

## In Memory of Mr. Houghton “Buck” Freeman

Van J. Symons

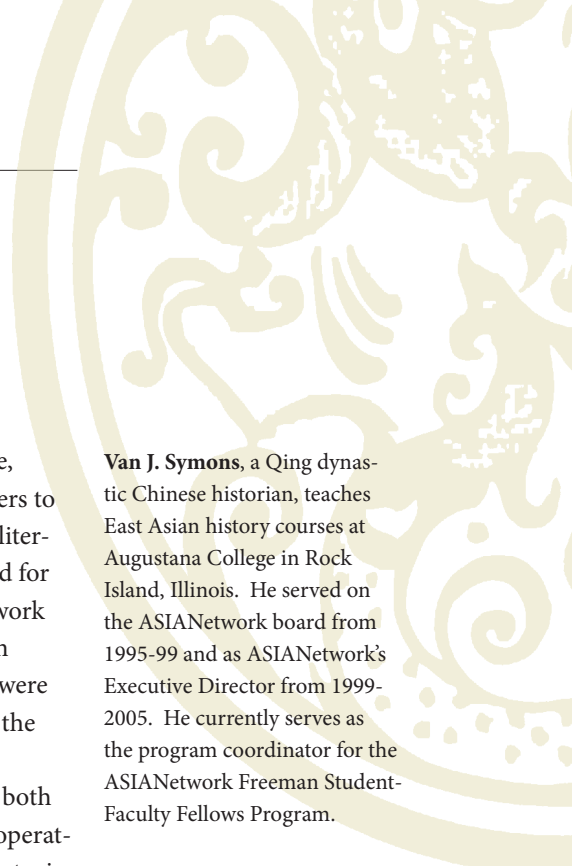
Shortly after hearing of Houghton Freeman’s death on December 1, 2010, in Stowe, Vermont, leaders of ASIANetwork created a window on our website to enable members to submit letters of condolences to the Freeman family. What followed was amazing as literally dozens and dozens of individuals wrote to express their appreciation for Buck and for the Freeman Foundation. Some of those writers were board members and ASIANetwork leaders, while others were consortium members who had participated in the Freeman Foundation–funded “College-in-Asia” and “Student-Faculty Fellows” programs. All were aware that without the early and continued support of Buck and the Freeman family, the impressive emergence of ASIANetwork could not have occurred.

It is fortuitous that the beginnings of the Freeman Foundation and ASIANetwork both occurred in 1992. Mr. Freeman was newly retired after serving for a decade as chief operating officer of American International Group (AIG), and he was eager to manage a trust—initially started by his father, Mansfield Freeman, in 1978—committed to developing mutual understanding among Americans and East Asians. Shortly thereafter, in the summer of 1995, the chair of the ASIANetwork board of directors was able to meet with Buck in Stowe. Buck quickly realized that this small but growing national consortium of liberal arts colleges might become a suitable vehicle for his foundation to accomplish some of its goals.

Buck read about Augustana College’s study-in-Asia program in our March 1996 newsletter and soon after, he informed the leaders of ASIANetwork that he was willing to support a grant initiative to encourage college faculty and administrators to develop similar term or semester-long study-in-Asia programs. Leaders of the consortium accepted his offer and, in the fall of 1996, submitted to him a dual proposal, which, once funded, established the “College-in-Asia” program to enable representatives from 25 different colleges between 1998 and 2004 to travel to East Asia to help them start term-in-Asia study programs. It also created the “Student-Faculty Fellows” program to facilitate undergraduate research in East and Southeast Asia, which since its inception has provided 158 grants to 696 “fellows” from 94 different colleges.

Early on in our conversations, Buck made it clear that if we met his expectations, his commitment to ASIANetwork would be solid and unwavering, and he kept this promise. His support for these programs helped us generate interest in ASIANetwork and grow our institutional memberships. Moreover, the small amounts of money built into grant budgets to run these initiatives were central to our remaining financially solvent, especially early on. In addition, much of the leadership of the consortium has been drawn over the years from colleagues who were first introduced to the consortium by serving as mentors to students participating in the “Student-Faculty Fellows” program.

In my first conversations with Buck, as a member of the board and then as the executive director of ASIANetwork, he suggested that one of the primary goals of the Freeman Foundation was to provide firsthand experiences in Asia to young people. He felt that such experiences would transform their lives and that they would then, through their actions, draw Asia and North America closer together. His programs, managed by the Institute for International Education to provide grants to hundreds of young people to study Asian lan-



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guages in Asia and by ASIANetwork to fund undergraduate research throughout East and Southeast Asia, converted this dream into reality.

Mr. Freeman informed me that he was pleased by ASIANetwork's growth because he realized that our national consortium of liberal arts colleges had become a means to funnel Freeman support to small colleges throughout North America. His father, he, and his son all graduated from Wesleyan University, and Buck was keenly aware of the importance of small colleges in the landscape of American higher education. Simply put, because the Freeman Foundation was and still is a small family-run endeavor, he, Doreen, Graeme and the limited staff working with them could not micromanage the reviewing of grant proposals from myriads of small colleges throughout the country. Consequently, ASIANetwork became a valued means for him to enhance the study of Asia at the more than 150 colleges in the consortium. Through his support, ASIANetwork has grown to help him achieve this outreach.

While this memorial has focused on Buck's significant contributions to ASIANetwork and our institutional members, it is important to recognize that the outreach of the Freeman Foundation has been and continues to be much greater than this. The foundation's focus has been Asia and includes a deep and abiding commitment to the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia, created by the Freemans to help infuse instruction about Asia into K-12 education; support for the Asian Studies Development Programs of the East-West Center and their outreach to community colleges; mine removal in Vietnam; rebuilding of educational institutions in Thailand and Indonesia after the 2004 tsunami; restoration of the Northeast section of the Qing Forbidden City in Beijing and of the Joseph Stillwell mansion in Chongqing; support for BBC news broadcasts on PBS; and a range of ingenious grants to sustain education and environmental concerns in his beloved Vermont.

One cannot be certain that the Freemans fully know how immense their impact has been for good through the Freeman Foundation, but I know we, at ASIANetwork, do. We will miss Houghton Freeman's vision, his energy, and his commitment to deepening the understanding of Asia in North America and to facilitating dynamic interactions between the peoples of Asia and our country. We are truly grateful for his help and encouragement in getting us started.

Sincerely,

Van J. Symons