

Bringing China to the High Schools: A Case Study

By Diana Marston Wood

I am a high school history teacher with an academic background in East Asian Studies. This article will describe the process by which my independent school implemented an interdisciplinary Chinese studies program that began in the Fall of 1987. Eight years later, the school offers students four years of Chinese language and courses in Chinese poetry and literature, as well as a two term Chinese history course. This case study of Shady Side Academy's curriculum change process may be useful to high school and college teachers wishing to effect similar changes in their own institutions.

Shady Side Academy, located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is a K-12 independent school. The coeducational high school division includes approximately 500 students. Prior to 1987, Shady Side's international curriculum consisted of annual offerings in Chinese and Japanese history as well as occasional courses in South Asian and Southeast Asian history. Languages taught included French, Spanish, German, and Latin. Through the addition of Chinese language and literature, I hoped to expand the global perspective of the school and forge interdisciplinary links between departments.

Starting in 1985, I instigated negotiations to attract a teacher for the Chinese language and literature courses. Believing that a person from the People's Republic of China would have the greatest cross cultural value, I enlisted the aid of a Shanghai graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh. It was important that this person have extensive connections within the Shanghai middle school community. The graduate student identified three appropriate middle schools. We then solicited one nominee from each of the Chinese schools

for the Shady Side language and literature courses. From those three applications, we selected an experienced female teacher of English at the Shanghai Number Three Girls School.¹ We believed this woman, because she was a high school English teacher, could deal effectively with teenage students and be experienced in foreign language teaching techniques. We arranged for this teacher to come to the United States on a J-1 visa through the United States Information Agency Exchange Visitor Program.² Three Shady Side families served as hosts to the teacher during the first year. The school provided meals and housing in subsequent years. The Shady Side Benedum Foundation (a private fund devoted to faculty study projects and visiting scholar financial support) funded airplane travel and a minimal stipend during the first year. Compensation from the regular school budget gradually replaced Benedum funds, resulting in a permanent teaching slot for a teacher of Chinese language and literature.

During the initial years of this program, the Chinese teacher and I consistently visited and contributed to each other's classes in order to establish firm interdisciplinary connections. For teaching Chinese language we adopted the Pinyin version of Princeton University's *Chinese Primer*. In addition to participating as a regular student, I presented a lecture which treated the following issues: oracle bones and the origins of Chinese language; differences between Mandarin and other dialects and the geographic/historical implications; Chinese language as a unifying force in Chinese history. The Chinese literature course included the analysis of widely varying materials: selections from *Sima Qian's Historical Records*; various poems by Du Fu (Tu Fu), Li Bai (Li Po), and Wang Wei; portions of some novels, e.g., *Journey To The West*; one complete novel, *Family*; and a number of choices from *Short Stories Of Chinese Contemporary Writers*. As with the language course, I regularly attended the literature class, developing a lecture which attempted to place the study of Chinese literature within a framework meaningful for American students. Topics covered included the following: two thousand years of Chinese

literature . . . what is comparable for America?; importance of Chinese religion and imported religions for understanding Chinese literature; and problems posed by studying translated works.

Our new Chinese teacher attended my history course and participated by answering questions during daily class discussions and after films. She taught an introduction to the Chinese language and joined me in leading small discussion groups whenever students read different books, e.g., *Born Red* and *Son Of The Revolution*. Therefore, we were familiar with each other's pedagogy and classroom materials and were able to capitalize on connections between Chinese history, language, and literature.

The resolution of several practical considerations was essential to this effort. During the first few years the school's scheduling officer proved helpful in arranging our teaching schedules so that each of us was available to visit the other's classes. While visitation was demanding and resulted in minimal free time during the school day, this degree of commitment was essential to establishing the valuable interdisciplinary nature of the program. We also needed the cooperation of both the English and Foreign Language departments. The English department readily added Chinese literature to its offerings since it wished to expand its non-Western choices. Within the last two years, the English department has modified the Chinese literature course so that there are now separate courses in Chinese poetry and Chinese literature/prose. Within the Foreign Language department there was concern that the addition of Chinese would threaten the enrollments of other languages as well as debate concerning the advisability of offering Japanese instead of Chinese. Eventually, the department unified amicably and currently offers four years of Chinese language. I believe that our promise of providing interdisciplinary connections between history, language, and literature enhanced the value of these curricular additions.

Considerable evidence suggests that this expanded program effectively reaches many students. All of these courses are

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Table 1

Students Studying Chinese History, Language and Literature, 1987-95.

	History	Language	Literature	Number of Students
Taking two courses	X		X	5
		X	X	27
	X	X		34
Taking three courses	X	X	X	6
TOTAL				72

electives. Chinese language is a full year course, while the literature class fills one term and history two terms within a three term school year.

Table 1 shows that the greatest overlap occurs between language and history where, over eight years, thirty-four students have taken both courses. Twenty-seven students have enrolled in both Chinese language and literature courses. Through my experience in the program during the first few years, I can document some instances where students made concrete cross-disciplinary connections. For instance, several students in Chinese history utilized in essays and class discussions the understandings of Confucianism gained from the literature course. Students also explored the similarities between Mao Zedong and the Qin emperor, citing as proof stories from the literature class. Of course, in order to capitalize on the potential for making cross-disciplinary connections, the teacher must know what is being covered in each course and encourage students to utilize evidence from these other perspectives.

By bringing a Chinese teacher to the United States, we faced many cross-cultural challenges which relate to both daily life and the nature of the teaching environment. Since our Chinese teacher lived with Shady Side families during the initial year, our first objective was to locate families sensitive to key intercultural issues. For example, there is often a lack of familiarity with the common characteristics of American homes, e.g.,

light switches, functioning of toilets, showers, baths, kitchen appliances. Our families always provided the teacher with a private bedroom. For us, this seems essential, but for a Chinese individual this personal space can result in isolation and loneliness. Food can be an enormous problem since many of the tastes, textures, and methods of eating are strange. Cheese and salad, common mealtime components for us, are initially unknown to many Chinese. Americans' acceptance of easy daily mobility can be bewildering for Chinese visitors. They are often newcomers to auto travel and are disoriented by feelings associated with motion. Seat belts, as well as window and door openers, can be confusing. Americans' reliance on cars forces the visitor to be dependent on the host family. Unless the visitor lives near public transportation or within easy biking or walking distance of shopping, it can be difficult to encourage the independent and adventurous attitude Americans tend to value. If one plans to bring Chinese teachers into homestay situations, it is essential to consider all the above, for they can cause considerable strain between Chinese and Americans. It is imperative to have people familiar with the Chinese environment intimately involved as advisers or hosts.

The American secondary school teaching environment also contrasts sharply with that of China. The typical American independent school teacher meets classes about twenty to twenty-five hours per week with additional advisory, coaching, dorm, and extracurricular duties. The Chi-

nese high school teacher has only twelve student contact hours and fewer additional duties. In Chinese schools there is always a two hour rest period within each day. Since American school schedules include no midday rest, working in an American school can be exhausting for a Chinese teacher. Classroom teaching techniques also differ. In China classes are large, totaling fifty to sixty students. The teacher lectures with questions specifically directed toward selected students. Students seldom ask questions. In America, classes are smaller, and teachers expect active student participation with a high value placed on student interpretation and opinion based on evidence. Student culture also differs. Chinese high school students are typically diligent, obedient, and possess excellent powers of concentration. American students are often independent, critical, and willing to argue with the teacher. Finally, Chinese curriculum materials are typically utilized for twenty-year periods while American schools change teaching materials more frequently. In both daily life and the working environment, there exist innumerable causes for cultural tension. American educators planning to sponsor a teacher from China must address these issues.

Over the past eight years Shady Side Academy has fostered a Chinese studies program where the students who wish to focus on China typically sample at least two courses within the three disciplinary areas offered: history, language, and literature. Teaching among the three areas is coordinated. We started this low-

budget program by recruiting a teacher from the People's Republic of China, housing her with host families, and utilizing foundation financial support. When the value of providing an interdisciplinary approach to Chinese studies became clear, Shady Side committed itself to a permanent staff position with a regularized salary.³

For institutions wishing to enhance their Chinese/Asian studies offerings but lacking the possibility of foundation support, I recommend participation in the American Field Service's Visiting Teachers Program.⁴ Through cooperation with the Chinese government, AFS sponsors a one year visit for approximately twenty teachers. These teachers live with host families, work with mentor teachers, and are expected to contribute generously to their host schools. I have had several successful experiences with AFS visiting teachers at both Shady Side and Phillips Academy. These teachers can be very effective in adding interdisciplinary perspectives to the courses already offered: with, for instance, small units or presentations on aspects of Chinese history, Chinese language, martial arts, medicine, or the importance of understanding China's environmental pressures. ■

NOTES

1. The author gratefully acknowledges the cooperation of the following individuals: Jialu Wu, Shanghai Foreign Languages Institute, Emerson Johnson, Shady Side Headmaster, and Carol-Jean McGreevy, Shady Side International Coordinator, who all helped with the selection process; Meiwang Shao, Shanghai Number Three Girls School.
2. For additional information, contact The Exchange Visitor Program Services, United States Information Agency, 301 4th Street, SW, FEMA Building, Room 200, Washington, DC 20547.
3. Contrary to the initial expectation of rotating this position among Chinese teachers from the Shanghai Number Three Girls School, our original visiting teacher has continued to hold this permanent teaching job.
4. For detailed information, contact AFS Intercultural Programs USA, Third Floor, 220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, 800-876-2377.

The ASIANetwork: A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies

By Marianna Presler McJimsey

In its beginning, the purpose of the ASIANetwork was simple enough. Since the end of the Second World War, contacts with and interest in Asian affairs had burgeoned, and a corresponding expansion of positions in higher education insured that Asian Studies would reach into the domain of private liberal arts colleges. The concurrent formation of regional associations of liberal arts colleges established the notion that a pooling of resources would expand opportunities for faculty and students to travel and study. The idea of an association of liberal arts colleges to promote the study of Asia on their own campuses followed in line with all of these promising developments.

Along with opportunity went needs. These needs comprise the three E's of Asian Studies: expansion, enrichment, and extension. Often Asianists at liberal arts colleges were solitary figures. The acquisition of financial resources and personnel—by means of a development campaign, grants to retool faculty, or even the addition of part-time staff—posed a “how to” challenge for Asian Studies. In particular, the provision of language training emerged as a goal for expansion.

Enrichment could take place at many levels, but primarily it meant keeping faculty in touch with a network of professionals concerned with teaching and learning. Teaching techniques employing textual sources, films, videos, and role-playing could be employed. New subjects could be inserted into course syllabi. The Internet, the fax machine, the newsletter, and the annual conference could help to construct and maintain a conversation among historians, linguists, musicologists, sociologists, economists and philosophers.

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The experiences of students could be solicited and used to illustrate valuable projects and learning styles.

Finally, the extension of learning about Asia could take the form of travel opportunities, foreign study programs, and the availability of visiting scholars, politicians, and business executives from overseas. Here was an agenda displaying variety and complexity.

In 1992, this agenda was clarified in two Asian Studies conferences of liberal arts colleges, one hosted by St. Andrews College and another organized by Colorado College and the Japan Study Program of Earlham College. The two groups merged in 1993 to form the ASIANetwork, A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies, an organization now affiliated with the Association for Asian Studies.

The ASIANetwork Conference

The principal assembly of the organization is the ASIANetwork Conference, held annually in April and attended by faculty from liberal arts colleges and universities throughout North America and Asia. The ASIANetwork focuses its mission on teaching. Keynoters have included Perry Link, Princeton University, whose vision for Chinese language teaching has shaped programs across the country; Ainslie Embree, Columbia University, whose editorial leadership has produced excellent classroom source materials; and Barbara Metcalf, University of California-Davis and past president of the Association for Asian Studies, who described anecdotally her professional journey as a teacher/scholar. Round table discussions, plenary presentations, and audio-visual showings carry forward the organization's strong push toward excellence in teaching, its encouragement of grant proposal writing, and its debates over curriculum issues. Faculty input generates sessions on teaching the survey course, teaching about Ko-