Director’s Letter

by Jim Woelfel woelfel@ku.edu

By happy coincidence, during the past several months some members of our instructional staff either visited China or became keenly interested in Chinese culture through involvement in teaching a course. We also welcomed to our GTA staff from China Hui (Jane) Meng, who joins her compatriot Hong (Frank) Cai. It seemed a “natural,” therefore, to feature China in this issue of the newsletter.

I’d like personally to introduce to the reader our two current GTAs from China, since they are exceedingly modest about themselves and both have come to us with impressive credentials and achievements.

Frank Cai has been working on a doctorate in American Studies and teaching HWC since the fall of 2005, having previously studied at KU as a Fulbright Scholar in 2001-03 and earned a Master’s degree in American Studies here. Frank received a B.A. in English from Yantai Normal University, graduating with highest honors, another B.A. in English and in American Studies from Shanghai International Studies University, and an M.A. in American Studies from Beijing Foreign Studies University. He has been successively a member of the faculty at Yantai Normal University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, and most recently China Foreign Affairs University, where he has been an assistant professor of English and International Relations. Frank won “Excellent Teacher” awards at both Yantai and Beijing. In the spring of 2008 he received one of KU’s all-university GTA teaching awards, and in 2008-09 he was a Dean’s Graduate Instructor in HWC, the highest honor we bestow on members of our GTA staff.

Like Frank, Jane Meng comes to us from a faculty position in China. Since 2005 she has been an associate professor of English at Harbin Engineering University, where she also earned a Master’s degree in English Literature and wrote a thesis on Sinclair Lewis. She did her undergraduate degree, also in English, at Heilongjiang University. She has won several teaching awards during her years at Harbin Engineering University. In 2007 Jane was the recipient of a highly competitive National Overseas Fellowship awarded by the Chinese Ministry of Education. She spent the academic year 2007-08 as a visiting scholar at UCLA. Jane has published four books and two articles on reading, comprehending, and speaking English, and also has an article on Kate Chopin’s The Awakening. At KU she is currently pursuing a doctorate in English and teaching in HWC.

Thanks to Our Donors

The donations HWC receives through endowment funds enhance the well-being of the program in many ways. This month, your gifts helped to sponsor the 22nd Seaver Lecture on Continuing Issues in Western Civilization, delivered by Marta Caminero-Santangelo, Professor and Chair of the Department of English. Dr. Caminero-Santangelo informed a full Alderson Auditorium audience of her new research on the narratives of Latino illegal immigrants and also of her volunteer activity with the organization No More Deaths. The title of her lecture was “Documenting the Undocumented: Stories of Migration, Border Crossing, and Unbelonging.”

Your donations will also support a “Meet and Greet” reception for peace activist, author, and former Weatherman Underground member Mark Rudd on November 9. Special guests will include students completing a Peace & Conflict Studies minor or graduate certificate. And, on March 3, Professor Elizabeth Borgwardt of Washington University will present the seventh annual Peace & Conflict Studies lecture.

This year’s Dean’s Instructor lecturers are Ph.D. candidates in History, Dustin Gann and Ryan Gaston. Details of their presentations and a link to “Donate to Humanities & Western Civilization” are found at www.hwc.ku.edu.
Seven Cups of Tea in Shanghai

By Antha Cotten-Spreckelmeyer, Associate Director

When we planned our family visit to China last summer, we imagined romantic vistas of old Cathay with pristine mountains, lotus flowers and temple bells tinkling in the distance. Instead, we found skyscrapers, Starbucks and loads of technology at every turn. One can now ascend the Great Wall in a computerized air-conditioned cable car, and descend on an electronic luge apparatus that looks like a life-size video game. The luge, or sled, sits on a small track inside a metal casing and catapults the passenger at high speed down a series of steep inclines to the base of the wall. Fun! But, not the kind of entertainment we were seeking.

Like many western tourists, we were searching for an experience of Chinese culture that would provide us with a glimpse of the past, or at least some insight into the juncture of the past and the present. We were eager for our daughter, Leah, who we adopted in China twelve years ago, to find a sense of her Chinese heritage. In Shanghai, we managed to penetrate the present, and find a taste of the past in the ancient Chinese tea ceremony. Looking back on our experiences, it is not surprising that we should find the old and new Chinas coming together in Shanghai. Commerce with outside countries has long been the life-blood of Shanghai, and, of course, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries much of the commercial activity revolved around the tea trade. Consequently, tea houses abound in Shanghai, and the Chinese tea ceremony is still a popular form of refreshment, and a way to socialize.

On one day Leah and I paid a visit to the Gu Yuan Tea House along with a young Chinese woman called Jasmine who served as our interpreter and guide. The Gu Yan is an old-style house with carved arches, shuttered windows, gold-plated decorations and an interior garden. Our visit to Gu Yuan coincided with “Ladies’ Day,” when the upper level of the house is reserved for women. Jasmine told us this was a throwback to the time when women exclusively occupied the upper floor of Chinese homes in what was usually a large open space that served as sitting area, workroom and sleeping accommodation. In these spaces, women would sometimes entertain their female friends with delicate foods and up to seven cups of tea during the hours between the mid-day and evening meals. It was a time for telling stories, playing games and exchanging gossip.

As Leah, Jasmine and I entered the upper chamber of the Gu Yuan house we saw groups of women, gathered around low tables. Some tables held books or Majong boards. At others, individuals engaged in animated discussions. At every table there was an elaborate tea service and a tea hostess. The tea utensils rested on a slatted bamboo box atop the table. The box served as a receptacle for draining and holding excess liquid during the ceremony. Atop the box there were a number—seven to be exact—of small clay teapots surrounded by even smaller porcelain cups. Next to the bamboo box, was a row of glass containers holding different varieties of teas, and alongside the stores of tea were bowls of dates, crystallized ginger, and dried fruits. The three of us, sat on cushions around the table while the hostess presided. Our hostess was a graceful young woman who explained to us that the teapots were made of a special clay native to the Shanghai region, and since the clay absorbs some of the tea’s essence and flavor, a different pot is used for each type of tea. The hostess rang a bell, and another young woman appeared with a large kettle of steaming water.

To begin the tea ceremony, the hostess rinsed the first pot with the steaming water to “warm” it, and then deposited a small amount of tea from the first jar inside with more hot water. While the tea brewed we were encouraged to sample the dates, the ginger and the dried fruits. Our first tea was an Oolong. Once we finished, we deposited the residue in the bamboo box, and started the process over again. We learned that one communicates gratitude and approval by tapping gently on the table with the first two fingers of the right hand. All in all, we sampled six teas, and marveled at the exotic flavors and aromas. We were even more captivated by the precision and expertise of the tea hostess as she served us from the succession of clay pots. After the sixth cup, the hostess informed us that the “ceremony” was drawing to a close. Leah and I concluded that we should gather our belongings and prepare to leave, and we were perplexed since other groups at other tables seemed to linger over their tea cups in animated conversations. We wondered if we somehow got it wrong, or missed a cultural cue which is easy to do in such situations. But,
our guide and our hostess exchanged amused looks, and motioned us back to our cushions.

Our hostess indicated that it was now time to choose our favorite tea for the “seventh cup.” There was no question about our favorite. It was the chrysanthemum variety of compressed tea leaves which open during brewing to display imbedded flower petals that infuse the tea with a delicate floral taste. After she served the seventh cup of tea, the hostess seated herself at the table next to Jasmine, and for an hour or so the four of us forgot about being tourists, or guides, Chinese, or American and became four women with a lot to say to each other. We learned that the hostess’ name was Lei, which is also Leah’s Chinese name. We learned she was, in fact, only a few years older than Leah, and that the two of them share a passion for playing badminton. Lei was eager to know more about teenage life in America, and Leah was impressed to learn that Lei had studied English since age five. Jasmine and I discovered a mutual interest in such diverse topics as Agatha Christie’s novels, the environment, wildlife preserves, and cooking. We could have carried on and on into the evening, but as we took our final sips, we knew it really was time to leave, and we knew that something wonderful had happened in the upper chamber of the Gu Yuan house. We discovered that the window on China’s past that we had been seeking, is also the window on the future, and if that pane of glass sometimes seems shuttered or closed, it can easily be opened in the space of time it takes to drink seven cups of tea.

Multicultural Scholars Program in the Humanities (MSPH) Enriched by Student’s Experience in China

MSPH scholar Rebecca Su Russell is heading back to China this month as a Student Ambassador to the “China-U.S. Relations Conference” being held in Beijing. Recipient of a Benjamin Gilman International Scholarship for study abroad, Rebecca spent the academic year 2008-2009 taking intensive language courses in Chinese at the CET Beijing language institute. Although her area of specialization is Chinese language and culture, she has focused a good deal of her undergraduate work experience on international development, particularly in the area of international education. Next year she hopes to be the recipient of a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Taiwan. (The Multicultural Scholars Program in the Humanities is a mentoring and scholarship program co-directed by HWC faculty).

HWC Professor Explores East-West Exchanges in Team-Taught Course on China

HWC associate professor Diane Fourny team-taught a graduate seminar last Spring 2009 with Art History professor Marsha Haufler on European and Chinese exchanges in the eighteenth century: HA 898/FREN 878 “From Versailles to the Garden of Perfect Clarity: Circuits of Exchange in the Eighteenth-Century (From Rome, Paris, and London to Beijing, and back).” The seminar examined the encounter of art, architecture, and literature, and commerce, religion, and politics between China and Europe from the beginning of European missionary outposts to Asia at the end of the sixteenth century to British Lord Macartney’s disastrous embassy to the court of the Qianlong Emperor in 1794. Professor Fourny is developing a undergraduate course on this East-West cultural exchange for the HWC program’s world literature track in the major for 2010-2011.

Sarah Trulove and Jim Woelfel Welcome Their First Great-Grandchild, Emmett James Ellis

Francois Boucher, The Chinese Garden (c. 1742)
2008-2009 Staff Accomplishments

Christine Anderson will have three entries published in Landmarks in Feminist Writings, a two-volume set forthcoming from Greenwood Press. In August 2008, Christine defended her dissertation, “(Per)Forming Female Politics: The Making Of The Modern Woman In London, 1890-1914” with honors, and was awarded a Ph.D. in British History. She also served as a panel chair and commentator for the first KU-MU graduate history conference in April 2009.

Tom Arnold taught the European Studies course for the HWC Semester Abroad Program in Italy and France. A history Ph.D. student, Tom became ABD in December, 2008. In May he presented a paper at the Hall Center Nature and Culture Seminar entitled “Aerial Bombing of World War II Germany: The Functional Equivalent of a Bavarian Natural Disaster.” Tom is a Graduate Direct Exchange Scholar this year at Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg.

Frank Cai was one of HWC’s two Dean’s Graduate Instructors for 2008-2009. He presented his lecture, entitled “A Chinese Ann Landers: the ‘Dear Diane’ Letters and the Encounter of Chinese Young Women in Contemporary America” on April 2, 2009. Frank also completed his comprehensive oral examinations in American Studies last fall, and was awarded a 2009 Summer Research Fellowship.

Shelly Cline is a history Ph.D. student and this year is on a Graduate Direct Exchange Scholarship at Universität Hamburg. She was also selected as an alternate candidate for a German-American Fulbright Grant.

In the summer of 2008 Antha Cotten-Spreckelmeyer presented a paper at the Annual Conference of The Environmental Design Research Association on “Origins of American Land Use: John Locke and the Failure of Empiricism.” In February, continuing her research on Robin Hood, Antha gave a paper at the Mid-America Medieval Association annual conference on “Robin Hood’s Trouble in Town.”


Chris Forth had another very productive year as a scholar in 2008-09. He has won a Keeler Intra-University Visiting Professorship to spend the spring semester of 2010 in the Classics Department, doing research on his next book, a cultural history of obesity. Chris has also been recognized by the History News Network as one of America’s “Top Young Historians.”

Last fall Diane Fourny presented a paper on “Goethe’s Italian Journey, the Travel Memoir, and the Rhetoric of Self” at the Hall Center’s Philosophy and Literature Seminar. In the spring she gave a paper at the 2009 conference of the Association for Core Texts & Courses, on “Freedom and its Limits: Molière’s Don Juan as Freethinker.”

Phillip Fox received the Eddie E. Jacobson award from the Truman Society for research and travel to Spain last summer.

Dustin Gann was one of three HWC nominees for the Outstanding GTA Award. He successfully completed his portfolio defense and comprehensive exams in May.

Marwa Ghazali attended the Penn Museum planning conference for the African Healing Journey’s exhibit as a consultant on African and Islamic healing. She translated Arabic writing on ancient artifacts from all over Africa and attended and provided feedback in various exhibit planning meetings. At the same conference she presented her own research in a paper entitled “Renegotiating the Past, Reshaping the Future: Historical Narratives, Identity Formation, and the Everyday Work of Repair among Somali Bantu.”

Last October Marike Janzen presented a paper at the German Studies Association on “Normalizing Germany: ‘68ers’ from Opposition to Affirmation.” In May Marike was at Queen’s University in Ontario for a conference on Cuba, making two invited presentations: “Carpentier, El siglo de las luces, and the Revolutionary Messenger,” and “Das Licht auf dem Galgen: From Seghers’s Novella to DEFA Film.

Franziska Jung presented a paper on “The Struggle Against Discriminatory Clauses of KU’s Sororities and Fraternities in the 1960s” at the Office of Graduate Studies’ Graduate Research Competition in February.

James Quinn was the winner of last year’s competition for an HWC 300 class proposal and taught HWC 300: War Literature in the spring. James taught the European Studies course for the HWC study abroad program in France and Italy last fall.

Nicholas Sambaluk was the 2008-2009 Graduate
“Westerners” and Humanity: Reflections on a Month in China

by Franzika Jung and Derek Richardson

We spent July 2009 traveling through and acquainting ourselves with China. We had extended stays in the “small town” (pop. 200,000) of Hezhou, Guangxi province northwest of Vietnam and in the modern mega-city of Shanghai. Although the two locations left us with drastically different impressions of what China “is,” the common denominator was a genuine openness and interest in the “Westerners” who are becoming more and more common in the Middle Kingdom. However, this impression was somewhat tainted by the feeling that such attention contributes to Western arrogance and a frustration that many, if not most, of the Chinese population are much more willing to extend courtesy and respect to visitors than to their fellow countrymen.

Our host in Hezhou was Derek’s younger sister, Megan, who was teaching English at a university in the city. The landscape of the surrounding Karst mountains is truly breathtaking but tourists pass by Hezhou for the more picturesque town of Yangshou. As a result, the only “Westerners” in the city are the university instructors and their guests. As our small group continually drew attention we began to think of ourselves as illiterate rock stars. We posed for pictures multiple times every day. Those who could speak English stayed a few moments and wanted to know as much as possible about our lives and opinions. Those who could not waved enthusiastically, said “Hello!” and quickly moved on; all the while attempting to control nervous laughter. The highlight of our time there was a feast prepared by the family of Megan’s boyfriend. The variety and amount of food truly put any Thanksgiving dinner to shame.

While in Shanghai we stayed with a Danish friend who teaches at an international primary school in the city. During our time there we experienced the modern cosmopolitan China and the daily life of the large expatriate community that now calls China home. Franzi was particularly excited because she was able to once again enjoy a true German bread roll or broetchen from an authentic German bakery. Shanghai is truly a world center and our status dropped from rock stars to just another couple of the ubiquitous expatriates and tourists. Even so, the expatriate life appears prone to breeding arrogance. Western teachers are paid more than Chinese teachers for the same work, and small concessions were made for us by officials and average people alike. For example, while waiting for a long-distance train people who were already sitting in the waiting area voluntarily moved or were forcibly rearranged to make space for us. We did not ask for this courtesy and we were in fact slightly embarrassed that they were making these allowances for us. After a moment’s thought, though, we started asking ourselves why no one had extended this courtesy to the Chinese people who had been standing before we arrived. No one was forced to vacate their personal seat because of the rearranging, they just had to content themselves with one seat rather than the 2-4 seats they had been occupying.

Our trip to China undoubtedly made us aware of being “Western,” but being invited into people’s homes and lives also showed us that human similarities are greater than the differences. The frustration is that these differences seem to be emphasized and inform people’s behavior more than the similarities. We hope that the continued study of our “own” Western culture coupled with the exploration of “other” cultures will contribute to an increased awareness of the shared human condition.

Writing Fellow at the KU Writing Center. He presented his paper, “Civilizing the Philippines: Kansas Volunteers and American Imperialism” at the KU-MU graduate student conference last spring.

Damon Talbott presented two papers last spring: “Continuities in Mapping America as Food Regions,” at the Great Lakes American Studies Association conference, and “Cultural Authority in Context: A Concept and its Application to Food Studies,” at the conference for the Association for the Study of Food and Society.

Steven Tucker defended his M.A. portfolio in the history department last spring and is now a Ph.D. student. He gave a paper at the KU-MU conference entitled “The Invasions of the United States: American Invasion Fiction, 1880-1917.”


Last spring Karenbeth Zacharias was one of five nominees for the Del Shankel Teaching Excellence Award, having been selected and interviewed by a group of student athletes.
HUMANITIES & WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND PEACE & CONFLICT STUDIES
SPRING 2010 COURSE GUIDE

HWC 114, 204 & 205 Western Civilization I & II
Course offerings are listed at www.opensections.ku.edu

HWC 206 Contemporary Western Civilization
MWF 1:00-1:50 301 BA
Richard Botkin

HWC 300 Studies in: Post-War Occupations
TR 9:30-10:45 3153 LEA
Nicholas Sambaluk

HWC 308 Masterpieces of World Literature II
MWF 9:00-9:50 202 BA
Diane Fourny

HWC 312 Masterpieces of World Literature III
TR 9:30-10:45 2096 DHDC
Marike Janzen

HWC 380 Modern Themes, Ancient Models
MW 11:00-12:15 4033 WES
Philip Stinson

HWC 424 Senior Seminar
By appointment 308A BA
Antha C-Spreckelmeyer

HWC 430 European Civilization in a World Context
W 3:00-5:30 4012 WES
Dale Urie

HWC 468 Illness in Art & Literature
TR 2:30-3:45 108 FR
Sandra Zimdars-Swartz

HWC 500 Studies in: American Communes
T 6:30-9:00 pm 208 SMI
Timothy Miller

HWC 510 Science, Technology, & Society
R 4:00-6:30 202 BA
Philip Baringer
Chris McKitterick

HWC 514 Totalitarianism & Literature in Central Europe
TR 1:00-2:15 4021 WES
David Skalicky

HWC 520 Literature in Translation: Russian
TR 9:30-10:45 1046 WES
Stephan Parker

HWC 540 Translation
W 12:00-2:50 318 BA
Gerald Mikkelson

HWC 600 Biography of a City: St. Petersburg
W 7:00-9:30 pm 1005 WES
Gerald Mikkelson

PCS 650 Senior Seminar in Peace & Conflict Studies
T 4:00-6:30 202 BA
Marike Janzen

PCS 850 Research in Peace & Conflict Studies
T 4:00-6:30 202 BA
Marike Janzen