



**LUCIEN**

*Gary, please inform our readers about yourself. What attracted you to teaching and what kind of work did you do before your present employment?*

**GARY**

I'll always cherish that memorable day in July 1977. I was going to the country of my family's ancestry for the first time in my life. My grandfather, Buntaro Mukai, left Hiroshima almost a hundred years ago to work as a laborer in Hawaii and then in California. My grandmother, Wakano Mukai, board-

ed the S.S. Manchuria bound for California as a "picture bride" in 1910 at the age of sixteen. As a third-generation Japanese American, I often struggled with my identity at a young age. Most of my classmates at school were Caucasians and Christian: I was Asian and Buddhist. During the 1950s and 1960s, many public schools in California offered the study of Japan in the fourth grade. I have a copy of the same textbook (*Japan: Home of the Sun*, Field Educational Publications, Inc., San Francisco, 1963) which I studied from in fourth grade. Let me read you some paragraphs from the section on "Japan and the United States":

Settlers in America had plenty of room. They had to fight the wilderness, and sometimes they were hungry. But if they wanted to move on and look for a better place, they did. They became used to the freedom of large open spaces. They began to think of things in large terms.

The Japanese, on the other hand, had no open spaces ahead of them. They had to make the best of whatever was at hand. They learned to find beauty in small, simple things.

Americans were lucky in their leaders, too. Our government, from the very first, was a government of, by, and for the people. The Japanese are beginning to get used to that kind of government.

An American almost always smiles when he is happy. When he is sad, there is sadness in his face. Most Japanese try not to show their pain or sadness. They smile even when they feel like crying. This is one of the differences we understand when we come to know one another.

In elementary school, I remember my friends asking me why my eyes were "slanted" and if Chinese eyes were "slanted up" and Japanese eyes were "slanted down"; and my teacher commenting that "Gary seems to laugh when he's really sad." In high school, I remember studying about Japan as well. I remember the tremendous embarrassment I felt whenever the topic of Japan and World War II came up. Though I held high respect for the teachers in my life, I still feel some bitterness towards two of my teachers who directed questions about Japan's involvement in World War II to me. I never studied about the internment of Japanese Americans until I entered college. At U.C. Berkeley, I took

# Gary Mukai



**G**ary Mukai, Assistant Director of the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), is one of the best writers of Asia K-12 curriculum in the United States. A former schoolteacher, Mukai manages to write units that combine accurate content with innovative and practical teaching strategies. Outstanding examples of Mukai's work include units on U.S.-Japan Relations, Rice in Asia, and Vietnam. This year the Association for Asian Studies selected Mukai as the first regular recipient of its Franklin Buchanan Prize for the Development of Curricular Materials. In the interview that follows Mukai addresses several important problems and opportunities that those of us concerned about improving K-12 student understanding of Asia constantly face. Gary also provides a unique perspective on his experiences as an Asian American and on multicultural education and Asian Americans.

courses in Asian American studies and began to appreciate my heritage and ancestry. I received my B.A. in 1976 and continued in the teacher education program at U.C. Berkeley until 1977, when I received my teaching credential. Shortly before graduation, I decided to go and teach English in Japan and to learn more about my heritage.

I lived and taught English in Gumma Prefecture from 1977–80. When my Japanese students heard that a new American teacher was coming to teach, I later learned that some were expecting to see someone who looked like Paul Newman or Robert Redford. I know that many were very puzzled, perhaps disappointed, when they saw me. I remember some girls at a local girls' high school saying that they were expecting to see a "real American." During many of my English classes, I learned a great deal from the students about Japan and about their perceptions of the United States and Americans. In addition to working with elementary and secondary school students, I also worked with corporate employees at companies such as Tokyo Sanyo, Niigata Ironworks, Toshiba Silicone, Sapporo Beer, and Fuji Heavy Industries. I am truly indebted to these students of my English classes for teaching me so much about Japan and for being so candid about their impressions of the United States. I returned to California in 1980 to pursue graduate studies in international development education at Stanford University. My advisor, Dr. David Grossman, was the director of the program I now work for—the Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE).

Following graduation, I taught at elementary schools in California for seven years until 1988. Perhaps the most vivid experience I had was in 1983. During parent conferences, the mother of one of my students in first grade refused to come to meet me. I later learned from my student that his mother was afraid to come in because I was of Japanese descent, and the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. I never did have the opportunity to meet her and will never know what was behind her fear.

Until today, I miss teaching young students very much. Reflecting back on my ten years of teaching, I think what attracted me most to the profession is the potential one has to make a difference in so many students' lives. I used to especially enjoy helping young students develop an appreciation for cultural and linguistic differences.

**LUCIEN**

*How did you become involved with SPICE, and what are the basic goals of Stanford's program?*

**GARY**

As a teacher, I used to borrow materials from SPICE to enhance my teaching. I joined SPICE in 1988 and often draw upon the experiences I have had in Japan and in the United States. My work involves the development and publication of curriculum related to Asia and U.S.-Asia rela-



tions for elementary and secondary schools as well as community colleges in the United States. I also work with teachers in the United States and Asia on topics related to global and cross-cultural issues. The origins of SPICE date back to 1976. SPICE serves as a bridge between Stanford University and K–14 schools by developing supplementary,

interdisciplinary, interactive curriculum materials reflecting the academic priorities of the Institute for International Studies. SPICE curriculum materials are nonpartisan and explore multiple perspectives on contemporary, international issues through active, accessible learning strategies.

**LUCIEN**

*Could you briefly describe the SPICE Asia-related curriculum projects you've developed and comment on the level of students for which the materials are intended?*

**GARY**

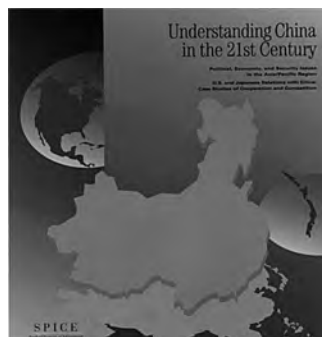
Since joining SPICE in 1988, I have developed cultural, historical, and contemporary curriculum units on Japan and U.S.-Japan relations. More recently, the focus of my curriculum work has been on issues related to U.S. and Japanese relations with other countries in Asia (e.g., China, the Korean Peninsula, Vietnam), with environmental issues in the Asia/Pacific region (e.g., rice, megacities in Asia), and with security issues in the Asia/Pacific region (e.g., China/Taiwan, Korean Peninsula). The curriculum is interdisciplinary and draws upon the multiple intelligences of students. Most of the recent curriculum publications are intended for middle school, high school, and/or community college levels.

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*Gary, as a Japan specialist who works with elementary and secondary teachers, one of my major concerns is quality control. Specifically, my sense is that for over a decade there has been an enormous amount of curriculum material on Japan developed for teachers, and the overall quality ranges from superb to poor. Do you share my concern? If varying quality of materials is a problem, what might those of us doing curriculum development and outreach do to ensure more uniform high quality materials?*

**GARY**

I share your concern. Increasing dialogue between curriculum developers, people who focus on outreach to schools, and content specialists such as yourself, in my experience, greatly increases the overall quality of curriculum materials. At SPICE, we have our curriculum reviewed by content specialists, and if we are developing curriculum on bilateral or multilateral relationships, we make a serious attempt to have content specialists from the various countries under study review the curriculum as well. For example, during the development of a curriculum unit series on U.S.-Japan relations, we had American scholars of U.S.-Japan relations, as well as Japanese scholars of U.S.-Japan relations, review the series.



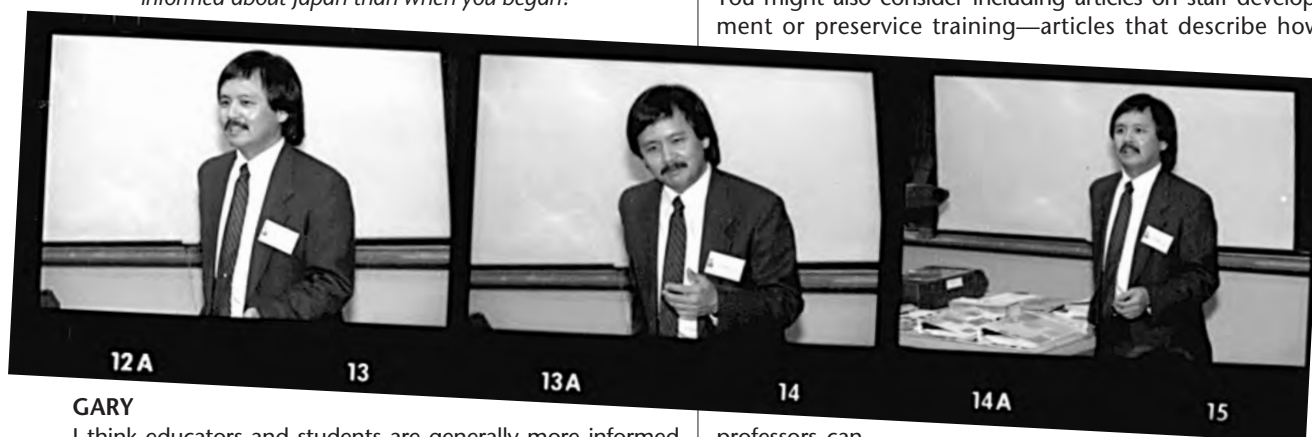
In addition, I think it is very important to work with scholars in schools of education. Having experts in pedagogy review curriculum can also contribute significantly to the overall quality of curriculum materials. Lastly, extensive field-testing of the curriculum in diverse settings helps to ensure that the curriculum is accessible to a wide range of students. Feedback from students and teachers is essential in the curriculum development process.

**LUCIEN**

*You've been engaged in one way or the other, for quite a while, in assisting American elementary and secondary students understand more about Japan. Are educators and students more informed about Japan than when you began?*

**GARY**

I am very impressed with *Education About Asia*. In addition to the impressive array of articles and reviews included in the journal, you might consider including sample lessons on Asia and U.S.-Asia relations developed by teachers and university Asianists. Wider circulation of *Education About Asia* in private and public school libraries, social studies departments, and school curriculum libraries, I feel, can build bridges between university Asianists and schoolteachers. I personally have been contacted by many teachers who receive your journal who want information about SPICE curriculum. Your journal has enabled me to create many new bridges with educators. You might also consider including articles on staff development or preservice training—articles that describe how



**GARY**

I think educators and students are generally more informed about Japan's history, culture, and U.S. relations with Japan. Private organizations, foundations, Japanese and U.S. governmental programs, university-based Japan projects, exchange programs, and other programs that promote the study of Japan and U.S.-Japan relations have contributed significantly towards the understanding of Japan at the elementary and secondary levels. As I travel around the United States, there are clearly regional differences in the general understanding of Japan. In states such as Hawaii, U.S. interdependence with Japan is clearly evident: in trade, tourism, large Japanese American population, etc. When I work with educators and students in states like Hawaii, there is a strong, general interest in Japan and U.S.-Japan relations, in large part, because of this interdependence. In other states, however, this interdependence isn't so easily apparent. In addition, states such as California mandate the teaching of Japan in public schools. For example, seventh grade social studies/history teachers are required to teach about Japanese history and religion. Social studies/history frameworks such as the California History/Social Science Framework contribute to student understanding of Japan at the elementary and secondary levels.

**LUCIEN**

*One of the goals of Education About Asia is to assist university Asianists and schoolteachers to "build bridges" in order to help a large number of Americans to become better informed about Asia. What might we do as a magazine to better realize this goal? What steps might schoolteachers and professors take to work together to promote American understanding of Asia?*

professors can contribute to teacher workshops, work with curriculum developers, assist educators going to Asia on study tours, etc.

**LUCIEN**

*You are quite well aware that the American elementary and secondary curriculum is "overcrowded" and that interest groups constantly pressure public school educators to include classroom content on a wide variety of subjects. At the same time, Asian Americans are our fastest growing immigrant group, and there is also an obvious need for Americans to know more about Asian countries. How should educators address the problem of what to teach and, more specifically, deal with the questions of whether to devote more time to the study of Asia or to assisting students to learn about Asian Americans in the United States?*

**GARY**

As a former teacher, I can relate to the "overcrowded" curriculum, and trying to make decisions about what to teach in subjects such as social studies. Yes, Asian Americans are our fastest growing immigrant group, and it's important to teach students about the diverse root cultures of our Asian American students because of their growing numbers. However, it's also important to devote more time in the school day to the study of Asia because of the U.S. economic interdependence with the region (e.g., U.S.-Japan trade; China and Most Favored Nation status); critical political issues involving the U.S. with Asia (e.g., recent appointment of an ambassador to Vietnam); U.S. security issues in the

**PHOTO:** Gary Mukai conducting a teacher workshop. Photos courtesy of Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education.

region (e.g., U.S. troops in Okinawa, South Korea); and environmental issues in the region impacting the United States (e.g., coal use in Asia and global warming, acid rain). It's also important to assist students to learn about Asian Americans in the United States. With increasing tension between countries in Asia and the United States, Asian Americans are often caught in the crossfire between the countries. The internment of Japanese Americans during World War II; the murder in Detroit in the 1980s of Vincent Chin by two unemployed automobile workers, who thought he was Japanese; and the increasing numbers of hate crimes directed at Asian Americans come to mind, and are reminders of why it's important to raise awareness and sensitivity to the Asian American experience.

Misunderstandings over cultural differences and negative sentiments towards one another are examples of problems that result from a mutual lack of knowledge concerning the United States and Asia and the history of U.S.-Asia interaction. Considering the growing number of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States, the growing numbers of Americans in Asia, the increasing political, economic, and social interaction and interdependence between the United States and countries in Asia, and the increasing globalization among leading corporations, it is especially important for U.S. elementary and secondary students to learn about Asia and about U.S.-Asia relations. A proportionately small number of U.S. students will have the opportunity to study about Asia and U.S.-Asia relations at the collegiate level. There is, however, a high likelihood that many will work for firms doing business in both Asia and the United States in the future. My hope is that more time will be spent during the school day at the elementary and secondary school levels to help students develop a critical understanding of Asia and U.S.-Asia relations through effective international and cross-cultural curriculum.

**LUCIEN**

*What other advice might you have for professors and teachers who want to have a significant, positive impact on American understanding of Asia?*

**GARY**

There are many issues I'd like to bring up here, but I'll limit my comments to three issues. Professors and teachers who want to have a significant, positive impact on American understanding of Asia need to help students understand issues related to conflict, the media, and U.S.-Asian economic interdependence. First, regarding conflict, I think it is important that students be introduced to conflict on personal, group, international, and global levels and to basic conflict resolution/management alternatives. It is also important to develop students' analytical and critical skills regarding conflict, which is a pervasive part of both students' personal lives and U.S.-Asia relations. Lastly, it is important to help students with the identification of perspectives representative of both Asians and Americans during critical episodes of our history and of contemporary times.



Second, I think it is important to help students understand that the media is a filter through which Americans try to understand the relationship between the United States and countries in Asia, and it has a critical role in defining the public perceptions of this important, yet often troubled, relationship. People look to the media for help in

learning about other countries. It is, therefore, a very powerful element in shaping our impressions of other countries' people and cultures, and in determining how we evaluate the actions and aims of other countries. Professors and teachers can help students to distinguish fact from opinion, identify point of view and objectivity, understand bias, and recognize multiple perspectives in the media. Students need to be introduced to how the media sometimes creates and perpetuates stereotypes and shapes opinion in its dissemination of information.

Third, in an increasingly economically interdependent world, it is vital that students become acquainted with the basic concepts underlying international trade. Helping students understand concepts related to economic interdependence, the process of trade, the benefits and problems of trade, etc., can assist in improving the students' understanding of the significance of the United States' economic relationship with Asia.

**LUCIEN**

*Gary, thanks so much for sharing your thoughts with our readers, and keep up the good work!*

**GARY**

Please know how honored I feel for this opportunity. ■

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A review of Mukai's *U.S.-Japan Relations: The View from Both Sides of the Pacific, Part 1—Episodes in the History of U.S.-Japan Relations: Case Studies of Conflict, Conflict Management, and Resolution* appears in the resources section of this issue. The following publications by Gary Mukai are also available:

- Cooperation in Japan*
- Episodes in the History of U.S.-Japan Relations*
- Feeding a Hungry World: Focus on Rice in Asia and the Pacific*
- Introduction to International Trade: With a Focus on U.S.-Japan Economic Relations*
- Modernization of Japan: Continuity and Change*
- Religion in Japan: With a Look at Cultural Transmission*
- Symbolism in Japanese Language and Culture*
- The Media in U.S.-Japan Relations: A Look at Stereotypes*
- Understanding China in the 21st Century*
- Understanding the Korean Peninsula in the 21st Century*
- Understanding Vietnam in the 21st Century*

They can be obtained by contacting:  
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