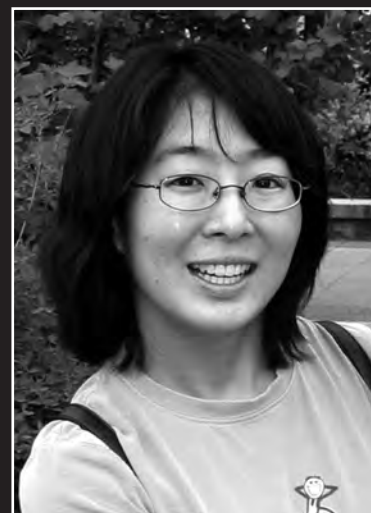


## Selena Lai and Waka Takahashi Brown

*This is our twelfth consecutive interview with winners of the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize. The Association for Asian Studies awards the prize annually for development of outstanding curriculum materials on Asia. The 2008 prize was awarded to the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) curriculum units, Chinese Dynasties, Parts One and Two, co-written by Waka Takahashi Brown and Selena Lai. A review of Part Two of the series appears on page 61 of this issue. Readers interested in Part One are urged to read the curriculum materials review that appeared in EAA Volume 13, Number 1 (Spring 2008).*



**Lucien:** *Waka and Selena, congratulations for winning the award! Please tell our readers about your background and about how you became interested in Asia.*

**Selena:** I grew up in cultural and ethnic isolation (from other Asians) in suburban New Jersey. For many years, we were the only Chinese family in our town of 8,000 residents, and despite my parents' best efforts to instill a sense of cultural pride in their children, we spent most of our childhood trying to deny our Chinese heritage. Things changed when I went to college. I went to the University of California at Berkeley—a place well-known for its diversity and its sizable Asian-American student population. There, I embraced being Chinese, and I went on to earn my BA in East Asian Studies. Later, I earned my MA in Special Education from Teachers College at Columbia University, and I taught blind and visually impaired children for several years before joining SPICE. I never thought I would find a job that so perfectly combined my personal and academic interest in Asia with my unique teaching background, yet my work at SPICE does exactly that.

**Waka:** As a child, I spent many summers in Japan visiting relatives, so I've always been interested in Japan as it related to my family and upbringing. Later, as a college undergraduate, I became more interested in other areas of Asia as well, and earned my BA in International Relations and then my MA in Secondary Education at Stanford University. I worked in Japan for two years as a Coordinator for International Relations with the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program. When I returned to the US, I taught high school Japanese for two years before joining SPICE.

**Lucien:** *What motivated you and others at SPICE to select Chinese imperial history as a focus of such an extensive curriculum development project?*

**Selena:** I think it was only a matter of time before SPICE tackled the

immense topic of the Chinese dynasties. Not only does Stanford have many scholars with expertise in this area, the topic is also listed in the national standards for world history as well as the California history standards. Teachers have been requesting it for years. I feel fortunate that the timing was such that I had the opportunity to be part of the project. It's always so much more satisfying when I have a personal connection to the topic about which I am writing—not just in the sense that I am Chinese American and that I have recently adopted a baby girl from China, but that I was also able to incorporate primary sources from my own family.

**Lucien:** *I am sure the process of developing the guides was intellectually stimulating for each of you. What is one aspect of imperial Chinese history that each of you learned in doing this work that you were not aware of before you started the project, and that you think is important?*

**Selena:** I was particularly fascinated by the fact that throughout the rise and fall of all the dynasties, China remained China in terms of its cultural identity. Some of the dynasties were not even ruled by Chinese, but rather by outsiders like the Mongols, the Jurchens, and the Manchus. The territory is geographically spread-out and linguistically diverse and conflict was ever-present throughout. Even though China's territory expanded and contracted over the years, there was still enough continuity to keep Chinese culture intact at the most fundamental level. It wasn't until China began to interact with the West that Chinese intellectuals began to question the validity of its Confucian cultural underpinnings and whether these ideas could be at the root of its weakness.

**Waka:** When writing my lessons and reviewing Selena's lessons, I was struck by how many similarities existed between each of the dynasties. It was fascinating to me that although much progress was made—how

# Sindh

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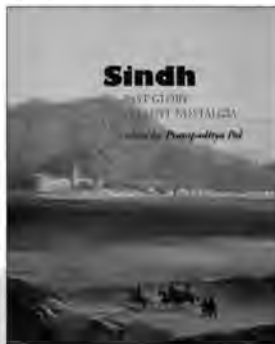
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PRATAPADITYA PAL, the editor of this book, is also the General Editor of Marg Publications. He has been associated as curator with leading American museums with Indian collections and has taught in several universities. Recognized as an authority on the arts and cultures of the subcontinent, Himalayas, and South East Asia, he is a prolific author of over 60 publications.



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dynasties began, how they progressed, and what caused their downfalls—were oftentimes quite similar.

**Lucien** : Please share with EAA readers some examples of user feedback you have received about the guides. You recommend the guide for grades nine through twelve. Do you have any sense about which grade(s) use the guide the most?

**Selena**: Middle school teachers use the lessons on the earliest dynasties because they meet middle school standards regarding ancient civilizations. But for the most part, these materials are used by high school teachers, not only because of the reading level, but also because the topics are more closely aligned with classes that high school social studies programs typically offer, such as world history and Asian studies.

**Waka**: I recently heard from one of my former eighth grade teachers who now uses the unit in his high school East Asia class. From what I can gather, the unit is used in world history classes when studying China as well as classes that focus on Asia.

**Lucien**: Thanks so much for the interview! ■

**SELENA LAI** earned her BA in East Asian Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, and her MA in Special Education from Teachers College, Columbia University. Before joining the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education, she taught blind and visually impaired children for several years and spent a year traveling around the world with her husband. She has been the Senior Curriculum Specialist at SPICE since 1997.

**WAKA TAKAHASHI BROWN** has been a Curriculum Specialist for the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE) since 2001 and has authored and contributed to a variety of units. In addition to *Chinese Dynasties, Parts I and II*, Waka has written or contributed to units on Chinese religions and philosophies, ethnic minority groups in China, Indonesia, the Beijing Olympics, and Islamic art.

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