

## EAA INTERVIEW WITH THE 2003 BUCHANAN PRIZE WINNERS

Award winners  
pictured left to right  
are the authors  
Chance I. Gusukuma,  
Eileen H. Tamura,  
Noren W. Lush,  
and Linda K. Menton  
along with  
graphic designer  
Wayne M. Shishido.



### EDITOR'S NOTE

*This is our seventh interview with the winners of the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize. The Association for Asian Studies awards the prize annually for the development of outstanding curriculum materials on Asia. Linda K. Menton, Noren W. Lush, Eileen H. Tamura, and Chance I. Gusukuma won the 2003 prize for the development of *The Rise of Modern Japan*. The authors of this outstanding work are all affiliated with the Curriculum Research & Development Group, an organized research unit of the University of Hawaii within the College of Education. Linda Menton is a Professor of Education, Noren Lush is a Social Studies Teacher and Curriculum Developer, Eileen Tamura is a Professor of Education in the Department of Education Foundations, and Chance Gusukuma is a Researcher and Curriculum Developer.*

**Lucien:** *Would you please inform our readers about the genesis of this project? Whose idea was it to develop a secondary school text on recent Japanese history? As you know, most high school social studies teachers spend about two weeks on Japan at best. How, if at all, did this rather sad fact influence your approach?*

**Linda Menton:** The Curriculum Research & Development Group is a part of the College of Education at the University of Hawaii. Our mission is to improve education by designing, developing, and providing quality educational materials for students and teachers from pre-K to grade twelve. We work in teams of teachers, researchers, scholars, and other experts in mathematics, science, language arts, music, and the arts.

Several years ago, our social studies team initiated a project called Curriculum on Asian and Pacific History. We were concerned about the lack of information about Asia in traditional world history texts. And so were the teachers we worked with. When we surveyed high school world history teachers in Hawaii's public

schools and asked them what geographic and cultural regions they would choose to teach about, their highest priorities were China and Japan.

We knew, however, that despite teacher worries about the lack of Asia-related content in the curriculum—teachers told us they were spending less than four weeks or less of class time per year on Asia—we could not ask them to stuff more and more content into an already overcrowded history curriculum. So we wrote both our first book *China, Understanding its Past*, published in 1998, and *The Rise of Modern Japan*, to be used as flexibly as possible. Teachers could choose, for example, to spend one semester of a year-long world history course concentrating on Western civilization, and then use our materials for a semester-long study of Asia. Or they might use our materials to augment the truncated information on China or Japan in existing world history books. Our materials could also be used in area studies courses, in international studies courses, in language courses, or in programs like the Model United Nations.

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One of the challenges we experienced developing materials on Japan was the perception on the part of potential funders that we wanted to do this because we have such a large Japanese American population here in Hawaii, that this was kind of a “roots” project. But this was never our intent. While it is true that some high school students in Hawaii may be somewhat more familiar with Japan than their mainland counterparts, especially in regards to foods, cultural traditions, and in some instances, language, their knowledge of Japanese history and culture is not significantly better than teenagers anywhere else in America. We planned from the very beginning to distribute our materials to schools on the American mainland, and to schools in English-speaking countries in the Pacific region that have significant ties to Asia, such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

Developing curriculum about Asia and the Pacific is a natural at the University of Hawaii. Hawaii really is the crossroads of the Pacific. We are equidistant from Asia and the US mainland. The University of Hawaii is home to the largest Center for Japanese Studies in the United States with its forty-five-member faculty; it also hosts a National Resource Center for East Asia and a National Foreign Language Resource Center that specializes in Asian languages. It has an excellent library and audiovisual resource collection on Japan.

Our challenge was bringing these different resources on Japan together to develop instructional materials for high school students. That is where the concept of really working as a team, of sharing expertise, became so critical. The fact that we work at a curriculum research and development center, where this kind of work is genuinely valued, made it possible for us to pull such a team together and write *The Rise of Modern Japan*. Grant awards from the US Department of Education’s International Research and Studies Pro-

gram partially defrayed the development and publication costs of these materials.

**Lucien:** *From everything I have been told, the development of these materials was a genuine team effort. Can each of you briefly inform readers about your roles in the development of The Rise of Modern Japan?*

**Eileen Tamura:** Doing this work requires pooling the expertise of many people. Over the years we have worked with many academics who are internationally known scholars in Japanese Studies, but who have no experience working with high school students. And we have worked with excellent teachers who are first-rate in the classroom but lack the historical knowledge to teach about Japan. Our job was to develop a team of people who could pool their expertise, allowing each person on the team to use his or her strengths to best advantage for the project.

The day-to-day team for this project consisted of four people: three curriculum developers, all of whom were experienced teachers and historians, Linda Menton, Noren Lush, and I, and a Japan area specialist, Chance Gusukuma. We met regularly to create the organizational design of the materials. All our decisions were guided by this fundamental question, which admittedly has many answers: What is important for students to know? We then decided on the scope of the book, which begins with building the early modern state and includes a broad sweep of the Tokugawa period and then moves on to the Meiji era, basically the years from 1600 to 1912. Incidentally, the meaning of the word “modern” as used by historians is very confusing to young people. The Meiji Restoration is not modern to them; yesterday is not modern to them. We spent a lot of time discussing this term with students. The second chapter covers the period from 1912 to 1945, the Taisho era and the Shōwa era to 1945, which, of course, includes the Pacific War. The

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last chapter covers the remaining years of the Shōwa era and the present-day Heisei era, and looks at the occupation of Japan, its post-war recovery, and its rise as an economic superpower.

Once we had decided on the basic structure of the book and what it would include, we divided the chapters among us, each taking responsibility for specific chapters and sections. With the help of our Japan area specialist, Chance Gusukuma, we began searching out high-interest readings, such as short stories, first person accounts, folk tales, and poems that would make the historical narrative come to life. We continued to meet weekly, critiquing each other's writing, suggesting possible hands-on activities, sharing art work, photos, or documents, and in some instances asking that Japanese language materials be translated. We spent a lot of time selecting photographs and art work. This was the first time we published in color. Color adds significantly to publication costs, but it makes maps much more understandable to students, and it gives them a sense of art work, such as woodblock prints, that cannot be conveyed in black-and-white.

Once we had developed the first chapter in draft form, we sent it to our scholarly readers for review. Simultaneously, we began pilot-testing the materials with our tenth grade world history students at what is now called the Education Laboratory School but will probably forever be called the University Laboratory School. The school is the starting point for all of our research and development activities. Unlike many laboratory schools that accept only high achievers, or that train student teachers, we use our school as our laboratory to test curriculum. Our student body is selected by means of a stratified lottery so that it is a microcosm of the state's public school population in terms of ethnicity, socio-economic levels, and learning levels.

There is nothing like taking an idea that seemed really wonderful when working at a computer and trying it out with real live students. We all spent time in the classroom observing students, teaching lessons, collecting feedback, and working day in and day out with the tenth grade world history teacher, Suzanne Acord. Student and teacher feedback, along with that of the scholarly readers, became the basis of revisions. This process was repeated with each chapter.

Once we had a coherent manuscript, our in-house editor strove to weave our admittedly different writing styles into a seamless whole, while we worked on securing copyright permissions, creating the timelines, completing the teacher's manual, and doing the myriad of chores involved in turning a manuscript into a book. We also started conducting professional development workshops for teachers so they would be able to use the materials effectively. This is where our experience testing the pilot materials with students paid off—again. It gave us a degree of credibility with teachers that can be earned in no other way. They know that we know what it's really like to work with kids.

Once the manuscript was finalized, it was turned over to one of our graphic artists, Wayne Shishido, who did the design and layout of the student book.

**Lucien:** *One of the things that personally impresses me about the*

*text is how interactive it seems to be. What kinds of specific feedback from teachers or students have any of you received about the book?*

**Noren Lush:** We have a lot of feedback from both teachers and students, formal and informal. Teachers seem to appreciate having everything they need in one place. Teachers are busy people. If you tell them they need a map and then they have to go scrounge around for one, they may well decide to just forget about it. We've found the more we can supply to teachers, the more we can support them, the more likely they are to use our materials. Teachers are generally very complimentary about the interactive quality of the classroom activities. We know teachers and students want to do more than the "read and answer the questions" approach many of us learned with, although sometimes there is a place for that. Teachers also seem to appreciate that we incorporated primary documents, stories, art work, and all the resources we agree should be included when teaching history but again, are often difficult for teachers to locate.

Feedback from students is a lot of fun; some of it is hilarious. Several boys wrote that they expected and wanted a lot more pictures of samurai warriors fighting with swords. A lot of kids wrote us notes like the notes we write them, saying "I see spelling mistakes," or "You need to proof your work more carefully." Payback. We think that the opportunity for them to see a book in progress is very good. They gain a much better sense of the writing process, writing, and re-writing. And they derive great satisfaction from see-

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*We have found, over the years, and it proved true in the case of The Rise of Modern Japan, that students really like social history. This makes sense as social history addresses topics that are close to their own experiences—what it is like to live in a family, go to school, celebrate a holiday, leave home.*

ing a book they used in draft form in a manila folder turn into a real published book.

We take student feedback very seriously. When a lot of students have trouble understanding a reading or completing an activity, that is our problem and we need to fix it. But we also have to stand firm when students complain they're expected to do "too much writing" or "too much speaking before the class."

We have found, over the years, and it proved true in the case of *The Rise of Modern Japan*, that students really like social history. This makes sense as social history addresses topics that are close to their own experiences—what it is like to live in a family, go to school, celebrate a holiday, leave home. So excerpts from *Makiko's Diary* and from the story *Bog Rhubarb Shoots* were very popular. They also really liked the activity where they had to create a *kami shibai* (a traditional Japanese storytelling technique that utilizes pictures).

Working with kids reminds us, lest we forget, that they are still kids. Sometimes we forget that high school students still like activities that include drawing or even coloring, like creating a poster or making a map. This, of course, allows them to use glitter, a very popular medium with tenth grade girls.

**Lucien:** *Another interesting aspect of this project is that you developed a CD of Japanese songs to accompany the textbook.*

*Whose idea was that? What specific pedagogical objectives are you attempting to achieve through providing the disc?*

**Linda Menton:** This idea was mine. We produced a music compact disc for both the China and Japan books. We wanted to give students a sense of music that is very different from what they are accustomed to hearing, and to acquaint them with selections that have historical or cultural importance. So, for example, when they read about the national anthem *Kimi ga Yo* being composed during the Meiji era, we wanted them to actually be able to hear the anthem. We are currently working on expanding the use of the compact disc by giving teachers more ways to use it with students beyond simply listening to the selections and reading the liner notes. We want to help them analyze the music more fully, much as we tried to do with some of the art works and photographs in the text, to see that music can be a source of historical information. We should add here that the article by E. Taylor Atkins, "Edifying Tones: Using Music to Teach Asian History and Culture," in the Spring 2003 issue of *Education About Asia*, is very helpful in this regard.

**Lucien:** *At present are you working on any other Asian studies-related teaching materials?*

**Chance Gusukuma:** We have three projects in varying stages of development. The first is entitled *Cross Currents*. It is a bilingual,

bi-national educational Web site that contains digital resources covering the history of the Japan and the United States over the past fifty years and highlights the way the two countries have interacted and influenced each other. It is organized in three parallel threads: Japan, the United States, and the Cross-Currents between them. The project was initiated by the United States-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON) and is intended for students and the public in both Japan and the United States. We are part of a team, headed by Dr. Patricia Steinhoff here at the University of Hawaii. We are developing content and educational activities for the site, while others are working on its technological aspects. We have colleagues in Japan who are also working on the project. This has been a wonderful opportunity for us to learn to use technology as a teaching and learning tool. And it is helping us learn to think about both Japanese and American history more thematically. The *Cross Currents* project has also made us even more aware of the explosion of information that has occurred on the Internet, and more importantly, of the need to help students evaluate and organize that information. Just because students have access to a lot of information does not mean they understand it or can organize or synthesize it.

Our second project, which we are just beginning to work on, is a new text on the political, economic, cultural, and social history and geography of the people of East Asia. In this instance, East Asia includes China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan; Japan; and South and North Korea. The historical connections between these countries and the United States and Russia will be interwoven throughout the text. Our approach here is more thematic, rather than a country-by-country approach, so that students can see the historical and cultural ties among the three areas. We are planning to develop a compact disc that will again contain some musical selections, along with supplementary stories, art work, maps, documents, and photos. Again, we want to give teachers and students as much as we can. But we don't want to overwhelm them with the kind of compendious textbook that students regularly complain about in terms of weight—our eleventh graders are carrying around an American history text that weighs seven pounds—and that teachers complain about because they can't "cover" everything.

Our third project is a text on Southeast Asia. That project is in the "thinking" stage. Again, we are thinking themes, but this is much more difficult in the case of Southeast Asia, where the historical and cultural connections, when they exist, are very different from those of East Asia. Still, because national boundaries in Southeast Asia are of relatively recent origin, we think the thematic approach is richer and will help students make connections precluded when using the country-by-country approach. ■