

INTEGRATING ASIA INTO WORLD HISTORY

Perspectives from Three Pre-college Teachers

World history is increasingly being included in numerous state and district curriculum standards. The EAA guest editors invited three teachers to discuss their experiences and insights on how best to integrate Asia in a world history course. Alison Kaminsky, who holds a master's degree in Asian Studies, teaches at a middle school in Long Beach, California and is also a mentor teacher in her district. Her school follows the California frameworks where world history is taught in the sixth, seventh and tenth grades. Colleen Kelly is a veteran Connecticut high school teacher who holds a Ph.D. in International Education and an M.A. in Teaching Asian Studies. She was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to India, and has traveled extensively in Asia. She has also written numerous curriculum materials and is an active member of the Association of Asian Studies Committee on Teaching About Asia. Colleen's school has not implemented a world history course. Gwen Johnson is a veteran teacher in New York State who has earned graduate degrees in Teaching Asian Studies and has studied in Asia. Her school is in the middle of a two-year transition from Western Civilization and area studies to world history. As Gwen remarks: "It's not easy." Here are their responses to our questions that focus on teaching about Asia in world history.

JEAN JOHNSON: *Let's begin with your own obvious commitment to Asian Studies. How did you personally get interested in Asia and what difference has that interest made in your teaching and in your life?*

ALISON: It all began with a Music Cultures of the World class when I was an undergraduate student. I was fascinated by the musical traditions of Japan, China, Indonesia (*gamelan*), Arab traditions, and particularly India. I spoke with the music history adviser and she said that although California State University, Long Beach did not offer a degree in Ethnomusicology, she would authorize a major in Music History with an emphasis in the music of India. I studied vocal music privately, took a Hinduism class, and did a directed study with the music cultures teacher.

I found out about University of Wisconsin, Madison's "College Year in India" program and knew that would be an ideal opportunity to expand my formal knowledge and experience of the musical traditions firsthand. I spent the summer in Madison studying intensive Hindi-Urdu before going to Varanasi, India to spend a full college year. What an

experience! I studied vocal music (*thumri*) and dance (*kathak*) and their interrelationship.

Since I've been teaching world history, it's been a great joy to share with the students the great things I've discovered about Asia. In my Fine Arts class, I spend a couple of weeks teaching them about North Indian classical music: some of the basic vocal scales and rhythms. I invite a tabla player to come in and the students enjoy clapping the *taalas*, or rhythmic cycles, he plays.

COLLEEN: I was virtually born with an interest in Asia. Since my father had been an inveterate world traveler, as a young man taking a riverboat up the Pearl River to witness the 1911 revolution, I grew up on the stories of his adventures and opinions on world affairs. As a young teacher I helped pilot the New York State curriculum (designed, in part, by Don and Jean Johnson). After completing a Master's in Twentieth-Century European History, I was delighted to receive a Fulbright to India with the U.S. Educational Foundation in India (USEFI). I followed that with a return to India and study in Japan before taking

another Master's in Asian Studies at NYU. Asia has occupied a very important place in my life; I am involved in it academically, but also in terms of taste, appreciation of the arts and more. Perhaps the palmist in Mussorie was on to something when he claimed I had been either a queen or a yogi in a previous existence. My many trips back to Asia are something like going home.

GWEN: The Asian world has been a passion of mine since my undergraduate days when I first took a course in Buddhism with a visiting Burmese monk, which led to my minoring in Far Eastern Philosophy. This led to graduate studies in Chinese History and Asian Studies and teaching positions in the Scarsdale and Lexington public schools where I was able to concentrate on teaching Asian Studies. Now that we have adopted a two-year world history course at Scarsdale High School, I am finding that my knowledge of the Asian world has allowed me to see the global picture more easily from many viewpoints. It is more difficult to jump into multiple world views when your orientation has exclusively been in the Western tradition. Furthermore, my

interest in Asia means that I will include this area as an equal partner throughout the two-year sequence.

DON JOHNSON: *What are three or four really good resources on Asia in world history that you would recommend to other teachers?*

ALISON: The Teachers' Curriculum Institute has produced a series of teaching materials for U.S. and world history. I've used their Ancient India activities which relate to geography, Indus Valley achievements, Ashokan edicts, Buddhism, Hinduism, and more. The students enjoy the slides and musical selections as well as a Readers' Theater version of the *Rāmāyana*. A new unit on Ancient China has recently been released. The lessons look good, but I haven't "student-tested" them yet. Seventh-grade teachers have had success with the units on Medieval China and Japan.

The American Forum for Global Education has produced a notebook of resources called *Spotlight on Rāmāyana: An Enduring Tradition*. A video showing cultural and religious traditions as well as highlights of the *Rāmāyana* is included.

There are a lot of great Web sites, such as the Australian National University site: <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/WWW/L-AsianStudies.html>; www.Harappa.com; and www.askasia.org.

In the Los Angeles area we have a lot of resources available: the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Pacific Asia Museum, and the Music Circle (promoters of Indian Classical Music and Dance). Bali and Beyond is a performance group of shadow theater and gamelan. They offer assemblies as well as workshops for students and teachers, and they have a great Web site: <http://www.pacificnet.net/gamelan/>.

COLLEEN: I am more comfortable with looking at Asia through the eyes of those scholars whose specialty is the region or country, than through world



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"I've developed a strategy to cover all the various civilizations by looking at their elements of civilization: Geography, Government, Agriculture/Food, Technology/Contributions, Occupations, Trade, Rules of Society, Lifestyle/Family, Arts/Music/Dance, Architecture, Language, and Religion."

history. A. L. Basham's *The Wonder That Was India* is still a favorite on India, supported by Wolpert's, *A New History of India*. Jonathan Spence is invariably a good guide through China.

GWEN: There are many books that have been most helpful to me in integrating Asian Studies into world history. A few of the more important ones are: Jerry Bentley, *Old World Encounters: Exchanges in Pre-Modern Times*; J. F. Bierlein, *Parallel Myths*; Philip Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History*; Ainslie T. Embree, *Sources of Indian Tradition*; William Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. I & II; S. A. M. Adshead, *China in World History*; K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilization of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750*; Jack Goody, *The East in the West*; Ross E. Dunn and David Vigilante, eds., *Bring History Alive! A Sourcebook for Teaching World History*; Heidi Roupp, ed., *Teaching World History: A Resource Book*; Don and Jean Johnson, *Through Indian Eyes*; Peter Seybolt, *Through Chinese Eyes*; and Richard Minear, *Through Japanese Eyes*.

JEAN JOHNSON: *If you wanted to feature Asian societies as equal partners in the study of world history, how would you organize an ideal course?*

ALISON: The California History-Social Science framework has designed a

syllabus for world history courses in sixth, seventh, and tenth grades. These courses cover ancient, medieval, and modern world history, respectively. Each course requires a broad glimpse of the world. Asia is represented at each level, though more extensively in some than others. Ideally, there would be less to cover and more time for in-depth study, but the world is a big place with lots of history. Choosing what students learn is a difficult and subjective task. The syllabus is on-line.

I think a course in Western Civilization is great if one wants to study that aspect of the world. A Western Civilization course should support its title and not claim to be a world history course. Interestingly, my training in that area is limited, so taking such a specialized course would be helpful to me.

COLLEEN: Perhaps I'm spoiled, since we offer a course called Modern World, which focuses on the non-Western world. In addition we teach a discrete course on Asia which concentrates on India and China. If I am teaching world history, I go back to the ancient river valley civilizations. In looking at Greece I see parallels between some of the ideas of ancient Hinduism and some of Plato's ideas. I love to spend time with the *Rāmāyana*. In dealing with Rome there are connections to the Han dynasty across the Silk Route. China's inventions and accomplishments precede those of

Europe, so a look at China as the leading world civilization is valid. If I had to teach a world history course without some data, I'd be tempted to leave out the West, not the East.

GWEN: The big challenge is deciding how to provide an in-depth understanding of an area, its culture, philosophy, traditions, history, as well as place it in a global framework, and maintain integrity of both in a shorter span of time. Since I have concentrated on South and Southeast Asia over the last fifteen years or so, I felt considerable angst when I had to eliminate many of the activities that had worked so well in an area studies approach. On the other hand, I realized that with world history the students did understand the basic concepts and had an inside view of the peoples and their history. In addition, they actually had a lot more, for other areas contemporary to the Asian world at particular moments in history had been added to their knowledge bank.

For example, they now could compare the various river valley civilizations of the Egyptians, the Sumerians, the Shang and the Indus people. Likewise, it was not just the Chinese who traversed the silk routes, but people from Rome, the Middle East, India, and Central Asia that met and exchanged ideas, goods, cultural traits and so on.

What a world history course does so well is to integrate the world thematically, chronologically and cross-culturally, which to me is the beauty of the approach. No longer will students study areas in isolation to each other and make wild leaps such as placing the Indus civilization as contemporary with the Roman Empire or even the Renaissance. It gives them the big picture as well as an in-depth analysis of specific areas.

DON JOHNSON: *Many states are now requiring, and many school districts are offering, an integrated world history program in place of the area studies approach that was introduced in the*

1960s. How does this emphasis on world history change your approach to teaching area studies, specifically Asian Studies?

ALISON: As I noted earlier, California already offers an integrated world history program. Therefore, it is the only curriculum I've taught. The units I cover in relation to Asia are Mesopotamia, Indus Valley and Ancient India, Ancient China, and an additional unit on Southeast Asia. It would be nice to offer a course focusing on ancient Asia, but those civilizations did not live in isolation. Considering the fact that most students will not cover the ancient world in any capacity later in life, I'd prefer to keep it as it is.

I've developed a strategy to cover all the various civilizations by looking at their elements: Geography, Government, Agriculture/Food, Technology/Contributions, Occupations, Trade, Rules of Society, Lifestyle/Family, Arts/Music/Dance, Architecture, Language, and Religion.

As we study each unit, we're sure to cover those areas and create an enlarged "graphic organizer" on the wall illustrating the various elements of each civilization we've studied. As we progress through the year, the similarities and differences of the varied regions and cultures become vividly apparent for the students. It is through the representations of these similarities that we can discuss the diffusion of technology and ideas.

COLLEEN: We are currently revising our curriculum. Although I am open to the concept of an integrated world history, my colleagues and I are still very comfortable with the use of the area studies approach. The liberty to concentrate on a particular region or country in depth has merit. In freshman year our students are introduced to Western Civilization. I consider this an important prerequisite to the study of either the modern world or an area study. Connections and comparisons are made during these sophomore-year courses.

GWEN: For teachers jumping into a world history approach when area stud-

ies has been the norm presents a leap of faith that can seem tremendously daunting. As several teachers in our program have stated: "I feel like a new teacher, for I am working every night with completely new material." It is not only new material, but it is putting it into an integrated framework. The whole process will take time to adjust to, but it is very exciting.

Specifically in our department, we decided two and a half years ago to consider a world history approach. We were excited when the world history standards came out and decided to consider a move in this direction. The hardest task has been four-fold: feeling comfortable with so much new material; trying to integrate it globally and cross-culturally; putting aside Western or Eastern bias; and finding time to work together to build a viable curriculum. Despite these challenges, we are all definitely committed to the approach and now realize that it will take several years for everyone in the program to experience teaching both ninth- and tenth-grade curriculums, and to feel comfortable with the material.

The Asian area is proving to be more difficult to grasp for those who have never been trained in it. The culture and philosophy on the one hand seem exotic, and on the other hand, alien to Western thought. In general, there are not as many Asianists among high school teachers, which may mean that teachers will shy away from an in-depth treatment of Asia and rely on more comfortable material. The Middle East and Africa do not seem as difficult to approach even if you have been schooled in the Western tradition.

JEAN JOHNSON: *What are three or four core ideas or concepts from Asia that you think we should include in a world history course?*

ALISON: More than one-half of the world's population is Asian. There can really be no world history course taught in isolation. Asian religion,

ethics, art, and other forms of material culture have interacted for millennia with the “West.” Certainly the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions stem from Asian society. The beginnings of cities and empires are all rooted in Asia.

COLLEEN: I tend to focus on the big ideas and institutions that most civilizations have. For example, family values is a big debate now and it is helpful to compare the nuclear family with Chinese, Japanese and Indian families. Contrasting individual choice with dharma and what East Asians think of as Confucian virtues is both valuable and interesting to students. Finally, what constitutes a social and moral order in Asian and other societies is well worth comparing over time.

GWEN: As Michael Wood states in his Legacy tape on India, there are fundamental differences in approach and practice to religious thought and culture in the East and West, yet a moral and ethical basis to life is the wish of all peoples everywhere. My students spend considerable time comparing world views and exploring the concept of point of view and its impact on how we see others. I want our students to view Asia in its own right, not simply as an area responding to European imperialism or Western culture, but one with its own cultural and philosophical integrity, and to understand that the Asian non-dualistic world view, whether it be Hindu, Buddhist, or Daoist, is not less viable than the Western dualistic view.

I also try to help students understand that the flow of ideas, goods, people, literature, and art from Asian civilizations have impacted the West in fundamental ways throughout history, as has the reverse flow from West to East.

DON JOHNSON: *Over the years you have been teaching, how have your students changed, and what are the implications for Asian Studies that result from those changes?*



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ALISON: Long Beach, California is an increasingly multicultural city. In addition to large Hispanic and black communities, we have a significant population of Southeast Asian students, particularly those from Cambodia. I’ve found, though, that regardless of ethnic background, my students have been fascinated by studying Asia. They enjoy learning about the various philosophies and cultural traditions.

At the beginning of this school year, some of my students from the previous year came to me with a request to begin an Asia Club. Most of these students are of European descent. We’ve studied the art of *mehendi*, gone to an “India Day” at the Pacific Asia museum, learned some basics of the Hindi language, and our next outing will be to explore the cuisine, markets, and clothing shops of “Little India,” a nearby South Asian commercial district.

COLLEEN: Although the students have changed in certain ways, so have the circumstances of their learning. Thirty years ago (even ten years ago), we had 55-minute periods, and once a week a 75-minute period. Students from all four grade levels of high school could elect the course, giving more diversity, and more maturity to the student body. We now have 43-minute periods, predominantly peopled by sophomores. It sometimes feels like a headlong dash through history. In the past students

seemed to be both intellectually able and interested, committed to serious study. Students today may be just as able, and perhaps even a bit more sophisticated, but often less serious about study. Games and storytelling are hooks to tie student interest into the concepts and content.

GWEN: I would say that students have more openness to the global community than in the 1970s when I first began teaching. I remember then that being associated with Asian Studies was not necessarily a plus, in fact it was a struggle to maintain its viability. That has changed as the world community is being drawn together economically and culturally, which means that the exchange of people and ideas naturally is taking place.

So many of my students over the past fifteen years are now in some line of work in the Asian/Pacific Rim area. Many have returned to say that they wish they had paid more attention to their sophomore course on the developing world. I do think that the Internet in some way has linked the students with other parts of the world in a way that was not possible before. The media in general also gives the students a verbal and visual eye on the world, which is to say that newspaper reading is probably not in vogue any more than it was a decade ago, but the other means of communication are.



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JEAN JOHNSON: *How do you teach sophisticated Asian concepts in an age-appropriate way to students in middle school and high school?*

ALISON: Middle school students are at an awkward age in relation to their peers and their own development of their inner-awareness of self. They are quite willing to consider the concept of karma or the "right attitudes" of the Eightfold Path due to the intense interactions going on during lunch break and passing periods. I find that as we study Asian philosophies, the students eagerly grasp the ideas and want to know more. I often tell them I would like them to approach conflict in the classroom with the easy-going Daoist view, but I insist on running my class with the hierarchical Confucian model. I'm in charge and they're subordinate; well, at least I try.

COLLEEN: I think this is best accomplished through stories, analogies, metaphors, research, and projects. Often some of the students are Asian, and act as resources, or help to engender the interest of other students.

GWEN: Finding examples in the student's everyday lives is the best way for them to understand abstract ideas. It must be relevant to their lives or it becomes only a passing exoticism with little meaning. For example, when I teach the ideas of impermanence in Buddhism, the students cannot understand why anyone would want to give up their prized posses-

sions, friends, etc. I explain that it is not so much giving them up, but being able to place that friend in perspective with the rest of their lives. I will say, "have a great friend, but do not become so obsessed with that friend that you cannot live without him/her." It touches a lot of our students who have had to deal with moving to a new place several times in their lives.

I will have them imagine that they are body surfing on a stream with a very fast current. They become scared and want to hang onto a rounded rock they see downstream. They try to hold onto it, but their hands slip away and the current carries them onward as does life. I will ask them to apply these examples to the concept of impermanence: you can never hold onto the moment forever, but you can enjoy it and move on.

DON JOHNSON: *How do you try to fit Asia into the major world history themes such as cross-cultural borrowing, the spread of universal religions, and world trade?*

ALISON: Asia is inseparable from these major world history themes. Cross-cultural borrowing, or diffusion, is a great thematic approach to the topic of world history. Certainly the Silk Road is an ideal "vehicle" as there was trade occurring from the Han to the Mongol eras. Integrating Southeast Asia into the curriculum, as Long Beach has done, flows nicely following units on India and/or China.

One can see how migration and trade brought about the intermingling of rich traditions in the strategically placed region of Southeast Asia.

COLLEEN: How could you teach these concepts and not teach Asia? Think of all of the scientific inventions from both India and China, think of the Silk Route, think of the great philosophies and religions of Asia!

GWEN: Asia is vital throughout a world history course and must be seen as an equal partner in world history. Putting Asia in a world history context offers you the opportunity to view this area of the world, not as one where poverty-stricken developing countries exist (the stereotype many students have), but one where nations with incredibly rich histories and philosophies existed long before Western Civilization as we know it developed.

Likewise, the notion that Asian nations are not exotic places of traditionalism that should be held in time and space (capture the native) for all to view, but are vital societies that are important on the world stage. Furthermore, a world history course must view Asia not as one entity, but as many individual societies all interacting with each other and the rest of the world. Focusing on the idea of interaction throughout history may be a way to help eliminate the idea of initiator and responder that becomes such an unequal equation between the West and the rest of the world in the modern era. Asia has been intimately involved from the earliest of times when trade routes brought people into contact with one another and established the process of cross-cultural borrowing as peoples, religions, and goods met without reference to the East or West dominating this exchange.

JEAN JOHNSON: *What are some of the good comparisons that can be made in world history, such as Elizabeth I and Akbar? What would you stress about each comparison?*

ALISON: There are so many, but three

examples come to mind: The political behavior and moral lessons given by both Machiavelli's *Prince* and Kautilya's *Arthashastra*; Aesop's *Fables* and *Panchatantra* connections, and the ideal societies suggested by Plato and Confucius.

COLLEEN: I tend to think of great teachers such as the Buddha, Confucius, and Lao Tze as historical figures to be admired and imitated. I like to connect the Buddha, Akbar, Ashoka and Gandhi. My students are in awe of Gandhi! Comparisons with Mao Zedong seem as much in order as with other leaders, but surely if we put all the twentieth-century leaders on parade and voted for heroes, Gandhi would be a winner, and some of our Western leaders might not. Martin Luther King Jr., Steve Biko, and Nelson Mandela come to mind for favorable comparisons.

DON JOHNSON: *How can the AAS, and Education About Asia in particular, offer more support to teachers of world history and teachers in general?*

ALISON: It would be great if the regional and national meetings of the AAS would incorporate outreach activities into their respective areas. Collaboration with local school districts would offer insight into what the teachers need and would like to include in their curriculum. As has been found in the Seamless Education movement in Long Beach, when teachers and professors get together to form a dialogue, exciting things come out of it. California State University, Long Beach has teamed with Long Beach Unified School District to create courses which are specifically directed to teachers' needs. One such course is World History for Middle School Teachers. As most of the teachers have not had the breadth of training to cover the entire curriculum, this course is helpful to them in that a professor gives content knowledge while a mentor-teacher offers strategies for implementing that content into the classrooms in a grade-level

appropriate manner. University faculty find that such collaboratives offer them an opportunity to have a say and to be involved in a continuum of the education of students who eventually come into their classrooms.

COLLEEN: The last issues of *EAA* have been wonderful resources. I hope they publish more of the same! AAS should try to have more appeal to teachers through their regional meetings, Council of Conferences grants, perhaps reaching out more directly to the schools, particularly with recognized scholars sharing insights with teachers.

GWEN: Continuing to concentrate on world history themes which involve Asia and printing units/lesson plans that have actually worked "in the trenches" would be great support for teachers. We know from our trial-and-error approach this year that some lessons/units did not work at all well, but others proved very successful. A sharing of successful lessons throughout the country would be great. Maybe even a space for teachers to send in the titles of units/lessons with their e-mail addresses so an exchange can begin occurring this way would be helpful. In addition, build part of each issue around a world history theme or topic such as the Silk Road and offer curriculum ideas, bibliographical sources and places to obtain materials pertinent to various levels.

DON AND JEAN: *Thank you all for sharing your most creative thoughts on the daunting subject of integrating Asia into world history. We know that other teachers at all levels will find your insights valuable and that they will want to try some of your innovative teaching strategies themselves.* ■

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Complete bibliographical information for books and other resources that the teachers discussed in the prior interview are listed below.

BOOKS

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- ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**
- California History-Social Science framework
Web sites: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/board/history/rya.html> or <http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/standards.html>.
- Long Beach Unified School District Web site: <http://www.lbusd.k12.ca.us/welcome.htm>.
- The Teachers' Curriculum Institute, P.O. Box 57996, Palo Alto, CA 94303, <http://www.teachci.com/default.htm>.
- Wadley, Susan, and Priti Ramamurthy (eds). *Spotlight on Rāmāyana: An Enduring Tradition*. New York: The American Forum for Global Education, 1995. 120 Wall Street, Suite 2600, New York, N.Y. 10005, (212) 742-8232.