The ASIANetwork: A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies

By Marianna Presler McImey

As its beginning, the purpose of the ASIANetwork was simple enough: to increase the exchange of students and faculty. Second, World War, contacts with and interest in Asian affairs had burgeoned, and a corresponding expansion of positions in higher education insured that Asian Studies would reach into the domain of private liberal arts colleges. The concurrent formation of regional associations of liberal arts colleges established the notion that a pooling of resources would expand opportunities for faculty and students to travel and study. The idea of an association of liberal arts colleges to promote the study of Asia on their own campuses followed in line with all of these promising developments.

Along with opportunity went needs. These needs comprise the three E’s of Asian Studies: expansion, enrichment, and extension. Often Asians at liberal arts colleges were solitary figures. The acquisition of financial resources and personnel—by means of a development campaign, grants to retool faculty, or even the creation of part-time positions—would “bow” to challenge for Asian Studies. In particular, the provision of language training emerged as a goal for expansion. Liberal Studies, which have been in many levels, but primarily it meant keeping faculty in touch with a network of professionals concerned with teaching and learning. Teaching techniques employing textual sources, films, videos, and role-playing could be employed. New subjects could be folded into existing programs. The Internet, the fax machine, the newsletter, and the annual conference could help to construct and maintain a communication among historians, linguists, musicologists, sociologists, economists, and philosophers.

The experiences of students could be solicited and used to illustrate valuable projects. Finally, the expansion of learning about Asia could take the form of travel opportunities, foreign study programs, and the availability of visiting scholars, politicians, and business executives from overseas. Here was an agenda displaying variety and complexity of the issues.

In 1992, this agenda was clarified in two Asian Studies conferences of liberal arts colleges, one hosted by St. Andrews College and another organized by Colorado College and the Japan Study Program of Earlham College. The two groups merged in 1993 to form the ASIANetwork, A Consortium of Liberal Arts Colleges to Promote Asian Studies, an organization now affiliated with the Association for Asian Studies.

The ASIANetwork Conference

The principal assembly of the organization is the ASIANetwork Conference, held annually in April and attended by faculty from liberal arts colleges and universities throughout North America and Asia. The ASIANetwork focuses its mission on teaching. Keynotes have included Perry Link, a professor of Chinese language teaching at Harvard University, whose work on the impact of the Cultural Revolution on contemporary Chinese society has been widely reported. Keynote speakers at the ASIANetwork Conference have included leading scholars in Chinese studies, covering a wide range of topics from the history of Chinese literature to contemporary Chinese society. These speakers, along with other invited experts, provide valuable insights into various aspects of Chinese culture and society. The conference is designed to foster collaboration among scholars and educators, creating a community of practice that supports ongoing research and teaching in the field of Chinese studies. The ASIANetwork Conference is a key event for anyone interested in Chinese studies, offering a unique opportunity to engage with leading experts and network with peers in the field.

Teaching

Zelioff’s discussion of a successful teaching technique underscores the ASIANetwork’s goal to promote the professional development of Asian Studies educators. He describes his experience with a group of faculty at 150 faculty who are affiliated with the ASIANetwork, and how the ASIANetwork Conference, held annually in April and attended by faculty from liberal arts colleges and universities throughout North America and Asia, has been a valuable resource for him.

The ASIANetwork promotes excellence in teaching, and the ASIANetwork Conference is an annual event that brings together educators from across the country to share their experiences and learn from one another. It is a place where educators can connect with colleagues and learn from each other’s practices and experiences. The conference is designed to foster collaboration among scholars and educators, creating a community of practice that supports ongoing research and teaching in the field of Asian Studies.

Language Study

The ASIANetwork provides a direct line to the Chinese language, which is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. The ASIANetwork Conference is a key event for anyone interested in Chinese studies, offering a unique opportunity to engage with leading experts and network with peers in the field. The ASIANetwork Conference is a key event for anyone interested in Chinese studies, offering a unique opportunity to engage with leading experts and network with peers in the field. The ASIANetwork promotes excellence in teaching, and the ASIANetwork Conference is an annual event that brings together educators from across the country to share their experiences and learn from one another. It is a place where educators can connect with colleagues and learn from each other’s practices and experiences. The conference is designed to foster collaboration among scholars and educators, creating a community of practice that supports ongoing research and teaching in the field of Asian Studies.
The experience of study abroad programs in Asia has encouraged ASIANetwork members to consider cooperating more closely with other Asian-affiliated institutions with different experiences or sponsorship rather than duplicating limited resources. As part of this initiative, the ASIANetwork will publish a directory of such institutions to which members either sponsor or participate in.

The ASIANetwork Consultancy
A grant from the Henry Luce Foun-
dation in 1994 established the ASIA-
network’s Consultancy Program. The Consultancy Program offers distinct opportunities for planning that relate very specifically to a given campus.

In addition, student/faculty task forces represent many stages in the evolution of Asian Studies programs. Some, such as the Asian Studies program at Wittenberg Uni-
versity, celebrating its Silver Anniversary in 1995, are well established. Wittenberg is the founder of a national honor society, Epistemic Alpha Sigma, to recognize stu-
dents of exceptional academic achieve-
ment in the area of East Asia. The college’s students edit and publish The East Asian Studies Journal, the only undergraduate journal of its kind for Asian Studies.

When Eckerd College was founded in 1963, the Asian Studies program offered a course in modern Chinese Civilization was required of all students. Recently, a resurgence of interest in inter-
national and comparative fields of study has generated interest in ASIANetworks and National Consultancies. Eckerd College is one of the many institutions which have been asked which one of the many institutions which have been asked if they have a plan to update and expand their East Asian Studies program. The college has initiated a major program in East Asian Studies which has received extensive media coverage.

The ASIANetwork Consultancy considers ways to stimulate Asian culture into all of the college’s curriculum. Faculty members are encouraged to collaborate with other faculty, along with consultants Gregory Gulfin, Pacific Lutheran University, and John Myers, Simon’s Rock College of Bard, examine ways to foster cross-cultural understanding, pinpoint new innovations in teaching Asian culture, and center on the fine arts in undergraduate education. Illinois Wesleyan University has decided to establish a minor in Asian Studies, and to accomplish this goal, faculty will retain in Asian Studies fields. Consultants Van Symons, Augustana College, and Madeline Chiu, Kalamazoo College, participate in the discussion on developing priorities and long-range planning and in coordinating the new minor fields with the existing International Studies program.

Madeline Chiu, Consultancy Coordina-
tor, summarizes the first year’s work: “The ASIANetwork consults share a common background with the Asian Studies faculty members or those struggling for the Asian Studies causes, of the host institutions. Their visits help bolster the positions of the Asian Studies faculty and validate their efforts, encourage them to consolidate and implementing these perspectives.”

Constructing Teen Tokyo: Museums and Teaching About Asia

By Elaine Vukov

Teen Tokyo: Youth and Popular Culture, an exhibit at the Children’s Museum in Boston, Massachusetts, represents the coming of age in contemporary Tokyo from the perspective of the teenager. Although designed for young adults, it is instructive for all age groups. For those laboring in the past, the exhibit evokes customs and manners that may be experienced only in Japanese culture. For people who have never visited Japan, the exhibit offers a context to view everyday life and to understand some basic aspects of contemporaneous life in Japan. Included in the exhibit are a Tokyo subway car, a life-size recreation of a teenager’s bedroom, and a stage where museum visitors can try their singing ability using a karaoke machine.

Teen Tokyo is an excellent case study of museum practices and educational approaches to representing Asia in museums. Curators and educators are faced with a recurring question: museum exhibition from whose perspective is an exhibit created? How much can the curators be expected to do to make sure that museum visitors, and especially the audience and how much should they be expected to be taken into consideration in developing exhibitions? Teen Tokyo offers answers to these questions with notable success.

To help investigate some of the peda-

gogical issues behind this highly regarded exhibit, Elaine Vukov, Director of Educa-
tion at the Children’s Museum in New York, recently interviewed the curation of the exhibit, Leslie Bedford. For-

tunately, at the Children’s Museum, Leslie is now at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

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