

An Interview with Buchanan Prize Winner Roberta Martin

This is our fourth consecutive interview with the winner of the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize. The Association for Asian Studies awards the prize annually for the development of outstanding curriculum materials on Asia. The 2000 winner was Roberta “Robin” Martin, Director of the East Asian Curriculum Project and Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum at Columbia University’s East Asian Institute. She won the award for her Web-based version of *Contemporary Japan: A Teaching Workbook*.



Lucien: Congratulations on winning the Buchanan Prize.

Robin: Thank you, Lucien. I am delighted that the *Japan Workbook* in its Web incarnation has been honored with the Buchanan Prize. I am just the figurehead here, however, the orchestra leader. The *Japan Workbook* is the work of many musicians: advanced graduate students in Asian studies, many of whom now are now teaching throughout the country, classroom teachers who are committed to Asia, and prominent Asian specialists. Two of the previous Buchanan Prize recipients—the SPICE units developed under the direction of Gary Mukai, and the Humanities Approach to Japanese History units, developed under the direction of Lynn Parisi—are products of similar initiatives that involve many Asian specialists. So this partnership of Asian specialist-educators from several educational levels is really a winning combination. I believe it was the intent of the committee that established the Buchanan Prize, its chair, Peter Frost, and the AAS Board, to underscore how important it is for us all to contribute high quality materials for the classroom. I hope that the Buchanan Prize will continue to inspire others to publish teaching material.

I hope, too, that the Buchanan Prize will continue to encourage foundations to fund the publication of teaching materials. There is certainly no commercial support for the publication of quality teaching material on Asia. Foundation

funding was crucial in the three instances I mentioned above. In our case, it was the U.S.-Japan Foundation (USJF) that funded both the first substantial publication of the *Japan Workbook* in print and its complete revision and adaptation to electronic format.

Lucien: Can you share with our readers how you became interested in Asia, and specifically, in educating K–12 teachers in Asian studies?

Robin: It’s rather embarrassing how I became interested in Asia: I really backed into it. My own experience may explain, however, why I also became interested in promoting education about Asia at both the secondary and college levels. When I graduated from college in the late 1960s, I knew virtually nothing about Asia. I had certainly never been taught anything about Asia in secondary school, and at Smith, where I was, there was just one course offered then called “The History of the Far East.” I didn’t take it because it sounded too remote. To take Chinese language at this time, one had to commute to UMASS or Amherst three times a week. I did not do that either. There were, however, several courses on Russia, the Soviet Union, and Sino-Soviet relations. I took them and decided I wanted to go on and study international relations in graduate school with a specialization in Russian studies. My senior counselor advised me, however, that the field of Soviet studies was becoming saturated and suggested

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My personal commitment is to making knowledge about Asia accessible to other teachers at the K-12 and college levels, who are not primarily trained as Asian specialists.

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that I choose another world area. I knew a little about Asian religions and philosophy, as we all did in the 60s, so I said, "Well, Asian philosophy seems interesting." Then, when I arrived at Columbia, I was told to choose just two countries, not all of Asia, as areas of specialization. I looked at the map and said, "China is the biggest, and I think that is where Confucius is from—so I guess I'll choose China." On the basis of this serious deliberation, my major area of specialization became China, and my minor, Japan. Thus I began my study of East Asia, in graduate school, knowing absolutely nothing but that Confucius lived in China.

I soon became enthralled with East Asia, stunned by how much there was to learn, and committed to taking the long road to the doctorate. I also quickly came to believe that I had been only "half-educated" in my secondary and undergraduate years, even though I had attended very good schools. I realized that Asian civilization is part of the human heritage we all share, just as Western civilization is, and one that should, therefore, be part of every student's general education at both the precollege and undergraduate levels. My personal commitment is to making knowledge about Asia accessible to other teachers at the K-12 and college levels, who are not primarily trained as Asian specialists. I would like to see

every student graduate from high school knowing as much about Asia as he does about Europe. And I would like to see Asian material integrated into the introductory undergraduate courses in all social sciences and humanities, so that every college student, not just the Asian Studies majors, will graduate with increased understanding of Asia.

Lucien: You were awarded the Buchanan Prize for your efforts as editor-in-chief of the new on-line *Contemporary Japan: A Teaching Workbook*. Those of us who have worked in Asian Studies outreach for a number of years are quite familiar with the original and highly useful hardcover version of the workbook. Could you please elaborate on how you came to develop the Japan Workbook?

Robin: In the late 1970s, when I assumed outreach responsibilities at Columbia, I was a novice looking for ideas on how to proceed. There was an energetic group devoted to precollege outreach around the country; Franklin Buchanan was publishing *FOCUS on Asian Studies* at Ohio State. There were a number of model curriculum units. One I liked a lot was a unit entitled, "Social Change: The Case of Rural China," designed by Ezra Vogel in 1971 under the auspices of the Committee on the Social Studies Curriculum in American Secondary Schools of the American Sociological Association.

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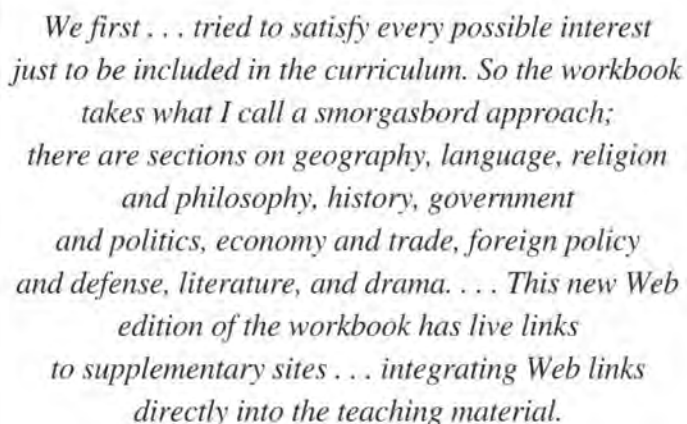
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*The challenge is to keep up with the fantastic potential of the Web.
We can reach every student at home, if necessary, and bring state-of-the-field insights
and selections from newly translated Asian sources directly
to students and teachers without having to wait for the "trickle down effect"
that takes years, if not decades, to happen.*

All the other sections in this new Web edition of the workbook have live links to supplementary sites. There are new units in every section as well and the classic units, such as those on Japan's geography and language that Amy Heinrich authored, are revised and edited. Wherever possible, primary sources from Asian texts—Asian voices—form the basis of classroom units. We have become committed to the use of primary sources for teaching, and particularly to the integration of literature and art into the teaching of history wherever possible.

Most importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the Web edition exists and the print edition no longer does. The print version was out-of-date and out-of-print and had been unavailable for several years before we began the creation of the on-line edition; we just could not keep up with the continual need for revision and reprinting.

Lucien: Robin, do you have plans for the development of other on-line teaching resources?

Robin: My plan is to put everything up on the Web. What was before just a dream for the Asian studies community (i.e., getting our materials into every classroom where they might be useful) is now a possibility. Teaching materials that once involved publicity, order forms, mailing, billing, and tracking

are now accessible instantly to any teacher or student with the click of a mouse.

Our own plans at Columbia are to develop interactive, multimedia and interdisciplinary modules on different topics in Asian history and civilization. We have received funding from the Freeman Foundation to do this, and special unit funding from USJF. The challenge is to keep up with the fantastic potential of the Web. We can reach every student at home, if necessary, and bring state-of-the-field insights and selections from newly translated Asian sources directly to students and teachers without having to wait for the "trickle down effect" that takes years, if not decades, to happen. The Web, because it is multimedia, makes it easier to capture the viewer's attention and interest and to convey visually points that you can just never convey in print. I would like to use the medium to get viewers to say, "Oh, wow!" on any topic . . . and then they're off in whatever direction their interests take them to explore Asian civilizations.

Lucien: Do you have plans to further develop the electronic version of the Contemporary China Workbook which is also available at the Columbia University Web site?

Robin: A completely revised version is being uploaded as we speak. I hope that it will be available by early 2001. Indiana

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University converted the *China Workbook* to electronic format in the mid-1990s and really demonstrated to me the educational power of the Web. They were the path-breakers in the Asian studies outreach community. But we had not revised the content of the *China Workbook* since the early 1990s. With the generous support of the Freeman Foundation we have been able to do that this year.

I would also like to see some class activities on Korea, Southeast Asia, and on South Asia available on the Web. We are working with the Korea Society in New York to make on-line teaching materials available by 2001. I hope that other programs like the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawaii will put some of the wonderful materials developed under Florence Lamoureux's direction up on the Web. As for South Asia, twenty years ago there were more teaching materials on India than there were on East Asia. For many reasons, that situation has reversed, but I understand it is soon to change. We really need to be able to provide teachers and students with materials on all areas of Asia.

Lucien: *In addition to the wonderful work you have done as general editor of the Japan on-line workbook, you are also a leader in the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia. While in my opinion, this still-new program is already having a big impact, I am sure many of our readers are unfamiliar with it. Could you please inform our readers about NCTA?*

Robin: The National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) is an initiative, funded by the Freeman Foundation, to make education about Asia a permanent part of every American student's precollege education. The Consortium itself is a collaborative effort to accomplish this goal. It is directed by five university centers for East Asian Studies, at the University of Washington, the University of Colorado, Indiana University, the Five Colleges in Massachusetts, and Columbia, and composed of Asian specialists and classroom teachers specializing on Asia throughout the country. Since 1998 over a thousand teachers have participated in the program, and there are an additional 650 teachers beginning the program this year at sites in twenty-seven states. The initial focus has been on East Asia.

NCTA's approach is to provide an in-depth enrichment experience, a seminar on East Asia in world history, for teachers teaching world history, world geography, world cultures, or world literature courses. The seminar program is then augmented by additional opportunities, such as study tours to Asia. All seminars and related programs are offered within individual states so that the program can be adapted to the particular curriculum framework of that state and can draw upon existing networks and resources for teacher training.

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also to have other Asianists and their universities adding institutional infrastructure to support the expansion of the program. This would include, of course, yourself and your institution, the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga, as well as the Universities of Oklahoma, Montana, UNC-Chapel Hill, Mississippi, Kansas, and Rice. We are in discussion with new state collaboratives as we speak, working simultaneously with teachers, institutions, and university-school collaboratives, such as those in California, to adapt the program to each state. Soon we will have a national Web site up that will link all the individual state programs on one map; you will be able to go to the site, click on your state, and find out what is happening and whom to contact to join the collaborative effort in your state.

Lucien: Robin, this issue of how to increase permanently the study of Asia in the nation's schools is of such long-term importance. Do you have any other ideas about how this might be accomplished?

Robin: Personally, I am an advocate of good content standards articulated at the state or national level. Perhaps using the word "goals" might be better than "standards" because the latter word sets off alarm bells for many who see them as a threat to the sacrosanct autonomy of local education. In my experience, however, if a state is actively implementing good content standards that include Asia, almost half of our work is done.

Large numbers of teachers in these situations sign up for teacher enrichment opportunities. Teachers already have basic knowledge from their teaching and reading. They are teaching similar material to students within a certain age range. The discussions of content and pedagogy can, therefore, focus on the specific concerns of these teachers and these grade levels, providing more depth that is specifically relevant to what all the teachers participating are teaching.

When there are no clearly articulated curriculum content goals that include Asia, it is harder to guarantee Asia will find a permanent place in the curriculum. Since our home base at Columbia is New York, many of our programs serve New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, as well as other states around the country. New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania offer very different approaches to standards and, as a consequence, have very different levels of education about Asia. In New York, all students study Asia in ninth and tenth grades, as well as in middle school, and they are tested on that knowledge. Teachers at these grade levels in New York are anxious to gain the background they need to teach well about Asia. In New Jersey, we have witnessed a world history standard come and go, and teacher interest in learning more about Asia has risen and fallen accordingly. In Pennsylvania, there is no world history standard, and for years the level of education about Asia there has not been what it should be.

This is the year 2000. When people do not see the importance of American students having rigorous and in-depth understanding of the rest of the world, and particularly of Asia where half the world resides, something is wrong, in my opinion. The NCTA approach is to organize statewide collaboratives that offer opportunities for teacher training and build a demand for education about Asia from the grassroots up. The hope is that this approach will complement the movement toward standards by supporting local expectations—school by school, district by district, if necessary—that solid instruction on Asia will remain permanently a part of world history and world geography courses.

Lucien: Has the movement to establish national standards helped?

Robin: Yes, the National Standards in World History, published in 1994 by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA, are having a substantial impact on standards in many states and on textbooks. Of the eleven members on the committee that drafted the scaffolding for the World History standards, three were past presidents of the Association for Asian Studies—Ainslie Embree, Carol Gluck, and Akira Iriye. There was also a strong presence of Asian studies teachers and specialists on the larger World History Task Force that filled out the standards. So Asian history is well represented in the National Standards in World History. Similarly, the syllabi recently released by the College Board for the new Advanced Placement courses in World History and Human

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Geography require major attention to developments in Asia and their significance in world history. I have high hopes that these syllabi will have very positive impact on world history and geography teaching and textbooks at all levels.

Lucien: *Do you think that undergraduate institutions are providing students with general education about Asia?*

Robin: No, the undergraduate curriculum does not right the balance, either. There are just a few schools with an actual requirement in world history, although many offer the course. So it is quite possible for a student to complete secondary school in this country without studying about Asia. Then this same student can proceed right through college—even colleges such as Columbia, which has a multitude of offerings in Asian studies—without ever having a day of his formal education devoted to Asia. This should not be possible.

The Columbia Project on Asia in the Core Curriculum approached the undergraduate curriculum by providing case studies and modules on Asia for all introductory courses in history, literature, and the social sciences. This was a collaborative effort also of more than one hundred Asia specialists and their colleagues from seventy-five two- and four-year institutions. The collaboration continues as the materials are discussed and adapted to the general education curriculum at undergraduate institutions around the country. The new materials being developed at the University of Pittsburgh on CD-ROM are designed for integration into a variety of undergraduate courses too, I believe, and they are excellent.

It would be nice to have better articulation between the history curricula at the secondary and undergraduate levels. We have such articulation now between these levels in the Asian languages, due to the collaborative efforts of teachers at both levels. All American students, in my opinion, ought to be required to take a world history course at some point in their education—just to be educated people. If world history is required at the secondary level, then students can select more specialized courses at the undergraduate level. If it is not required at the secondary level, then it ought to be required at the undergraduate level as an “introductory course” before students proceed to specialize in particular world areas. Certain universities, such as the University of Delaware, have moved to require world history for admission, just as colleges require so many years of English or math. This is another way of approaching the issue, with the undergraduate level essentially asking the secondary level to give the student a foundation in world history.

Lucien: *One of the reasons for the creation of EAA was to try to bridge the existing gaps between educators at various levels who are attempting to teach about Asia. What are some ways EAA might bridge these gaps? What are other approaches those of us in Asian studies outreach might take to assist educators at all levels in working together to teach Americans more about Asia?*

Robin: *EAA is doing a fabulous job, Lucien, in achieving these goals, and I congratulate you on its success. It has surpassed all of our expectations as a channel for communication among educators at all levels and as a resource for teaching. EAA is a resource we all take for granted now, even though it is still a relatively young journal. Many of the participants in the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) say they “could not live without it.” Since I feel that EAA’s basic model is accomplishing its goals, the only way I can answer your question is by talking in terms of content. Earlier, I mentioned the national curriculum outlines. These divide world history into basic eras and then discuss what historians see as the significant developments in each era. It might be interesting to devote sequential issues of EAA to each of these major eras. One issue might be devoted to “Asia in World History in the Period 1000–1500,” which is Era 5 in the National Standards outline and a major period of concentration in the AP syllabus. Articles could be written by teachers at both the undergraduate and precollege levels, as well as by specialists on particular historical periods, addressing content and pedagogy. The focus of the articles would be key issues and central themes in the histories of China and Japan—in terms of their significance to world history. Depending on the amount of material, an EAA issue could focus on all of Asia or, more specifically, on “China in World History, 1000–1500,” “Japan in World History, 1000–1500,” and so forth. Several issues could be made available as sets and in bulk—forming an enduring library for teaching about Asia in world history. Certainly there is enormous need for this, and it would provide invaluable support to initiatives such as NCTA. ■*

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FILM REVIEWS

A Narmada Diary

BY ANAND PATWARDHAN AND SIMANTINI DHURU

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COLOR, 1995, 60 MINUTES/COLOR

A *Narmada Diary* tells the story of Indian villager resistance to the enormous Sardar Sarovar dam project. The film comes largely from documentary videos shot between 1990 and 1993 by the Narmada Bachao Andolan (the Save Narmada Movement). The Narmada Bachao Andolan represents the indigenous Adivasi people of the Narmada valley, who are being forced to evacuate their homes as the dam floods their land. The partial successes and ultimate failures of the movement are documented in a continuing struggle with international agencies and Indian government officials intent on completing construction of the dam regardless of the human consequences.

The film focuses on a series of protests mounted by villagers and the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the continuation of the dam project. Local women and men stage marches to the site of the dam, as well as to major cities such as Bombay and Delhi. Employing tactics of passive resistance, demonstrators provoke police and dam officials to harsh threats and, on several occa-

sions, to violence. Such confrontations serve to increase the notoriety of the opposition movement. In 1992, the scope and depth of villager protests forced the World Bank to abandon support of the Sardar Sarovar dam.

Indian government officials, however, continue dam construction even without international assistance. The film chronicles the increasing desperation of the protesters as they attempt to save their villages from flooding. Adivasis refuse to leave their homes, claiming that they will drown before being resettled to government camps, where they must sleep in common barracks without any land of their own. Police eventually forcibly remove the villagers. Medha Patkar, one of the leaders of the movement, initiates a hunger strike in central Bombay in an attempt to draw attention to the plight of her followers. Government promises of a review of the project, issued in order to end the hunger strike and other protests, are never realized. In one particularly poignant scene, Patkar and other leaders consider whether to throw themselves in the river and drown to protest the dam. Despite their efforts, however, dam construction continues.

The film establishes two sharply contrasting visions of India's future. The viewpoint of the dam builders is shown through 1950s government-sponsored black-and-white films that proclaim dams the "new temples of modern India." Electricity represents progress; traditional methods of land usage in India must give way to speed and technology. Use of these old video clips allows the filmmakers to portray this view as outdated. The creators of *A Narmada Diary* constantly criticize industrial megaprojects as remnants of a less caring, more wasteful era that must be ended. Instead, they advocate the ancient, traditional lifestyle of the Adivasis, suggesting that fishing and small-scale farming could be the "model for an intelligent world." The old has become new; the grandiose dreams of the industrial age threaten to destroy India, and only a return to the past can save the country.

This film explores a number of issues appropriate for either high school or college classrooms. The issue of development versus the environment is universal. The film also offers other interesting points for discussion. The role of Medha Patkar and other women as prominent leaders in the resistance demonstrates evolving gender roles in India. The power of the protests, and their ultimate defeat by government forces, show both the mobilization of the population and the extent to which the state will go to stop such movements. Other subjects the film touches upon deal with such eternal struggles as rich versus poor, rural versus urban, and tradition versus progress. Students need not have any special knowledge of India to understand the debates as they are presented in the film. ■

JEFF SAHADEO is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of History at the University of Illinois. His research is focused on European colonialism in Central and Southeast Asia. He served as the teaching assistant to "The Civilization of India" course at the University of Illinois.

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