

The National Consortium for Teaching about Asia

By Madge Huntington

Teachers of world history, geography, and culture have a remarkable opportunity to participate in seminars and study tours with the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA). In addition to learning a great deal and becoming better equipped to teach about Asia with confidence and enthusiasm, those who complete these seminars earn points toward professional development, and receive both in-service credits and a stipend when they have completed the seminar. In some cases, teachers can earn graduate credits. Their schools also receive materials on Asia.

What is the NCTA? Begun in 1998, it is a multiyear national effort offering professional development for teaching about Asia, currently operating in forty-four states, with a projected lifetime of ten years. The consortium's work is supported by the Freeman Foundation. NCTA seminars offer K–12 teachers a way to engage in in-depth study of Asia while working with local scholars and resource specialists. NCTA seminars focus primarily on China, Japan, and Korea. Participants attend thirty hours of seminars, then have the option to apply for NCTA-funded study tours to East Asia.

The long-term goal of the program is to encourage permanent inclusion of Asia in the K–12 curriculum of American schools. The NCTA's strategy is to focus on grassroots professional development, working directly with teachers at the local and school district level. This approach puts into practice research that has identified the critical role teachers play in educational change. Teachers with a sound knowledge base on a subject tend to spend more time and teach more creatively about it, regardless of what each state's curriculum guidelines, standards, requirements, or textbooks include. If Asia is to find a place in American classrooms, teachers need to know about Asia and feel informed and motivated to teach about it.

Already, close to 3,000 teachers have taken NCTA seminars and the response has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic:

"Projects like this are great because many times textbooks are thrown at teachers and you are told to teach. This opportunity added to what I know and gave me new insights into how to better teach it."

"Teachers want to be informed. We only teach what we understand and are comfortable with."

In sum, it turns out that Asia, once you know about it, can fit in almost anywhere: "Before taking this seminar, I never even thought of putting Asian studies in my courses. Now I'm looking for opportunities to bring them in."

"This [Asia] is so important! Why didn't anyone tell me about it before?"

The NCTA Web site (www.nctasia.org) provides detailed information about NCTA activities in each state and cites each state's educational policies and guidelines. It also provides excellent links to resources for teaching about Asia, and more.

The NCTA program is in step with the growing eagerness among Americans, as documented in numerous reports and apparent in media presentations, to know and understand more about Asia. Anyone following the news today knows that Americans are more than ever connected to what happens within and among Asian nations.

One American foundation that feels strongly about the need for Americans to know more about Asia is the Freeman Foundation, which, in recent years, has generously funded Asia-related educational efforts. In 1997, the Foundation posed a challenge to educators to make education about East Asia a permanent part of every American's pre-collegiate education. Educators working from East Asian centers in universities across the United States had spent, prior to 1997, two or more decades producing resource materials and running workshops for teachers on East Asia. Five of these centers came together, in response to the Foundation's challenge, to propose the formation of a national collaborative effort to further education in K–12 classrooms. In 1998, the Freeman Foundation accepted their proposal and the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia was launched. The five centers are: Five College Center for East Asian Studies, in Northampton, Massachusetts; the Weatherhead East Asian Institute at Columbia University in New York; the East Asian Studies Center of Indiana University at Bloomington; the Program for Teaching East Asia at the University of Colorado in Boulder; and the East Asia Resource Center at the University of Washington in Seattle.

In deciding where to offer initial seminars, the NCTA selected states where it seemed that the seminars and study tours would fill a need. They sought out other colleagues and institutions to work with NCTA as seminar leaders or outside speakers. Seminar leaders draw on local experts on Asia to bring outside speakers to the seminars, take field trips to museums or other places where resources for teaching about Asia might appear, and inform the seminar participants of Asian-related events, resources, and celebrations in their region.

The seminars have been carefully designed to fit into current guidelines and curriculum standards for world history, world geography, and social studies especially. Teacher participants attend seminars of thirty hours duration, the majority of which are divided into ten three-hour sessions given over a span of months—once a week or every two or three weeks, depending on individual schedules and travel time. The syllabi include the geo-

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NCTA Annual Conference, Indianapolis 2002.



NCTA Study Tour participant receiving diploma after week stay at Beida, Beijing.



NCTA Study Tour in China. Photo Courtesy of Robert Richter.

ographies, languages, and early civilizations of China, Japan, and Korea, and move through history to the present. Seminar leaders choose one or two texts to form the core bibliography. Other texts, primary source readings, literature anthologies, maps, calligraphic materials, curriculum units, videos, and films, along with field trips to museums fill out the reading assignments. Participants receive a collection of these materials for their school libraries. Invited speakers include academic and/or curatorial experts on East Asia who work and live in the seminar area. Best practices in pedagogy are modeled by seminar leaders or invited teachers. Participants are required to complete an average of three assignments in the course of the seminar. The aim of these assignments is to help seminar participants retain the information presented and discussed in the seminar sessions by using it to fulfill the assignments.

A follow-up session with the seminar leader completes the professional training requirement and qualifies participants to receive stipends and choose resource materials for their school libraries. The end of the formal seminar is not the culmination of group energy and contact. The collegiality and sense of shared purpose that builds up between seminar members carries forward as alumni continue to meet for field trips, for further exchanges on teaching about Asia, or to feast together in celebration of, for instance, the Lunar New Year.

Participation in seminars and follow-up activities has shown that the NCTA alumni are ready to bring new knowledge into their classrooms and that they have found the whole experience immensely valuable. Testimonials such as the following are common on seminar evaluation forms:

“Great seminar! This has been worth all the time and effort.”

“The resources and teaching strategies have allowed me to grow professionally and to gain confidence in my ability to teach about Asia.”

“I feel I grew a great deal professionally. From sheer exposure to new ideas, detailed history, group discussions, and activities, my knowledge of China and Japan has grown tenfold.”

“This seminar gave me many new ideas and inspired me to learn more about the comparisons I can make between the history of the U.S. and the histories of China and Japan.”

The NCTA summer study tours for alumni were initiated in the summer of 2001. Tours have gone to China, Japan, and Korea; others have focused on a single country. Some tours include teachers from only one state, some have teachers from several. Reunions have begun to take place to enable the travelers to exchange ideas on bringing their experiences into the classroom. As with the seminars, study tours have elicited an enthusiastic response:

“The curriculum I developed as a result of the NCTA seminar and study tour has been shared . . . with Indiana University [and] the University of California at Santa Barbara. My colleagues have also used these lesson plans (Shintōism and Buddhism) in their classes.”



Visiting a Japanese school during a calligraphy lesson.



NCTA Study Tour visit to a silk factory in China.



NCTA Study Tour includes a demonstration of a Japanese tea ceremony.

“Korea was an unexpected delight. I must confess to having been woefully ignorant about this country . . . I was delighted by the vitality of the Korean people as illustrated in their art, dance, and architecture. This is a country I want to read and learn more about, especially its history.”

Because the NCTA seminar training can be applied to the teaching of history, geography, culture, literature, and art, the NCTA participates in the national meetings of several educational organizations and seeks collaboration with their state and local affiliates, including: the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the National Council of Geographic Educators (NCGE), the World History Association (WHA), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). This collaboration and networking reaches educators at several levels who might not otherwise know of the NCTA and encourages them to become involved. Many NCTA seminar leaders are also leaders in these organizations.

The NCTA holds its annual national meeting in the fall in Indianapolis. Seminar leaders, national directors and their associates, and invited speakers meet in plenary sessions and small groups to discuss ways to broaden the reach and impact of NCTA through recruitment strategies, new resources, follow-up activities, study tours, and initiatives in new areas. New strategies are considered, such as working with the educational, business, and political leaders in a state to reinforce what teachers are bringing to the classrooms from their NCTA seminars, and the promotion of direct school-to-school exchange between American and Asian schools.

While the NCTA reaches out to more teachers interested in taking its seminars, it is also engaging others in the educational

system. Principals, supervisors, and others involved in state education policies are beginning to notice the classroom effects of NCTA training, while at the same time becoming aware of the importance of Asia in the school curriculum. They are joining the effort to establish a permanent place for Asia in the school curriculum. This is wonderfully encouraging to all those who have joined in the NCTA effort. Readers of this article are encouraged to add their strengths to make this a truly successful enterprise, a landmark in educational change.

For further information, please go to www.nctasia.org or contact the NCTA coordinating site directors:

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Institutions, schools and school districts, and organizations involved in National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) programs

This list, while in formation and incomplete in details, illustrates the range of those participating in NCTA programs.

NCTA NATIONAL COORDINATING SITES

Columbia University, NY
Five College Center for East Asian Studies,
Five Colleges, Inc., MA
Indiana University
University of Colorado
University of Washington

REGIONAL AND STATE COORDINATING SITES

China Institute, NY
Clark University, MA
Furman University, SC
Los Angeles Center for International Studies
at Loyola Marymount University
New Hampshire Humanities Center
Princeton University, NJ
Rhode Island College
Rice University, TX
SPICE, Institute for International Studies,
Stanford University, CA
University of California, Los Angeles
University of Florida
University of Kansas
University of Pittsburgh
University of North Carolina
University of Oklahoma
University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
World Affairs Council of Northern
California

SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Adams Five Star School District, CO
Ardsley Union Free School District, NY
Bangor High School, ME
Belchertown High School, MA
Boulder Valley School District, Colorado
Broken Arrow Public Schools, OK
Cherry Hill Schools, NJ
DeKalb County School System, GA
Emerson Junior-Senior High School, NJ
Grant Wood Area Education Agency, IA
Hacienda La Puente Unified School District
(USD), CA
Heartland Area Education Agency, IA
Holland Hall School, OK
Jenks Public Schools, OK
Jericho Union Free School District, NY
Jordan School District, UT
Lincoln Public Schools, NE

Littleton School District, Colorado
Long Beach Schools, CA
Los Angeles Unified School District, CA
Northwest Arkansas Educational
Cooperative
Oakland School System, CA
Oklahoma City Public Schools, OK
Omaha Public Schools, NE
Park Tudor Schools, Indianapolis, IN
Poudre School District, CO
Rowland Heights USD, CA
San Francisco Unified District, CA
Sapulpa Public Schools, OK
Springfield School System, MA
Syosset Central School District, NY
Tulsa Public Schools, OK
Walnut Valley USD, CA
Yonkers Public School, NY

ORGANIZATIONS

Adult Education Center, Hartford, CT
Connecticut Department of Education
Connecticut Geographic Alliance
East-West Center, HI
Experiment in International Living, VT
Houston Center of the Asia Society
Indiana Department of Education
International Division, Oklahoma
Department of Commerce
Iowa Council for the Social Studies
Maine Humanities Council
Maine World Affairs Council
Massachusetts Department of Education
New Hampshire Geographic Alliance
New Hampshire Humanities Council
North Carolina Center for International
Understanding
Oklahoma Department of Education
Tulsa Global Alliance, OK
Virginia Department of Education, Office
of International Education
Windham Supervisory Union, VT
World Affairs Council of Richmond, VA
World Affairs Council of Philadelphia, PA
World Affairs Council of Washington

Colleges and universities

Arizona State University
Augustana College, IL
Bowdoin College, ME
Brooklyn College of the City University of
New York

Carroll College, MT
Cape Cod Community College, MA
Center for East Asian Studies and the
Asia/Pacific Research Center, Stanford
University, CA
Cleveland State University, OH
Colorado College
Croft Institute of International Studies,
University of Mississippi
Duke University, NC
Emory University, GA
Fairfield University, CT
Kansas State University
Keene State College, NH
Lasell College, MA
Lewis-Clark State College, ID
Loyola University, LA
Macalester College, MN
Mercyhurst College, PA
Michigan State University
Middle Tennessee State University
Montclair State University, NJ
Nazareth College, NY
Northeastern State University, OK
Rose State College, OK
Slippery Rock University, PA
Trinity University, TX
University of Alabama
University of Arkansas
University of Central Oklahoma
University of Georgia
University of Hartford, CT
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Maryland, College Park
University of Michigan
University of Montana
University of Nevada at Las Vegas
University of Chicago, IL
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville, KY
University of Pittsburgh, PA
University of North Texas
University of Southern California
University of Toledo, OH
Virginia Commonwealth University
Wesleyan University, CT
West Virginia University-Shepherdstown
Wittenberg University, OH

For further information, please go to the
NCTA Web site: <http://www.nctasia.org> ■

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