

EAA Interview with Lynn Parisi

Lynn Parisi, winner of the 1998 Association for Asian Studies Franklin Buchanan Prize for the Development of Curricular Materials, is an Associate Director of the Boulder, Colorado-based Social Science Education Consortium and Director of its Rocky Mountain Japan Project. Lynn, a national leader in Asian studies outreach for K-12 teachers, is also an innovative and incredibly productive educator. In the following interview with Lucien Ellington, Parisi addresses a wide range of issues that relate to teaching and learning about Asia.



Parisi offers an introduction to Chinese geography at a recent workshop.

Lucien: *Lynn, congratulations on winning the Buchanan Prize. Can you share with our readers how you became interested in Asia and, specifically, in educating K-12 teachers in Japanese and Asian studies?*

LYNN: Lucien, thank you; I'm honored to have received this award and to have the opportunity to talk with you and *Education About Asia* readers about the field of Asian studies outreach.

I suspect that my path into Asian studies is hardly unique. For me, the impetus was a Chinese history course I elected in college. I probably chose the course for convenience, but it was a watershed. It was the first non-Western studies course I had taken and it literally jolted me out of any assumptions about the world revolving around and responding to Western models and standards. I went on to a master's program in Asian studies with a focus in Chinese history, and then into the world of employment, which did not much value such a degree. I was interested in outreach, but outreach programs were limited to a few Title VI outreach centers.

There is actually a nice symmetry for me in receiving this award because, following graduate school, I wrote a letter to Franklin Buchanan. I didn't

know him but I knew *Focus on Asian Studies*, which he edited and published out of his center at Ohio State. Working on that journal seemed like a dream job, so I asked Professor Buchanan if he needed help or had any advice about similar jobs. He wrote back a very supportive letter, explaining that the journal was a small operation, but encouraging me to go into teaching and stay involved with the study of Asia. I did go into teaching, which, in turn, led to the opportunity to travel and study in China with the first U.S. Office of Education program for K-12 teachers in 1980. It was a fascinating time to be in China, witnessing Mao slogans being painted over on public buildings.

From China, I resigned from my teaching job back home and went to Taiwan. After two years traveling in Southeast Asia and teaching in Taiwan and Japan, I returned to the United States, where things had changed considerably for Asian outreach, particularly related to Japan. I was fortunate to join the Social Science Education Consortium, a private not-for-profit that encourages its staff to develop programs to address needs in K-12 social studies education. Encouraged and guided by people like Linda Wojtan and others who welcomed us as newcomers

in the field, my colleague Jacquelyn Johnson, and I developed a local educational program on Japan that was then funded by the United States-Japan Foundation as the Rocky Mountain Japan Project (RMJP).

Lucien: *I am sure that many of our readers are interested in knowing more about the curriculum series A Humanities Approach to Japanese History for which you received the Buchanan prize. What was the incentive for developing this series? Who is the intended audience? What are, in your opinion, particularly notable sections of the unit, and what feedback, if any, have you gotten about how teachers are using it in the classroom?*

LYNN: *A Humanities Approach to Japanese History* explores critical periods in Japanese history through an interdisciplinary approach. The series consists of self-contained units on the Tokugawa, Meiji, and Imperial periods. The curriculum project was conceived in the early 1990s as a response to the *California Framework for History and Social Science* and the draft version of the *National Standards for World History*. Both of these documents have been blueprints for reform in social studies-history education. Both called for more study of Japan

and also for more attention to the nature of history and historiography, multiple narratives, and the use of varied sources—including art and literature—as historical evidence. The *Framework* also emphasizes developing literacy in the humanities as well as history. Our goal was to use art and other visual source material, fiction, poetry, memoirs, as well as government documents and other primary sources as “texts” from which to construct a picture—or multiple pictures—of how Japanese have seen themselves and their world at different times.

We wanted students to explore how Japanese people saw events unfolding around them, what it was like to live at a certain time and place, as well as how we have come to understand these events and periods today. Another emphasis of the materials, particularly the Meiji and Imperial units, is the role of history as national memory and the potential for historical revision with new sources of evidence.

Personally, the Humanities series offered a new direction and challenge for me as a curriculum developer, which made it especially fun. Having worked on several introductory curriculum units on Japan, I really wanted to try developing more in-depth materials, and I

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have a particular interest in teaching history through art and literature stemming from my own experiences with a team-taught humanities course in my first teaching job.

A Humanities Approach to Japanese History was a collaborative two year project. Rocky Mountain Japan Project staff developed the Tokugawa and Meiji units, working with the Asian art and education staff at the Denver Art Museum. The Imperial Japan unit was developed by a team headed by Kathleen Woods Masalski of the Five College Center for East Asian Studies. Also essential in the collaboration were a project advisory board; a team of reviewers consisting of classroom teachers, outreach specialists, and university-based scholars; and teacher field-testers from across the country.

The units in the series are intended for grades 10–14. In one sense, the audience may be relatively small, since not many history teachers have the time in a crowded curriculum to go into depth on one or more periods of Japanese history. But, if you are going to use one country as a case study on which you spend more time in a survey course, why not Japan? If materials are available, teachers may have more incentive to make such a choice. And, of course, Tokugawa, Meiji, and early twentieth-century Japan did not exist in a vacuum; the stories of these periods tie to and parallel the history of the rest of the world.

Teachers report using the materials in many ways, adapting for their classrooms. Some teachers tell us they use selected lessons from the units to globalize their world and U.S. history

courses; English teachers report that the background essays and selected lessons provide a quick context for classroom discussion of the literature excerpts.

Lucien: *Lynn, I know we share a strong interest in promoting Asian studies in K-12 schools, not only through increasing classroom teachers' knowledge of Asia-related content and pedagogy, but also in creating a cadre of teachers who have in-depth experiences in Asian studies that substantially transcend one course or a study tour. Your curriculum units reflect this focus on in-depth study. The Rocky Mountain Japan Project summer institutes that you have directed over the past several years are another example of programming that addresses our mutual interest in in-depth study and the creation of teacher-leaders in*

Asian studies. Would you please comment on the issue of how to institutionalize Asian studies in the schools through programs for teachers who already have Asia experience?

LYNN: Looking over the period from the early 1980s to now, there have been many short-term study opportunities in Asia for teachers, including Fulbright Group Projects, the China and India Fulbrights, long-running programs like the Keizai Koho Center Fellowships Program, the regional and urban projects sponsored by the United States-Japan Foundation, and many special projects that involve study tours. Cumulatively, these study-tours have created, and continue to create, a large pool of teachers with strong interest in, and enthusiasm for, teaching about Asia. These teachers, and others who have taken advan-

FRANKLIN M. BUCHANAN PRIZE

Call for Submissions

The AAS Committee on Teaching About Asia (CTA) invites submissions for the Franklin M. Buchanan Prize, which is awarded annually to educators who develop educational materials dealing exclusively with one or more of the countries and cultures represented by the AAS. Submissions may be in any standard medium, and designed for any grade level, from elementary through adult. For the 1999 Prize, which will be awarded at the Annual Meeting of the AAS in March 1999, materials must have been published after January 1, 1997. Factual accuracy and likely impact upon the intended audience are criteria for the award.

The winner will receive a year's membership (including journals) to AAS and a book. For 1998, the winner is Lynn Parisi of the Rocky Mountain Japan Project at the Social Science Education Consortium, for the curriculum units *Japanese History Through the Humanities, Part I, Tokugawa Japan*, and *Part II, Meiji, Japan*. Honorable mentions went to Noren Lush, Linda Melton, and Eileen Tamura at the University of Hawaii for *China: Understanding its Past* and to Hazel Greenberg, Editor, *China: Traditions Old and New* (American Forum for Global Education).

Send submissions by December 1, 1998 to:

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tage of Asian studies programs in this country, can and do play important roles in raising awareness about Asian studies and integrating Asia into the curriculum, both key steps in the institutionalization process.

Most teachers who come back from a study tour are enthusiastic about sharing their experience and resources. These teachers take on roles in their school districts and regions as resource people and mentors. They create awareness in their schools, districts, and communities of the importance of Asia. By their own example, they encourage other teachers to apply for similar programs and in that way, can create a ripple effect that can lead to additional teachers in the district acquiring Asian experience. Teachers with a conviction that Asia is important in the world and in the classroom can encourage parent and school district support for curricular change.

Often, the teachers who spend their summers in professional development are already recognized as key people in their districts—the kind of people who are active on curriculum committees. But others who may not have contributed to curriculum policy formation at the district level may be invited to do so because of their experience, giving them new recognition and potential for helping to institutionalize Asia in the curriculum. In other words, teachers who are alumni of Asian studies programs of all kinds are not only teaching about Asia, they are doing outreach every day.

While experienced teachers are critical in promoting Asian studies in the schools, in reality a ripple effect doesn't always happen easily, and some teachers, of course, do not go on to study Asia more or change their teaching. I think one of the things that the many introducto-

ry study tours has done is create a need for more advanced staff development programs targeted to the growing number of educators with initial experience and study in and about Asia. Such programs should encourage and challenge those with beginning study of Asia to continue updating and expanding their knowledge and their teaching, help them network with other educators, and encourage them to exercise leadership. This isn't a new idea; outreach centers have offered such programming over the years. But I think the need is growing. I can offer some examples with which I am involved.

The Japan Studies Leadership Program, funded by the U.S.-Japan Foundation, is a national collaboration among RMJP, the East Asia Center at the University of Washington, and the Five College Center for East Asian Studies in Massachusetts. It is open to K-12 teachers who have taken part in formal study tours or academic programs in Japan and want to continue to study and improve their teaching about Japan.

In the context of this project, leadership comes from building on prior study of Japan by (1) spending a year engaged in discussion with other teachers, visiting scholars, and staff; and (2) reflection, revision, and enrichment of their own teaching about Japan. The goal is to develop replicable models of exemplary teaching about Japan appropriate for various levels of K-12 social studies. These teachers will share their units through an Internet web site and workshops.

We've also tried to incorporate a leadership component in our Japanese History through the Humanities summer institutes, which we began in 1996 with funding from the Center for Global Partnership. During these two-week programs, secondary history, literature, and

art teachers study a period in depth, working with scholars who are involved in cutting-edge research on that period. Teacher leadership comes into play as institute alumni plan and conduct a required workshop for other teachers during the following school year. Staff support the teachers in planning and conducting a minimum three-hour in-service for at least five other teachers who have a real opportunity to teach about Japanese history or humanities. By conducting these workshops in their districts, these teachers gain visibility and credibility as having special background in Japan studies. They are visible as resource people who can help other teachers, curriculum committees, and so on.

Lucien: *Lynn, I know that although you have worked primarily in Japanese studies outreach, you are now involved in a China-related project for school-teachers. Please describe this new initiative.*

LYNN: I'm very excited about SSEC's new China initiative, in part because it offers me a return to the study of China. More importantly, though, we have been receiving more and more inquiries about China teaching materials and professional development opportunities in China studies for teachers. While we always referred these inquiries to other projects around the country, we began to see a real need for a program that could more directly serve the teachers in our region.

It often seems that, due to time restrictions, teachers—or their school districts—take a “sample country” approach to the inclusion of East Asia in the curriculum. If the course is World Geography, the teacher may be in a position to focus on either China or Japan. I'd like to see that change, and I hope this project will help schools and teachers in our region move in that

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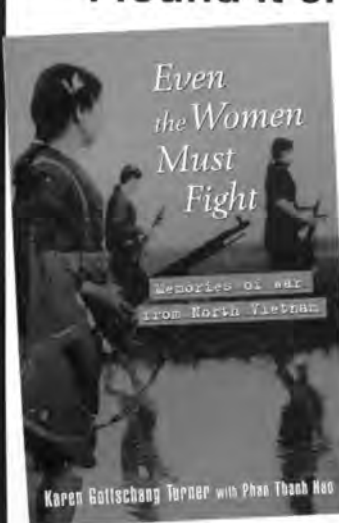
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direction. Of course, Asia should be allocated enough time, and supported with enough good materials, that the Asian curriculum can move beyond China and Japan. But for SSEC as a small organization, we wanted to start to broaden this focus, so we have expanded the Rocky Mountain Japan Project to become Teaching East Asia, and I am very grateful to The Freeman Foundation for enabling us to make this move.

Our China programming will follow models that have proven successful in our Japan studies outreach over the years. For example, we are beginning with a series of introductory workshops on China to raise awareness and provide supplementary curriculum materials to teachers in our region. Over several years, we will add more intensive staff development opportunities, including a China study tour and summer institutes in which participants in our earlier programs will contribute as master teachers.

Lucien: *Since you have been a national leader in educating K-12 teachers in Asian studies for quite a while and certainly have some perspective, please share with our readers your assessment of how K-12 Asian outreach has changed, and what are some challenges and opportunities those of us in this field face at the end of the century?*

LYNN: When I walked into the real world with a degree in Asian studies, there weren't many jobs that would draw upon that degree. As someone who taught in the 1970s, I think there was less formal opportunity to teach about Asia. Things seem very different now, though we still have a long way to go.

In the 1980s, a handful of private foundations joined the U.S. Department of Education International Research and Studies Program (Title VI) in funding

K-12 Asian studies outreach. There are now many ways for teachers to take part in a study tour of Japan and growing opportunities to study in China, Korea, and Southeast Asia. And, largely through the generosity of some private foundations, a range of national, state, and local educational outreach projects now complement the work done by university-based Title VI outreach centers.

I don't mean to say that we are luxuriating in programs and educational opportunities by any means, but teachers have more opportunity for learning about Asia than they did two decades ago. I think most teachers would say that they tend to spend more time on topics that they themselves know well and enjoy. So I think all this grassroots activity has had a definite impact on K-12 education about Asia, although it may be hard to measure. Large and small outreach programs, study tours for educators, along with Asian studies degree programs in higher education, and other factors, are making a difference in K-12 education.

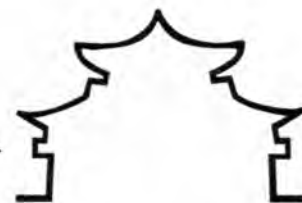
The challenge now may be to continue moving toward a more formalized place for Asia in the K-12 curriculum. We want and need high-quality, well-articulated teaching about Asia across the board, not just among teachers with a special interest or in communities with a special link to Asia. In this country, such an educational challenge requires multiple strategies and efforts, and both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Among other things, we need to continue to provide more introductory programs for educators—there are always new teachers entering the field. At the same time, there should be programs that challenge the teachers who have completed an initial study to learn more and to share their knowledge, not only through their classroom instruc-

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tion, but also through peer workshops and through participation in state and local curriculum committees. As we work towards this, I think we also need to work toward broader attention to the Asian Pacific region and multinational relationships.

Lucien: *Finally, please share any ideas you have on how Education About Asia might better serve the needs of teachers in both schools and colleges and universities since that is our charge from AAS.*

LYNN: I can't say enough good things about *Education About Asia*. It addresses issues relevant to elementary, secondary, and post-secondary teaching about Asia—every issue seems to have an entry targeted to the needs of those different groups of educators. It also balances

focus on East, Southeast, and South Asia. Your inclusion of curriculum activities and scholarly pieces by pre-college and college educators validates the fact that we are all students and teachers in the field and encourages partnerships across K-12 and higher education.

I think one of the things that *EAA* is doing well, and should continue to do, is help bridge the gap between elementary-secondary and college-university specialists in educating about Asia. I feel very fortunate that, while at a small organization, I am able to work closely with faculty at the University of Colorado who recognize the importance of outreach and are very supportive and generous with their time and expertise. I have to admit that sometimes when I call university faculty around the country to ask if they would

serve as faculty on summer institutes, I'm never sure what the reaction will be. We have worked with great people on our summer institutes, but we still often hear people say that they can't figure out how their research would be relevant to elementary-secondary teachers or instruction. While I understand this response, I think that if they work with pre-college teachers, they are impressed with their professionalism and ability to translate new scholarship for their students.

Can I leave you with a couple anecdotes? I've just finished reading the evaluation of our 1997 summer institutes, so the comments are fresh in my mind. These two comments are, to me, the reward both for reading through a twenty-five-page evaluation and for the work we do in outreach. One comment is from one of our institute faculty and relates to narrowing a gap between K-12 and higher education in Asian studies. She wrote, "I really enjoyed interacting with the teachers, even if I did get to do most of the talking. They were a great bunch to teach. I had my doubts about doing this sort of thing, but they have been completely dispelled and if I ever get another chance, I'll do it again."

The second comment is from an alumna of our Meiji institute, who, on her institute application noted that she has wanted to move away from her Eurocentric approach to world history by learning about Japan. For the program evaluation, she wrote, "Before I came to the institute last summer, I spent two days on Japan and even that was under protest, because I had no background. Now, I'm fighting to find ways to fit Japan into three weeks—and the kids are loving it. But, I still have to teach the rest of the world!" By the way, this teacher is studying in Japan this summer on a Keizai Koho Center Fellowship.

So, in closing I would just like to reiterate my impression that the field of Asian studies at the K-12 level continues to grow. We're in the midst of a very exciting time, with much work to be done but with many excellent people and good programs working on a variety of issues, all towards a common goal of integrating and institutionalizing quality Asian studies across U.S. education.

Thank you again, Lucien, for this opportunity to comment on the field. ■

Editor's Note:

The Buchanan Prize entry that is featured in the interview is:

Japanese History through the Humanities.

Part I: Tokugawa Japan: The Great Peace and the Development of Urban Culture, by Lynn Parisi, Sara Thompson, and Patterson Williams. Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, 1995. 146 pp./19 slides, \$37.95; and *Part II: Meiji Japan: The Dynamics of National Change*, by Lynn Parisi, Sara Thompson, and Anne Stevens. Boulder, CO: Social Science Education Consortium, 1995. 175 pp./22 slides, \$42.95. The units can be ordered from:

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