



Franklin Buchanan



Elgin Heinz

PIONEERS IN ASIAN STUDIES OUTREACH

EDITOR'S NOTE: Most people in Asian Studies outreach at the K-12 level are familiar with Frank Buchanan and Elgin Heinz. They, along with a few other people, created the field in the U.S. We are pleased to publish this essay by Elgin Heinz and the following interview with Frank Buchanan. Special thanks are due Lucia Pierce, David Grossman, Carol Marquis, Carol Murphey, Namji Kim Steinemann and Lynne "Tuckie" Yirchott for their assistance on this feature section.

Elgin Heinz's first contact with Asia was as the child of a faculty member at China's Tsing Hua College. His father was a mathematics instructor and department head of the original faculty. Elgin was literally born on campus in 1913. Most of the years between learning to read and entering the University of California at Berkeley were spent in the Tsing Hua library. In his own words, ". . . the library became my unsupervised school." Heinz graduated from Berkeley with degrees in philosophy and public speaking and later earned a graduate degree in history at San Francisco State University. He spent forty years teaching in the San Francisco Public Schools, at first teaching literature and later, geography and history. During his tenure as a teacher Heinz became nationally known for his efforts in assisting students and school teachers to learn more about Asia.

In addition to classroom teaching Heinz has been active in a number of organizations including the Association for Asian Studies, the Asia Society, the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, and the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations. He has also authored and edited numerous publications on teaching about Asia, including two widely used curriculum guides, *Opening Doors* and *Stepping Stones*.

Heinz has been the recipient of many awards including the National Council for Geographic Education's California Teacher of the Year and in 1997, the World Affairs Council of Northern California's Castile Award. Perhaps the award that most epitomized his ground breaking work in K-12 Asian Studies was the Association for Asian Studies Committee

on Teaching About Asia's 1987 recognition of Elgin Heinz for "Fifty Years of Innovative Teaching About Asia."

Elgin Heinz continues to serve as a consultant on the development of materials and methods for teaching about Asia. In the following essay Heinz addresses a subject common to all of us in Asian studies—regardless of the institution in which we teach.



1917. On the campus of Tsing Hua College, in a Chinese costume made by his amah.



1937. At Balboa H. S., San Francisco, with the Student Association president and vice-president.

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I was asked to make specific suggestions on teaching about other cultures for K–12 teachers and those who work with them, and to address obstacles I faced in my early years as a secondary school teacher.

“Specific” narrows the topic from shotgun blasts fired at random to recollections vivid enough to have stung when they hit me. For example, one day in my first year of teaching, a girl dropped a note on my desk as she left at the end of the class period: “Mr. Heinz, I hear you talking, but you aren’t saying anything to me.” Up to this point I had spent my life learning by being talked to by writers of books and, more recently, by university professors. Wasn’t this the way to teach? Other students seemed to enjoy listening to me. Apparently, it was only to these others that I had been talking.

How could I communicate with the note-leaver? Would changing “to” to “with” help? A framed homily I had seen on a librarian’s desk nagged me: “Tell me; I forget. Show me; I remember. Involve me; I understand.” This meant listening as well as talking, asking as well as answering, admitting that I didn’t know all the answers—but we could look them up. Gradually, I learned that any opinion had to be respected, but I insisted that it must be advanced as a hypothesis, subject to verification. Because this applied as stringently to me as to my students, it became a game that was not appreciated by all of my colleagues! Today, with the geometric acceleration of fact-data accumulation and its availability, it should be easier than when I started teaching to adopt a position of inviting hypotheses and making inferences rather than posing as authority standing on a textbook’s eternal verities.

While still the new teacher who could be plugged into any hole that appeared in the academic dike, I was assigned to World Geography (a course for students who, never having learned to read, couldn’t take courses that required a textbook). The regular teacher, called away by an emergency, reassured me before leaving, “Don’t worry, Elgin, I’ve already ordered all the films for the semester.” Films? Since the students were non-readers, he solved instructional problems by booking all of the travel and nature films in the district’s AV library and, over the years, had devised a little true-false, fill-in-the-blanks test for each.

The first arrived too late for preview, so I frantically scribbled notes as it ran. It ended before the period did; so, in desperation, I asked what they had seen. The answers astounded me. Except for those who had put their heads down and gone to sleep as soon as the lights went down, they had seen many details that I had missed, and they were willing to ask questions and express opinions about and even find meanings in what they saw. They weren’t stupid; they simply regarded reading and listening as less satisfactory than looking and observing as ways of learning.

It was a wonderful year! We learned that as long as the screen was shaded, the classroom could be lighted brightly enough to discourage sleepers and for students to take notes. We learned to show the film without sound, so that we could share and discuss what we saw instead of being told what we were supposed to see. We learned to use film in ten-minute sections so that there was time to discuss what we had seen and then rerun it before the end

TEACHING ABOUT OTHER CULTURES

by Elgin Heinz

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of the class period. We learned that films could be a great deal more than “infotainment” as we compared them and made inferences about the makers’ objectives and success with which they were achieved. All of this can be done today much more easily with videotape.

But we learned, too, that unless the purpose was to analyze movement or action, as in dance, slides were more effective than either film or videotape. A slide can show detail much more clearly than any film or tape, and can be studied at length without being burned up. Even more important, slides can be used to make direct, side-by-side comparisons. With two projectors, cultural differences that we had never been aware of suddenly became apparent. Better, with three projectors, we could avoid we-they polarizations. Since students were given the chance to discuss what they were looking at instead of looking for what captions or narrations said they were supposed to see, we seldom had time for more than a dozen slides in a class period.

We discovered that, with a close-up lens, we could make slides of any picture, chart, or map, of any size; that a 25-cent slide can replace a \$100 wall map, can be stored more easily, updated more often, and projected on a chalkboard where routes, physical features, and political developments can be drawn, erased, and redrawn. During the Communist takeover of China and replacement of the Kuomintang that made all existing maps and textbooks obsolete, I was able to bring Chinese views of what was happening into my classroom with slides made of pictures and maps in *China Reconstructs*, the only Chinese publication allowed to enter the United States.¹

Comparison is the foundation of all learning; it is when, in making comparisons, we see a connection between what we know and what we don't know, that we have learned something.²

Polarization, however, is an ever-present danger of two-way, we-they comparisons. The cultural norms with which we have grown up are our social habits, the natural, the “right,” if not, indeed, the only way to feel, think, act, and react. “Our” way, in any situation or circumstance, is the automatic instrument of evaluation, particularly when confronted with anything new or unfamiliar, whether an item of diet or belief (or, frequently, a combination of the two). Since we are usually unaware that a comparison is being made, it is essential that comparisons be made consciously so that they can be evaluated rationally instead of simply reacted to. This is why three-way comparisons (or more) are essential, so that we can look at similarities and differences, not “good” and “bad” features.

Another way of dealing with polarization is by using a continuum. When I found argumentative students driving themselves into polarized positions from which it would be difficult to retreat gracefully, I drew a line on the chalkboard, the ends representing the polarized extremes of the subject under discussion, and asked them to locate themselves on the line. (If the extremes are black and white, where does black leave off and white begin? With discussion, the positions usually become those of a darker or lighter shade of gray.) Compromises and shifts in position now become feasible.

My attempts to overcome obstacles during my first few years of teaching often created more problems than they solved. Enthusiasm for historical and cultural serendipity vanished without a trace in the sands of apathy and indifference. Whose apathy? First, the apathy of students, whose innate curiosity and sense of wonder had been eroded by generations of teachers who thought that their academic responsibilities had been fulfilled by force-feeding “facts” to their pupils. Second, colleagues pleased by students’ high scores

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on fact-retention tests, who resented my asking, “What do you expect your students to *do* with the information you impart?” Third, that of administrators and boards of education who feared the introduction of anything “controversial” into the course of study. History had to be certifiably dead before it was admissible. Controversy is anathema to bureaucrats, but a wonderful advantage of teaching history is that current controversies can be disguised as events that happened in twelfth-century Japan.

Did I have any support? Most notably, the PTA, parents whose children, at the dinner table, were still chewing on a classroom problem; parents who, when requisitions in quintuplicate failed to produce a needed item, dug into their own meager resources and bypassed the bureaucracy; the occasional administrator who risked position and promotion by responding to “Can we do this?” with “Try it and see if it works.” Activities that provided some involvement included artifact bingo, the chair game, and museum visits where, instead of listening to a docent’s lecture, students, in small groups, were given a map locating five or six items which, after investigation, were the subjects of whole-group discussion to which the docent was invited. How I envied the private school colleague who, when she wanted to take a class to the Asian Art Museum simply requisitioned the school’s bus!

Most important, however, was the appearance of SPICE (Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education) and equivalent outreach organizations. After the ignoble failure of my attempt to get fact-data colleagues to use Fenton’s inquiry methods and materials, I realized the need to get myself and everyone else possible involved in participatory preparatory workshops. Criticisms of the social studies standards that incorporate the achievements of this outreach, demanding more “content,” show that critical mass has not yet been attained.

Sadly, funding for education has been reduced in my state, California, where there are now more billionaires than there were millionaires a generation ago and where it is cheaper, but less important, to keep a person in school than in prison. But, from the “half full” view, we have reached the point after two generations that, when I started teaching, I thought would take three.

When I started teaching, the chalkboard was still *the* visual aid, and I struggled to get library cards that would enable students to do research beyond copying articles out of an encyclopedia. Today, we are overwhelmed with materials in quantities that defy evaluation. “Interactive” games challenge competitive students and issue 151 of the American Forum for Global Education newsletter has a three-page listing of Web sites for world history, open to any student who can read.³

“. . . who can read.” Educators get into acrimonious arguments about adopting one system or another. Sensible teachers use whatever works for whichever students whenever it is appropriate. *Any* system will work if the teacher is enthusiastic and the students have a sense of involvement. *Any* system will fail when it becomes a bureaucratically mandated routine. I taught long enough to see the same alternative systems go through several cycles of initial enthusiasm and sense of involvement that gradually ebbed with routine repetition until dissatisfaction prevailed and a “new” system was introduced, reviving enthusiasm and a sense of involvement. A complete cycle usually took about eight to twelve years.

The Asian studies outreach programs succeeded spectacularly, and will continue to do so, with teachers who are enthusiastic and who see ways of getting their students involved in their own learning by using outreach methods and materials. Teachers who

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saw the profession as an alternative to clerking at Macy's ignored the outreach offerings and will continue to do so until they can be convinced that using outreach programs is easier than what they are doing.

For me, the most effective way of teaching reading, maintaining my own enthusiasm, and encouraging my students' sense of involvement came through using literature of personal narrative, both fiction and nonfiction, as if teaching cultural anthropology. Who are these people with whom I can identify? What are their characteristics, personal and social? What circumstances of place and position influence their behavior?⁴ How would my behavior compare with theirs? Why? These questions encourage participation in the story and avoid getting trapped in discussions of "literary" values that are abstract and inapplicable to translated materials. (As an example, see how the short story, "After Seventeen Years," introduces us to Korean lifestyle and values.)⁵

Every event, past, present, and imagined future, occurs at an intersection of place (geography) and time (history) in a cultural envelope or context. "A Cartographic Route to World History" is an example of my use of this conceptualization, and "Whose Reality Is Really Real?" is its extension into the realm of values and beliefs.⁶ ■

NOTES

1. Soon after assuming control, the People's Republic of China started publishing *China Reconstructs*, a monthly magazine designed to show the non-Chinese world how rapidly the people were advancing, economically and socially, under Communist leadership. When individual wealth became admirable, the magazine's focus shifted from accounts of individual heroes who advanced the collective welfare to individual entrepreneurs. Advertising appeared, and the magazine's name was changed to *China Today*. It is fascinating to compare early with recent issues. Subscriptions to this and other Chinese publications are available through China Books & Periodicals, 2929 24th Street, San Francisco, CA, 94110-4126.
2. James Burke, *Connections* (Little, Brown & Company, 1978). *The Day the Universe Changed* (Little, Brown & Company, 1985). As companion volumes to the PBS TV series, these wonderful books are built on the premises that (1) change is the only constant; (2) human changes of the environment are accelerating in magnitude, frequency, interaction, and irrevocability; and (3) knowledge is a human artifact; when human perceptions of reality are changed by knowledge (whether accurate or not), reality changes. As a teacher of world history, particularly as it incorporates Asia, I accompanied these premises with the dictum summarized by Marion Brady, "The primary function of historical study is to clarify the assumptions that structure our perceptions of reality" (*Social Education*, February 1988, p. 85).
3. "Major Electronic Resources For World History" by Linda K. Brown appeared in the newsletter *Issues in Global Education*, #151. The newsletter is published bimonthly by The American Forum for Global Education. It is available on-line at their Web site, <http://www.globaled.org>.
4. Chitra B. Divakaruni, "Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter," *Atlantic Monthly*, April 1998. Mrs. Dutta, a widow, brings her traditional habits and values when she comes to live with her married daughter in the U.S.
5. James and Cheryl Harstad, eds. *Asian-Pacific Literature*, volume 2, Hawaii State Department of Education, 1981. A very useful collection of personal stories and poems revealing life styles and value systems of the peoples of Asia and the Pacific, treated by the Harstads, alas, as "literature" although obviously not written as such, and any accidentally literary values destroyed by translation into English.
6. "A Cartographic Route to World History" and "Whose Reality Is Really Real?" are not publications; they are titles of workshop presentations of two of my favorite themes. The first encourages teachers and students to see history as a seamless web of inseparable geography and history. U.S. history, for example, doesn't make sense except as part of world history. "Whose Reality" starts with the story of the six blind beggars describing an elephant, defining it in terms of the part they touched, and quarreling because their perceptions differed.