced by a familial devotion often expressed in an oddly pop-culture manner. Mao the political theorist was being replaced by Mao the founding father. In tandem with this, the Chinese leadership repackaged Mao’s ideas as “preparatory” and “foundational,” enabling the state to avoid the wholesale disposal of its communist heritage by finessing Maoist doctrine in such a way that, for instance, market economics could be relentlessly pitched as “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” To render the transition from communism to capitalism seamless, China’s leadership reshaped Mao’s legacy, gently bringing it into line with an increasingly market oriented population who likewise had to be convinced that, while “to get rich is glorious,” to do so did not mean straying from Mao’s vision.

As I mentioned above, while the changing symbolic meaning of the Mao-image was only partially orchestrated by the state, much of the transformation was carried out by the private sector which got caught up in the so-called “Maocraze” of the early nineties. The undoubtedly complex interplay between state policies regarding Mao’s legacy and private sector fads covers far too much ground to examine carefully in this paper, and the range of knowledge required to do so is in any case, beyond my capacity. What I will do is pose a few questions and hypotheses to suggest that the selling of Mao in the 1990s helped preserve Party legitimacy in the midst of economic globalization, and remains today an important component of Chinese nationalism—fifty years after the founding of the PRC.

**Nationalism and Culturalism**

Before I discuss how the representation of Mao in the 1990s helped finesse Chinese national identity, it is important to take a moment and be clear about what exactly one means by a “nation.” One must bear in mind that nations need not be thought of exclusively in terms of states. The two terms have no internal or natural connection. Though frequently associated, as in the use of the term “nation-state,” this association is conventional, not essential. Consequently, any discussion of the nation must bear in mind that, while the state is fundamentally a mode of political organization, the nation is primarily a cultural phenomenon—a group of people who differentiate themselves from others on the basis of a set of perceived cultural differences. While this is certainly not to say that nations and national sentiment are apolitical, certainly they are, it is nonetheless important to recognize that nations are more deeply associated with a people’s shared cultural self-understanding than they are with political institutions or even citizenship. To the extent that the nation is a necessity of state-building, its character is ultimately determined by the practical need for the state to represent something other than itself.

Having said this, however, the scholarly literature on Chinese nationalism very often speaks of the nation as being synonymous with the state. Scholarship concerning the modern history of China repeatedly references the strong and exceptionally durable cultural tradition that dominated two thousand years of Chinese history. The pervasive influence of this tradition on Chinese society is referred to in the literature as “culturalism” and is generally discussed in contrast to “nationalism” which, it is argued, does not appear in China until the waning years of the Qing dynasty. “The core proposition,” Townsend writes, “is that a set of ideas labeled culturalism dominated traditional China, was incompatible with modern nationalism, and yielded only under the assault of imperialism and Western ideas to a new nationalist way of thinking.” And as James Harrison explains, “the traditional Chinese self-image has generally been defined as culturalism, based on a common historical heritage and acceptance of shared beliefs, not as nationalism, based on the modern concept of the nation-state.” The traditional Chinese self-image, therefore, attaches supreme loyalty to the culture itself, not to the state, and thus “there can be no justification for abandoning or even changing the cultural tradition in order to strengthen the state.”

While I will not spend time here discussing the merits of this view or, for instance, whether it is indicative of a sort of Chinese exceptionalism, it does seem that discussions of Chinese nationalism have largely used the term culturalism to substitute for, and to serve the same role as, nationalism. Either way, and despite the notorious definitional confusion concerning nationalism—that between “statists” and “ethnists,” for instance—I will follow Ernest Gellner’s general sentiment that nationalism is the “striving to make culture and polity congruent.”

According to the literature, it is generally agreed that the critical transition period from culturalism to nationalism occurred in the late Qing and early Republican periods, particularly the years between 1895, when defeat by Japan galvanized Chinese patriotism, and 1919, when the May Fourth movement brought culturalism to an end. The recent post-Mao period, I would like to suggest, represents an equally significant transition during which nationalism was reconfigured in response to the increasingly “outward” orientation of China during the 1980s and 90s, helping to create a more confident, often assertive form of Chinese nationalism which, among other things, has had to overcome the residual prominence in communist doctrine of class struggle and its considerable impact on national solidarity. And one should not forget that the PRC is a multi-cultural, even multi-national state with its non-Han Chinese population, approximately 8% of its overall population, divided officially among fifty-five minority nationalities—some of which, like the Tibetans and, increasingly, the Muslim minorities groups in the far west, brandish a strong ethnic consciousness. But despite these exceptions, China has
managed to transition out of the Maoist era and it has done so, in part, by repackaging aspects of its national self-image.

The MaoCraze

I recall that in spring of 1992, while on my regular bike ride into downtown Jinan, I was confronted by a set of new, state-sanctioned billboards that had sprung up along my route. They boasted of China’s unbroken 5,000-year history (a history which less than two decades earlier, during the height of the Cultural Revolution, was in the process of being eradicated), and in the process of celebrating China’s past these large signs graciously invited tourists to visit China and see this history for themselves. But it struck me: presumably these signs were not displayed for the benefit of would-be foreign tourists who would have to already be visiting China to see them. Instead, I suspect, these signs were displayed for internal eyes. I mention this because it is indicative of an effort on the part of China to repackage itself, to brand itself as an open nation committed to things international. But the selling of China had to take place not only overseas, but at home as well—indeed, in a small but telling event, the name of the state’s Propaganda Department was recently changed to the Publicity Department. And one of the ways in which this repackaging was accomplished, as I have mentioned, was to redefine the dominant symbols of Chinese nationalism during the Mao years, but to do so without threatening the legacy of communist China and, most importantly, the political Party that had emerged from it.

With the end of the Cold War and the subsequent rollback of superpower influences throughout the developing world, countries across the globe were been gripped by renewed national aspirations and China found itself affected by this global trend. The rapid dismantling of strict Maoist ideological beliefs after 1991 and the undeniable end of the communist era compelled Party leadership to draw upon China’s long history, cultural heritage and other traditional forms of national sentiment to serve as a new unifying ideology. But despite these state sponsored initiatives, the Party had lost much of its capacity to embody the spirit of patriotism. By the mid-1990s patriotic sentiment was no longer exclusively in the hands of the Party and its propagandists, and soon symbols of national pride were beginning to appear in non-state arenas, beyond the control of official culture.

During this time, from the late 1980s and on into the 90s, China experienced a nationwide revival of interest in Mao which came to be known as the “MaoCraze.” Unlike the first Mao craze of the Cultural Revolution, this one was not heavily state sponsored, but was largely a popular movement that rose from the streets. In the aftermath of both Tiananmen and the Soviet Union’s demise, many within China hungered for strong leadership and, more specifically, for a powerful figure capable of guiding China through this period of crisis. Put simply, China’s masses wished for a leader who could to square off against the United States given the pervasive belief that China would be forced to step into the shoes left by the Soviets to play out the last chapter of the Cold War. To an extent, the early ninety’s nostalgia for Mao Zedong was a reflection of these mass sentiments; for Mao was a figure who, despite his flaws, stood firm against western influences. And while the collapse of Soviet Russia was a political blow to China on the world stage, the social and economic plight that Russia experienced soon after its liberalization served as a potent reminder to those who supported the 1989 student movement, that if China had undergone a similarly sudden political change the nation may well have succumbed to the same disorder that so quickly devastated communist Russia.

For the Party, the new enthusiasm for Mao’s image was welcomed as a symbol of economic and social stability, egalitarianism, and national pride at a time when, in addition to external pressures, Chinese society was becoming increasingly characterized by new set of class divisions. The exact origins of the Mao Craze are uncertain, but most commentators locate its inception in South China when laminated images of the chairman began to appear hanging from the rearview mirrors of trucks and taxis. The trend caught on quickly and, as Geremie Barmé explains, soon spread throughout the country.

According to a story that was to become one of China’s most widely told urban myths, the driver of a vehicle involved in a serious traffic accident in Shenzhen that left a number of people dead, survived unscathed because he had a picture of Mao on the dashboard. . . . Shortly after the tale began spreading, laminated images of Mao appeared in vehicles in cities, towns and villages throughout China.

Mao’s image, in other words, was widely attributed with powers of supernatural protection—a Saint Christopher of the new China.

Following the appearance of these images and the craze they started, the statistics regarding official portraits indicate that not only were the people acquiring Mao’s portraits at a remarkable rate, but in doing so were also redefining the role of Mao Zedong would play in Chinese social and political life. Regarding the dramatic increase in the production of Mao images, Barmé reports that, while “in 1989 a mere 370,000 copies of the official portrait of Mao had been printed. In 1990 the number rose dramatically 22.95 million, of which 19.93 million were sold. In 1991 and
And in addition to printed images, Mao’s likeness appeared on everything from T-shirts to yo-yos, and for a period of time CCTV even ran a Mao quiz show. By the mid-1990s, however, the grassroots popularity of Mao was being utilized by the business community in marketing campaigns and product labeling. The Party acted quickly to prevent this profiteering and in what I take to be a direct attempt to preserve the veneration of Mao as a saint-like figure as well as to prevent the popular interest in Mao from turning into a passing fashion, the exploitation of Mao’s image in advertising was officially banned in 1994 with the passage of China’s advertising law. Although for those who have been to Yangshou outside of Guilin, there was, in 1991, and to the best of my knowledge still remains a café called “Mickey Mao’s” which represents, for me at least, and early and quintessential marketing of the Mao-image.

The ironic cultural effect of this bifurcated agenda has been the selling of Chairman Mao—that is, a fascination with the quintessential image of national unity that is being fed by the wholesale marketing of the Mao-image according to very straightforward capitalist techniques. The blurring of Mao with capitalism is the cultural effect of a political strategy that seeks to accommodate both an outdated Communist Party dogma and international capitalism. The result has been a precarious equivocation. Terms have been redefined, legacies have been reinterpreted, and histories have been rewritten in a tenuous effort to keep the party leadership and its doctrine relevant. Above all, it is the party’s fear of succumbing to the same calamitous fate as the Soviet Union that has forced it to embark on this hazardous rhetorical strategy. The selling of Chairman Mao, although perhaps not directed from Beijing, has been, and in many ways continues to be, encouraged.

In conclusion, then, balancing the economic need to engage the outside world with the political need to solidify an internal patriotism remains the fundamental problem of the post-Mao Communist Party. It is the often conflicting need to remain internally coherent and externally opened that has governed the perplexing rhetoric of the CCP during the last 20 years. Remarkable on this the China Daily, in a June 1991 quotes the then General Secretary, Jiang Zemin,

The creation of the road of building socialism with Chinese characteristics and the formation of its theory, line, and policies indicate that China’s socialist cause has entered a new stage of development. And then, in what had become, and remains, a rhetorical balancing act, China Daily, reported Jiang’s statement from a March 1992 Politburo meeting:

To judge whether a move is ‘socialist’ or ‘capitalist’ will depend mainly on whether it will benefit the development of the productive forces under socialism, the enhancement of the comprehensive national strength of our socialist country and the promotion of the living standard of the people.

8Ernst Gellner, Nations and Nationalism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 43
13Jiang: China’s Socialism Enters a New Stage,” China Daily (June 1991).
Highlights from the 2004 ASIANetwork Conference Fieldtrip

Visiting a Japanese papershop in Chicago

Visiting the Qianlong Exhibit at the Field Museum

Visiting Chicago’s Chinatown

Photos provided by Marsha Smith.
Make a note to attend the 2005 ASIANetwork Conference
Hosted by Whittier College
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