

ROUNDTABLE

Are We Adequately Training the Next Generation of Asia Experts?



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The Need for Policy-Relevant Asia Studies

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Asia's resurgence marks a turning point in world history. In the decades ahead, many of our country's greatest interests overseas—entailing opportunities as well as challenges—will be in Asia. Accordingly, the United States must be better prepared to understand the implications of developments in the region, whether they involve our nation's economic vitality, diplomacy, natural environment, or security. While Asia studies scholars have long anticipated Asia's return to the world stage, the policy community has been somewhat less attuned to these developments until recently. For a variety of reasons, the ties between these two communities have weakened over the last two decades in ways that are potentially detrimental to U.S. policy toward Asia.

The following analysis will explore the evolution of the relationship between the U.S. academic community and the U.S. policymaking community and its implications for U.S. policy toward Asia. The essay will conclude by outlining a new national research and conference initiative called the National Asia Research Program (NARP), which is designed to build stronger bridges between Asia studies scholars and policymakers. Initiatives such as the NARP will help the field of contemporary Asia studies attract more support both to boost its strength and to assemble its most capable minds on a regular basis to work on policy-relevant issues in the region. It is of vital importance to U.S. interests for Asia studies scholars to play a stronger role in shaping U.S. policy.

A Brief History of Asia Studies Programs

As with area studies in general, support and funding for Asia studies programs has waned since the 1990s, and funding is now even more tenuous due to the recent financial crisis. This development has significant albeit often underappreciated implications for U.S. policy, especially as it inversely

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corresponds to the increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific. If a decline in funding for Asia studies continues unabated, the likelihood that U.S. policymakers will lack sufficient specialized knowledge to craft effective policies toward the region will increase. A brief history of the evolution of area studies provides important context for understanding the present state of Asia studies programs and the direct impact on U.S. policy.

Early efforts to promote the study of Asia date back one hundred years. During the first decades of the twentieth century, universities across the United States enhanced their offerings in international studies as a response to the nation's growing role in world affairs. Columbia University founded its Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures in 1901.¹ In 1909, the University of Washington established the Department of Oriental History, Literature, and Institutions, which would ultimately become the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies. On the west coast, institutions were particularly attuned to events in Asia, specifically Japan.² However universities in all parts of the country were engaged in the study of Asia, and Asian studies course offerings expanded each year. The Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago was founded in 1919.³ Princeton University established a Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures in 1927,⁴ and the following year the Harvard-Yenching Institute was founded.⁵


Several universities began developing area studies programs in the 1920s and 30s. In the 1930s, the Luce Foundation began giving small grants to promote the study of Asian affairs. While such initiatives are notable, it was only as a consequence of fighting Japan in World War II and then the onset of the Cold War that area studies gained prominence. During World War II, the U.S. government called on Asia specialists to aid national intelligence. For example, George Taylor, who had been building the Department of Oriental Studies at the University of Washington, left his post to join the Office of War Information.⁶ Such experiences bolstered the

¹ "Department History," Columbia University, Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures  http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ealac/about_introduction.html.

² Anand Yang, "A Hundred Years of the Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies: Engaging Minds, Engaging the World, 1909–2009," University of Washington, Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies, 2009.

³ "The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago," University of Chicago, Oriental Institute  <http://oi.uchicago.edu/>.

⁴ "Program History: East Asian Studies at Princeton," Princeton University, East Asian Studies Program  <http://www.princeton.edu/eap/about/history/>.

⁵ The Harvard-Yenching Institute was founded with funding provided by the estate of Charles M. Hall, the founder of the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA). See "The History of the Harvard-Yenching Institute," Harvard-Yenching Institute  <http://www.harvard-yenching.org/about/history/>.

⁶ Yang, "A Hundred Years," 22.

resumes of experts in the field and contributed to the growth of area studies at U.S. educational institutions. During the Cold War, area studies was further strengthened by an influx of foreign scholars studying and teaching at American universities.

Following World War II, there was an increasing demand for deep knowledge of the world at large as the United States sought to contain the expansion of Soviet power and influence and U.S. interests overseas expanded dramatically. Although most moderately educated Americans had at least some basic familiarity with Western Europe and Japan at that time, they knew very little about other people and places. This knowledge deficit made the United States potentially vulnerable to the Soviet Union, particularly in developing countries around the globe. During the years following World War II and throughout the Cold War, it became a national security imperative for the United States to cultivate regional experts on the histories, languages, and cultures of societies around the world.

Academe was an eager participant in this national security effort. Toward the end of World War II, universities recognized the wide-ranging relevance of East Asia, the Soviet Union, and other non-Western countries and made full use of the considerable funding they received from major foundations and the U.S. government to develop area studies programs. In 1946, the Rockefeller Foundation provided funding for the establishment of the first area studies center in the country, Columbia University's Russia Institute.⁷ Then, in 1949, the foundation announced a twelve-year program promoting area studies, and universities in the United States and around the world received grants. In 1952, Dean Rusk, president of the Rockefeller Foundation, emphasized the importance of Asia to a congressional committee and pointed out that the foundation had "attached significant importance to these area studies."⁸

Additionally, the Ford Foundation was integral to the development of policy-relevant area studies centers in the United States, giving \$278 million for international studies from 1950 through 1973. Of this, \$37 million went to Asia studies, including a pledge of \$23.8 million to China studies between 1959 and 1970. In 1951, the University of Chicago established an interdisciplinary Committee on Far Eastern Studies, which were later reorganized as the Center for Far Eastern Studies with the support of funds

⁷ Rockefeller Foundation, "The Rockefeller Foundation Timeline" ~ http://www.rockfound.org/about_us/history/1940_1949.shtml.

⁸ John Trumbour, *How Harvard Rules: Reason in the Service of Empire* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

from the Ford Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education, and other sources. Ford Foundation funding also contributed to the establishment of the Foreign Area Fellowship Program (FAFP) in 1952, which created opportunities for scholars to study overseas. The foundation eventually handed the FAFP to the Area Studies Committees, which were jointly sponsored by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in 1972, but it continued to provide millions of dollars of support.

U.S. government support for area studies was no less significant. Between 1946 and 1970, the U.S. government contributed \$15 million to China studies alone.⁹ The most important source of funding began in 1958, when Congress demonstrated its understanding of the need for international expertise by passing Title VI, a key part of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). Title VI focused on language development, specifically the development of less commonly taught languages. The act supported language area centers for expanding postsecondary language education and related subjects. The NDEA provided funds for the Department of Education to support approximately 125 area studies programs as National Resource Centers (NRC).¹⁰ Title VI funding also enabled the founding of Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships (FLAS) and International Research Studies (IRS).

Many universities have benefited from Title VI funding in the past 50 years. For example, in 1956 Columbia University founded the Weatherhead Institute for East Asian Studies with a wide variety of funding sources. Since 1960, the Department of Education has designated Columbia as an East Asian NRC and provides 3% (approximately \$255,000) of the center's annual funding needs.¹¹ Efforts to promote area studies were reinforced in 1961 with the expansion of the Fulbright Program for "Mutual Education and Cultural Exchange," which allowed the U.S. government to fund thousands of dissertations and research projects on the non-Western world.¹² The effect of Title VI on area studies has undoubtedly been both significant

⁹ Chalmers Johnson, "Political Science and East Asian Area Studies," in *Political Science and Area Studies: Rivals or Partners*, ed. Lucian W. Pye (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1975), 78, 97, 80.

¹⁰ David L. Szanton, "The Origin, Nature, and Challenges of Area Studies in the United States," in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David L. Szanton (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

¹¹ "About the Weatherhead East Asian Institute," Weatherhead East Asian Institute ~ <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/about.html>.

¹² Szanton, "The Origin, Nature, and Challenges of Area Studies in the United States."

and beneficial, but still fewer than 3% of the nation's higher education institutions that offer modern foreign languages have Title VI NRCs.¹³

Area studies programs not only created space for scholars to explore virtually uncharted intellectual territory but also gave them an opportunity to serve the national interest. Area studies programs have provided strong incentives for scholars to contribute to U.S. foreign policymaking, whether through a permanent or temporary career transition into government or simply through cultivating policy-relevant research. While many scholars were not drawn to the policymaking process (and some even scorned the possibility of using their work toward that end), the prospect of having an impact on policy was in itself a reward for many scholars as it demonstrated the relevance and importance of their work.

Against this backdrop, the traditional social science disciplines and the burgeoning field of area studies found themselves in competition with one another. As Lucian Pye wrote in a 1975 volume dedicated to understanding the complexities of this rivalry, the differences between social science disciplines and area studies affect “the self-identities of aspiring scholars, the designing, funding, and execution of research, and even the organizing and hiring of faculties.”¹⁴ These differences were typically cast in binary terms, with each side arguing the greater intellectual or policy merit of its respective position. For example, while the social science disciplines were characterized as theory-driven and scientifically grounded, area studies was characterized as archival and empirical. The “theoretically pure” social science scholars believed their methodological approach made them capable of uncovering universalisms. As such, they generally discounted the importance that area studies scholars placed on understanding the unique elements of a particular region or culture. From a social science perspective, area studies was highly subjective and therefore inferior to well-tested theories in explaining the behavior of foreign actors. Though often overstated and misrepresented by both sides, the existence of such dichotomies between the social sciences and area studies nonetheless fueled bitter academic turf wars throughout the Cold War heyday of area studies and even into the present.

Area studies in the United States continues to contribute excellent scholarship and attract promising students, though it has generally fallen

¹³ Richard D. Brecht and William P. Rivers, “Language and National Security: The Federal Role in Building Language Capacity in the United States,” National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland, August 2001.

¹⁴ Lucian W. Pye, “The Confrontation between Discipline and Area Studies,” in Pye, *Political Science and Area Studies*, 3.

out of vogue and out of touch with policymakers since the end of the Cold War. Joseph Nye addressed this trend with regard to the role of political scientists in government in an April 2009 op-ed piece for the *Washington Post*. He pointed out that while it was quite common in years past for political scientists such as Henry Kissinger to fill high-level positions in government, this is no longer the case. As evidence, he cited the 2008 Teaching, Research and International Policy (TRIP) poll, by the Institute for Theory and Practice in International Relations, that shows that only 3 of the 25 top-rated scholars producing the most interesting work during the past five years had ever held policy positions. Interestingly, he believes that “the fault for this growing gap lies not with the government but with the academics.” According to Nye, academics have effectively cut themselves off from the policy world by their focus on theories and methods that often require specialized knowledge and a good deal of time to comprehend.¹⁵ This is not to say that their work inherently lacks policy relevance, but that little effort is made to demonstrate and communicate this relevance to policymakers.

Thus, as social sciences gained prominence and security issues seemed less pressing with the “end of history,” the need for developing deep knowledge of a foreign country became less urgent and bonds between academics and policymakers weakened. Area studies programs now commonly encourage expertise within a social sciences department as well as on a particular country or region. This trend has in some ways strengthened area studies programs, but it makes the path to becoming a China or Japan “expert” all the more difficult because a student is responsible for mastering multiple disciplines. While certainly not insurmountable, such a requirement risks yielding only a superficial knowledge of a foreign country or a discipline. Moreover, it strains the student’s ability to communicate ideas beyond a particular disciplinary field.

The history of area studies programs is certainly much more extensive than can be stated in this essay. Suffice it to say that the evolution of area studies is deeply rooted in the values and traditions of both the academic and the policy communities. At present, Asia studies programs have a somewhat tenuous place in the academic world and are virtually removed from the policy world. It is possible and, indeed, essential to reintroduce the value of area studies for both of these worlds.

¹⁵ Joseph S. Nye Jr., “Scholars on the Sidelines,” *Washington Post*, April 13, 2009.

Critical Policy Issues in Asia

Despite the post–Cold War lull in U.S. threat perceptions, the challenges the United States faces abroad, particularly in Asia, are still daunting. In the aftermath of September 11, the U.S. threat perception once again became more acute, but many policymakers still have not adequately recognized challenges arising from the Asia-Pacific region. After a tumultuous history during the greater part of the previous century, the region has emerged as an economic and political powerhouse deserving of high expectations. Yet, as the naysayers point out, Asia is fraught with grave security challenges that could disrupt its rise. Irrespective of its trajectory, the region is certain to demand greater attention than in the past:

- Asia has long been a source of global economic growth, but in the current financial crisis, Asia is more critical than ever. Despite the slowdown, the region has proved to be incredibly resilient. The Asian Development Bank forecasts the region's 2010 growth rate to be 6.4%, compared to 3.9% in 2009.¹⁶ Having already rebounded significantly, the region has an important role to play in fueling the global economic recovery. Over the long term, the United States will need to work with the region to rebalance the economic relationship between the two sides in order to help avert a similar crisis.
- The political landscape in Asia is rapidly evolving in ways that are highly consequential to U.S. interests. The rise of China is the salient phenomenon in the region and, indeed, in world affairs. The region includes Japan and India as the principal powers with vibrant, multi-party democracies. Yet it also includes North Korea and Burma, two of the world's most closed and repressive regimes. The character and strength of these regimes hold serious implications for regional peace and stability, economic progress, opportunities to solve international problems, and the advancement of human rights, among other issues.
- The growth in Asian regional institutionalism also requires serious attention from the United States. Having established a strong tradition of regional cooperation through organizations such as ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation), Asian states continue to develop new regional mechanisms to manage economic, security, and political issues. Although some are designed to work in tandem with existing multilateral organizations (i.e., the Chiang Mai Initiative as it relates to the International Monetary Fund), others are more regionally exclusive in nature (i.e., the East Asia Summit and the Shanghai Cooperation

¹⁶ Asian Development Bank, *Asian Development Outlook 2009 Update: Broadening Openness for a Resilient Asia* (September 2009): 1–172.

Organization) and hint at a new Asian regional self-confidence. It is important for the United States to be intimately knowledgeable of these regional organizations as they could affect the international system and rules of the road more generally.

- Asia is home to numerous traditional security challenges. Of obvious concern to U.S. interests at present is the war in Afghanistan, yet the United States does not have the luxury to focus solely on this regional security challenge. U.S. policy must also address issues ranging from the proliferation of nuclear weapons (i.e., North Korea) to the enduring maritime and territorial sovereignty disputes in the region (i.e., South China Sea, Taiwan, and Kashmir, among others). While the United States is not and perhaps should not be at the center of resolving all of these issues, it is clearly essential for U.S. policymakers to have deep knowledge and an informed position on them.
- Nontraditional security challenges in Asia have an enormous impact on U.S. policy. Health and human security, environmental degradation and resource scarcity, and social and demographic imbalances, among others, all risk undermining regional stability. While many regions in the world face similar nontraditional security challenges, the scale and rapid escalation of these challenges in Asia is exceptional. In the case of mitigating climate change, for example, China and India are integral to the success of any global emissions reduction effort. Asia will be at the center of resolving many other global nontraditional security challenges as well.

While the social sciences can contribute to our understanding of these types of regional challenges in a general sense, they are insufficiently capable of explaining Asia's complex environment. With a concentration of economic, political, and military power in Asia, the consequences of failing to understand regional nuances are immense. Clearly, Asia matters greatly to U.S. as well as global interests, and the need for a deep and detailed knowledge of the region is perhaps stronger than at any other time in modern history.

New Opportunity to Bridge the Gap

The need and opportunity to strengthen Asia studies programs and rekindle their ties to the U.S. policy community is greater than ever. In recognition of this, The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars are launching a major national research and conference program, entitled The National Asia

Research Program (NARP), which is designed to reinforce the importance of area studies for understanding the policy implications of Asia's rise.

The NARP will achieve this purpose through multiple interrelated components including:

- Establishing an Advisory Council to develop a research framework for the NARP every two years.
- Establishing a NARP Selection Committee that will select up to 35 National Asia Research Associates and Fellows to serve a two-year term during which they will contribute policy-relevant research for publication and presentation. Candidates will be nominated by the presidents and chancellors of U.S. research organizations and institutions of higher learning participating in the program. The NARP Associates and Fellows will be invited to contribute policy-relevant research both for publication in NBR and Wilson Center publications and for presentation at conferences and briefings across the United States.
- Convening an Asia Policy Assembly, a major international policy/academic conference that will feature presentations by NARP Associates and Fellows, keynote addresses by central figures in international affairs, and the participation of university presidents, international scholars, graduate students, and other stakeholders in the field of Asia studies. The first Asia Policy Assembly will take place in June 2010.
- Awarding a significant prize, named after renowned Asia scholar Robert A. Scalapino, to one scholar whose commitment and expertise have made exceptional contributions to U.S. understanding of the vast changes underway in the region. In the months following the Assembly, the Scalapino Prize winner and select Associates and Fellows will present their research at a West Coast Symposium open to the public.

Through the NARP, NBR and the Wilson Center hope to foster stronger ties between the policy and academic communities and cultivate the next generation of Asia scholars. We believe this program will be enriching for the field of Asia studies and beneficial for U.S. policy. The NARP is meant to support and cultivate the interests of those scholars who care about influencing U.S. policy in Asia but have few outlets and little incentive.

Institutions like NBR and the Wilson Center are well positioned to play a role in bridging the gap between policymakers and academe. Our outreach and publication vehicles are often tailored specifically for the policy community. This is not only in terms of the format, but also in our

ability to pinpoint the policy relevant findings in research projects. Both NBR and the Wilson Center place a high priority on the NARP and intend to do everything possible to ensure adequate funding. By building the first ever national association for Asia studies scholars who work on policy-relevant issues, and by facilitating the close interaction of these scholars with policymakers, we hope to strengthen our nation's capacity to develop effective policies toward Asia. 

Gen Next: Are We Adequately Training Our Next Generation of China Intelligence Analysts?

Christopher M. Clarke

I have been asked to address the question of whether we are adequately training our next generation of Asia experts, a seemingly clear and simple task, but one which first requires some deconstruction. First, who is “we”? Second, what do we mean by “training” and what are the necessary components of “adequate” training? Finally, what do we mean by “Asia experts”?

This essay will mainly address the preparation of intelligence community analysts specializing in China, my own area of interest and experience. Some of these remarks, no doubt, will be applicable to other types of Asia experts, while some will not. But in both academia and the U.S. government, China experts almost certainly outnumber experts on any other part of Asia, and China is arguably the Asian country that will have the largest and most enduring impact on the 21st century. Thus, it is vital that “we” “adequately train” the “next generation” of experts to best understand and be able to interpret China for the rest of the world.

Taking a Beating

Since September 11, outsiders have been extremely critical of the quality of intelligence community analysis, pointing to several key areas of alleged deficiency, including structural, cultural, educational, managerial, and other shortcomings. The so-called 9/11 Report, for example, was highly critical of the intelligence community’s performance in the run-up to the deadly terrorist attacks of 2001.¹ Jeffrey R. Cooper, in his 2005 study “Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis,” is scathing in criticizing “the dysfunctional practices and processes that have evolved within the culture of intelligence analysis” and calls for “fundamentally different approaches in both collection and analysis, as well as in the processing and dissemination practices and

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¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2004), 339–60, 399–428.

procedures that support them.”² In addition to managerial and structural reforms, Cooper points out:

[there is] no substitute for analytic expertise, deep understanding, and self-imposed professional discipline...they must come from an appropriate recruiting profile, effective training, continual mentoring at all levels, time to learn and practice the craft of analysis—both individually and collectively—and constraining the “tyranny of the taskings” that prevents analysts from exercising curiosity and pondering more than the obvious answer.³

Douglas Hart and Steven Simon are even more critical: “none of the current efforts to reform the U.S. intelligence community addresses...[the]... virtually intractable pedagogical, cultural, and organizational challenges” facing intelligence analysts.⁴ They go on to warn that “the intelligence community is saddled with large numbers of new recruits who are, on average, ill equipped to manage the complex analytical demands posed by a new, highly distributed and strongly motivated adversary operating within a framework of values, beliefs and experiences alien to the average American.”⁵ While specifically decrying the lack of preparation for dealing with much of the Muslim world and the problems of international terrorism, Hart and Simon’s points apply in many respects to China as well:

- “Only 10% of enrolled [American college] students study a foreign language; a far smaller percentage concentrates in one. The top five choices are Spanish, French, German, Italian, and American Sign Language.”
- “It takes 33 months of full-time instruction in a language not written in the Latin alphabet to bring the average student to a so-called 3.3 level, which reflects competency but not fluency.”⁶

Hart and Simon go on to assert that “students graduating from four-year institutions of higher education in the United States are not well equipped for critical thinking.”⁷ They cite studies showing that college students have difficulty drawing inferences, synthesizing and integrating

² Jeffrey R. Cooper, “Curing Analytic Pathologies: Pathways to Improved Intelligence Analysis,” Center for the Study of Intelligence, December 2005, 6–7.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴ Douglas Hart and Steven Simon, “Thinking Straight and Talking Straight: Problems of Intelligence Analysis,” *Survival* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 35.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁷ *Ibid.*

information, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and estimating potential outcomes, as well as reach hasty conclusions and have difficulty separating conclusions from the assumptions that undergird them.

Another study by Kenneth Lieberthal, a China specialist with extensive experience in academe, government, and think-tank work, warns that “many of the young IC [intelligence community] analysts...lack the deep immersion in the country’s political system, economy, and modern history necessary to produce nuanced, insightful analytic products.”⁸ He warns that “Area studies programs have declined across the U.S. higher educational system. The social sciences in particular have trended overall toward prioritizing methodology and theory over empirical work and deep immersion in individual cases... country and regional specializations often do not provide an adequate basis for obtaining tenure.”⁹ Lieberthal’s recommendations include devoting “greater time and attention to formal training” and nurturing and rewarding area specialists. Similar recommendations were made in 2006 by a multi-disciplinary task force under the auspices of the Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland.¹⁰

The result of this deficient analytical expertise is said to have been a contributing cause to the so-called intelligence failures of the 1990s, including the failure to connect the dots between the first attack on the World Trade Center in 1993 and the ultimately successful effort that brought down the twin towers on September 11; the mistaken judgments about WMDs in Iraq; the failure to accurately assess the nuclear weapons programs of India, Iran, and North Korea; and the mistaken identity that led to the accidental bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999.

Problems Start Early

The U.S. education system from top to bottom lacks an outward-looking perspective. Primary and secondary school generally contain, at best, two years of general world history, and many teachers are unfamiliar with and unprepared to teach in any depth the history, civilization, and culture of such foreign regions as East Asia or the Middle East. Very few primary or secondary schools offer an Asian language.

⁸ Kenneth Lieberthal, “The U.S. Intelligence Community and Foreign Policy: Getting Analysis Right,” Brookings Institution, September 2009, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰ William J. Lahnen et al., “The Future of Intelligence Analysis: Final Report,” Center for International and Security Studies at the University of Maryland, March 10, 2006.

College education is not much better. There is little question, for example, that American college students are significantly behind developed world averages in studying—never mind gaining fluency in—foreign languages, and that these shortages are particularly severe in the so-called hard languages, including Arabic, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and languages of the emerging world. Even the better universities often only require the equivalent of two years of foreign language and, perhaps, a year of world history.

Unless matriculating at a well-known China studies center, college students are lucky to find more than a small number of course offerings on Asian history, culture, politics, or foreign affairs. Heavily loaded requirements, limited class sessions, and scheduling conflicts often prevent students from even taking all those courses that are available. Master's degree programs are often much the same: requirements consume the first year, leaving the student to attempt to fit in whatever language and substantive courses possible in the second year. PhD programs can be just as problematic, with such strong disciplinary and departmental focus on methodology (as if language competency were not an appropriate methodology for a country or area studies major) that students have little time for courses of substance on Asian affairs. One academic at a premier U.S. university told the author that some PhD students specializing in China have had as few as two or three courses on the country before graduation.¹¹

“Unfortunately,” according to a veteran IC analyst and high-level manager, once an analyst joins a government intelligence agency, “the intelligence community does not spend a significant amount of time on analyst training. Much that an analyst learns comes through on-the-job training.”¹² This conclusion is echoed by Kenneth Lieberthal, who notes that “a typical US military career will entail about 15–25% of the time in formal training.”¹³ Foreign Service officers also typically spend up to 25% of their career in a variety of training courses, including initial indoctrination, mid-level substantive and management training, and language training (often as many as two to three years and frequently in more than one language over a twenty-year career). Formal training for IC analysts is generally limited

¹¹ Author's private communication, spring 2009. For another critique of the weakness of higher education for preparing intelligence personnel, see Bowman H. Miller, “Improving All-Source Intelligence Analysis: Elevate Knowledge in the Equation,” *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* 21, no. 2 (June 2008): 337–54.

¹² Mark M. Lowenthal, *Intelligence: From Secrets to Policy* (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2000).

¹³ Lieberthal, “The U.S. Intelligence Community,” 40.

to “tradecraft” (thinking skills, writing, etc.), IC issues, and management. Often language training must be squeezed in before or after work or during lunch hour.

Is It Really That Bad?

Though these critiques of the preparation and training of IC analysts contain much truth, in my experience they suffer from unrealistic expectations and are somewhat overstated. Few employers in any line of work expect new graduates—whether bachelors or masters—to possess the expertise to step directly out of the classroom and assume a full work burden. The IC should be no exception.

The situation is not as grim as portrayed by many critics, however. There are a number of universities that have maintained long-standing ties with the U.S. government, for example, that offer master’s degree programs tailored to the needs of employment in the Foreign Service or the IC. These include the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service, George Washington University, and the University of Maryland system. These programs are often staffed, at least in part, by retired government experts and diplomats, and they offer courses in area studies, policy analysis, intelligence disciplines, and other subjects directly relevant to the work of the IC. Several have their own campuses or maintain close relations with universities and training programs in China, offering the opportunity of a year or more of full-time study in country. Although several of these schools are in the Washington, D.C., area—making ongoing contact between administrators and faculty and government experts and recruiters easier—schools such as Harvard and Stanford, among others, also have first-rate programs that prepare students well for transition to government employment. As a result, the Foreign Service and IC recruit a disproportionate number of their new hires from such schools.

At the same time, there have never been so many opportunities for high school and college students to live and study abroad, including in China. As of the 2004–05 academic year, China was the eighth-leading host destination for American students and the only Asian country in the top ten, with nearly 6,400 students spending at least part of the academic year in the People’s Republic

of China.¹⁴ By the 2006–07 academic year, more than 11,000 Americans were studying at Chinese universities, a jump of another 25%.¹⁵ Every indication suggests the numbers will keep climbing. This has provided the IC with a substantial pool of candidates with in-country experience and at least some language competency. As Kenneth Lieberthal points out, a security system still stuck in the Cold War makes it difficult for those with the most intimate connections to China—and therefore the greatest presumed expertise—to receive the types of security clearance needed for IC employment,¹⁶ but enough well-qualified candidates appear to have passed through this barrier to meet the major increase in IC staffing of China analysts.¹⁷

The intelligence community is also working to establish a program to more directly train potential recruits in colleges around the country, a program modeled on the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) that has been so successful in providing the military with trained officers upon graduation. According to the *Washington Post*, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence has proposed a program as part of its 2010 intelligence budget, under which colleges and universities would apply for grants that would be used to expand or introduce courses “to meet the emerging needs of the intelligence community.”¹⁸ Applicants to the program would be required to pass a background security investigation and would receive tuition assistance. Like ROTC graduates, these students would be committed to spend a certain amount of time employed by the IC.

Higher education, even at the master's degree or PhD level or with an ROTC-like IC degree, will never be a substitute for experience, mentoring, and rigorous practice in critical thinking and writing. No entrants to

¹⁴ Wang Shanshan, “Now, Nation a Big Draw for Foreign Students,” *China Daily*, December 19, 2006. This reportedly was a 35% increase over the previous year. This number, however, was dwarfed by the more than 60,000 Chinese students studying in the United States at the same time. Even accounting for a Chinese population roughly five times that of the United States, Chinese students in this country outnumbered American students in China by almost two to one. Hart and Simon report that the CIA has been hiring an estimated 2,000 individuals per year (not all analysts), resulting in at least 30%–40% of the staff having been on the job five years or less. Hart and Simon, “Thinking Straight and Talking Straight,” 43.

¹⁵ Tamar Lewin, “Study Abroad Flourishes; China Attracts More American Students,” *Tech*, online edition, November 18, 2008 ~ <http://tech.mit.edu/V128/N56/studyabroad.html>.

¹⁶ Lieberthal, “The U.S. Intelligence Community,” 30–31. See also Lahneman, “The Future of Intelligence Analysis.”

¹⁷ Numbers and distribution of China analysts within the IC remain classified, and definitions of what constitutes an “analyst” hinder estimates. Since September 11, however, the number of “all source” analysts working on China appears to have significantly more than doubled. Lieberthal provides an estimate of approximately 18,000 total IC “analysts,” without any further breakdown by specialty. Lieberthal, “The U.S. Intelligence Community,” 13.

¹⁸ Walter Pincus, “Obama Administration Looks to Colleges for Future Spies,” *Washington Post*, June 20, 2009.

the IC could possibly come completely prepared to deal with the array of issues and flood of information they will confront. The IC still lags in providing continuing linguistic and substantive education but is beefing up cooperation with other centers of expertise, including allies and foreign partners, multinational organizations, industry, think-tanks, and academics as one way of making up for the shortfall.¹⁹ One aspect of this outreach is the IC Associates Program, run by the National Intelligence Council, which is “designed to expand the global coverage of the Intelligence Community by tapping the expertise of scholars outside the Government.”²⁰

Generation “Next”

The director of national intelligence (DNI) estimates that in the coming decade expertise will consist in large part of the ability to quickly find and assess information and communicate it to the appropriate consumer. In today’s globalized world, policymakers and other consumers have a better understanding of China than those of 20 or 30 years ago. Many, if not most, have been to the country, often multiple times, and the “rise” of China assures that would-be policymakers or officials will pay attention to the key issues involving China. The needs of intelligence customers have changed, and with them the IC business model is changing.²¹

Although substantive depth will remain crucial, according to the DNI,

by 2015, the Intelligence Community will be expected to provide more details about more issues to more customers...the range of customers will broaden to emphasize other federal departments (e.g., Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Commerce), state and local agencies, international organizations, and private sector and non-governmental organizations.²²

The analytic community [through 2015] will be expected to understand and develop judgments on a broad spectrum of national security threats, support a more diverse customer set, and cope with access to unprecedented amounts and types of information. Information overload already presents a profound challenge to our business model. Given these challenges, the analytic community has no choice but to pursue major breakthroughs in capability. Applying the principle of Collaborative Analytics, analysts will be freed to work in a

¹⁹ “Vision 2015: A Globally Networked and Integrated Intelligence Enterprise,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Washington, D.C., July 2008, 13–14.

²⁰ National Intelligence Council, “IC Associates Program” ~>http://www.dni.gov/nic/IC_associates.html.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

fundamentally different way—in distributed networks focused on a common mission.²³

The good news is that the “Gen Next” cohort—and perhaps even more so, the upcoming “Gen Z” generation—are better prepared to face the technological and informational challenges of the future than are the current generation of analysts.²⁴ The new generation—raised on and educated with technology and inculcated with a more collaborative outlook to research, project management, and accomplishment—is well placed to face such an environment.

Prospects

In short, it appears to this author—based on both a review of the literature and personal experience—that recruitment and the expertise of incoming IC analysts, at least on China, are less serious problems than many critics have suggested. This is not to minimize the generally low level of public understanding of Asia; the poor job the U.S. education system does in emphasizing broad horizons, languages, and expertise in foreign culture; the systemic impediments to getting well-qualified candidates through the security gauntlet; or the need for depth of expertise within the IC’s analytic corps.

The greater problem, however, likely will be retaining the high quality young people the IC is able to recruit. As the ODNI pointed out,

the intelligence workforce of the future will be more distributed, virtual, and flexible than at anytime in the past... We need professionals with strong linguistic skills, deep cultural understanding, and mastery of the “human terrain.” Cultural, linguistic, and technical diversity will be critical to the workforce of the future. Moreover, the changing strategic environment will require a more entrepreneurial and customer-focused workforce that can combine deep functional knowledge and expertise with broad networking and collaboration skills.²⁵

The problem will be that Gen Next people with such skills will view government employment as a step in a lifelong journey, not necessarily as

²³ Vision 2015,” 13.

²⁴ “Gen Y” or “Gen Next” generally refers to those born between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. Consequently, Gen Y has little or no recollection of the Cold War. September 11, however, dramatically changed this generation’s college experience. Members of Gen Y are “digital natives” who have owned a cell phone their entire adult lives, always received most of their news from the Internet, are comfortable multi-tasking and working in teams, are savvy in rapidly accessing and evaluating public domain knowledge, and telecommute as a way of life. They are the current class of recruits for the IC, business, and other segments of society that will be dealing with China. “Gen Z,” or the “Internet Generation,” is still in elementary or secondary school. Adapted from “Vision 2015,” 10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

a career, as most of their predecessors did. For many Gen Next experts, a tour as an IC analyst or collector will be neither their first job nor their last. Along with their technological sophistication and sense of social responsibility often comes a degree of impatience with obstacles to “getting the job done,” a disdain for bureaucracy and seemingly incomprehensible security restrictions, a substantial sense of ambition, and a sharp eye for opportunity. Such people will be in high demand in business and other private sectors, which often can provide higher salaries, more attractive career opportunities, and fewer constraints. In the future, managing and retaining a high quality corps of intelligence analysts may present a greater challenge than recruiting or training them. ♦

Asian Studies Past, Present, and Future

Anand A. Yang

Pronouncements about the imminent demise of the field of area studies notwithstanding, area studies is very much alive and well in the United States and elsewhere. In fact, the field's Asian studies variant is blossoming, particularly in Asia, where research and teaching concentrating on the region as a whole or in part have gained considerable traction in the last two or three decades. Indeed, universities in East and Southeast Asia are investing in the study of their own areas by establishing centers, institutes, and departments, often with the generous support of their governments.

In the United States, by contrast, there has been much angst expressed and much ink spilled over the perceived decline of area studies. Many of the field's proponents believe that they have become marginalized in the academy, their area- and culture-specific concerns overshadowed by the formal and mathematical modeling that has become the stock-in-trade of social science disciplines—particularly economics, and from early on, but also increasingly political science and sociology.

Furthermore, the so-called area studies wars that flared in the 1980s and 1990s not only shattered rising expectations about the growth of area studies in the humanities and social sciences but also challenged the field's founding assumptions about the significance of context-based learning and research. This was a major turnaround from the initial post-Sputnik decades of the 1960s and 1970s, when, for a moment, the field appeared poised to gain considerable standing in a number of disciplines. At many institutions, interests ran high enough that programs and even departments centered on area studies were established. Underwriting this growth were funds that poured in from private foundations and the federal government, the latter taking the form of Title VI appropriations for area and international studies initially authorized by the National Defense Education Act of 1958.

Beginning in the 1980s, however, the tide turned against area studies, with intellectual opposition mounting at the same time as funding dried up because key foundations shifted their priorities away from area-based to theme- and problem-based research.

To make matters worse, the field has had to confront attacks from within and without: from postcolonial and postmodern critics drawn primarily

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from the ranks of humanities-related cultural and literary studies fields, which once constituted the core disciplines associated with area studies, and from humanities and social science scholars writing in the wake of the Cold War, who challenge the field's attachment to that earlier era's categories and imperatives at a time when global forces are transforming the lives of individuals and societies everywhere.

Critics find the field of Asian studies wanting, in other words, because they consider it overly Orientalist, on the one hand, and overly dependent, on the other hand, on rigid American notions of states and regions that are more in accord with that particular country's strategic imperatives. To some, the very idea of treating Asia, or for that matter its regional divisions of Central, East, South, and Southeast Asia, as analytical units is problematic because they are viewed as fabrications of European colonialism and, subsequently, U.S. imperialism.

As the first decade of the 21st century closes out, the field of area studies does not look worse for the wear, as the rest of this discussion will illustrate by using Asian studies as a case in point. In fact, the field is entering a new growth spurt, with the impetus this time around stemming primarily from developments occurring in Asia as well as in the United States. Consequently, research and teaching imperatives are changing, including in the United States, in large part in response to the emergence of Asia as the new center of global economic, political, and socio-cultural gravity. Two manifestations of this new outlook are the greater emphasis placed on highlighting the internal dynamics of change in the area rather than external forces and Asia's global connections and ties to all world regions rather than just Europe and the United States. "Global Asia," which has been the theme of scholarly conferences, special journal issues, and even new institutes and publications, is a rubric some people in the academy employ both to cast a spotlight on the area's centrality in world affairs and to underline its historical and contemporary ties with every corner of the earth.

Leaders and academics in Asia today understandably repose considerable confidence in their own world area and its centrality. More so than ever before, they dwell on the ties that bind their countries together in the present—and that will increasingly bind them in the future—than on the history that divides them. Although better mutual understanding alone will not create a pan-Asian identity or European Union-style integration, these possibilities are no longer idle speculation. Consider how widespread and serious public discourse in Asia is about Asian regionalism and about establishing an architecture for cooperation across the entire area as well as

in particular regions—for instance, an East Asia community. ASEAN in the 21st century is a very different organization than when it sprang to life in 1967, and the surge of bilateral and multilateral agreements across the entire area is yet another manifestation of growing economic integration.

Asia is very much in the U.S. headlines as well. Hardly a day goes by when there is not public talk about the rise of Asia, about our living in the midst of an Asian century, and about China's growing economic and military ascendancy and India's imminent ascent to great power status. In the academy, to use my home institution of the University of Washington in Seattle as an example, interest in Asia is clearly on the up and up, particularly in China but also in the rest of East Asia and increasingly in South and Southeast Asia. In recent years, Asian studies majors at the undergraduate and graduate levels have been steadily increasing. In addition, students are flocking to classes on contemporary Asia, especially ones relating to business, economics, politics, societies, and popular cultures. Professional schools, business and law in particular, are also taking notice by developing programs that focus on the area and prepare students to live and work in the new century.

National data on student enrollment in foreign language classes at the postsecondary level further highlights the rise of Asia in the classroom. European languages still rule, especially Spanish, which commands a little over 50% of all students learning a foreign language. But as a 2006 survey of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) indicates, interest in Asian languages is intensifying—in Chinese especially, although Japanese continues to do well and still attracts the largest audiences among Asian languages.¹ Sixth overall, Japanese accounts for 4.2% of foreign languages studied, followed by Chinese with a 3.3% share. French, German, American Sign Language, and Italian, by contrast, which follow on the heels of Spanish, make up 13%, 5%, 5%, and 5%, respectively. Although still relatively small, the number of students taking Korean and Hindi is growing as well.

Although foreign language enrollment at the college and university level, in the words of the 2006 MLA report, “mirror significant national and global developments, including the rise of Asian economies [and] the steady increase of Spanish-speaking residents,” they are still a far cry from earlier patterns when a significantly higher proportion of postsecondary students

¹ See “New MLA Survey Shows Significant Increases in Foreign Language Study at U.S. Colleges and Universities,” Press Release, November 13, 2007 ~ http://www.mla.org/pdf/release11207_ma_feb_update.pdf.

enrolled in foreign language classes.² Furthermore, the aggregate number of students taking classes in Japanese (66,605) and Chinese (51,582) is relatively minuscule, especially when compared to the staggeringly high percentage of people studying or fluent in English in any Asian country.

Across Asia, foreign language study begins early, in middle or primary school, as it must for young learners to have a reasonable chance of attaining proficiency in a second language. Unfortunately, however, the number of K-12 schools in the United States offering serious language instruction remains small, although many more are embarking on it, including at the elementary school level, and opting for Chinese.

And more schools will, especially if China continues to thrive. Chinese language instruction at the K-12 level, furthermore, has also received a boost from the Confucius institutes that are springing up in each and every state. Funded by the Chinese government, these institutes are designed to promote the study of Chinese language and culture through partnerships involving local universities and neighboring pre-collegiate schools or school districts working in concert with institutions of higher learning in China that supply the language instructors. In most states, universities with China or Asian studies programs have taken the lead because the Confucius institutes help them strengthen their Chinese language coverage and extend their ties to the extramural community. What the long-term impact of the Confucius institutes will be in developing Chinese language instruction and study at all educational levels remains to be seen, although the goal of promoting study early on in the career of students is admirable.


Thriving as well is the Association for Asian Studies, “a scholarly, non-political, non-profit professional association open to all persons interested in Asia.” Founded in 1941, this learned society has weathered many changes over the last five decades or so, from expanding beyond its Far Eastern or East Asia focus to embrace all of Asia and growing beyond an emphasis on arts and humanities to include all of the disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Asia. Over the last three decades, membership in the association has grown by almost 50%, from less than 5,000 in the 1970s to nearly 7,000 members today.

As the programs of the association’s annual meetings reveal—as do its various publications and regional meetings held in different parts of the United States and in Japan—the Association for Asian Studies is the premier organization for and of Asianists in the world. This is not to say that the

² “New MLA Survey.”

association has managed to become the representative body for scholars in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere; or that it is a big draw for social scientists; or that it bridges the gap “between the academic and policy worlds.”³ On all these fronts, the association has a ways to go, but at least it has set its sights on pursuing these goals: by convening in 2011, in conjunction with the Dutch-based International Convention of Asia Scholars, a joint meeting in Honolulu aimed at bringing together Asianists from all over the world; by emphasizing more social science, cross-area, and interdisciplinary panels at its annual gatherings to make area studies more cosmopolitan and less parochial; and by incorporating more policymakers and policy sessions into its meetings.

Similarly, on many college and university campuses, Asian studies scholars are striving to transcend the divides that separate them from their colleagues in other programs and departments, from their counterparts in Asia and elsewhere, and from the many constituencies beyond the academy that are also intent on engaging Asia.

As long as Asian studies continues to evolve and grow, the field will flourish, as it must and should in this Asian century. 

³ Andrew D. Marble, “Bridging the Gap with Market-driven Knowledge: The Launching of *Asia Policy*,” *Asia Policy*, no. 1 (January 2006): 2.

A Human Capital Wish List

Davis B. Bobrow

My wish list of preparations for future cohorts of Western experts on Asia follows from particular views about the attributes those experts should have. The list no doubt reflects the skills and assets I have found helpful and the deficits I have found to be hindrances. The future experts of special interest to me will engage in the practice of applied, policy-related work with the hope of informing, influencing, and rationalizing government, business, NGO, and media decisions. They will practice their craft in relation to current decisionmakers and their staffs and will prepare non-specialists who in the future, as they have in the past, often will make and shape U.S. decisions on matters pertinent to Asia.

Starting Points

Two general assumptions about the context in which those experts will function have important implications for what will make them wise and valuable, and thus special in a positive sense.¹

My first assumption is that the next generation of experts on Asia will be professionally active for 40 or so years, like their immediate predecessors. Our ability to recommend wisely very specific preparations for that long a career seems modest—after all, think about what a roundtable such as this would have stipulated in 1969. What is certain with a multi-decade time perspective is uncertainty about the when and what of many aspects of Asian futures and Western cause-and-effect connections to them. The future experts of special interest to me will add value to the extent that they can adapt to uncertainties about who and what matters, anticipate what at

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¹ I leave it to others to assess the extent to which current and emerging steps to prepare those future experts appear appropriate and sufficient and to explore the reasons for any deficiencies. Others no doubt will point out (and in large measure correctly so) the by now familiar sins of inadequate student aid funding, transient foundation priorities, unappreciative university administrators, disciplinary snobbishness toward area studies, and intellectually lazy and politically opportunistic policymakers. They will as well, I hope, point out area studies practitioners' not infrequent disdain for social science methods and theories, greater affection for liberal arts faculties than for those of professional schools, and avoidance or unawareness of questions preoccupying policymakers.

the time are surprising changes and surprising continuities, and address futures of very different temporal extent. The chances that their potential to add value will be realized will increase if these experts understand the sorts of non-Asian and non-academic organizational and situational realities impinging on those they advise and educate.²

My second assumption is that future Western experts on Asia will operate in a far more competitive and demanding environment given that those they seek to inform, influence, and educate are themselves more familiar with Asia. We have in many respects passed from an era of information scarcity about Asia and perceived remoteness from Asia to one of information abundance and virtual (and physical) accessibility. There now are few or very low barriers to finding basic factual information of an aggregate kind (albeit perhaps less than fully accurate), exposing oneself to mass culture and consumption fads, viewing built and natural environments, or even obtaining computer translations of indigenous language text. In the future there will be a larger supply of persons with some basic competence in major Asian languages, be they Asian-Americans from bi- or multilingual homes, students exposed to Asian languages in K-12 and undergraduate courses, or young professionals with life experience in Asia, such as study abroad, internships, or work for NGOs and firms. Such are the continuing consequences of the United States' demographic multiculturalism and the rise of Asia in the world economy and international affairs. Beyond the previously mentioned certainty of uncertainty, we reasonably can be certain of greater competition to exert direct and indirect influence on key institutions and officials from Asia-knowledgeable Westerners—and of course from a growing number of Asians who are knowledgeable and expert about the United States and the West.

What implications follow from my two assumptions and concern with experts who will perform applied, policy-relevant work? Future experts should have generic diagnostic skills of at least three kinds and substantial specific assets for applying them to Asian contexts. The former should be generic because the exact focus of their applications will vary in unpredictable ways. The latter should be substantial if they are to add value to Westerners who, even though not expert already, are knowledgeable about Asia.

² That understanding may better prepare them to deal with pressures to downplay gaps in information and understanding and incentives to overstate what influential Western audiences at a particular point in time want to hear about a given Asian individual, faction, organization, or society.

Generic Skills

One kind of diagnostic skill set focuses on how to find out and assemble the details that make up “how things really work” in particular institutions and settings at particular times for particular issues—what really happens (and does not happen) with regard to policy choice and implementation as well as securing and allocating resources. Those details include identifying who are key participants, what are their policy proclivities, and what are the incentives and disincentives operating on them. They also include how a particular set of indigenous actors considers the involvement of foreigners in terms of historical memory (precedents and track record) and information processing. This skill set is more about thick description than theory building or grand policy architectures. The relevant details, once discovered, will likely have at most only limited value for other issues, time periods, and institutions. And the relevant details are unlikely to be found in journals or books that have prestige (or indeed even respectability) in American academia. The generic skills to get at the details are those of ethnography, investigative journalism, political sociology, management consulting, behavioral economics, and policy evaluation.

If the first set of generic diagnostic skills addresses the current and the micro, the second deals with longer-term macro developments that can amount to transformations with broad consequences—discontinuities and qualitative changes. Examples include the disintegration of the Soviet empire, China’s economic rise, and the diffusion of waves of new information and communication technology. The future timing and specific content of conceivable transformations are inherently conjectures open to change but nevertheless call for anticipation, and that in turn requires understanding of their dynamics. After all, the possibilities matter not just for the rules of established games but for the very games that will be played domestically and internationally. Transformation alerts call into question the prevailing wisdom in operating organizations about continuities and discontinuities in feasible goals, threats, opportunities, resources, and the identity of significant others.

Especially pertinent diagnostic skills involve comparative historical analysis to find leading indicators, catalytic events, and tipping points. Such retrospective work often has high standing in the academy (“real scholarship”), but the projections from it less so. In the world of practice, transformation alerts tend to be ignored or instrumentalized. The reception depends on the extent to which the foretold developments appear to undermine or bolster pre-existing preferences and potentially reduce

or enhance the bargaining power of particular organized interests and ambitious individuals. The validity of reasoning from some selected well-known retrospective examples to argue that a particular transformation will or will not occur is both debatable and dramatically appealing. The latter can provide career incentives to generate such visions but also trigger parochial reasons to ignore or promote, trash or champion, such visions.

The third set of generic skills deals with creating information and assessing information quality and significance. Creating information (or indeed disinformation) involves establishing that something we can observe provides an efficient proxy for the state of some phenomena of interest harder to observe directly. It takes ingenuity to posit and rigor to confirm a possible proxy relationship. It also calls for awareness of and competence in some low technology (e.g., listening) or high technology (e.g., remote sensing) ways of gathering observations. Assessing information quality and significance—whatever the institutional or individual source—goes beyond awareness of a proxy relationship to discern tendencies (biases) in the processes that produce, integrate, and aggregate observations and report them. That process involves knowledge about the habits and interests of participants in information acquisition and processing chains and their agendas for various sponsors and audiences. Reported descriptive results, findings, and conclusions are treated less as the products of neutral processes and more as flawed and possibly manipulative products to be scrutinized for discrepancies and both advertent and inadvertent distortions and gaps. Categorical labels such as unemployment become suspect until provided with detailed definitions. Performance comparisons such as that of economic growth rates become dubious until it is clear that like is being compared to like.

Pertinent diagnostic skills are in part forensic like those of an auditor or fraud detective who has checklists of and sensitivities to anomalies and distortions. In part the skills called for are a clear understanding (“operational definition”) of the conceptual categories (e.g., military spending) being used and thus of what elements they comprise. Finally, skills from administrative behavior can aid recognition of the career and organizational incentives that affect information processing practices.

Asia-specific Assets

Asia-specific assets are needed for the most effective application of the general diagnostic capacities just discussed. One asset is of course contemporary indigenous language competence of a high order. It should

be sufficient to recognize linguistic ambiguities, cultural and historical associations, and alternative meanings, as well as the absence of linguistic equivalents for key terms. A second asset is sustained, lengthy experience and the organized memory and perspective continuity can provide. Expertise built up over time can bring an awareness of precedents, historical analogies, lessons learned, and discernment of what is or would be new rather than recurrent or even resurrected. The first two types of assets will both benefit from and be facilitated by a third: a network of ongoing relationships with Asian professional colleagues, very much including ones of the same cohort. Those networks should not be limited to Asian colleagues who focus on the same topics about the West that that our expert pursues on Asia. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of those colleagues for understandings of how their “place” works, embryonic transformative developments, and assessments of information and its purveyors.³

These assets all can contribute to the most important asset of all—empathy. By that I do not mean agreement with or praise of Asian actors but, rather, the ability to see matters from one or more indigenous perspectives and to convey what is seen by various Asians to non-experts. Like the other assets, empathy has to be worked at, exercised. Unlike the others, a reputation for being empathic may have negative consequences for influence on Western elites. Future generation of experts on Asia, like some in the past, may be penalized when the perspectives they accurately convey indicate costly and perhaps even successful Asian evasion, exploitation, and resistance to Western elite preferences.⁴

Gaining Skills while Building Assets and Vice Versa


The generic diagnostic skills and Asia-specific assets can of course be seen as unrealistically and unwisely increasing the years and financial costs needed to achieve expert status. That could happen, but it is far from necessary. Note that sequential preparation may be required in terms of both skills and assets but not as much between them. If anything, concurrent skill and asset acquisition has synergistic advantages. The previous wish list

³ Sustaining and broadening such a network to extend to other parts of an Asian society will also benefit from having an avocational interest in some locally popular hobby.

⁴ Perhaps we should prepare experts who may bear “bad news” for (1) vigorous attacks on their evidence, reasoning, and even loyalty, (2) less recruitment and career advancement than for experts viewed as more “positive” and “helpful” and less as naysayers, and (3) less attention in the short run from Asian elites when they seem to have little usefulness for influencing Western organizations, or fail to reinforce the messages those elites wish sent to Western audiences.

does not call for future experts to as a rule obtain a disciplinary or doctoral degree in Asian Studies and write a dissertation, let alone to become a full-fledged member of both a social science disciplinary community and an Asia area expert community.

The front end of expert preparation can begin early. Concerns about economic competitiveness and opportunities for profitable international economic activity can encourage pre-college and undergraduate Asian language training and Asian studies courses as well as field residence opportunities. The United States (and some other Western countries) can take advantage of demographic multiculturalism by encouraging young Asian-Americans with family-based Asia assets to pursue careers as experts on Asia.

Rather than being embedded in disciplinary qualifying programs, diagnostic skill preparations can take the form of what are, in effect, applied social science modular training packages. The package for each skill would try to convey best practice principles by means of: (1) critical analyses of illuminating and misleading past diagnostic attempts, (2) exercises at using the skills, and (3) clinical observation of a skilled diagnostician or diagnostic group at work. Each would involve two stages. The first stage would not require Asia content and would feature content from systems native to the embryonic expert. The second and more advanced would primarily use Asia content. The first stage should be available in general to those preparing for the informing/influencing/educating missions that began this essay, whether or not with respect to Asia. The skills are surely sufficiently central both to policy analysis and design and to management. Accordingly, the full cost need not be borne by future Asia experts and could even be subsidized as in-service training by employers. Both stages of diagnostic skill preparation need not require altogether as much as two years of time. In any event, it seems past time for us to stop treating diagnosis and treatment of others in the world as requiring less preparation time and cost than being a medical general practitioner. After all, policy relevant future experts on Asia will also on occasion find themselves dealing with matters where lives and quality of life are at stake. 

The Idea of Asia

Amitav Acharya

“I want you to go away with [get rid of] the thought that Asia has to conquer the West.”

— Mohandas K. Gandhi, speech to the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947

What is Asia?

There are two powerful myths about Asia that plague any debate over whether it exists as a region. One treats Asia as essentially an outsider’s invention. The other conflates it with the “rise of Asia.” Both are misleading or misguided, the latter even more so than the former.

The term Asia was used by the Greek historian Herodotus to designate Anatolia, in modern Turkey, in the context of the Greek-Persian wars. But Asia in many ways was an invention of colonialism. Francois Godemont, a French scholar of Asia, associates “Asia” (and “the East”) with “a fantasy seemingly woven from a Baudelaire poem, a melody by Ravel, a short story by Somerset Maugham and a James Ivory film.”¹ When the *Economist* launched a new weekly column called “Banyan” in April 2009, the magazine reminded readers that it had, as recently as 1987, written about Asia as “a geographic accident.” Though today there might be a growing “search for an Asian identity,” the “suspicion lingers on that Asia is a Western construct.”²

Then there are those who speak of the rise of Asia, and even of a growing Asian identity, but still predict a future of rivalry and strife. Consider a recent book on Asia by Bill Emmott, a former editor of the *Economist*.³ Emmott recognizes Asia’s economic integration and an emerging sense of regional identity based on the overlapping interests of its principal powers—China, Japan, and India. But he nonetheless foresees rivalry rather than cooperation as the dominant trend. Hence the title of the book: *Rivals*.

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¹ Francois Godemont, *The New Asian Renaissance*, (London: Routledge, 1997), 4.

² “In the Shade of the Banyan Tree,” *Economist*, April 11, 2009, 43.

³ Bill Emmott, *Rivals: How the Power Struggle Between China, India and Japan Will Shape Our Next Decade* (Orlando: Hartcourt, Inc., 2008).

To compound the problem, Asia also has had multiple names and identities. I can count at least thirteen different ways in which Asia has been described: (1) Asia, (2) Asia-Pacific, (3) Asia Pacific, (4) Asian Pacific, (5) Asia and the Pacific, (6) Asia/Pacific, (7) East Asia, (8) Eastern Asia, (9) Far East, (10) Greater East Asia, (11) Pacific, (12) Pacific Asia, and (13) Pacific Rim. Power, prosperity, and identity have determined which of these names are in vogue. Terms such as Far East, Greater East Asia, and the Pacific are associated with British, Japanese, and American power respectively. Hegemons are especially fond of naming regions after their own interests and spheres of influence. By contrast, Pacific Rim, Pacific Asia, Asia-Pacific (as in APEC), and Asia Pacific (a Canadian preference) are linked to rising economic interdependence and prosperity. Gareth Evans, a former Australian foreign minister, once distinguished the idea of “Asia Pacific” from the idea of the “Indian Ocean.” Whereas the former connoted prosperity and progress, the latter was associated with poverty and underdevelopment. Cultural forces, such as ideas, identity, cultural exports, and social construction, have recently led to the popularity of regional concepts such as East Asia or Eastern Asia.

Asia is, of course, not a given. It is constructed, as most regions tend to be. There are powerful forces working against the concept, with diversity (geographic, cultural, and political), rivalries, and the lack of European-style regional integration being chief among them. Yet to view Asia simply as a Western construct is misleading. In a wonderful little booklet called *Narratives of Asia*, Brij Tankha, a Japan specialist at Delhi University, and Sinologist Madhavi Thampi compare Indian, Chinese, and Japanese discourses about Asia to assert that “while ‘Asia’ is in many ways a colonial construction it is important to remember that it has an earlier genealogy that continues to find expression in ways” [*sic*]. Tankha and Thampi conclude that “ideas about the region are a complex of premodern and modern developments.”⁴

Although the myriad peoples and cultures of what is today loosely known as Asia did not name themselves as such—that is, as Asians—the idea of Asia, far from being simply the invention of Westerners, was also robustly imagined from within. Asia’s first generation of nationalist thinkers and leaders, such as Okakura Tenshin of Japan, Sun Yat-sen of China, Jawaharlal Nehru of India, and Aung San of Burma, were among those

⁴ Brij Tankha, “Preface,” in *Narratives of Asia: From India, Japan and China*, ed. Brij Tankha and Madhavi Thampi (Calcutta and New Delhi: Sampak, 2005), 7.

doing the imagining. Although some of their ideas were self-serving, and the colonial context was important, these leaders were Asians recognizing Asia's emerging place in the international system. They used a Western term to articulate a changing local awareness and context, just like *banyan* (a variant of the Bodhi tree), which as the *Economist* pointed out was so named by the Portuguese after Gujarati merchants who used to conduct business under the tree.

In other words, naming a region is not the same as constructing a region. The term Asia may be outsiders', but the reality of Asia is not.

It is often said that Asian regional institutions, which would help to legitimize the idea of Asia, are themselves a reminder of Asia's diversity, especially among the subregions. But regional institutions also help to blur subregional boundaries. There is no reason why subregional identities cannot coexist with a larger regional one. In fact, there is growing evidence that subregional boundaries are being blurred, and indeed they have always been questionable. In 1954–55, South Asia and Southeast Asia were inseparable. Nobody complained when the Asia-Africa Conference in Bandung was sponsored by a group officially known as Conference of South East Asian Prime Ministers (or more informally as the Colombo powers) that included Ceylon, Pakistan, India, Burma, and Indonesia. The rise of Chinese power has led some to question whether an independent "region" of Southeast Asia is really relevant. Yet ASEAN will not accept China, India, or even Sri Lanka, who was in 1967 invited to join ASEAN as a founding member, as full members but rather only as dialogue partners.

Unlike others, I am less bothered by whether Asia is too diverse to merit a single name or whether Asia's rivalries are justification for dismissing the term's relevance. There was an idea of Europe at the height of Europe's internecine wars, prior to the European Union's constructed peace. What is more worrisome, however, is the conflation of Asia with the rising power of Asia. The early imaginings of Asia were partly a defensive reaction to Western dominance: they were ideational and spiritual in content. By contrast, the new imagining of Asia, by both Westerners and Asians, seems to be inextricably linked to power politics (internationally) and in some cases to authoritarian politics (domestically). Take, for example, the notion of "Asian values," which finds an integral place in some versions of the "rise of Asia" discourse. The economic growth of Asia is said to be underpinned by a set of communitarian values, which in turn has laid the foundation for an Asian century. But these stereotypes of Asia distort history and risk delivering more damage than good to the idea of Asia.

For example, the contemporary talk of Asian values is grounded in Lee Kuan Yew's notion of Confucian values: respect for authority, high savings rates, society over the self, etc. Some policy intellectuals and leaders in the region drew on such ideas to construct the notion of Asian values in the 1990s. Yet not surprisingly this concept of Asian values has come to be closely associated with the proponents' authoritarian politics.

By contrast, Asian leaders from an earlier postwar generation who spoke of Asian identity were referring to a restoration of Asia's dignity rather than to Asia's once and future global dominance.⁵ One of the first Asian leaders to speak of Asian values was India's Jawaharlal Nehru, nobody's idea of a tin-pot dictator. Nehru spoke of democracy and what he hoped would be India's and Asia's democratic politics. Moreover, early Asian leaders from India, Burma, and China spoke of Asian values in spiritual and emancipatory, rather than simply material, terms, their focus being liberation from Western dominance. As Mahatma Gandhi, who addressed the Asia Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947 (the very first gathering of liberated Asian nations), put it: "The message of Asia...is not to be learnt through European spectacles, not by imitating the vices of the West, its gunpowder and atom bomb. If you want to give a message of importance to the West it must be a message of love, it must be a message of truth."⁶ China's Sun Yat-sen spoke of Asian virtues, but in juxtaposition to both European and Japanese colonialism. He urged Japan not to develop pan-Asianism through empire but rather through Asian virtues, such as ethics, righteousness, and benevolence. Sun also contrasted European materialism and militarism (the ways of a hegemon) with these Asian virtues. By contrast, today's "rise of Asia" discourse is distinguished by its very material and instrumental nature.

To say that Asia had been constructed from within does not mean this inside construction was or is unproblematic. It was tinged with nation-centrism and dominance. As *Narratives of Asia* shows, Japan's Okakura Tenshin saw Japan as the best of Asian civilization and as "mirror[ing] the whole of Asian consciousness."⁷ His idea of Asia was thus equated with Japan's rise. Some versions of Japan's pan-Asianism were blatantly hegemonic; Japan espoused pan-Asianism to counter Western dominance

⁵ Amitav Acharya, *Whose Ideas Matter? Agency and Power in Asian Regionalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁶ *Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference*, New Delhi, March–April 1947 (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), 244.

⁷ Tankha and Thampi, *Narratives of Asia*, 60.

but in the process staked a claim to its own centrality and empire. China's new Asianism smacked of Sinocentrism. The opening issue of the journal *Xinyaxiya* (New Asia), launched in China in 1930 to advance Sun Yat-sen's nationalist cause, argued that "the regeneration of China is the starting point of the regeneration of the Asian peoples."⁸ The journal claimed Sun to be the only leader who could come to the rescue of the people. And Sun did favor the Asian order as a revival of the Sinocentric tributary system. Nehru saw India as the "natural centre and focal point of many of the forces at work in Asia," including geography.⁹ He stressed geography and the civilizational flows into and out of India. In convening the 1947 Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, the first international conference of Asian countries after World War II, India organized an "Inter-Asian Art Exhibition" for the visiting delegates.¹⁰ Despite the name, however, the exhibition was essentially a portrayal of India's historical links with its neighbors encompassing Iran, Indonesia, China, and Central Asia. The official script of the exhibition, prepared by the Indian hosts, spoke of an Indian "cultural empire" that "once embraced these distant lands for several centuries" over an area encompassing Burma, Malaya, Siam, Cambodia, Champa, and Indonesia (Java, Bali, and Sumatra).¹¹ Whatever the organizers' intentions, the exhibition was too Indo-centric not to have had a sobering impact on foreign participants, who were already wary of India's political dominance of Asian regionalism. Indeed, the fear of Indian dominance (as well as dominance by China, whose then nationalist government had asked for and received the right to host the next Asian Relations Conference) led a group of Southeast Asian delegates attending the New Delhi Conference to imagine a regional association of their own—the Southeast Asian countries minus India and China. This was in a way a stepping stone to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which has a better record of longevity than the short-lived Asian Relations Organization that came out of the 1947 New Delhi Conference.

Thus, those who celebrated the end of Western dominance over Asia were also to some extent imagining the dominance of their own countries and cultures over the rest of Asia. Just as Japanese ideas about Asia (the Greater

⁸ Tankha and Thampi, *Narratives of Asia*, 108.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31. The quote is from Nehru's speech to the Asian Relations Conference, the text of which can be found in *Asian Relations*.

¹⁰ At the time of the conference, India was still under British rule, but the British allowed prime minister-in-waiting Nehru a free hand in hosting the event through the non-official Indian Council of World Affairs. For details, see *Asian Relations*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 302.

East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere) masked the country's quest for regional hegemony, today's "Asia rising" discourse carries the risk of turning into a cover for dominance within and between states. Now that we are hearing so much talk again of Asia's emergence, the audience should be wary. The protagonists of "Asia's rise" discourse should themselves be wary as well, as such projects have often ended in disillusionment and humiliation.

There are serious questions regarding to what extent the rise of Asia is real or hype. Some of it is undoubtedly real. Poverty reduction is Asia's singular achievement. But as Minxin Pei points out in a recent article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, subtitled "Don't believe the Asia hype," the per capita GDP of the United States is nine times larger than that of Asia, and at current growth rates it will take the average Asian country 77 years to match the U.S. per capita GDP.¹² As the example of the 2009 Noble Prize winners for physics and chemistry suggests, Indian and Chinese scientists need to leave home for the West before they can achieve excellence in innovation. Although this might change, given that many Asian countries have invested massively in education, these countries will need to overcome the bureaucratic culture, political authoritarianism, and regulation that continue to stifle creativity and innovation. The pan-Asian discourse of the pre- and early postwar period was not followed by economic or technological progress. The rise of Asia is neither linear nor irreversible, and there is a need for a critical perspective. The idea of Asia should be based on an understanding of Asia's strengths and limitations.

Moreover, to conflate Asia with the rise of Asia simply imposes an essentially Western discourse of power politics (the rise and fall of nations, powers, and regions) on what had earlier been to a large extent—Japanese, Chinese, and Indian ethnocentrism notwithstanding—an emancipatory and civilizational idea. Are we to assume that nations that are not part of the economic rise of Asia are excluded from Asia? Such nations include India before the 1990s and North Korea and Burma now. What if Asia suffers a terminal economic breakdown? Will the term disappear? Most certainly it will not.

Hence, neither geography nor geopolitics, nor power and prosperity, is a sufficient basis for claiming the relevance of Asia as a region. Asia is, and will remain, a contested notion. But three things about the present and future of the idea of Asia stand out. First, the idea of Asia is not just about rising power. It is as much an ideational as material construct. Second, Asia

¹² Minxin Pei, "Bamboozled: Don't Believe the Asia Hype," *Foreign Policy*, July–August 2009, 33.

is not merely the sum of its parts. The woods are indeed different from the trees; national and subregional differences do not obscure or prevent the construction of an Asian identity. Third, Asia will be increasingly constructed from the inside rather than from the outside.

The local imagining and construction of Asia, however, must not and need not be monopolized by a narrow regional elite clinging to a “rising Asia” discourse. Such imagining needs to be more broad-based and people-centric and to reflect a genuine sense of Asian universalism. Small states and vulnerable populations of Asia living under authoritarian rule have much to fear from the rise of Asia, especially from the idea of a rich, powerful, and authoritarian Asia displacing the West from its perch of global supremacy.


Those who speak of the West and the East in binary terms are easily contradicted by Asia’s recent historical trajectory. In the early aftermath of World War II, Asia’s regional architecture was shaped by economic nationalism, security bilateralism, and political authoritarianism. Over the decades, these have gradually given way to economic openness (i.e., economic liberalism) and interdependence, security multilateralism (though still in competition with bilateralism), and democratic transitions (largely peaceful, contrary both to popular myth and certainly relative to the murderous record of enduring dictatorships in the region). Asia has moved on, slowly bridging the gap between Kautilyan power politics, Confucian communitarianism, Nehruvian idealism, and Kantian pluralism. Hence, the true basis for an Asian identity need not be a culturally exceptionalist, politically backward, strategically competitive (West denouncing), and psychologically self-gratifying discourse of Asia rising, but the local manifestation and construction of enduring universal principles, including human security, multilateralism, and democracy.¹³

Implications for Training the Next Generation

How should Asia be studied in classrooms across the United States and the world? First, we need to address the question of whole versus part. In universities and think-tanks in the United States, Asia fragments into Japan studies, China studies, Korea chairs, etc. The currency of these depends on which country or subregion is rising faster, commanding more bad news (for example, Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War), or, reflecting the above, attracting more funding from governments and foundations. Asia can be

¹³ Amitav Acharya, *Asia Rising: Who is Leading?* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2007).

and should be studied as a whole, however, even if its boundaries are fluid and contested. Though the idea of Asia is contested, it has relevance as an analytic notion and as a subject of enquiry. Moreover, research and teaching on Southeast Asia, now lacking the funding that it formerly attracted for being a hotbed of conflict, has remained a poor cousin of Japan, China, and Korea studies. Yet, it is Southeast Asia that is really the heart of Asia as a region. Not only was Southeast Asia at the crossroads of inter-civilizational interactions during the classical age, but many of the central ideas of Asian unity and regionalism during the postwar period were also first articulated and pursued in this region. The region certainly deserves greater attention. India, a major site of ideas about Asia, also should be firmly brought into the mainstream of Asia studies. Regional interactions and integration, broadly defined, involving all these actors could be one of the anchors of the new Asia studies, as opposed to the old, fragmented Asian studies.

Second, we need to find space for more dialogue and synthesis between area studies and disciplinary approaches to Asia for the benefit of the new generation of Asia scholars. I can only speak for international relations. Although representing a false distinction, both area studies and disciplinary approaches suffer from an acute parochialism when they confront each other in university curricula or think-tank agendas. International relations scholars disparage area studies for being atheoretical and treat the field mainly as a supplier of raw material to test their generalizations. Area specialists dismiss international relations and security studies perspectives on Asia, especially when these are grounded in theory and indulge in comparison. For area studies specialists, only those who speak the language of a country and have “gone native” are accepted into the fold. Yet the gap between the two approaches can and should be bridged. A new synthesis between them could be imagined, represented in such notions as “transnational area studies” and “discipline-based area studies.”¹⁴ The emergence of Asia calls for growing attention to what goes on inside the region. Disciplinary and comparative perspectives are well-equipped to help make sense of Asia’s growing integration into and role in world affairs. 

¹⁴ Amitav Acharya, “International Relations and Area Studies: Towards a New Synthesis?” (revised version of a paper presented to the “Workshop on the Future of Interdisciplinary Area Studies in the UK,” St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University, Oxford, December 6–7, 2005), available at <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/SSIS/SSIS002.pdf>.

Learning Asia the Asian Way

Parag Khanna

Asia is entering a new geopolitical phase, one driven as much by economics and culture as political and military trends. An older generation of academics and government officials has relied for too long on a U.S.-centric view of Asian diplomacy. “Offshore balancing,” “hub-and-spoke” alliances, “outside-in” diplomatic management are concepts that I believe have outlived their usefulness at least as dominant lenses for understanding dynamics in the Far East today. Recently, Georgetown’s Institute for the Study of Diplomacy convened noted scholars of China and Japan, who concluded that they had collectively underestimated, among other trends, the extent of Sino-Japanese “new thinking” and how interdependence at various levels is now more characteristic of this bilateral relationship than the traditional “nationalist rivalry” perspective.¹ This particular tension is best illustrated in the surprise appointment of John Roos, Silicon Valley lawyer and venture capitalist, as ambassador to Japan over the widely expected Joseph Nye, former dean of Harvard’s Kennedy School and a one-time assistant secretary of defense for East Asia who is a well-known Japanophile. Roos represents a new generation of Americans (including Chinese and Japanese immigrants) who wish U.S. policy toward Asia to focus on economic integration and capitalize on the vast market opportunities of China—precisely as Japanese policymakers are doing. Nye, on the other hand, represents a potentially outmoded approach toward the region, which focuses on reconciling “national interests.” This episode seems to be an example of policymakers being a step ahead of mainstream academics, specifically security studies specialists.

It is of course possible that an overly sanguine view of Asian regionalism, most vocally represented by Singaporean diplomat-scholar Kishore Mahbubani of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, swings too far in the direction of arguing that “the guns have fallen silent” in Asia. In private conversations with members of the U.S. defense establishment, however, I have been struck by their reluctant acceptance of the fact that Taiwan, for example, has clearly fallen down the list of geopolitical flashpoints due to

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¹ See, for example, Aaron Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1993/94): 5–33.

the same economic integration dynamic that characterizes Sino-Japanese relations. Indeed, in the case of Taiwan, China's strategy of co-opting neighbors through commercial integration is much further advanced. This could serve, then, as an example of academics or intellectuals being a step ahead of the policy and defense communities.

The major denominator of "Asia for Asians" thinking is the argument, most cogently argued by David Kang of the University of Southern California, that Asian geopolitics is returning to a period of Sino-centric hierarchy.² Particularly in the wake of the global financial crisis, this approach seems to have been validated by widespread expectations that it is China rather than the United States that will lead Asia's economic recovery (if not the world's). The passing of the "Chindia" fad also seems to have lent credence to the hierarchy school as well, with India increasingly seen not as a rival for Asian dominance but as a geographic free agent intent on multi-directional influence from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean to the Far East. The business community's embrace of China and the country's ubiquity in the media round out a robust list of factors that have pushed China to the center of American mental geography about Asia.

Many of these debates have taken place within the community of U.S.-based scholars, but it is very important to note the role of Western scholars based in the region, who to a strong degree challenge potentially oversimplified paradigms. At the risk of sounding overly critical, scholars who make a once annual pilgrimage to their region of interest largely to reconnect with old friends may not really be leaving the echo chamber of U.S.-centric views. A fine example of a scholar countering this trend is Daniel Bell, a Canadian-born professor at Beijing's Tsinghua University, who has spent over a decade living and teaching in China. Bell's articles and books on the "new Confucianism" have been invaluable in transcending stale debates about the weakness and potential collapse of Chinese communism and instead sketching vivid portraits of a new, and even somewhat democratic, system emerging on the horizon.³ Only by spending substantial time in countries such as China can one cultivate the networks and sources, and engage with local scholars, in order to develop such a sophisticated understanding.

² David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing, and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security* 28, no. 3 (Winter 2003/04): 165–80.


³ Daniel A. Bell, *China's New Confucianism: Politics and Everyday Life in a Changing Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

I tend to believe, therefore, that the best thing American academia can offer today to budding Asianists would be to strongly cover history and languages and strive to present the latest state-of-play in debates and scenarios for national and regional futures, but to leverage local sources of analysis as much as possible (even while interpreting them with a critical eye). This might be called the “light footprint” approach to teaching Asia: paradigms made in the United States should never dampen Asia’s diversity.

It is the nontraditional sources of learning, which now so permeate the American elite, that are becoming the missing pillar of Asian studies. In understanding Asia today, the next generation of scholars and researchers cannot help but be influenced by the television and print media, entrepreneurs and businesspeople, online listservs and blogs. Indeed, young Asia analysts are perhaps the most enthusiastic consumers of these diverse sources of information—and not just as a complement to their academic research. The financial press, for example, reports on the deals and political potential of sovereign wealth funds such as the China Investment Corporation before the international relations community can adequately problematize their existence. The availability of China’s CCTV in the United States—including Chinese-language educational programs with young Americans and Chinese as co-stars—also plays an important role in educating about Chinese current affairs and serves as an important counterpart to traditional U.S. media reportage. Daily bulletins and listservs such as China Daily and China Beat, not to mention numerous proprietary discussion groups involving China experts, provide truly valuable insights and analysis as well. In the case of India, largely diaspora-driven discussion groups have now been to some extent displaced by high-quality blogs from within India covering Indian industry and politics.

Even more so than the media, the business community has been at the forefront of changing perceptions about Asia at a pace that challenges conventional academic paradigms. Most fundamentally, the lure of Asian markets has already had an impact on the generation of executives currently occupying the commanding heights. An even more enthusiastic younger generation of American entrepreneurs has helped boost Shanghai’s image in the West as the Manhattan of the East. Similarly, the pace of investment activity with respect to clean-energy projects in China and India, for example, provides stronger evidence of both nations’ seriousness about climate change more than government pronouncements. From study abroad alumni groups to professional networks, these commercial and demographic

trends of Americans in Asia have had a dramatic feedback effect in shaping American perceptions and knowledge of Asian affairs.

In a world of perpetual global information flows, academic, political, commercial, and journalistic priorities vis-à-vis Asia will undeniably be impossible to synchronize. From the perspective of a young student of Asia, however, this is the best of all environments in which to explore the region's innumerable facets and construct one's own integrated tableau. For students to best understand the Asia that is emerging, the conversation must be an ongoing multi-way street. 



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