

“Exotic Asia/Global Asia: Asian Studies in the 21st Century”

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Introduction

Global Asia is very much with us. While discussions of globalization generally have often focused on the “McDonaldization” of China, I was interested to note that an article in the Dining In section of *The New York Times*¹ today reported that there are now some 36,000 Chinese restaurants here in the US, more than the number of McDonald’s, Burger Kings and Wendy’s combined! And if you picked up *The New York Times Magazine*² last July 4th—on our national holiday, no less—you found a cover story entitled “The Chinese Century.” The article—a factoid-laden panorama of China’s growing economic influence on the US and the globe—begins in Pekin, Illinois, a city which many of you must know that was named for the Chinese capital located exactly half the globe away. The fact that Pekin formerly called its high school team by a racist epithet provides an ironic setup to a description of the imbrication of its economy with that of its counterpart. Pekin sells corn to China for a tidy profit; Pekin buys consumer goods at the rock-bottom “China price”; Pekin exports manufacturing jobs to China. The heart of the story, however, is China’s transformation into a global powerhouse. “China is everywhere these days, influencing our lives as consumers, providers, citizens. It has by far the world’s most rapidly changing large economy, and our reactions to it shift just as quickly.” Low wages alone do not account for all the efficiencies of Chinese factories; they are managed with zealous exactitude by an eager generation of global traders. Chinese expenditures for research and development are beginning to approach the levels of America and Japan. China now has 100 million people who live a middle class life “comfortably close to that of the American middle class for a fraction of the cost.” “If any country is going to supplant the US in the world marketplace,” the article’s author Ted Fishman suggests, “China is it.”

I suspect that Fishman’s theme sounds familiar to you even if you did not read the article. I could just as easily quote accounts of Bangalore as the new Silicon Valley or Kuala Lumpur as the vanguard of architectural innovation. Sometimes these stories sound tones of alarm and surprise, but their underlying premise is a certain prideful wonder that Asia is becoming just like us, that is, just like (the) US. The exotic yields to the global, and the global is normatively the universal. In this rhetorical trope, “global” Asia is really “noble” Asia, the Asia of astonishingly productive industrial workers, of savvy, eye-on-the-main-chance financial managers, and of free-spending, brand-

¹Michael Luo, “As All-American as Egg Foo Young,” *The New York Times* 22 Sept. 2004, late ed.: F1.

²Ted C. Fishman, “The Chinese Century,” *The New York Times* 4 July 2004, late ed.: 24.

conscious consumers. It is the Asia of progress. It is Asia as the West likes to think of itself. In contrast, the bewitching, exotic Asia that prevailed in the 20th-century popular Western mind is “neurotic” Asia: tradition-bound, obscurantist, obsessed with “face” and status. This is an Asia that suffers from reverence for a long-gone glorious past.

This notion that a new progressive Asia is immanent within the carapace of confining tradition is a theme of long standing in American-Asian relations. In 1900, the Western powers had demanded from China millions of dollars in payment for damages inflicted during the Boxer Rebellion. Some Americans advocated using those payments to fund scholarships for Chinese students to study in the US. “Education,” it was confidently predicted by William B. Parsons, an American engineer in China at the time, “will sweep away the incrustations that hamper progress, and as each improvement in the ranks of the official class occurs, such additions will hasten the advance and spread of education. Thus the downfall of one will go hand in hand with the rise of the other.”³ Historian John Dower presents a more extreme instance of this dualism. In his book, *War Without Mercy*, he charts the oscillations of culturally constructed racist images on both sides of the Pacific war through many sources, including political and propaganda drawings. These images are deeply rooted, but not fixed. He documents an almost instant turnabout in 1945, when, with the advent of the American occupation, the Japanese are no longer rendered as bloodthirsty and sharply fanged simian beasts, but instead as small, playful monkeys, eager to imitate their new masters.⁴

The easily caricatured superficiality of such breathless previews of a new world order adds to the discomfort with which I approach the very concept of “globalization.” I suspect that many of us in this room may have shared my irritation with the term, which can be both reductionist and totalizing at the same time. And it is maddeningly imprecise, if not—at times—apparently self-contradictory. It may be a word that should only be used in the plural, as my former UCLA colleague Mick Mann and others have argued, or one for which one wishes another term could be substituted.⁵ While serving on a fellowship selection panel with anthropologist Sherry Ortner, I heard her exclaim with exasperation, “Globalization is all over the place!” “Globalization” can be a term of “global” vagueness, one with a planetary margin of error. Is the “global age” really something new? And is a new course necessary for those of us who are committed to the deep study of a particular “exotic” culture?

Whatever we think of the “globobabble,”⁶ and however meaningless or distracting the term “globalization” may be, we must still engage it. And speaking in Illinois, one would do well to recall the advice of Abe Lincoln: “A universal feeling, whether well- or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded.” I’m not going to argue, with Bourdieu, that it’s purely malignant nor, with Bhagwati, explain why it’s “good.”⁷ It’s here, and we have to deal with it. The idea of globalization has taken root and will shape

³William B. Parsons, *An American Engineer in China* (New York, 1900), 311-312, as cited in Michael H. Hunt, “The American Remission of the Boxer Indemnity: A Reappraisal,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (May, 1972), 539-559.

⁴John Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986)

⁵See Giles Gunn, “Globalizing Literary Studies,” *PMLA*, 116.1 (January 2001).

⁶See Robert Eric Livingston, “Glocal Knowledges: Agency and Place in Literary Studies,” *PMLA*, 116.1 January 2001.

⁷See *Items*, Vol. 2, No. 3-4 (Winter 2001) for a brief discussion of the conflicts over globalization.

decisions about the funding and organization of the academy, even if its attendant notions can seem shallow, contradictory or, worse, ideologically slanted.

Furthermore, let me argue that even though the hype-quotient of the globalization rhetoric may be off the scale, there are real and important changes afoot. Some of these are readily apparent in the academic enterprise itself: increased international mobility of students and faculty—at least until this year; dramatically enhanced capabilities for communication and sharing of scholarly resources; increased prosperity of Asian colleagues, both institutions and individuals. These developments present significant new opportunities. We may have before us the necessary ingredients of a new, more equilateral, global community of inquiry. But before we can take advantage of these opportunities we should assess the history of our own particularities. What exotic intellectual incrustations has US scholarship acquired in its attempts to study Asia? Quite a few, I think, but this afternoon I will discuss briefly what I see as some of the universalizing assumptions of both Asian studies as it emerged in West and of the disciplines more generally, and conclude with a quick inventory of what may be promising new modes and approaches to building transnational scholarship.

Before going further, I must readily acknowledge that my own views not surprisingly derive mostly from work in China studies—which will be the focus of most of my remarks—and I look forward to discussing with you other areas of our field.

Asian Studies in the West

When scholars throughout Europe in the seventeenth century—among whom Leibniz is probably the best known—turned their attention to China, their framework was in some sense a globalizing one. They sought to assimilate Chinese civilization into a grand narrative of Mediterranean culture through a variety of projects that established a powerfully diffusionist heritage for much of the work published over the next century. Reconstructing a supposedly universal language was one of them. The respected French sinologist Joseph de Guignes, for example, published a study in 1759 “in which it is proven that the Chinese are an Egyptian colony,” that the Chinese script is derived from Egyptian hieroglyphics, and that the names of the legendary sage kings of China’s prehistoric golden age are actually those of royalty from the Old Kingdom of Egypt. Even late in the nineteenth century, C. J. Ball’s work on *The Accadian Affinities of Chinese* purported to demonstrate the Mesopotamian origins of the Chinese and their language.⁸ And universalizing theories of history developed over the course of the century contributed on a different plane to versions of this same project.

As one foot soldier in this march of world history and its spirit, early sinology—like all philological efforts—was motivated by two potentially contradictory assumptions. On the one hand, it could not but recognize its texts as fundamentally other, different, and undeniably removed from the present in either time or space. This is a critical recognition that, one would assume, would be inherently destabilizing because of the fundamental alienation it presupposes. And yet, on the other hand, and perhaps understandably,

⁸Edward H. Schafer, “What and How is Sinology?” *T’ang Studies* 8-9 (1990-91), 29. Some of the discussion that follows has been adapted from my article, “Disorientations: Asian Literatures in the University,” *Stanford Humanities Review* 6 (1995) 1; <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/6-/html/you.html>.

sinology developed procedures, goals, and a rhetorical tone that sought precisely to restabilize what that recognition had set adrift, to recapture an elusive immediacy and anchor the “linguistic remains” that constituted its object of study within fixed and knowable, “universal” semantic limits.

The impulses behind such efforts to accommodate, incorporate, or control that which is distant and different are well known to us, most certainly since Edward Said’s work on orientalism. Needless to say, neither methodological innocence nor political neutrality are claims that sinology has been inclined to put into question. Individuals steeped in European traditions of scholarship have tended to reject any consideration of Chinese traditions and priorities as indulgences in what one eminent American sinologist disdainfully dismissed as “ethnic criticism.”⁹ The tendency to read China through the filters and lenses of European scholarship and desire evident in the early diffusionist studies has also been reflected in the indulgence of many modern Western sinologists in personal scholarly fetishes redolent of the purest and most undisguised chinoiserie.

What has been the institutional context in the United States for these developments? Various unrelated acts of generosity in the nineteenth century played key roles in inserting Asian studies into American university curricula. The first endowed chair at the University of California at Berkeley, in fact, was the Agassiz Professorship of Oriental Languages and Literatures, which Edward Tompkins presented to the institution in 1872, 24 years before the founding of the department itself. At Columbia University, General Horace Carpentier endowed the Dean Lung Professorship of Chinese in 1901 in memory of his devoted Chinese servant who, we are told, “had embodied such characteristic and self-evident virtues that on his death the General decided that an effort should be made to study the civilization out of which such virtue grew.”¹⁰ During the next few decades similar positions in Chinese and/or Japanese history, literature, and art history were established at other institutions around the country, with motivations and methods only slightly less quaint. Curricula focused on the premodern eras of both countries, with linguistic training—if at all—provided almost exclusively in the classical languages alone. Graduate studies were haphazard at best, consisting of considerable independent reading; of studies abroad—for the fortunate few—with one of the handful of respected European Orientalists claiming expertise in Chinese or Japanese classical texts; and of more lengthy tutelage in China or Japan from distinguished professors in universities there. The research of this small cohort was typically text-oriented, positivistic, and probably appropriately regarded—and self-proclaimed—as an exotic, esoteric sidebar on the American academic scene.

The textual wealth of Asian civilizations could, I should note, be wielded towards more ambitious ends by early advocates of Asian studies. The American Council of Learned Societies was one of the very first national organizations to support and promote the field within the US and framed those programs in a rhetorically revealing way. As the Assistant Secretary of ACLS wrote in 1929:

⁹Schafer, 38.

¹⁰Cited by Marius Jansen in *Japanese Studies in the United States* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1988), 12.

That the next decade will see a striking increase in American interest in Chinese studies is no very daring prediction. . . The fact, however, that the East, in general, and the Chinese world in particular, has an important contribution to make in the humanistic and social sciences is only receiving belated recognition. The immensity of this contribution can be suggested by the recital of a few pertinent facts. It has been estimated that prior to 1750 more books had been published in Chinese than in all other languages combined. As late as 1850, Chinese books outnumbered those in any other language. Even in 1928, the largest publishing house in the world was located not in New York, or London, or Paris, or Berlin, but in Shanghai. And little of the literature thus produced is ephemeral . . . [but instead concerns] history, topography, philosophy, poetry, and commentary on the classics . . . Indeed, it would be no very difficult task to maintain the thesis that in none of the world's civilizations has knowledge for its own sake played so prominent a part over so long a time as in that of China.¹¹

Texts were thus for many years the only legitimate subject for US China studies scholars, but what texts? As intensive language training initiated during World War II created a new and larger generation of linguistically able scholars and funding from the government and the Ford Foundation established area studies centers around the country, the academy's interest in China expanded across the disciplines. Area studies specialists, in the words of one president of the Association for Asian Studies, prided themselves on being "humble gatherers of facts" motivated by "the desire to communicate deep understanding of other societies."¹² Over the years many social scientists in area studies programs came to deplore—understandably, but not necessarily for honorable reasons—the antiquarianism of the earlier generation of philologists for their privileging of classical languages and premodern literature and their refusal to be pragmatic about language learning. By the late 1980s and 90s, the critique intensified, as scholars, especially those in the quantitatively oriented and model-building social sciences, argued that this paradigm was too focused on local particularities to grasp—let alone to interpret—the undeniable inundations of transnational commerce, migration, and culture. One of the most cogent responses to the critique launched by disciplines newly hostile to area-specific expertise came from a more discursive social scientist, Susanne Rudolph of the University of Chicago, who specializes in the study of South Asia. Addressing the ACLS Annual Meeting in the mid-1990s, she noted:

[T]he contradictory trends of our decade [are] toward globalization on the one hand and localization on the other. The two feed each other. Globalization creates common languages, common concepts, common communities of praxis. It creates an expert brotherhood of computer specialists who can communicate with each other even when they do not speak the same language. It creates a normative and practical community of technicians, scientists, and leaders of non-governmental and activist

¹¹"The Promotion of Chinese Studies," *American Council of Learned Societies Bulletin*, No. 10, April, 1929, 3.

¹²Benjamin I. Schwartz, "Presidential Address: Area Studies as a Critical Discipline," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 40.1 (1980), 7, 15.

organizations addressing common problems of the environment in Washington, Ahmedabad, and Geneva. We all know that the media are an important force in creating these transnational epistemes.

But lo and behold, transnational epistemes do not eliminate the regional and local.¹³

Professor Rudolph made clear what was demanded of the university and of area studies:

We need at least two kinds of international education, and there is a significant epistemological difference between them. We need international studies that recognize the emergence of a global community, global expertise, global epistemes, universal conceptual languages that tie together bankers in Rio and Bombay and Bangkok, or human rights activists in Boston, Ahmedabad, and Bonn. But we also need education for particularism, for the immense locales represented by China, Malaysia, India, Egypt, Kenya—locales whose ethnic, subnational, class, and religious particularities explain much that we want to have explained: agrarian productivity, population decline, literacy lags, ethnic conflict, deforestation, bureaucratic rigidity, and other global issues.¹⁴

Rudolph's call accurately predicted the new directions soon undertaken. The intellectual vitality of area studies scholarship in the past decade has been evident in its voracious appetite for new subjects. Texts, especially traditional texts, remain in view, but some new phenomena can only be interpreted in a framework that takes careful account of multi-media, cross-cultural flows. Take, for example, the context of the policies developed by the Japanese cabinet to invest in cultural exports and to make the country an "intellectual property-based nation."

Now, it is one of the piquant facts of our age that the category of "intellectual property" includes such items as the Sanrio Corporation's cosseted little cartoon icon known as "Hello Kitty." The commercial success of this adorably innocent feline (worth \$1 billion/year in sales) derives from her intercultural positioning. As journalist Douglas McGray wrote in *Foreign Policy*, "Hello Kitty is Western, so she will sell in Japan. She is Japanese, so she will sell in the West. It is a marketing boomerang that firms like Sanrio, Sony and Nintendo manage effortlessly. And it is part of the genius behind Japanese cultural strength in the global era." Instead of collapsing beneath its political and economic misfortunes, Japan's global cultural influence has only grown. In fact, from pop music to consumer electronics, architecture to fashion, and food to art, Japan has far greater cultural influence now than it did in the 1980s, when it was an economic superpower.¹⁵

¹³Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, "The Paradoxes of Transnational Learning," *ACLS Occasional Paper*, No. 26, 15-16.

¹⁴Rudolph 19

¹⁵Douglas McGray, "Japan's Gross National Cool" *Foreign Policy*
<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~ikalmar/illustex/japfpmcgray.htm>

Japan has developed what McGray calls a large “Gross National Cool.” Japan, he writes, has succeeded not only in balancing a flexible, absorptive, crowd-pleasing, shared culture with a more private, domestic one but also in taking advantage of that balance to build an increasingly powerful global commercial force. In other words, Japan’s growing cultural presence has created a mighty engine of “national cool.”¹⁶

“Japan’s cultural output is broad and deep, self-aware and ironic,” writes *TimeAsia*.¹⁷ “Cool Japan” has become the subject of provocative research in literature, anthropology and performance studies focusing on Pokemon, digital music piracy, manga, anime, and Asian hip-hop.¹⁸ And there are many other cross-cutting themes animating contemporary research on Asia that could be cited here. But as we pursue these new topics embedded in new transnational and global phenomena, we should be continually mindful of the national and cultural origins of the theories and disciplinary premises we deploy. Like globalization, to recall Sherry Ortner’s comment, universalism is all over the place, too.

Perils of Universalism

Lisa Anderson, Dean of Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs and Chair of the Board of the Social Science Research Council, published last year a trenchant analysis of the conceptual limitations of contemporary social science confronting globalized phenomena and its own global power.¹⁹ American social science, she argues, often fails to acknowledge the liberal origins of its enterprise. It “emphasizes the individual, relies on freedom of belief and association, and challenges authority. Those values are routinely assumed to be universal, especially in our post-cold-war triumphalist frame of mind. But they are not, of course, really so.” The “liberal origins” Anderson highlights are evident not only in teleological assumptions—the market economy and political democracy are the logical endpoints of social development—but in the conditions of practice—a limited state—and, more generally in being “supremely confident in the susceptibility of social problems to human intervention.”

As a consequence, she tells us, American social scientists have found “themselves estranged from colleagues” abroad, collaboration with whom is strained by “tendencies of American social scientists to write about other countries as diverging from the norm.” Equally regrettable has been the impoverishment of their scholarship. Taking paradigms from home as the universal standard has imposed serious constraints on what is asked and what is taken for granted elsewhere. One of her economist colleagues evidently recently confessed that “it was not long ago that he realized that the countries of the world are not organized alphabetically.” Another colleague in political science, equating only the familiar institutions of liberal politics—parties, elections, public opinion, etc.—with the

¹⁶ McGray

¹⁷ Jim Frederick, *TIMEAsia*, “What’s Right with Japan”
http://www.time.com/time/asia/2003/cool_japan/story2.html

¹⁸ Anne Allison, “Portable Monsters and Commodity Cuteness: Pokemon as Japan’s New Global Power,” *Postcolonial Studies* 6(3): 381-395; Joichi Iwabuchi, *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism* (Durham: Duke U. Press, 2002); Ian Condry, “Cultures of Music Piracy: An Ethnographic Comparison of the US and Japan,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7(3): 343-363.

¹⁹ Lisa Anderson, “The Global Reach of American Social Science,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 26 September 2003.

proper stuff of the discipline, suggests that “authoritarian regimes, kinship networks, kings, cliques, clients, religious communities, terrorist networks, and informal economies are unfit subjects for systematic political research.”

Anderson urges her colleagues in the social sciences to recall yet another aspect of the liberal impulse that animated the disciplines’ founders, the attachment to the power of the “marketplace of ideas,” and become “far more self-conscious about our project of social inquiry, about what ‘area knowledge means,’ about how we understand not only ‘the rest of the world’ but ourselves.” Recognizing and testing the “universalist pretensions of these still profoundly American sciences,” she hopes, will not only contribute to “protecting and fostering the work of our colleagues who labor in illiberal circumstances” but perhaps advance “the project of the development of a powerful, inclusive, genuinely universal social science.”

However distant that goal, the challenges Anderson highlights confront the humanities as well. To take an example with which I am most familiar, the discipline of comparative literature was founded and fed by similarly unexamined or unquestioned universalizing impulses. Established at various American institutions in the late nineteenth century, it experienced its first real flowering in the same post-WWII internationalist context that spawned interest in the strategic importance of Asia. Comparative literature’s primary desire, however, was more directly to reaffirm the essential unity of European culture, one which had been sorely disrupted by World War II, and its “patron saints” were to a remarkable extent exiles or émigrés from that devastation. By the mid-fifties, some scholars proposed the introduction of “East-West comparative literature” into the discourse, and for the next two decades a small group of specialists worked their way through a variety of critical and evaluative positions. They had to wrestle with the old-guard comparatist position that only “relationships of fact” provided adequate grounds for comparison; if that were so, then the entire premodern Asian tradition would be off-limits. But scholars like Owen Aldridge of the University of Illinois argued that “affinities” were just as interesting and certainly “illuminating” as demonstrations of direct influence, so the work of one-on-one comparison between Eastern and Western figures and texts could proceed. It did so, however, within what was often a kind of methodological and contextual vacuum. Comparisons were almost inevitably one-sided or unwittingly invidious: if similarities could be shown, it was because something Chinese was just like something Western. Discussions comparing Chinese to Western poets on an individual basis proliferated, elucidating the proleptically “romantic” or “symbolist” practices of the former, or discovering that deconstruction was practiced in fourth-century B.C.E. China. If differences existed, it was to the detriment of the Chinese example which, as Anderson put it, “diverged from the norm” (China “lacked” epic and tragedy, for example, or its fiction suffered from the “limitations” of a strong didactic impulse). Entire richly varied traditions became homogenized as unqualified monoliths in the face-off of East and West, with a selected group of East Asian texts and figures charged with the burden of being “representative,” reduced to distillations of an already essentialized culture and subject to the measure of so-called literary “universals” that turned out, to no one’s surprise, to be Western ones.

Miyoshi Masao recalls that “Critical categories transferred from European literature to East Asian literature—without scrutiny as to their applicability—were still very much in use at the beginning of the 1980s. Genre, form, structure, periodicity (such

as ‘modernity’ and ‘modernization’), intentionality, affect, authorship, originality, audience, textuality, media, plot, character, tonality, the idea of literature’ itself, and many other fundamental literary and cultural notions . . . were more or less randomly chosen as approximations.”²⁰ As comparative literature relocated itself within the domain of theory, so, too, albeit slowly, did Asian comparative literature and the study of Asian literatures. I remember as a graduate student being cautioned that it would be best to wait until New Criticism had become accepted and established practice in Asian literary studies before moving on to other approaches: such was the power of the desire to be embraced by the evolutionary master critical narrative. Soon, however, “applying” Western theory seemed to provide an intellectually respectable way of dispelling doubts about the comparability of historically unrelated texts or figures. We could pour our Chinese materials into the theoretical Cuisinart, press whatever button was in fashion—“structuralism,” “phenomenology,” “Marxism,” “deconstruction,” “Lacan”—and produce the appropriate reading. And we did, once again subsuming Asian literature to presumed theoretical universals.

Now, sinology, area studies, and comparative literature are to be credited for having made Asia a (more or less) legitimate field of teaching and research in most American universities today. But what they share, perhaps to their mutual surprise, are universalizing impulses that have, in the past, both distorted and impoverished scholarship. In other words, whether defined as “transparent communicability,” on the one hand, or “fetishized exoticism,” on the other, the historical goals of philology and comparatism can turn Asia into what has been called a “localized embellishment of the general narrative.”²¹ It makes little difference whether the story is one of a Mediterranean linguistic and mythological diaspora or the triumphant march of modernization and development theory across the globe—we are still likely to be rather far away from understanding Asia on its own terms.

Are we any closer now, and what would that mean? There’s no question that any comparative work is susceptible to the perils of generalizing from a usually unstated norm, “constrained,” as Natalie Melas puts it, “by an invisible binary bind in which comparison must end either by accentuating differences or by subsuming them under some overarching unity.”²² Who among us, after all, occupies what William Haver has called “an endowed chair of transcendental subjectivity,” such “that every movement of thinking becomes equally an object for judgment under [one’s] panoptic gaze”?²³ If, as some scholars have proclaimed, the “traditional Eurocentrism of literary studies in the West” has been finally “undone,” what has taken its place?²⁴ Rather than the “hodge-podge of critical approaches rooted in identity politics and shorn of a historical consciousness” feared by the late Bill Readings,²⁵ Gayatri Spivak has proposed that

²⁰Miyoshi Masao, “Turn to the Planet: Literature, Diversity, and Totality,” in David Leiwei Li, ed., *Globalization and the Humanities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), 20.

²¹Rey Chow, “The Politics and Pedagogy of Asian Literatures in American Universities,” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* (1990), 36.

²²Natalie Melas, “Versions of Incommensurability,” *World Literature Today* (Spring 1995), 275.

²³Review of Graham Parkes, ed., *Nietzsche and Asian Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 51.3 (August 1992), 629.

²⁴Paul Jay, “Globalization and the Postcolonial Condition,” in Li, ed., 81.

²⁵Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1996). 66; cited by Jay, 81.

scholars “redo Comparative Literature” as a truly “planetary” discipline that will “collaborate with and transform Area Studies,” sharing with it a respect for serious study of languages but in a decentered and non-hierarchical way.²⁶ If Spivak’s “planetary” eludes us, we should at the least maintain a rigorous and self-critical vigilance about our theoretical presumptions and perhaps consider the benefits of shifting vantage point from which we undertake our comparisons. Here the work of Ken Pomeranz provides an outstanding example of what happens when you don’t take the course of European history as the paradigm for the rest of the world. Assuming a different perspective, he points out that Europe’s particularities, its colonialist ventures, caused *it* to diverge from what had been circumstances shared with China. Rather than obsessing about China’s failure to industrialize, then, one can begin to reframe the question and understand why Europe did.²⁷

Global Partnerships

Our efforts to be reflective on our theories and respectful of their fit with local phenomena will be reinforced if we develop the means for durable scholarly partnerships with colleagues based in other localities. Let me now turn to the opportunities I see for building such partnerships and to a few examples of them. In his valuable study, *Internationalizing China: Domestic Interests and Global Linkages*, David Zweig analyzes the forces that are transforming Chinese universities. He charts the complex interplay of domestic and international politics—including reactions to the June 4, 1989 massacre in Tiananmen Square—bureaucratic and economic change within China, the role of overseas Chinese communities, and the voracious appetite of American and other universities for Chinese students. Deng Xiaoping initiated changes by telling Chinese educators in 1978 that “independence does not mean shutting the door on the world, nor does self reliance mean blind opposition to everything foreign.” New bureaucracies were devised to both ease and monitor the ever-growing stream of Chinese seeking education overseas. The aftermath of Tiananmen proved to be a critical moment. As Chinese students abroad protested before the global audience, hard-liners in the Chinese government were determined to punish them by exclusion and exile. The US, Canadian, and Australian governments changed their immigration regulations to allow these same students to become permanent residents. More moderate Chinese leaders, Zweig tells us, realized that “[t]o compete with the United States for this pool of human talent, China had to liberalize its policies dramatically.”²⁸ These forward-thinking leaders prevailed, and Chinese students were welcomed back. The government instituted preferential housing and employment policies for academic returnees. These incentives to return became incentives for other colleagues to go abroad. Personal and institutional international connections became increasingly valuable.

In 2004, internationalization is no longer optional: it is now an essential part of the strategic planning at any Chinese university. “Transnational linkages and resources, such as information, capital, books, technologies, management skills, and teaching methods, energized universities and became an important source of market-oriented

²⁶Gayatri Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 5, 19.

²⁷Ken Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

²⁸David Zweig, *Internationalizing China: Domestic Interests and Global Linkages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 178.

competition among faculty, among departments and bureaus in the universities, and among the universities themselves.” Returnee scholars represented “transnational capital.”²⁹ “Foreign students became valuable commodities in China’s highly commercialized educational environment.”³⁰

The liberalization of Chinese educational exchange regulations has also transformed American universities. Many Chinese scholars do not return. The present vigor of Chinese studies in the US owes much to energy, connections and perspectives of scholars born in China who are now making their careers in the US. Here before us, then, are all the materials for ever stronger linkage. How can we use them? Let me provide a few examples.

My first example, the Mellon International Dunhuang Archive (MIDA), helps preserve, document, and make globally accessible the artistic record of the several hundred Buddhist cave shrines in Dunhuang, China at the crossroads of a fabled early transnational trade route, the Silk Road. The MIDA is the product of a major and ongoing multi-institutional, multi-national effort to create high-quality digital reconstructions of the mural paintings and related art and texts. The collection reunites in cyberspace images of sacred and secular scrolls, manuscripts, textiles and other objects once located at Dunhuang and now dispersed among museums and libraries around the world. Institutions involved in this collaborative effort include The British Library, the British Museum, the Musée Guimet, the Bodleian Library, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Scholars from Northwestern University and the Dunhuang Research Academy lead this effort.

For a second example, consider the many new platforms and collaborations in East Asian archeology. Don Waters of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has called our attention to the relations among this “booming subfield,” the capacities of information technology and economic growth. He writes: “As the Chinese economy rapidly expands, development of potentially historic sites is preceded by significant archaeological work that is managed by government and university agencies at all levels, and involves teams of archaeologists from around the world. So much work is being done so rapidly that it is difficult to stay abreast of relevant work even in a neighboring village or province. Productive analysis and synthesis that promises to reshape the entire field based on these rapidly accumulating discoveries is hindered until scholars can begin simply to identify and track related work. A team of East Asian archaeologists based at Boston University is working with their Chinese colleagues and an international network of archaeologists to deploy a highly distributed digitized system that would make it possible to create and manage one of those old-fashioned, but essential tools of identifying relevant evidence and scholarly analyses—a bibliography. And the work is being designed as the framework for the eventual electronic dissemination of working and published papers.”³¹

²⁹Zweig 181.

³⁰Zweig 186.

³¹“Cyberinfrastructure and the Humanities,” Presentation to the Coalition for Networked Information, Portland, OR, December 9, 2003

My third example comes from the experience of a recent ACLS project, a collaborative research network titled “Official and Vernacular Identifications in the Making of the Modern World.” Its design reflects a new type of scholarly cooperation, one whose intellectual agenda and operating structure propose to go beyond the area studies paradigm without abandoning the centrality of deep cultural and historical knowledge of its specific research sites. The network has been multi-polar, with four teams of researchers, each studying a different world region, led collegially by one American and one local scholar, and each pursuing its own independent research agenda.

The intellectual foundation for this enterprise was the conviction that the topic chosen—identities of nations, religious and ethnic groups: how they come to be and how they change—could not be adequately studied *except* through this sort of project: area-based but not area-bound, multi-polar, collegial, with an effective structure for communication. Several natural languages were used by researchers, but the intellectual lingua franca that sustained their cross-area interactions was the project’s theoretical framework, which (simplifying greatly) was based on replacing the concept of “identity” (a static fact) with “identifications” (a process) and noting that particular choices of identifications come in a context of competing official and vernacular formulae.

I’m pleased to be able to report the appearance of solid results from the work of area-based teams: conferences, papers and books. The cross-area ambitions of the network were more difficult to realize, but regular meetings were held for exchange of views and pairs of researchers from different teams wrote comparative-collaborative essays assessing the impact of the original theoretical framework on their own subsequent work.

My fourth example is currently underway at ACLS, the Social Science Translation Project. As many of you know, the question of language presents itself on the front doorstep of any international project. Increasingly often the lingua franca is English, but whether or not this is the case, translation does and must play a role in international scholarly communication. This role is very poorly understood, and one of the principal purposes of our project is to raise the level of awareness of what is involved.

Anecdotal evidence abounds of incorrect translations leading to awkward, funny, or even tragic situations. Social science writing is especially susceptible to problematic renderings, and two scholars speaking a mutually intelligible language may be profoundly misunderstanding one another. The ACLS Translation Project has brought together a core group of sixteen translators and social scientists who will hold four workshops over the course of two years to discuss translations of selected types of social science writing (including heavily jargonized texts, prose issued by governmental agencies and NGOs). The aim is to identify non-language-specific problems that can be compiled and described in a brochure-length set of guidelines that will be addressed primarily to those who commission translations—social scientists, NGO officers, editors—but will likely be of wider interest as well. They will also offer advice on how to find a translator under a spectrum of circumstances (money is no object or no money at all).

So these are some examples of a new generation of research in which the conceptualization and the conversation are coming from and going in multiple directions.

Let me conclude with a tale of two letters that, together, seem to mark a certain transformation in building a trans-Pacific community of academic inquiry. The first, from 1972, is preserved, along with our articles of incorporation and US Congressional Charter in the "Important Papers" file at the ACLS offices. It is one sheet of neatly ruled paper. The letter responds to an invitation from the then ACLS President Frederick Burkhardt to the Chinese Academy of Sciences to send a delegation to an international conference on Taoism convened by ACLS and colleague organizations. The responding letter from China is signed by the "Red Guard Team in [the] Academy of Sciences." Its penmanship is graceful, but its tone is fierce:

July 15, 1972

Dear Mr. Burkheart;

We have received the two letters you sent us on behalf of the American Council of Learned Societies. We the Chinese people are very dubious about your purpose and intention of your sending the two letters to us. Religions the very product of remaining feudal system had long been listed among those objects which should be struggled and destroyed as early as at a time when China was liberated by Chairman Mao. At present the People's Republic of China has only Mao Tsetung Thought. All other sects are big poisonous weeds and they are not allowed to exist under the revolutionary line of the proletariat dictatorship. Whether or not you are thinking again to poison the revolutionary Chinese people by the help of religion and to revive remaining feudal ideology among the Chinese people with the invitation of our representatives to attend the International Taoism Conference. The aggressive ambitions and schemes of the United States can never be concealed before the devil-finding mirror of Mao Tsetung thought. Here we would solemnly warn you that if you dare to play any schemes and tricks, we will certainly smash your dog head.

Long Live down with U.S. imperialism!

Long Live Mao Tsetung Thought!

Red Guard Team in Academy of Sciences, Peking

I ask you to consider this letter alongside a second message I received late last month. This is an email message with the subject line "Come from the chinese letter" and addressed to "Honorific lady pauline yu." The author explains his distinctive prose by noting "I do not understand English, the draft write with English translation software, not does the consciousness deny to see understand?" It continues:

I the one who am the faith of a party member of Communist Party of China and socialisms. I know that you do an academic exchanges work of China and the United States from the network.

The United States is a democratic nation, China is the socialism nation, this is the social system totally different two nations. So I think: The

United States and China carries on the social system that one of the contents of the academic exchanges should understand the other party mutually, then China should understand the democratic institution of the United States adequately, what should the United States understand adequately is a socialism, what is a socialism, China of Chinese special features why to make how will socialism, China make the socialism. . .

The democratic institution and the centralization systems must comprehend each other, peaceful coexistence, the words that are otherwise not only disadvantageous associate mutually in the people and but also is very dangerous.

Now I send to you the article introduces the Chinese socialism of draft (in the enclosure), I also would like to understand the democratic institution of the United States very much at the same time. We can do not like the social system of the other party mutually, but understand to always have the advantage mutually of!

Please deliver an E- mail for me.
Ask toward you good!
Liu's wave

What has changed? China is still socialist, or at least some who represent it in correspondence are. The literary quality of that correspondence has declined, even as its cordiality has increased. Also notably increased is faith in the possibility of intellectual partnership. The Red Guard Team was convinced that the conference invitation concealed a dangerous ploy. Mr. Liu is convinced that ACLS's reputation in academic exchange assures that we will see mutual advantage in his invitation. It took more than three decades to effect this shift. Is this change a small example of the progress "global Asia," "global America," and the "global globe" can make? Will the 21st century see a new transnational scholarship able to comprehend simultaneously the global commonalities and the heterogeneity of local particularities? I think I'll conclude by invoking Mao Zedong's colleague, Zhou Enlai, who, when asked by Henry Kissinger for his opinion of the French Revolution, replied, "It's too soon to tell." It may indeed be too soon to tell, but we can hope. And I hope, too, that the Center for East Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Illinois will continue to be an important part of the story.

Thank you very much.