As the Acting Director of the Asian Studies Program at Rice University, I would like to welcome you all to this, our first newsletter. Its rich content will ably witness to the health, vitality, and sheer enthusiasm of Asian Studies here at Rice. It is our sincere hope that each of you will take something of value away from your reading of the following brief essays, each of which, in its own way, brings home both the intellectual significance and the contemporary relevance of Asian Studies at Rice.

Special words of thanks are due to Rich Smith and Sarah Thal. Rich, the Program Director, has stepped in to help in every way, even though he is officially on a well-deserved sabbatical. Sarah was the Acting Director last semester and energetically pushed forward this project. Thanks also to all those who wrote for us (David Gray, Marshall McArthur, Sara Thal, Rich Smith, and Dee Garza), and especially to Dee Garza, our remarkable coordinator, co-worker, and espresso connoisseur, without whom nothing, including this newsletter, would likely get done, at least very well. Finally, a very special word of thanks goes to the Gee Family, whose generous gift to the Asian Studies program has made possible the publication and distribution of this newsletter.

A Note of Welcome from the Acting Director

The term “globalization” evokes for us the very epitome of modernity. In contrast to our world of just a generation ago, in which cultures often seemed completely enclosed by the boundaries of nation states, now the world seems very much more permeable. American stores are brimming with goods from around the world, and even small towns often have a fair selection of international cuisines. Meanwhile, one can conclude one’s visit to Beijing’s Forbidden City with lunch at an American fast food restaurant, and even the smallest towns in countries such as India often have thriving private schools dedicated to the teaching of English. Yet while “globalization” is indeed a hallmark of the present day, it is not just a modern phenomenon. While it has been accelerated by technological change, it is rooted in the distant past and has been a force of social and historical change for millennia.

Asian Studies as Global Studies

David B. Gray

Asia long played a central role in the globalization process. This is in part because the Eurasian landmass, horizontally aligned with the majority of its landmass included within temperate climatic zones, has encouraged communication in all of its forms, including the migration of peoples and the transmission of languages, culture and technologies. It also served as a link or bridge between the Earth’s far-flung continents. Europe, after all, is simply the Northwestern extension of the Asian landmass, which also links with Africa in the Southwest. The Northeastern tip of Asia is separated from the Americas by the narrow Bering Strait, which was the route taken by the Asian migrants.
who would become in time the ancestors of the Native Americans. Likewise, Asia extends to the Southeast via an extensive archipelago toward Australia, which likewise served as the route taken in the distant past by the ancestors of the Native Australians, and much later, by the Austronesians, who migrated from the mainland into the islands of South East Asia and the Pacific.

Asia has in fact long been a “global” space, the locus of not one but many of the world’s great civilizations, such as the Sumerian and Persian empires of the Middle East, the Mauryan and Gupta empires of India, and the Han empire in China. These civilizations did not exist in a vacuum but were interconnected, with many smaller but still important civilizations, growing up along the coastal and inland trade routes that criss-crossed the Asian landmass as well as the waterways that surround it, such as the Central Asia city states that flourished along the Silk Routes. Marco Polo, who spent two dozen years traveling in Asia (1271–95), was not the first person to have traversed the overland trade routes linking West and East Asia. These trade routes had been active for at least a millennium prior to Polo’s journey. The merchants who plied these routes conducted extensive trade in precious metals, silk and other textiles, spices, incense and other commodities between Rome in the West, the Persians and Kushans of West Asia and India, and the Chinese in the East. Beginning in Roman times at the latest, merchants also employed an ocean route linking North Africa and Arabia with India, Southeast Asia and China. Trade along this route reached a peak by the fifteenth century and was actually a rather exemplary model of open and free trade. Ironically, it was the Europeans who disrupted this trade, seeking to monopolize via force a trading system which often left them at a disadvantage, as demand in Europe for the products of Asia was far greater than the demand in Asia for European goods.

Mercants and their goods were not the only things that traveled these trade routes. Monks and priests traveled them as well, bringing with them not only their religions but other cultural traditions as well. Buddhism traversed Asia along the trade routes, and Hinduism spread from South India to Southeast Asia along the sea routes. With these religions came the cultural narratives of India. Hence the Mahabharata and Ramayana epics became culturally central in Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, elements of the Ramayana entered into popular Chinese narrative traditions, resulting in Wu Cheng-en’s sixteenth century novel Account of the Journey to the West (Xi-you-ji), immortalizing the figure of the monkey hero, a transformation of the Ramayana’s Hanuman. Other narrative traditions traveled West; Indian story collections were translated into Persian and thence into European languages, and elements of them ended up in many far-flung texts, from the Arabian Nights and Aesop’s Fables to Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, Gottfried von Strassburg’s Tristan und Isolde, and the narrative portions of the New Testament. Meanwhile, Tibetans in Central Asia heard about Caesar of Rome, perhaps from the Nestorian Christian or Jewish merchants who traversed the silk routes, and transformed him into Gesar, the hero of their national epic.

The breakdown of Asia into regional units reflecting modern national identities may be appropriate for the study of modernity, but it obscures a great deal when we delve deeper into the past, where these national identities are often no longer relevant. In spite of this, however, they are often anachronistically projected back into the past, distorting our understanding of ancient history and cultures, and often leading us to downplay the links between civilizations. Asian Studies can help remedy this cultural myopia, insofar as we actively seek to adopt an interregional and interdisciplinary approach. It can do this by bringing to our attention the interdependence of peoples in both the modern and pre-modern eras. In other words, we are what we are today due to global processes of change that have transformed the world, and many of these processes were rooted in or strongly present in Asia. And as globalization is not a novel process, but one with premodern antecedents, it behooves us to study Asian histories and cultures of the ancient, medieval and modern periods, since doing so may contribute to our understanding of the globalization in its modern manifestations. To study Asia, then, is to study ourselves, to learn more about the world today and our roles in it. And this is true, I believe, regardless of our ethnic identities.
To many students at Rice, Asia seems far, far away. Studying science and engineering, English and American history, they can easily lose track of the broader, global context in which we increasingly live. Surrounded by the popular media, students, too, can easily see Asia as irrelevant to their daily lives—the exotic locale of popular films, a heritage wholly different from what it means to be a modern “American.”

Thus, a central challenge in teaching Asian Studies at Rice is to make Asia relevant to students’ concerns. How do we connect Asian thought, literature, history and politics to the lives of Rice undergraduates? How do we help them connect what they learn in class to their everyday lives?

This is, in large part, the purpose of the core Asian Studies course—ASIA 211: Introduction to Asian Civilizations—which introduces many Rice students to the study of Asia and is required of every Asian Studies major. Taught each year by three different faculty members specializing in different disciplines and geographic areas within Asia, the course introduces students to the diversity of Asia while helping them think critically from a variety of perspectives. This year, Anne Klein (a scholar of Tibetan religion), Sarah Thal (a historian of modern Japan), and Kerry Ward (a historian of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean) designed the course to focus on the connections both between countries within Asia and between Asia and the rest of the world. The result? “Asia in Houston.”

Students in ASIA 211 formed small groups to explore the Asian community in Houston, then presented their findings and reported to the class. After learning about the Vedas and Buddhism, Confucius’ Analects and the Tao Te Ching, as well as broader history and culture, students set out to compare this knowledge with what they could find in the vibrant Asian communities in Houston. They visited Buddhist temples and Islamic mosques, Korean restaurants and Chinese grocery stores, the Indonesian consulate and a Thai boxing school.

In the process, students suddenly looked at Houston, Asia, and themselves in new ways. While investigating the differences among the various Vietnamese restaurants in the area, for instance, one group came to appreciate the importance of regional variation and the availability of natural resources in shaping local cuisines. “I had not realized how many different kinds of rice there are!” wrote one student.

Another group, given the opportunity to play gamelan music at the Indonesian consulate, found themselves in the midst of a unique auditory experience. They also learned a dramatic lesson when a student inadvertently stepped over one of the instruments instead of around it: as they later told the class, objects such as musical instruments that Americans usually see as inanimate may, in Indonesia, command the respect due a living human being. The students of ASIA 211 will now never forget that the rules of respect can differ dramatically between cultures.

Meanwhile, several groups, having visited Chinese, Tibetan, and Sri Lankan temples, came away with a clear appreciation of the many roles a religious institution can play. As they repeatedly remarked, Buddhist temples in Houston are, in many respects, as influenced by their current congregations as by their histories, with some catering to immigrant groups, others to interested non-Asians, and almost all to an increasingly assimilated, English-speaking generation of Asian-Americans.

For many students, this was their first hands-on experience of “Asia” outside of films, TV, or literature. For others, the “Asia in Houston” project offered a way to explore a different area than that with which they were already familiar. And for still others, it was a way to explore their relationship to their own heritages.

Indeed, the mix of students in each group contributed significantly to the learning experience. For Carolyn Choi, a student of Chinese heritage, visiting a Chinese grocery store in the company of non-Chinese-American friends prompted new insights into her own identity. Her fellow students, on entering the store, quickly noticed familiar brands among the unfamiliar offerings: “duck eggs next to Grade A Chicken Eggs, Blue Bell Ice Cream amidst freezers full of frozen buns.” Suddenly, Carolyn saw the store in a whole new light: “Before, I just looked at everything and figured [it] all belonged in the Chinese grocery store, but now I realized that it wasn’t a Chinese grocery store, but truly a Chinese-American grocery store,” she wrote. “Then I realized that I could draw a parallel between the grocery store and myself. I am very similar to the Chinese grocery store – upon first glance, I look Chinese, but upon looking beneath the surface, I am truly Chinese-American.”

Such insights—whether about cuisine, communities, or themselves—helped students recognize the great diversity, constant interaction, and consequent changes within what we so often lump together as a generalized “Asia.” Just as eating patterns changed when people came to the United States in the twentieth century, so too did Buddhism change when it entered Japan in the sixth century. Just as Chinese-Americans today can envision themselves as Chinese, American, or both, so too in ancient Southeast Asia could people simultaneously share in the political, cultural, and intellectual realms of India and Angkor.

As part of the core course in the Asian Studies Program at Rice, “Asia in Houston” thus helped students begin to understand “Asia in Asia” as well as Asia in the world.
Exploring the Continuum: Tantric Studies at Rice University

What is Tantra? Tantra is a Sanskrit term that means, literally, the “warp of the loom” or “continuum.” The term is commonly used to refer to a group of Asian mystical texts and especially practices that emphasize the underlying unity of all things, including thought and sensation, mind and body, sex and spirit. In its broadest sense, Tantra refers to a group of pan-Asian nondual religious traditions—from South Asian Hindu Tantra to Japanese Zen—that see the universe as a real manifestation of divine energies and consciousness that can be accessed through physical and mental ritual and various contemplative arts.

Currently at Rice, the research interests of four faculty members all converge on the study of Tantric traditions. This shared focus has created the core of an energetic, scholarly community of both faculty and students, including the largest concentration of graduate students in Asian religions ever accepted at Rice. Each of the four scholars—two faculty members in the Religious Studies department, a third in History, and a postdoctoral fellow in the Center for the Study of Cultures—specializes in a different geographical area and approaches the study of Tantra from a different perspective.

Anne Klein, Professor of Religious Studies here since 1989, studies the Tibetan Tantric traditions with an emphasis on the learning and discipline of mind and body. With her groundbreaking 1995 book, Meeting the Great Bliss Queen, Dr. Klein became the first scholar to open a dialogue between Tibetan Buddhist and Western theories of identity. More recently, she initiated and currently oversees the innovative digitalization of Tibetan Bon texts at Fondren Library, translates various Tibetan materials, and works with scholars of traditions around the world to promote the cross-cultural study of different religious conceptions of the body.

Jeffrey J. Kripal, who arrived at Rice this year as the Lynette S. Autry Associate Professor of Religious Studies, also focuses on the translation of Tantric traditions across cultures. Best known for Kali’s Child, his 1995 study of Tantric themes in the life and teachings of the Hindu saint Sri Ramakrishna, Dr. Kripal more recently published an analysis of the mystical and erotic experiences of scholars of mysticism themselves, his Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism (2001). He is presently researching the entrance of Asian modes of thought and contemplative practice into American culture via a history of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California, one of the more well-known American centers of East-West encounter and synthesis.

While Anne Klein and Jeffrey Kripal place Asian Tantric traditions in conversation with American thought and practice, David Gray, a Woodrow Wilson postdoctoral fellow in the Center for the Study of Cultures, focuses on Tantra as a tradition for conversation and connection within Asian cultures themselves. Working with a remarkable linguistic range in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese materials, Dr. Gray studies the historical development of Tantra across India, Tibet and China, focusing in part on the influence of Tantric discourse on the development of Asian political systems as a whole.

Sarah Thal, Assistant Professor of History, likewise highlights the historical and political dimensions of nondual ritual traditions, but in a more recent Japanese context. Her work on popular pilgrimage, Shinto, and the development of the modern state in nineteenth-century Japan focuses on the transition from a body- and ritual-focused understanding of politics and religion to a more cognitive understanding informed by the ideas of rationalism and belief that developed out of the European Enlightenment.

With these four scholars studying the religious traditions of India, Tibet, China, and Japan—as well as their connections to each other and to the United States—Rice currently offers its students a wealth of opportunities to explore the significance of ritual and mystical traditions both in Asia and America. Courses such as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (Kripal), Mysticism and Meditation in China (Gray), and The Knowing Body: Buddhism, Gender and the Social World (Klein) have captured the attention of undergraduates and introduced them to the theoretical and scholarly issues involved in studying rituals, texts, and history itself through the medium of the body as well as the mind. In this way, the study of Tantric traditions helps us cross the boundaries that seem so absolute in the everyday common sense of our time. We cross national borders, finding connections among
In addition to the many long-standing individual efforts by our faculty to promote Asian Studies in the Houston community (and beyond), we have recently established a regular institutional relationship with the National Consortium on Teaching about Asia (NCTA). Indeed, Rice now runs one of the NCTA’s most active regional centers, in close partnership with the Asian Outreach and Global Education program of the Center for Education (see http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~cteduc/asiaoutreach.html). Both of these programs have been directed since their inception (in 2000 and 1993, respectively) by Rich Smith.

One important manifestation of this partnership has been the offering of a series of 30-hour Faculty Development Institutes on East Asia designed primarily for Houston-area high school teachers. In the past these Institutes have focused primarily on the complex historical interaction between China, Korea and Japan from Neolithic times to the present. The two most distinctive features of Rice’s professional development programs for teachers are (1) an emphasis on visual images, and (2) an explicit interest in “world-making”—that is, the way different cultures (in this case, China, Japan and Korea) arrange “things,” ideas and activities into coherent systems of meaning across both space and time. The past two Institutes have been led by Rich Smith, with the assistance of various Asian Studies faculty, including Sarah Thal, Nanxiu Qian, and Steve Lewis.

In June of 2002—by virtue of their participation in one or another Faculty Development Institute, and after a rigorous competition involving evaluation by experts from other NCTA centers, twenty-two Texas teachers embarked upon an expenses-paid three-week field study focusing on the People’s Republic of China (PRC). These teachers, who were selected out of a pool of about 70 candidates, studied the interplay between “tradition” and “modernity” in various cities and rural areas of contemporary China, visiting important cultural and historical sites, and also interacting with Chinese in various public spaces and organizations, including schools, museums, parks, work places, and so forth. Through these interactions, the participants were able to get a sense of how Chinese of different ages and backgrounds view their own history and culture and how they perceive the world outside of the PRC. The leaders of this Freeman Foundation-funded field study were both Rice Asian Studies faculty: Steve Lewis and Marshall McArthur.

This spring, Nanxiu Qian will direct an Institute focusing primarily on Chinese and Japanese literary history with the assistance of Sarah Thal and Rich Smith.

Exploring (continued from page 4)

As trained researchers, we cross the borders of received wisdom in each of these traditions, unearthing histories and connections that can contribute to multiple dialogues within and among religions, practitioners, and historians alike. Put poetically but not inaccurately, through the study of Tantric traditions and Asian cultures at Rice, faculty and students help us bridge the gaps between people and cultures, contributing to an understanding—indeed, a “continuum”—that can often appear lacking in our modern, seemingly disjointed, world.
Five of the fourteen foreign languages regularly taught at Rice are Asian. In the last two years, Hindi and Tibetan have been offered for the first time, Japanese and Sanskrit are holding their own, and students are petitioning for the teaching of Vietnamese on a regular basis.

Among all of these offerings, Chinese stands out. In the autumn of 2002, approximately 110 students enrolled in Chinese, making it the third most commonly studied language at Rice (after Spanish and French). Since 1981, when Chinese became the first Asian language taught at Rice, student interest has grown so much that four full-time lecturers are now required to keep up with demand: Lilly Chen, Marshall McArthur, Chao-Mei Shen, and Meng Yeh. In 2002-2003, students can enroll not only in traditional language classes from beginning to advanced levels, but also in special topic courses such as Media Chinese, Commercial Chinese, Syntax and Semantics, Literature and Film, and Texts from Popular Chinese Culture. In addition to Mandarin, students can also take a course in Taiwanese Language and Culture.

"Chinese class is fun," say many of the students. "I like the small size and the close bond my Chinese class has," says sophomore Cynthia Chang. Indeed, Chinese classes at Rice average ten students in size — small enough for intensive learning in a relaxed atmosphere.

Commented Laura Fagundes, a junior in Chinese 101, "Dr. Yeh really created a very fun, comfortable learning environment... I never noticed the time go by."

Part of the excitement comes from innovative use of technology in the classroom. Rice’s teachers are actively developing and using new curricular materials. Dr. McArthur (Mai Lao-shi), for example, builds language lessons around videos he made of someone visiting a market in Shaoxing or a nightclub in Shanghai. The teachers also encourage students to use the world wide web to develop language skills in areas of personal interest: a student interested in talking about cars, for instance, can work from an on-line Chinese description of spark plugs. Through the use of such digital resources both at home and in Rice’s state-of-the-art language lab, students can increase their contact time with the language while also learning about Chinese culture.

A distinctive aspect of the Chinese curriculum at Rice is its two-track system. The standard track assumes that students have little or no previous knowledge of Chinese: it begins with a focus on oral skills, increasing attention to the written language as students progress in the course sequence. Because many students come from Chinese-speaking backgrounds, however, Rice offers an accelerated track that prioritizes reading and writing skills for heritage speakers. "The fact that my entire class is made up of native speakers is a big advantage," says freshman Jo Kent. "Already having a strong Chinese background, I find it very valuable that I do not have to begin learning to read and write while speaking at a beginner’s level. Chinese 211 is a unique course that caters to one of the biggest needs for native speakers choosing to establish their reading and writing abilities."

The targeted "track" system, the small class sizes, the enthusiasm of the teachers, and their focus on culture as well as language—all help make Chinese one of the most exciting and popular languages on campus.

What’s next? With Japanese offerings growing, and Hindi and Tibetan just begun, anything is possible.
The Transnational China Project

The Transnational China Project (TCP) was established by Ben Lee and Rich Smith in 1998 with the strong support of the Asian Studies program and a $500,000.00 grant from the Ford Motor Company and Coopers & Lybrand (now Pricewaterhouse-Coopers). Housed in the Baker Institute and directed by Steve Lewis, with the advice and assistance of Lee and Smith, the TCP has, since its establishment, sponsored a series of conferences, workshops, roundtables, lectures, course development initiatives, electronic archiving efforts and collaborative research at Rice—all focused on the basic theme of the "Internationalization of the New Middle Class in China and Asia."

The goal of this globally-oriented interdisciplinary project has been to develop innovative approaches to the study of “cultural China” (i.e., the People’s Republic, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and various overseas Chinese communities) through the use of advanced technologies, and by means of new forms of both personal and institutional cooperation. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing), Duke University, Harvard University; National Tsinghua University (Taiwan), New York University, UC Berkeley, the University of Hong Kong, the University of Texas, Austin, UCLA and MIT are among the major domestic and international institutions with which the TCP has forged strong working relationships.

The TCP has received widespread acclaim for its award-winning website (http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina/), its curricular projects, public lectures, workshops and conferences (see the above-mentioned website), and its innovative research on advertising in East Asia (see not only the materials on the TCP website but also the review at the end of "Political Communications and Popular Education in China in the Early Years of the People’s Republic," http://www.crl.uchicago.edu/info/focus/XXIv1/Hunter Collection.pdf).

The plan for the future is threefold: First, to broaden the TCP’s geographical/cultural/conceptual coverage by exploring, from an explicitly comparative perspective, the related themes of globalization, nationalism and culture; second, to link the project more closely with other area studies programs at Rice (for instance, Latin American Studies and Middle Eastern Studies); and third, to use the TCP as a model for Rice’s new Global and Transnational Studies (GTS) initiative.

The Yijing in Global Context

Rich Smith is currently working on a book, under contract with the University of Virginia Press and tentatively titled Ordering The World and Fathoming the Cosmos: The I-Ching (Yijing or Classic of Changes) in China and Beyond. This book follows the general contours of the James A. Richard Lectures Dr. Smith delivered at the University of Virginia in April of 1999. A few of Smith’s preliminary findings were published in an article titled “The Place of the Yijing (Classic of Changes) in World Culture: Some Historical and Contemporary Perspectives,” Journal of Chinese Philosophy (Winter, 1998). Smith’s work focuses on three central questions: (1) From its origins some three thousand years ago as a simple divination manual, how did the Yijing become such an honored and influential philosophical text in both premodern and modern China? (2) How and why did it travel to other countries, not only in East Asia but also throughout most of the world? and (3) How was the Yijing interpreted, employed, and transformed at different times and under different cultural circumstances, both within China’s borders and beyond?

Most of Dr. Smith’s research so far in both primary and secondary sources has centered on the early evolution of the Yijing in China, its far-reaching significance in virtually every realm of Chinese culture, its spread to Japan, Korea, Vietnam and Tibet, its use as an evangelical tool by the Jesuit missionaries and their supporters in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (both in China and in Europe), and its eventual transmission to England, the Americas and other parts of the world during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Smith is especially interested in the ways that the Yijing can be compared to other “classic” works, such as the Torah, the Bible, the Qu’ran and the Vedas in terms of both its global spread and the hermeneutical strategies that helped to “domesticate” it. Significantly, he says, over the past two millennia or so, the Yijing (I Ching; Classic of Changes) has been, with the notable exception of the Bible, the most widely read and extensively commented upon book in all of world literature.
In June 2002, twenty-three Texas area secondary school teachers traveled to China on a three-week study tour made possible by the Freeman Foundation, Columbia University’s East Asia Institute, and Rice University’s Asian Studies Program. Participants had completed a 30-hour seminar taught by Rice’s Director of Asian Studies, Richard Smith, and co-sponsored by the Texas Consortium of Teaching About Asia and the Asian and Global Outreach Project of Rice’s Center for Education. After the seminar, participants were screened through a competitive process to receive scholarships for the East Asia Study Trip. All teachers involved in the trip regularly teach secondary school-level courses that involve a substantial component on East Asia. The group was led to China by Rice faculty Steven Lewis of the Baker Institute and Marshall McArthur of the Center for the Study of Languages.

A primary objective of the trip was for teachers to gather information that could be developed both into their own lesson plans and, more generally, into any Asia-related curriculum. Members of the group included teachers of history, geography, world literature, music, and social studies, as well as a librarian and a media specialist. Teachers’ specific project interests included: the social and economic impact of the Three Gorges Dam, the incorporation of Chinese music into the social studies classroom, a comparison of the Confucian examination system and the modern educational system, the relationship of Chinese literature to world and Asian American literature, and the Silk Road as China’s link to the outside world.

During the trip, many teachers compiled “cultural chests” to help them bring China “alive” for their students. Kim Ramirez, a World Geography teacher at La Porte High School, for instance, brought back a Chinese Coke bottle, a Starbucks cup, and a McDonald’s tray liner to help illustrate the concept of acculturation for her students. Other “chests” included everyday items such as children’s books, chopsticks, compact discs, calligraphy, currency, and bookmarks. Kim LaCoco, World History Department Chair at Lewisville Learning Center in Lewisville, Texas, took more than 500 digital photos in China that her students now use in research projects. With the materials she collected, Mrs. LaCoco has turned the walls of her classroom into an ever-present lesson on the varied cultures of China: among the items that students see each day are a poster of a Chinese pop star, a map of the Forbidden City, a farmer’s painting from Xi’an, six floral prints from the Shanghai Museum, and a collage of placemats and advertising fliers.

During the first week of the trip, the group stayed in Beijing, where the Philosophy Department of Beijing University had worked with Susan Greenwell of Columbia University’s East Asian Institute to arrange an eye-opening mix of sightseeing, educational field trips, and lectures. The teachers visited Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and the Ming Tombs. They took in Peking Opera and an acrobatics show, and climbed two separate spots on the Great Wall. Amidst all of this, they lived on campus at Beijing University, experiencing China from a perspective unavailable to the common tourist.

In the remaining two weeks of the trip, the group left Beijing to visit, among other attractions, the Qing emperors’ Summer Villa in Chengde, the terra cotta excavations at Xi’an, the Shaoxing Brewery and, in Shanghai, the Lu Xun Museum (dedicated to the famous author) and the Bund, site of Shanghai’s foreign community in the early twentieth century. In keeping with the theme of the trip, they also met with teachers and students at middle schools in Beijing and Shanghai and with university students in Xi’an.

The range and pace of activities was formidable, yet teachers managed to keep body and soul together throughout the trip. Their advice for teachers on future study trips? “Climb plenty of stairs before you go!” Between the temple and the villas, the hills and the Great Wall, the Texas “flatlanders” certainly got a workout. And don’t worry about food: with the great variety, every-
one could find something to enjoy. Breakfast was typically buffet style and included soy milk, Chinese breads, fresh and preserved vegetables, eggs, tea, and even coffee. Lunch and supper were generally group affairs, sometimes simple dishes of stir-fried vegetables and meats, sometimes special dishes such as Beijing Roast Duck, Beggar’s Chicken, or Dong-po Pork. They also sampled more common fare such as Ma-po Tofu, pig’s ears, chicken feet, dumplings, sautéed eggplant, tu-dou-si (shredded potatoes), and even stinky bean curd. The communal meals were not only a respite from the quick pace of the tour, but they also provided a welcome gathering space to discuss what was being taken in while teachers experienced first-hand the many treasures of the Chinese kitchen.

All in all, the trip was a great success. As one participant commented afterward, “The experience was amazing and I know that my enthusiasm and experience will transfer to my students.” After three jam-packed weeks in China, the twenty-three teachers from the trip are not only taking their experiences and energy back to their own schools, but are giving presentations and making their “cultural chests” and resources available to teachers throughout their school districts. From Houston to Dallas, they are bringing China to the next generation of Americans.

**Upcoming Events**

**March 7-9, 2003** Rice hosts the symposium, “Tradition and the Challenge of Modernity: Politics, Poetics and Gender in Late Qing China, 1840-1911,” organized by Nanxiu Qian, Associate Professor of Chinese Literature at Rice University and Grace S. Fong, Associate Professor of Chinese Literature at McGill University. This event is sponsored by Rice University: Center for the Study of Cultures, Office of the President, Dean of Humanities, the Gee Family Fund for Asian Studies, and the Study of Women and Gender. The public is invited to attend on Saturday, March 8, 2003 in the Humanities Building, Room 117, Rice University. For more information, see www.owlnet.rice.edu/~nanxiuq

**April 18, 2003** Professor Aditya Behl of the University of Pennsylvania will speak about Indian Sufi literature on Friday, April 18, 4:00 p.m. in Room 117, Humanities Building, Rice University.

**April 11, 2003** Hendry D. Smith II (Columbia University), “Portraits for the People: Wood-Boxed Ambrotypes of Late 19th-Century Japan.” Friday, April 11, 4:00 p.m., in Room 328, Humanities Building, Rice University. This coincides with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston’s ground-breaking exhibit on the History of Japanese Photography.
**Q:** What made you decide to go abroad to study?

**A:** I’m an Asian Studies major and a pre-med student. I had a semester free, and I thought it would be a good experience. Some people can’t go abroad because they’re engineering majors and they have to take some classes only offered here. But as an Asian Studies major, I could take many different classes and those that appealed most to me. I tell everyone that this is one reason to major in Asian Studies!

**Q:** Why did you choose Taiwan and the particular institution?

**A:** I have family in Taiwan, so I’ve been there a few times and I really like the country. I knew that with Taiwan’s very good public transportation system I could visit them on the weekends. Also, I need the comforts of a city, such as good computer access. I didn’t think I could find that in some other countries.

I chose the institution because of its affiliation with Rice. It is a program through the CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange). Their program in Taiwan is at the National Chengchi University. It’s probably the best Social Sciences University in Taiwan.

**Q:** What level did you achieve?

**A:** I tested into advanced intermediate. I was able to sign up for two more classes. One was a linguistics class and the other was in sociology. The classes were in English.

**Q:** Where did you have your meals?

**A:** We didn’t have a school cafeteria. The street in front of the University is just filled with food shops, so you can buy whatever you like.

**Q:** Did you do something special in the evenings?

**A:** No, unless you call watching a lot of Japanese dramas special. I got hooked on one of them!

**Q:** Tell me about your roommates and your dorm.

**A:** It was a girls’ dorm. My three roommates were Taiwan natives, seniors majoring in International Trade. Although we stayed in the newest dorm in campus, it was not modern by our standards. The rooms were small and shared by four. We had no air-conditioning in the dorms, and it is very hot and humid there. We had two common bathrooms on each floor. Only one stall in each had a western style toilet.

**Q:** What was the best part of being there?

**A:** The food! Stepping outside and having instant access to such wonderful food was great. There were lots of wonderful things such as the scenery, the culture—but the food is what I miss the most.
Whereabouts and Words of Wisdom: Notes from our Alumni

I’m a graduating third-year law student at UC Berkeley (Boalt Hall). I plan to go into entertainment law in LA or New York next year. My words of wisdom: If you are interested in Chinese culture, take as many classes from Rich Smith and Nanxiu Qian as possible. Both are wonderful teachers and passionate about the material.

Austin Ku, Hanszen ’00

The summer after graduation I attended the Middlebury Language Program for language immersion in Chinese. Since then I have been a student at the Yale Law School, with a joint degree for an MBA. I will graduate with a JD and an MBA in 2005. My advice is to not worry that majoring in Asian Studies will not be well-received by law schools. I’m so glad that I majored in something that I really love, and when I got here I was surprised to discover a large number of other Asian Studies majors!!!

Victoria Vierling, Jones ’01

I majored in History and Asian Studies and spent the ’95-96 year studying at Kyushu University in Japan. After graduation in 1996 I spent four years as a management consultant, including extended postings in Hong Kong and Japan. I am now pursuing an MBA and an MA in International Studies (with a concentration in East Asia and Japan) from Wharton at the University of Pennsylvania. My advice is to keep it up — there’s lots of opportunity to use what you’re learning out there, as I hope my own career demonstrates. Oh, and do the reading before class!

Kent Garneau, Jones ’96

Time sure has swift wings...to think that at this time last year I was still at Rice worrying about grad school applications. I am at UC San Diego, in my first year of the Ph.D. program in Chinese history. I would encourage current majors to strive to learn as much language, history, and culture as they can in the undergraduate years. Whether or not they will continue to immerse themselves in graduate school or in future careers, their experience in studying Asia will undoubtedly enrich their lives.

Dahpon David Ho, Jones ’02

I am able to apply what I learned from my degree to what I do. Currently, I am a partner in a small law firm (Cruver & Associates, L.L.P.) that specializes in providing legal services to the engineering and construction industry. We often have the opportunity to work with international clients. And if those clients happen to be from Asian countries, I fill the role of “resident expert”. Sometimes this means understanding the culture to help us in negotiations or social situations, speaking the language, or being familiar with the history or politics of the subject country so that we can make our client aware of potential risks— all skills or knowledge I developed through the Asian Studies program at Rice. But, most importantly, Dr. Smith showed me how our backgrounds color our perspectives and he taught me to think outside myself and my own preconceived notions in order to consider things from other people’s perspectives. This I use everyday.

Lyn Kulapaditharom Fu, Jones ’94

I graduated last year and am teaching English in Japan through the JET program. I was placed far from the warmth of sunny Fukuoka in the south, where I had spent my undergrad year abroad here. I am in the middle of nowhere in Akita prefecture in northern Japan, a place known for having some of the highest snowfalls in the world and the highest drinking rates in Japan. My town is small, but I’ve found plenty of young people here to hang out with, play soccer with, and snowboard with to my heart’s content. In fact, despite this being my fifth time to live abroad in Asia and only the first time outside a city, I found it much easier to settle in here and make friends than any of my previous experiences abroad. I’m enjoying the laid-back lifestyle my new town and new job afford me. The experience so far has been remarkable. I am actually quite happy that the JET program placed me outside of my comfort zone and allowed me to see another side of Japan and find the hidden treasures countryside life (and its two feet of snowfall a day) have to offer.

My advice to current Asian Studies majors is to start looking now for ways to get yourself to Asia after graduation. It is the most populous and dynamic region in the world. Jobs, scholarships, internships, volunteer activities, and countless other options abound. If nothing else, you can find English teaching jobs in almost any country you want to go to in Asia. For those who’ve never been to Japan before, I highly recommend JET even if your interests lie elsewhere in Asia. It’s a good hub for travel in other parts of Asia, and you have plenty of vacation time to do that traveling.

Jay Hubert, Brown ’02
Rice’s newly appointed Assistant Professor of Art and Art History, Hajime Nakatani, recently arranged for a major Chinese experimental artist, Mr. Xu Bing, to visit the campus for a series of talks and informal gatherings during the period from February 10-12, 2003. This high-profile visit was co-sponsored by Rice’s Asian Studies program, the Transnational China Project, the Department of Art and Art History, the Dean of Humanities, and the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. On February 11, at 6:00 p.m., Mr. Xu delivered a well-attended public lecture titled “Between Visual and Written Languages,” and the following day he held an entertaining and informative seminar on “Copying and Abusing Culture.” During the rest of his three-day stay at Rice, Mr. Xu had several opportunities to meet with groups of students and faculty, as well as members of the Houston community.

Xu Bing has received wide critical and popular acclaim for his solo and group exhibitions at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.), Museum of Modern Art (New York), Joan Miro’s Foundation at Mallorca (Spain), as well as a number of galleries and museums in the U.S., Europe, and Asia. In addition, his work has been the subject of many critical and scholarly publications, including Public Culture, Performance Research, Boundary 2, and Art Journal. In 1999, Xu Bing was awarded the MacArthur Award for Genius by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in recognition of his “originality, creativity, self-direction, and capacity to contribute importantly to society, particularly in printmaking and calligraphy.”

Xu Bing’s February visit marked the beginning of a collaborative effort involving the above-mentioned co-sponsors—together with the Rice University Art Gallery—that will lead to a major exhibition of Xu’s oeuvre in Houston, projected for the Spring of 2005. This show will be accompanied by a symposium on Xu’s work and a number of related scholarly and educational activities. These events, designed in part to link the local Asian and Asian-American communities more closely with the contemporary art scene in Houston and beyond, will all be part of the “Year of Global Cultures” program in 2004/2005, organized by the Baker Institute’s Transnational China Project and the Rice Global and Transnational Studies Initiative.

For more information on the Asian Studies Program, please visit our website. http://asia.rice.edu

To see how you can be more involved in the Asian Studies program at Rice University, contact Dee Garza, Program Coordinator, at 713-348-5843 or email her at asia@rice.edu.