Introduction to ANE special issue

This special section on teaching modern Asian history developed from papers originally presented as a panel at the 2012 Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association. Tracy Barrett (North Dakota St. U.) and Xiaojia Hou (U. Colorado-Denver) constituted the panel with an eye to drawing together research expertise from each of the "subregions" of Asia (Central Asia, East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia). It was their hope to identify new strategies and materials that would support rigorous teaching of Asia in liberal arts institutions. When Alison Mackenzie Shah (U. Colorado-Denver) was unable to attend the conference, she kindly recommended me to participate as the representative for South Asia. As a relative latecomer to the project, I hope to convey accurately the aims and concerns of these essays, which represent the trajectory of our discussions thus far.

Each of the contributors perceived the need to address two pressing concerns. First, for over a decade we have seen the creation of new faculty positions in one field of Asian history or another. In the United States, many of these new positions are conceived very broadly as "Asian history." Such a broad category presents a problem, as the demands of this definition are often at odds with the area studies boundaries that continue to define graduate-level training. This presents scholars in all fields of Asia Studies with both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge is that scholars with training in one area may be asked to teach courses that lay well beyond the boundaries of their training. For example, an East Asia specialist may be asked to teach courses on South Asia or on Asia at large, for which they have little training. Faculty find themselves at a loss to identify appropriate readings and craft assignments for their undergraduate students because they cannot draw upon their formal preparation. How does one develop a familiarity with whole new fields of study, or keep an eye open for new trends in fields to which they are not accustomed? The opportunity lies in the potential for faculty to read and engage more widely in discussions across area studies boundaries, and to bring to bear analytical concerns and techniques from one field of scholarship upon another. This breadth can serve us as scholars and our students as young adults living in a connected, interdependent world.

Second, the area studies framework of graduate training, grounded as it is in study of particular languages, has created a problem when it comes to finding and evaluating primary sources. To be sure, the vast linguistic diversity of Asia plays a role in the structure of this problem. But it is difficult for a specialist in Southeast Asian history to know what sort of primary sources can best represent, for example, Japanese thinkers and connoisseurs of high culture in the Muromachi period, unless that person has built and maintained a network of colleagues who can make these recommendations. While such appeals have been made through H-Asia, and contributors to that network do periodically announce the publication of electronic and print resources that might suit the needs of instructors attempting to cross the various area studies boundaries, H-Asia alone is not enough. A cursory search for "Muromachi culture" carried out on 16 March 2014 yielded just seven hits, including announcements of scholarly publications and academic conferences. With new resources becoming available electronically, and older print sources becoming less easily available or disappearing entirely, annotated lists of resources need to be made available and updated

regularly. This is a particular area in which ASIANetwork can serve educators in many different kinds of institutions.

Traditional formulations of Asian history cohere in one or two regions, including East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia and Central Asia; alternatively, Asia is presented as a collection of disparate nation-states. One may be tempted to substitute a nation-state approach for the problematic area studies approach; after all, much scholarship and course design limit themselves to a single nation-state. The nation-state approach offers a mixed blessing: it provides massive quantities of data, yet the production of such data naturalizes the teleology of nation-state. And the populations and territories claimed by nation-states constantly change, for political and environmental reasons. Further, forces with causative power have acted and continue to act without reference to area studies or nation-state boundaries. How could a specialist in only one region of Asia easily assess and teach the effects of the 2005 tsunami or the Tablighi Jama'at with sophistication? Given the range of problems, how might we organize courses, particularly those taught at the introductory level? How can we present distinctively Asian voices from the past, without succumbing to the latent orientalism of the area studies mode of organizing knowledge? The essays in this special section of *ASIANetwork Exchange* seek to introduce students to new methods of understanding the interconnectedness of Asian history in modern times and in world history. The articles focus on the idea of avoiding the description of historical actors as objects by incorporating their subjective experiences through the use of their photographs, art, primary texts, music, and other media. Each article considers specific sources drawn from their field and provides insight into how one might incorporate them into existing syllabi or shape a new syllabus altogether.

Tracy Barrett focuses her essay on the common historiographical problem of who gets to write histories and the linked pedagogical problem of how to get primarily American students to think about Asian history outside of fundamentally colonial *mentalités*. Barrett argues forcefully that, in the case of Southeast Asia, the answer to both problems requires the classroom use of films, memoirs, and fiction produced by Southeast Asians. While this pedagogy may require interpretive practices that are not staples of undergraduate historical training, such primary sources are much more widely available in English translation than are collections of documents that might otherwise shed light on the economic, social, or cultural history of Southeast Asia. In addition, their narrative structures make them more compelling than analytic narratives and thus better able to evoke an empathetic understanding of the past.

In my article, I address the pedagogical problems associated with building a course covering the full range of South Asian history with the available textbooks on the subject and the absence of a primary source reader free of the political history and Indological proclivities of the mid-twentieth century. I offer some possibilities for combining textbooks with each other as well as with longer primary sources. The article makes an introductory effort at listing primary sources, mainly written, with an eye to those that shed light on the material, social, and cultural lives of South Asians. While there is no single solution to suit all needs, I argue that some materials do permit instructors to organize teaching in ways that move students beyond the narrow focus on the colonial popularized through readings of *Subaltern Studies*.

Amy Kardos grapples with the historiographical chestnut of how to recover histories of central Eurasian people through the often pejorative textual sources produced by their literate neighbors. She shows how using new scholarship can help specialists in South and East Asia to conceptualize the "silk road" not as a path along which material objects, people, and

therefore ideas traveled, but as a shorthand for material and intellectual exchanges, carried out by central Eurasian brokers along shifting frontiers defined by the exchanges themselves. These can be traced through, for example, variations on the spiked fiddle that extend from Persia to China, and through modes of playing them, from early times to Yo-Yo Ma's "Silk Road Project."

Danke Li thinks through the old, yet persistent, problem of transforming students' one-dimensional views of women in Chinese and Japanese history. Though some of the challenges posed by student assumptions detailed in her article could apply to instructors in courses pertaining to virtually any other part of Asia, Li argues that the most effective solution is to expose students to feminist scholarship produced by Chinese and Japanese scholars and to supplement it with textual and film primary sources that let Chinese and Japanese women, as much as possible, express themselves and depict their own lifestyles. The approach has the additional benefit of giving students tools with which to challenge and therefore engage intimately with gender and feminist theory, both as an academic enterprise and as a strategy for seeking social justice.

Through this collection of articles, the special section on teaching modern Asian history aims to initiate what we hope will be an ongoing discussion about the theoretical underpinnings and practical approaches to a pedagogy of modern Asian history. We pointedly invite comment, either in *ASIANetwork Exchange* or in other venues.

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