

STUDIES OUTREACH

An EAA Interview with Franklin Buchanan

Now 85, Franklin Buchanan, along with Elgin Heinz, was among a small group of people who in the 1960s redirected their educational efforts toward encouraging the teaching of Asian studies at the precollegiate level. As with John Fairbank who is credited with bringing Asian studies into the university as a major subject area, Franklin and Elgin were among those who took the next logical step and began to explore ways to introduce Asia into the K–12 classroom.



Franklin Buchanan and Lucia Buchanan Pierce. December, 1976.

Frank was born in the small town of Pleasantville, Ohio. He was introduced to the world of ideas through working in a town drugstore where the proprietor carried *Harper's* and *The New Yorker*. After attending graduate school on the GI Bill, Frank began as a social studies teacher in Urbana, Ohio. The course he taught there on comparative politics and religion set off a minor storm during the McCarthy era, but he was strongly defended by the local school superintendent.

Buchanan later joined the faculty of Ohio State's attached University School and the University. His work with Asia grew as a result of interests in Buddhism, Gandhi, and Japan. As a professor in the School of Education at Ohio State, Franklin established the Service Center for Teachers of Asian Studies and in 1963 edited the first issue of *Focus on Non-Western Studies*, the first Asian studies periodical specifically for elementary and secondary teachers. In 1965 it became *Focus on Asian Studies* and was edited and published from Ohio State University until 1981 when the Asia Society assumed responsibility for its publication.

What led to the creation of *Focus*? According to Franklin it came out of one basic question: Is it possible to change our cultural attitudes? He believes that striving for this change is the purpose by which we enlarge any awareness of viewing life and living life; in broadening our horizons, we are enlarging and expanding our awareness of the diversity of life and our acceptance of that diversity.

Buchanan was the recipient of two Fulbright grants, the second as a Fulbright scholar conducting study and research on Contemporary Japan at the International Christian University in Tokyo, 1966–7. In 1973 he was co-leader of an invited delegation of American educators to the People's Republic of China, one of only four groups invited to China that year.

In what follows, Lucia Buchanan Pierce, an accomplished Asian studies outreach specialist in her own right, interviews her father.

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Lucia: *Who were the most memorable people in Asian Studies K–12 Outreach with whom you worked?*

Frank: There are at least four. Ez Vogel was one of the earliest subscribers to *Focus*. While very supportive of K–12 activities, he especially liked the listing of new books that was at the back; in the “early” days *Focus* was the only place where an updated listing of almost all Asian books that were being published (far fewer in the 1960s than today) could be found. His support gave *Focus* the seal of approval/acceptance.

An early meeting with Sy Fersh of the Asia Society turned *Focus* from a rather vague idea into a viable publication. The meeting was a brainstorming session about the need for something like *Focus* (the philosophical underpinnings) as well as a discussion of the logistics and how *Focus* could actually be done out of my small office at Ohio State.

James Hantula of the University of Iowa developed excellent material for teachers as well as strong bibliographical sources.

Samuel Chu of the history department at Ohio State joined me in the “Sam and Frank Show” in which we would travel around Ohio meeting with teachers and conducting workshops. Sam gave content information and I discussed curriculum development and implementation. This model, the joining of content and pedagogy, and going to schools, would be wonderful to revive. It made a significant contribution to Ohio schools.

I also recall a 1964 National Endowment for the Humanities Asian studies workshop I was asked to conduct at the University of Oklahoma in Norman. It was well funded and provided financial support for teachers to attend. Many who participated later developed solid programs in their schools. The workshop was well organized and well conceived and helped the germination process of *Focus*.

Lucia: *In your opinion, what challenges remain?*

Frank: Close relationships between scholars and teachers must be ongoing. This has been a major issue throughout the last thirty-five years and will continue into the future. EAA’s support by AAS is a major step in that direction. This focus on getting the university into the precollegiate classroom is so very important. It is not uncommon for young people to pursue Asian studies at the college/university level because of being exposed to it at the precollegiate level. I am pleased and honored that the Franklin Buchanan Prize has been established to reward, among other things, scholarly input and implementation of curricula at the precollegiate level. Teacher training in Asian content and in teaching about Asia remains an ongoing challenge. There is often minimal follow-up of results of conferences. No one is identified or engaged in following up; often there is a sense of “we’ve done our bit on Asian studies and it’s time to move on.” Those who are committed must add it to their already overburdened plates (e.g., Lucien Ellington!).

Lucia: *What can be done to effect positive change?*

Frank: There are three major areas: 1) include service in precollegiate activities as a positive factor when reviewing professors for advance in rank; 2) develop programs in which teachers and scholars are working together to create materials, not just communicating with each other, and continue to have scholars actively involved in reviewing precollegiate materials; 3) Colleges of education need more emphasis on study and inquiry in area studies. They need to do more with the use of comparative methods.

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Other ideas for change, while perhaps not as central, include the following: 1) Over the past twenty years commerce and travel between Asia and the United States has hugely increased. What has not increased is American knowledge about and understanding of Asian cultures. It would be intriguing for schools to explore possible linkages or relationships with organizations and offices doing business in Asia. It might be mutually advantageous to link increasingly solicited funding of college and university Asian Studies programs with precollegiate programs. 2) The kind of literature used in college courses on Asian studies is not always applicable to secondary schools. It is critical that good materials and innovative use of materials be available at the precollegiate level. *EAA* is doing as much as it can in this area with reviews, articles, and suggestions, but a serious infusion of materials remains crucial.

Lucia: *How do you view the role of textbooks vis-à-vis the treatment of Asia?*

Frank: Textbooks are an ongoing problem as noted above. Asia continues to be almost an afterthought in most textbooks or the emphasis is primarily on the past 100–200 years of Asian history and Asia’s relationship to the West. There is certainly no sophistication in exploring Asia, let alone in looking at the multiplicity of Asian cultures. It is vital that textbooks set up projects in which students investigate Asia more deeply as its own entity and then make comparisons with their own lives, comparisons within Asia, and comparisons with other cultures. This all has been attempted without much success to date.

Lucia: *In what ways, if at all, is technology changing and shaping the field?*

Frank: I am glad I wasn’t still working in the field when e-mail became a common communication tool! Computer technology is certainly a plus for ease and reach of communication and use of primary materials and sharing of materials. Questions include how to bring critical judgment to what is available, and how to encourage thoughtful dialogue rather than just efficient and speedy interactions!

Lucia: *How would you rate the Internet, in particular, as an agent or tool? Would you place it above or alongside other technologies such as CD-ROM?*

Frank: I haven’t experienced the Internet or CD-ROM and don’t feel qualified to answer beyond what I said above.

Lucia: *When we think about teaching Asia within the context of World History, do you find that students (and administrators) are more receptive?*

Frank: Asia is increasingly more relevant in people’s worlds through the globalization of the world economy and the ease and affordable cost of travel. Therefore there is, of necessity, more receptivity at least conceptually to information about Asia and, for some people, more openness to cultural differences. However, this does not mean there is more knowledge, nor is it reflected in texts or courses. Receptivity must be translated into action or else it is not very meaningful.

Lucia: *How do you see the impact of the Standards movement on the teaching of Asia?*

Frank: This whole issue emerged since I retired twenty years ago, but while the specifics are new, the idea is not so new. With regard to Asian studies, just including some questions in a test or mandating the study of a certain geographical area or historical time period does not do much unless the materials that are used are good and the teachers themselves have had a chance to have some training in Asian studies. So it comes back to creating good materials and training teachers.

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Lucia: *What do you see as the obstacles to “mainstreaming” Asian studies—or is that something for which to strive?*

Frank: I actually think it is something for which to strive. How do we change significantly the cultural awareness and judgments of our students and help them be open to other customs? Sometimes this is done by combining the study of other cultures with an increased awareness of one’s own culture. Mainstreaming Asian studies can encourage this. While the Standards movement may help this, Asian studies will not truly be mainstreamed until it is part of teacher training and until good materials are available. Am I beginning to sound like a broken record?!

Lucia: *Finally, let’s talk about the Association for Asian Studies and its role in education. What are some of the things AAS could do to enhance teaching and learning about Asia?*

Frank: AAS should work to remove the academic barriers between professors and teachers. This is an age-old problem. I don’t know how to do it because this has been an issue for the past forty years. Professors are aware and sensitive to precollegiate training but find it difficult to find the time and to get the recognition for work with teachers. While professors serve as reviewers for texts, they often are cursory in their reviews. Having little time for their own research, it is hard for professors to find time to give to teacher training. Young non-tenured professors do not receive kudos for teaching, let alone working with precollegiate teachers, and they are under enormous pressure to publish. Senior scholars are called on by their institutions, professional organizations, and media, for various tasks. Adding even one more group is often too much. Precollegiate teachers often don’t know what they are teaching until just before a term begins and many times don’t have the time to prepare or talk with specialists before starting class. Precollegiate teachers have a teaching load that does not lend itself to research time. Precollegiate teachers who do research and have time to prepare for their classes during the summer often have to do the research and write the curriculum within a six-week period.

What can AAS do? Continue to support *EAA* which reaches beyond the precollegiate teachers into colleges and universities. Having *EAA* go to all AAS members, insures that it is looked at, even briefly, by professors. The participation of college and university professors as authors has been excellent and should continue to be encouraged.

The Association can add its voice to public pressure to publishers for better texts. It can also lobby NEH to reinstate the grants to elementary school teachers that allowed them to spend a year researching a specific subject. ■

LUCIA BUCHANAN PIERCE received a B.S. in Education and an M.A. in Asian Studies Education from New York University and an M.A. in Asian Studies specializing in Chinese History from Yale University. She has taught Asian Studies at the secondary level (1973–7), was Outreach Director at The Council on East Asian Studies at Yale from 1978–80, and is a former Chair of the Committee on Teaching About Asia. Lucia served as Director of Education at the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, the national museums of Asian art at the Smithsonian Institution, from 1986–99. She is currently a consultant in the arts, international exchange, and education.