

Asia in the Undergraduate Curriculum

A Case for Asian Studies in Liberal Arts Education

Suzanne Wilson Barnett
and Van Jay Symons, Editors

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IN CONJUNCTION WITH ASIANETWORK, 2000

XIII + 170 PAGES

This is a book not for undergraduate students but for the readership of *Education About Asia*. *EAA* readers are often giving rationales for studying Asia. We are writing grants and justifying new courses, new curricula; we are trying to convince administrators, faculty and students to see the delight and usefulness of Asian material. We challenge old disciplinary views about what in the world needs to be taught, how, and to whom. The essays in this book draw together relevant information for these tasks, but also lead to a greater awareness of the complexities involved.

The prologue by Suzanne Wilson Barnett and Van Jay Symons explains the book's genesis. The Luce Foundation, which funded its writing, is helping to "launch" forty new positions in Asian Studies at liberal arts colleges between 1999 and 2002. As hundreds of colleges compete for this Luce funding, administrators need to be persuaded of the value of such positions! Furthermore, graduate students and junior faculty need to be attracted to teach at small liberal arts colleges. While I sense that this target readership galvanized the writing of the book, as a community college teacher, I see a much wider application for the book's essays than for the 2 percent of American students currently at liberal arts colleges (one of many interesting statistics). All of us concerned about the first two years of college curricula need to judge not only the value of Asian studies in liberal arts education but how global studies justify a liberal arts foundation for every student, erasing the dichotomy between vocational/career training and pure academics.

The critic most often referred to is Edward Said, and two contributors, Thomas B. Coburn and Ainslee Embree, make explicit the desire to avoid "orientalist" justifications for Asian studies; the authors critique American efforts to control and dominate the world culturally, politically and economically. Accordingly, some of the most obvious reasons to study Asian countries are not emphasized. The authors do not evaluate the economic and military strength of different countries to encourage career choices based on potential for business, diplomacy and espionage! If one

thinks about the pull of Asian studies rather than African or Latin American studies, for example, Asian economic factors play a large role. But this book is more idealistic. The chapter by Samuel Hideo Yamashita on the history of Asian courses in liberal arts colleges traces this idealism to a missionary concern of Protestant colleges. One gets the sense that these missionaries were less concerned with conversions than they were with altruistic reasons to escape a homogenous Midwest. For those who are skeptical about altruism, all careers in Asia are orientalist to some degree. But the authors' emphasis on the intrinsic rather than extrinsic reasons for learning indicates an attempt to articulate goals that promote peaceful, harmonious relationships among peoples. The goal "to understand better a diverse and interconnected world community, and to live more fully in it" reflects a secularization of religious values and appears in my community college's mission statement, as it does, I am sure, in various forms in private colleges today.

The essays on teaching Asian languages and on study abroad will be useful to those designing such programs, but I thought the book was more broadly interesting for the questions raised by the more theoretical essays. One such question involves the definition of Asia itself. Are the continental designations of Europe and Asia arbitrary and a result of ethnocentrism? I wonder whether more recognition should be given to the geographical barriers of mountains, deserts and ocean currents that made diffusions of peoples and ideas significantly easier among the countries we call Asian than through the narrow corridor of the silk routes. What generalizations are worth making, what commonalities, influences, conflicts and complementary dualities can be analyzed to make Asian area studies meaningful rather than the study of discrete nation-states and ethnic groups? Can we escape the old East-West dichotomy that many of these authors criticize and justify Asian Studies without claiming as Asian the birth of Islamic culture and the contribution of Jerusalem (see p. 10)? The book does not cover the Middle East, but it makes apparent the need for another term for that central region that radiated ideas to Europe, Asia and Africa.

Rita Smith Kipp emphasizes the need to see change and heterogeneity in Asia. In terms of my college's thousands of students, this is certainly crucial; over-generalization precludes understanding the series of alliances, conflicts and treaties that have led Koreans, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Chinese and Japanese at different times to come to our neighborhoods and become our students.

It should be noted that this book continues the efforts of Columbia University to make Asian materials accessible to non-specialists. The inclusion of Ainslee Embree recognizes his life-long dedication to the establishment of courses and programs with both breadth and depth in Asian Studies. We need the specialists such as those the Luce Foundation will support. But I like the idea that Coburn proposes to see the work of specialists and nonspecialists as fruitfully complementary, because introductory courses educate the broadest numbers about Asia, including the 55 percent of students at community colleges. We need to continue

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the book's debate concerning interdisciplinary programs and comparative courses such as world history and world literature. These lead to different types of questions, insights, and careful analysis. For all of us who want to step back and reflect on curricular decisions, this is a timely, provocative, and informative book. ■

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Market Cultures

Society and Morality in the New Asian Capitalisms

Robert W. Hefner, Editor

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328 PAGES

In an excursion across Southeast Asia and to Taiwan and the People's Republic of China, this book examines how economic activities are woven within the fabric of life in particular communities. It also addresses the perplexing question of why "Chinese" entrepreneurs have apparently been dominant in a number of Southeast Asian economies. A remarkable consistency of quality and unity of theme make this collection of contributions, mainly by anthropologists, stand out as more than the sum of its parts. As well as useful to graduate students and thought provoking for advanced scholars, the book appears well suited to serve as a reading assignment for undergraduates in Anthropology, History, and Asian Studies.

For courses on "The Chinese in Southeast Asia" it will be ideal. *Market Cultures* aims to show that, throughout the region it visits, both small and large-scale money-making activities are conducted as "embedded" parts of many distinctive ways of life, and that the activities are supported by a wide variety of local accommodations between profit making and inherited conceptions of morality.

The volume's eleven contributors show that particular local circumstances have either encouraged or held back the emergence of successful forms of capitalism in the region. These "capitalisms" have not been determined by religious and cultural predispositions. Entrepreneurs from many backgrounds, including Roman Catholic Filipinos, Muslims in the People's Republic of China (PRC), women in Java and Vietnam, the Chinese of Singapore, and the Minangkabau of Sumatra, have been economically successful in ways that social theorists have not expected.

Robert W. Hefner, editor of the volume, argues that the "capitalisms" born in particular Asian settings do not appear to be changing in the direction of greater uniformity. In his chapter on "Markets and Justice for Muslim Indonesians," Hefner observes that "global capitalism is not likely to eliminate local cultural variation any time soon." Validated rather than outdated by the economic and political turbulence occurring in Indonesia and other parts of the region since publication, the book's approach is a refreshing antidote to current certainties that "globalization" is the main event of our era.

Coherence is the outstanding feature of *Market Cultures*. By linking the chapters together with frequent cross-references, Robert Hefner has skillfully highlighted connections between the findings of the contributors and kept the aims of the enquiry clearly in sight throughout the volume. In their case studies and discussion, each of his collaborators helps to show that economic activity remains securely "embedded" in cultures rather than reducible to a universal pattern. Another notable strength of the book is that it provides an excellent balance of description and discussion. Readers familiar with more sweeping treatments of economic change in Asia will welcome reports on closer observation of human activity. They will also appreciate the sophistication of Robert Hefner's introductory chapter, where he reviews and critiques social scientific understanding of "culture" and "economy" and connections between the two. Moreover, instructors reluctant to assign *Market Cultures* in its entirety might find Hefner's introduction useful to familiarize students with a name such as Karl Polanyi and a theory such as Mark Granovetter's concept of the "embeddedness" of economies.

Also noteworthy is the inclusion of a subsection on "Natives and Chinese in Southeast Asia" in the introductory chapter, suggesting that the geographic and intellectual scope of the volume is largely determined by engagement with the issue of economic success among Southeast Asian Chinese, despite the fact that the editor does not state this explicitly.

The eleven chapters that follow the editor's introduction to *Market Cultures* are divided into three sections. "Chinese Capitalisms and Cultural Pluralisms" is the first section, and begins with a contribution by Gary Hamilton. Hamilton's chapter describes and explains the success and continuing importance of private credit systems along with small-scale enterprise in Taiwan during the 1990s, at a stage of capitalist development when conventional analysts would expect both phenomena to have been outgrown.

Next, in a stimulating and wide-ranging discussion combining a survey of anthropological understanding of China with detailed observation of recent developments in Taiwan, Robert Weller illuminates how the Chinese, women in particular, have tended to blend economic activities with personal relationships, including their interactions with superhuman forces. Hamilton and Weller both demonstrate that culturally distinct responses to market opportunities do not inevitably fade away with capitalist success. Indeed, they show that because the achievement of material success does not banish uncertainty, success combined with continuing uncertainties may actually cause the perpetuation and even the expansion