



Orientalism and Asian Studies: How to Teach Asia?

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Few works have exerted as profound and enduring an influence on Asian Studies as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). In the decades since its publication, countless books and articles have appeared, attesting to its continuing relevance not only within Asian Studies but also across related disciplines and fields of inquiry (e.g., Ahmad 1992; Asad 1993; Lie 1994; Brennan 2000; Kumar 2012; Shatz 2019; Nebot and Boubrit 2023, to name only a few). *Orientalism* challenged college teachers of Asian Studies to move beyond simply introducing "Asia" to students; it urged them to interrogate Western constructions of Asia through comparative and dialogic approaches, including radical reappraisals that even question the very category of "Asia" as a geographic or cultural unit (Chen 2010). Nearly fifty years after *Orientalism*, the pressing question remains: where do we stand—and where might we go next—in our practice of teaching Asia in American college classrooms?

We have come a long way since the late 1970s, and even a simple glance at the demographic breakdown of students in Asian Studies classrooms would provide clear evidence of this assertion. In 1998, reflecting on the challenges of teaching Asia critically in the American classroom, Asian Studies scholar Yoshiko Nozaki suggested, among other things, that we move beyond the East/West binary, and "represent the multiplicity of identities that exists within any Asian nation" (Nozaki 1998: 150); in 2025, my classroom at Rice University is the multitude of identities that exists within Asia—and elsewhere. According to class profile data collected by Rice University's Office of Admissions in August 2024, Asian American students formed the largest cohort in the class of 2028, accounting for thirty-four percent of the total, followed by Caucasian students at thirty percent. Seventy of the total of 156 international students came from China, while two-thirds (101) of the entire international student population of this class came from Asian nations (<https://admission.rice.edu/apply/class-profile>).

American campuses are more multinational—and more Asian—than ever. In 2000, foreign students constituted 11 percent of U.S. higher education enrollments, rising to 21 percent by 2014. The number of students from Asia alone increased from 259,893 in 1995 to 627,306 in 2014 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_310.20.asp). Despite the pandemic-era dip, by 2024 more than 60 percent of the 1.1 million international students in the U.S. came from Asia (<https://opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students/>). College enrolment rates among Asian and Asian American populations continue to be higher than those of other demographic groups. In

2022, according to the Institute of Education Sciences, Asians recorded the highest college enrolment rate in the 18-24-year-old age bracket at sixty-one percent, followed by Whites at forty-one percent (<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpb/college-enrollment-rate>). Indeed, despite fees having risen threefold between 2000 and 2025 to \$86,926 per year, thirty-seven percent of students in Harvard’s class of 2028 were Asian or Asian American (<https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/admissions-statistics>).

Enter digital technology and social media, the staples of the twenty-first century. Today’s students inhabit a radically different information environment than their late-twentieth-century counterparts—both in how they absorb knowledge generally and in how they encounter Asia specifically. This shift carries considerable implications for the field of Asian Studies. Many students now participate in and contribute to the online circulation of globalized Asian culture: K-pop and J-pop, multilingual memes that evolve at lightning speed, emoji and other transnational communicative tools, and the shifting lexicons of messaging and texting. Together, these elements form the digital lingua franca of their daily lives. Crucially, this exposure begins well before college. Prospective Asian Studies majors often arrive already socialized into Asian linguistic and cultural worlds through video games, anime, manga, webtoons, Netflix, and even tools like Google Translate. From yet another angle, language-learning apps such as Duolingo have turned smartphones into good-enough entry-level language instructors, normalizing casual engagement with foreign languages.

Today’s classroom is marked by diversity and disparity, with students identifying across multiple dimensions: race, class, nationality, visa status, sexual orientation, gender, political orientation, academic major, and future career path. On U.S. campuses, moreover, Asians and Asian Americans no longer occupy the position of minority. These conditions make it all the more urgent to ask: how should we teach Asian Studies in the college classroom today?

1.

“What is Asian Studies?” As instructors of Asian Studies know, this question has no easy answer. In my classroom, many students respond by saying it is the study of Asian languages. Yet almost as soon as they do, they realize that this answer falls short. If asked instead, “Do you have to study Asian languages to know Asia?” they hesitate. Some say yes, but with reservations—perhaps adding that knowledge of Asian languages would certainly help, though they are unsure if it is an absolute requirement. This hesitation reflects a broader ambiguity in the field today. A century ago, it would have been unthinkable to claim expertise on Asia without proficiency in Asian languages. To a large extent, this still holds true within higher education. But shifts are evident. Many institutions have moved from emphasizing formal study to prioritizing conversational competence and intercultural communication (whatever that may mean). Study abroad programs or summer immersion programs often attract more interest than courses in classical languages, especially when

students cannot fit everything into four years. The meaning of “language training” itself varies widely from one institution to another, ranging from rigorous philological instruction to only basic proficiency requirements. In today’s context, one can plausibly imagine an expert on Asia’s economy, public health, or governmental systems who does not command Asian languages but instead relies on collaboration with colleagues in Asia—collaborations that digital technology now makes immediate and practical. At the same time, it remains true that language study is valued: those with deep knowledge of Asian languages tend to command respect and enjoy clear advantages. Yet we also recognize that language ability alone does not make one a good scholar of Asia.

Moreover, today we are aware that the teaching and learning of languages is not an innocuous activity. During the twentieth century, powerful nation states sought not only to institutionalize their own respective languages in the territories they had conquered, but also to learn the languages of their enemies in order to more easily vanquish them. The tentacles of this endeavor were seen domestically in the elimination of indigenous languages and the national standardization of languages at the expense of regional vernaculars, and internationally in the case of imperial conquest and the colonial institutionalization of the language of the colonizer as well as in the strategic learning of enemy languages during times of war. Indeed, nation-building depended upon the successful production and dissemination of national languages (Anderson 1983). As such, there is nothing innocuous about teaching, say, Japanese or Chinese in our college classrooms. For, which Japanese or which Chinese we teach is the result of material and historical conditions that were generated by the uneven relations of power among the national states and between the dominant forces and the dominated peoples and cultures within a national state. In college-level Asian Studies programs, traditionally speaking, the study of Asian languages has been seen as the inevitable first step, or even (with some exaggeration) the key to knowing about Asia. With some exceptions, most Asian languages taught at colleges are national languages, rather than regional or ethnic ones, languages that nation-states deploy as tools to govern and to exercise sovereignty.

The U.S. Department of State classifies Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic as the most difficult languages for native English speakers to learn. This designation reflects concerns at the level of the nation-state, but it also raises the question: difficult to learn for what purpose, and measured against what standard? While national security priorities may not directly shape the aims of college-level instruction, they undeniably influence funding streams and institutional opportunities. Moreover, the federal label of “difficult-to-learn” does more than describe; it legitimizes the challenge of these languages and dramatizes the wall students must climb to master them. Implicit in this framing is an expectation of extraordinary perseverance—years of drills, memorization, and practice—before one can claim competence.

The perception that East Asian languages are uniquely inaccessible works in two directions: it leads the West to view East Asia as a particular challenge to comprehend,

while prompting East Asia to self-identify as the least knowable—and therefore the most mysterious—region of the world. As Q.S. Tong observes, the seventeenth-century designation of Chinese by European and Anglophone scholars as one of the world’s most difficult and incomprehensible languages carried lasting consequences. By the early twentieth century, prominent Chinese intellectuals, including Lu Xun, described classical Chinese as oppressive, even blaming it for hindering national progress (Tong 2000). Writing a century later about the institutional formation of Chinese Studies in the United States, Norma Field (2002) remarked:

Philology as sinology at once represents a priceless treasure trove of knowledge and serves a gatekeeping function. It provides residual support for the pillar of pride in isolation [...] not only in Chinese studies but in a phantasmatic notion of Asian Studies. It is hard for the marginalized to relinquish claims to distinction [referring to the self-pride taken by the Asian Studies scholars to be working in an enormously challenging field]; hence, the sobering tenacity of self-chosen orientalism. (Field 2002: 1262).

The supposed difficulty of the Chinese language has long been double-edged: on the one hand, it valorizes Chinese as mysterious and secret; on the other, it is invoked to explain China’s alleged failure to modernize—or Westernize. Both Western and East Asian scholars have contributed to the construction and perpetuation of these views. Orientalism here, then, is not unidirectional. Its imprint is visible in the rise of Asian Studies programs in the United States, where “Orientalists” of all races (including Asians themselves) can be found—most Western-trained, at least in their terminal degrees, and many striving to master what are framed as difficult and esoteric languages and cultures.

This proclivity to overemphasize language learning, and particularly to highlight its difficulty (thus valorizing its rare and mysterious qualities), took on new significance in the age of China’s rise and globalization. By 2018, 449 institutions of higher learning worldwide—including ninety-seven in the United States—had accepted Confucius Institutes (Swain 2018). Whether or not these Institutes are “Trojan Horses” of the Chinese government, their very spread mirrors—in an inverted form—the English language education long promoted by the British Council, which Robert Phillipson famously described as “linguistic imperialism” (Phillipson 1992; see McCord 2019). Beyond China’s Confucius Institutes, powerful Asian states also play an active role in shaping how their societies are studied in Western academia: organizations such as the Japan Foundation, the Korea Foundation, and the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation fund research, teaching, and K-12 language instruction across the United States. The uneven economic weight of these states is reflected in the prominence of their fields of study: for example, disbursements from East Asian sources have long exceeded those from Southeast Asia, helping explain why East Asian Studies programs enjoy greater institutional visibility in U.S. higher education. Asian nation-states, then, are not merely passive recipients of Orientalist projection; they are key players in the ongoing configuration of Asian Studies programs in the United States. Their strategic funding of language instruction and related

programs functions as a tool of influence—reinforcing the still-persistent (if outdated) conviction that to know Asia, one must first know its languages.

In *Orientalism*, Said posits a question concerning the attributes and quality of knowledge by distinguishing between pure knowledge and political knowledge (1978: 9). Contrasting the study of Wordsworth or Keats to that of contemporary China or the Soviet Union, Said says “it is very easy to argue” that the former is not political while the latter is (1978: 9). Said then quickly reminds us that what is seen as political shifts, depending on historical and material conditions. While a study of the science and technology of the Soviet Union carried out by an American researcher during the Cold War would have immediately provoked concerns relating to the political motives of the researcher, prior possession of Shakespearian knowledge by an enemy agent could have been enormously profitable when carrying out espionage activities in the West. Said writes:

What I am interested in doing now is suggesting how the general liberal consensus that “true” knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overly political knowledge is not “true” knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced. (Said 1978: 10)

The above passage serves as an overture to Said’s entire discussion of *Orientalism*. Orientalist knowledge—no matter how neutral or apolitical it may appear—carries within it the material and historical conditions that made its production possible and lent it authority. Such knowledge is never innocent: it is imbued with political will, structured by uneven relations of power between Orient and Occident, and shaped by those who decide what counts as knowledge and how it is to be understood. For, since Michel Foucault’s intervention, we have recognized that knowledge, truth, and power are inseparably linked (e.g., Foucault 2003). Asian Studies knowledge, too, is produced within this field of unequal relations between Asia and the West, framed to a large extent by Western intellectual agendas that have sought domination over Asia. If this is the case, is the study of Asian languages itself Orientalist? The answer must be yes. Language study, as technical as it may seem, is not apolitical; it rests on the “organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced” (Said 1978, 20).

But does this mean we should abandon the study of Asian languages? The answer is no. Orientalist knowledge, when wielded with critical self-awareness, can also serve as an effective tool to critique and even dismantle Orientalist worldviews. For this reason, Asian Studies would benefit from applying a greater degree of reflexivity to its own assumptions and priorities—including the taken-for-granted inevitability of learning Asian national languages. Encouragingly, many in the field have already begun this work (see Bridges, Sharma, and Sterling 2022).

In today’s classroom, many of my students are acutely aware of global wealth gaps and the discrimination faced by marginalized populations in Asia and beyond. No one assumes

that the world is fair when witnessing the forced removal of immigrants without legal status in the U.S., legislatures dismantling social safety nets, the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes during the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing wars of invasion and unlawful occupation, famine imposed on occupied peoples, or the intentional destruction of livelihoods and environments. With minimal prompting, students quickly recognize that the presence of Asian Studies programs on Western campuses carries a palpable association with power and domination. It is extremely rare for a student to enroll in such a course believing that Asian culture is backward or in need of Western guidance. Their desire to learn about Asia is genuine, yet it calls for careful intellectual guidance. For this reason, it is preferable to encourage students to revisit the question “What is Asian Studies?” throughout their academic journey, rather than attempting to answer it once and for all in an introductory course. Over time, each student’s response will evolve, enriched by greater critical capacity and sharper analytical insight. In this process, Said’s *Orientalism* remains an invaluable and productive point of departure.

2.

Aside from a heightened awareness of uneven power relations, current students typically arrive in Asian Studies programs possessing prior exposure to a new phenomenon, one that appears to contrast sharply with the traditional image of this field as a serious and challenging academic domain: Asian popular culture. In 2025, many students of Asian Studies take courses in this area in order to learn more about J-pop songs or K-drama lines, better appreciate Japanese anime or Korean webtoons, or enhance their knowledge of their K-pop idols. Exactly how many Asian Studies students are motivated by a desire to get to grips with their popular cultural idols is not known—and perhaps, it is an unquantifiable question. But the global rise of Asian popular culture, and East Asian popular culture in particular, among young people is a factor that cannot be overlooked when thinking about the production of Asian Studies knowledge and the nature of this knowledge. Rather than entering the Introduction to Asian Studies classroom with the self-imposed determination of having to learn something that is unreachable and incomprehensible, many students arrive with prior exposure to phrases, words, vibes, and moods associated with East Asian popular cultural products. The racial and ethnic composition of the student body may be diverse, meaning that not all of them have East Asian heritage languages or have even been to East Asia. Instead, their ubiquitous and intensive digital exposure to Asian cultural products via audio-visual platforms (such as TikTok and YouTube) as well as through chatroom exchanges (on Reddit and Discord, for example), where a meme can go viral in the blink of an eye and information spreads in a nanosecond, gives them a different kind of Asia and for what it is worth, a different kind of common language. This Asia is not buried under royal chronicles, thick dictionaries, back-to-front sentence structures, and thousands of Chinese characters, but is the subject of momentary feedback, an object to “like” or respond to with an emoji, and a place that, altogether, feels not so strange or unfamiliar for the digital generation. The COVID-19 global shutdowns even worked to enhance this shift,

seen for example in the avid collaboration between Korean drama series and Netflix represented by *Squid Game* (Jin, Lee, and Hong 2023). As such, the mystery of language dissipates somewhat, with language-learning for many becoming part of a whole package of music, dance, drama, stories, songs, beauty products, and food.

The premise above warrants a reconfiguration of Asian Studies knowledge production as practiced through instruction in college classrooms. Indeed, if the end of the Cold War made Area Studies programs nervous, the rise of K-pop ensures the longevity of Asian Studies—a state of affairs contrasting markedly with the bleak fate of certain European language programs—recent closures of many German programs come to my mind. Mix in the aforementioned demographic change, reflecting the increase in the proportion of international students from Asia on American university campuses, and we get a landscape that is starkly different from that of the late twentieth century, where teaching and learning about Asia were seen as esoteric and difficult activities reserved for a select few, where the field largely catered to white American students, while Asian American students were drawn on toward Asian American Studies rather than Asian Studies; this is not the case today. In our own introductory Asian Studies class at Rice University (ASIA 295 Introduction to Transnational Asian Studies), which my colleague Sidney Lu and I teach, I no longer expect Asian and Asian American students to show indignation when I introduce Said's notion of Orientalism and a critical stance toward the Western hegemonic power's definition of the Orient; instead, some of them can be a tad confused, since the Asia they know is neither a poor, weak, or backward region nor the mysterious and sensuous plaything of the West. It is just as powerful, effective, and real as the West in terms of economy, science, arts, and technology, and is even able to surpass the West in terms of its cultural appeal, soft power, and above all, fun. If the students' own perception of Asia does not fit Said's presentation of the Western definition of the Orient—as infantile, feminine, powerless and witless, in need of the West's guidance and protection, waiting to be appropriated and interpreted by the West, serving as the West's other—then, what kind of Asia should we be teaching and learning about in American college classrooms?

In many Asian Studies programs which I have observed and reviewed, language classes function as the primary gateway into Asian Studies. Based on conversations with colleagues outside my home institution, I have gathered that enrollment numbers—especially for language courses—are a widespread concern, since such courses often serve as the main recruitment base for majors. This pattern is characteristic of what I call the *EALC (East Asian Languages and Civilizations/Cultures) model*. Reflecting the foreign language credit requirements at most U.S. universities, the EALC model capitalizes on students' initial curiosity about Asia by directing them first toward language study. In some programs, students can declare an Asian Studies major only after they have fulfilled a prerequisite of studying an Asian language for two semesters. Moreover, its disciplinary orientation often leans toward literature, comparative literature, and to some extent,

history, telegraphing the aspiration for the ability to read and interpret texts in the original Asian languages.

In addition to the EALC model, I'd like to present a complimentary (not alternative) model, which I will call the *Transnational Asian Studies (TAS) model*. The term "transnational" is based on the name of my own department, the Department of Transnational Asian Studies, at Rice University but it also reflects the recent "transnational turn" in Asian Studies discipline whereby the attention to circulatory and transnational movements of people, ideas, and goods within and beyond Asia came to offer productive ways to think about Asia (e.g., Duara 2014). While Rice has had a history of offering Asian Studies programs since the 1980s, it was with the 2008 inauguration of the Chao Center for Asian Studies that Rice came to place its Asian Studies program on a more formal footing; following this, in 2020, the Department of Transnational Asian Studies was formed. Rice University does not have foreign language credits in its graduation requirements, with enrollment in language classes being either voluntary or forming part of the requirement for the major of each student's choice. This is an important difference from institutions operating according to the EALC model. Due to the absence of the foreign language credit requirement toward graduation, students who are interested in learning about Asia often come directly to the Introduction to Transnational Asian Studies class, completion of which is required for those pursuing an Asian Studies major or minor. Another difference between the EALC model and Rice's TAS model is that the latter does not depend on literature as the main frame of study. Also, whereas the traditional EALC model tends to see divergence at the advanced level as students focus on a more discrete culture area (China, Japan, or Korea), the TAS model gives students a bird's eye view of Asia that is in constant engagement with comparative themes and geopolitical areas in and outside Asia across diverse time frames utilizing a multidisciplinary approach. My department consists of a mix of social scientists and historians, an art historian, a scholar of religion, and a literary scholar. While different, the EALC model and the TAS model overlap. For instance, at Rice, students majoring in Asian Studies can choose to concentrate on language study (with up to 70 percent of their coursework allocated to the study of Asian languages).

Reflecting demographic shifts and the surging influence of Asian popular culture on young Americans from diverse backgrounds that I mentioned earlier, many students do come to the introductory class with varying degrees of prior exposure to Asian languages and/or popular culture. But the class does not have to (or cannot, depending on one's point of view) privilege the language learning that is supposed to have happened prior to or is happening concurrently with the introductory class, as the students in the class may or may not have decided which Asian language they might want to learn. This semi-openness creates an enormous amount of energy and breadth of exploration among student peers; since not everyone is wedded to a certain Asian language at this point, students move into explorer mode rather than recipient mode, mobilizing their interests outside of the Asian Studies purview—most Rice students are double-majors, combining STEM subjects and

humanities/social science subjects—and creating an exciting mix of original ideas with a fresh approach.

Although Rice is a competitive, highly ranked school, our students' GPA and SAT scores ranking in the higher echelons, the diversity of our students in terms of their exposure to Asia, Asian languages, and Asian cultures should be comparable to that of students on many other U.S. campuses. The Introduction to Transnational Asian Studies course explores topics such as race, immigration, religion, and history, examines the field of Asian Studies in relation to humanistic (ideographic) and social scientific (nomothetical) knowledge, and ponders where it stands vis-à-vis Asian American Studies (see Lie 2012). The intention of the class is not so much to provide students with a knowledge of Asia (as in what “Asians” do and what they are like) than to steer their curiosity to which questions to ask when learning about Asia (as in how we should approach Asia based on where one stands). There has been a four-fold growth in enrollment numbers since its inauguration in 2016 in our introductory class. Given that Rice's undergraduate body is expanding, but not by four hundred percent, it is probably safe to say that the materials and the mode of inquiry the course offers have been the drawcards.

3.

How does a TAS model unfold in the classroom? While this is a subject of ongoing exploration, let me cite one classroom example of my own. I start my freshman class on transnational Asian food with the topic of sugar. Relying on the seminal scholarship of Sidney Mintz, the students and I think about the production of sugar (which depended on the trans-Atlantic slave trade) and the distribution of sugar in the British empire (which turned the emerging working class in England during the Industrial Revolution into major consumers by providing workers with empty calories by way of adding sugar to their lunches, which for each of them was basically just a cup of tea) (Mintz 1985). Sugar tells the story of the coexistence, or indeed, the imperative of slave labor during the rise of capitalism against the backdrop of the vast global European empires. When the Marxist assumption that the politically-awakened European working classes would liberate the poor, land-bound peasants of Asia turned out to be unfounded, and a system based on the nation state firmly came to define the post-imperial world, food, too, was nationalized. Thus, inside Korea, restaurants boast of their original, secret recipes that have been transmitted from one generation to the next, yet once the food crosses the national border, it simply becomes “authentic Korean food.” In the class, we try to reverse-engineer this flow and see what kind of relations of domination (slavery and colonialism in the case of sugar production) lie behind this “authentic Korean food” in America (the American postwar military occupation and continuing huge military presence in Korea paralleling with successive military dictatorships amidst Cold War tension on the one hand, and ongoing transnational migration of Koreans to America on the other). Starting the class off with something that first might appear unrelated to Asia (sugar) and reminding students that to think about Asian food is not simply to collect connoisseur information about Asian food

enables me to establish a non-Orientalist and/or anti-Orientalist approach for the class, simultaneously alluding to students the possible parameters of studying Asian food, which may be more relevant to their own lives than they might have first imagined.

In one segment, I focus on the Japanese term *yakiniku* as it appears on the menus of Korean restaurants in Honolulu. Hawaii, after all, attracts millions of Japanese tourists each year, and their spending contributes significantly to the state's economy. *Yakiniku* in Japanese means “grilled meat,” and at first glance, its use by Korean restaurateurs in Honolulu seems like a straightforward strategy to appeal to Japanese visitors. But a closer look reveals that this single term functions as a microcosm of global history, reflecting migrations, colonialism, and shifting geopolitical alliances.

The story begins with the arrival of Japanese plantation workers in the Hawaiian Kingdom in the late nineteenth century, followed by Japan's colonial expansion in the twentieth century, including the annexation of Korea in 1910. That annexation spurred the migration of Koreans to Japan, where they labored in factories and on construction sites. After Japan's defeat in the Pacific War and the subsequent U.S. Occupation, the Cold War redefined Asia's political alignments, firmly placing Japan within the American orbit. With prosperity in the postwar decades, Japan became a major source of tourists to Hawaii. For most of these visitors, their knowledge of Korea before the twenty-first-century *Hallyu* (Korean wave) boom was limited to food traditions brought to Japan by Korean colonial migrants. Chief among these was *yakiniku*: spicy, barbecued cuts of meat—often organs and animal parts unfamiliar to most Japanese palates until relatively recently.

The very word *yakiniku* is a neologism in Japan. While the components of the word (*yaki* from *yaku*, “to grill,” and *niku*, “meat”) are linguistically simple, the practice it names reflects deeper cultural and political histories. Traditionally, Japanese cuisine did not include the grilling of meat in this way, nor the consumption of items like liver, stomach, tongue, ox tail, pig's feet, or pig's heads. The Korean migrants who popularized these dishes adapted them to their conditions: unable to afford the fresh pears traditionally used in Korean marinades, they created a sharper, spicier, more garlic-heavy flavor profile. For decades, this migrant cuisine defined what “Korean food” meant in Japan.

By tracing the journey of the word *yakiniku*—from colonial Korea to Japan, and from Japan to Hawaii—we uncover a layered story, similar to the story of sugar, that far exceeds the surface pleasures of international food tourism. Cuisine, when read historically, is not simply “fun” or “exotic”; it tells stories of power, colonial survival, and injustice, again, much as the history of sugar does. In class, I encourage students to move beyond treating Asian food as an assortment of novelties—whether chicken feet, thousand-year eggs, or tea ceremonies—and instead to situate themselves within these broader historical narratives. Ideally, the discussion evolves from an inventory of dishes into a deeper reflection on how this geopolitical entity called “Asia” is imagined, consumed, and transformed.

The above segment is significant for thinking about the discipline of Asian Studies itself, as it shows students that studying Asia is not simply a matter of treating each nation as autonomous, discrete, and unrelated. Such an approach uncannily replicates colonial logic of “divide and conquer.” Asia, instead, is transnational and constantly in motion. While a strong knowledge of national histories remains crucial, critical and constructive inquiry often leads us to transnational and transhistorical questions. And we should ask these questions in deep reference to colonial, imperial, military, political, economic, and other relations of power between the nations, between the classes, between the genders, and between the races. Cultivating this sensitivity helps us see Asia not as a culturally bound entity of ancient, unchanging traditions, but as a dynamic time-space in which boundaries have been repeatedly drawn and redrawn in response to shifting forms of hegemonic domination.

This is not to dismiss the value of the EALC model, where language proficiency sits at the core. Language training can open profound insights, and literary texts in particular are rich with stories about food, migration, and identity. Yet from my perspective, what is equally imperative is to maintain an awareness of both the course materials and my own objectives as I work to practice a new kind of Asian Studies pedagogy. None of this effort is new: it simply returns us to the debates raised by Edward Said on Orientalism, particularly the interrelationship between power and knowledge, and the role of the scholar in producing discourse. The urgency of such an approach has only intensified in the age of global digital connectivity, and in this regard the TAS model represents a constructive and timely addition to the field.

4.

Transnational Asia called for papers addressing pedagogical and instructional issues in Asian Studies classes in colleges and universities when directly engaging with themes and critiques raised in Said’s *Orientalism* as well as its reverberating effects. The articles housed in this special issue have been selected among many articles that reached the editorial committee in response to this call. The first article in this issue, “Archives as Bridges: Connecting Students to Asia’s Histories” by Lauren Collins, shows us how visual, tactile, and sensory elements can be introduced to the Asian Studies classroom in an innovative way so as to encourage students to go beyond curiosity and explore the subtle relations of power behind the maps and images. As students discuss and analyze old maps and colonial photographs of Asia in a collaborative and communicative exchange of ideas, their views come together to form a transformative critical gaze. These maps and photographs are not housed and curated in one location on campus, and the task of searching for and locating these Asia-related archival materials following a curatorial vision beyond the domain of Asian Studies itself creates another interesting challenge for the class. Students learn from the archives and from each other, thereby discovering new ways to relate to Asia and to each other.

In Kyle Chong's "*Teaching American Born Chinese Isn't Beyond Repair: Preparing Preservice Teachers to Navigate a 'Great Wall' of Mirrors and 'Bamboo' Windows,*" we learn that using Asian American materials—here, the award-winning graphic novel *American Born Chinese*—in K-12 classrooms demands considerable effort from educators. The novel's multi-layered complexity reflects the diversity of Asian American communities in the U.S., requiring teachers to be critically aware of both the double meanings and potential pitfalls of stereotypes, as well as the vast differences among specific Asian American groups. Even exemplary materials like *American Born Chinese* necessitate careful scaffolding and thoughtful presentation. Drawing on existing scholarship and his own classroom experience, Chong proposes a method for guiding Asian and Asian American students through such material in a way that moves beyond mere acknowledgment of differences.

If the above two articles were inspired by the enduring influence and message of Said's *Orientalism*, Peter Bramson's "Good Intentions: Orientalism and Grinnell's Mission to China in the 20th Century" takes us on an exploration of early-twentieth-century Christian missionary education in China. Tapping into hitherto underused archives stored at Grinnell College, Bramson documents the dedicated effort involved in the Grinnell-in-China missionary project. While he critiques the Orientalist stance and assumptions held by the mission, he shows the direct and real benefits that the missionary work brought to China through its academic, athletic, medical, and philanthropic work. He then asks a hard question: given the good intentions of the missionary, how should we look at it from today's vantage point? Bramson's article urges us to adopt a nuanced approach when designating the complex entanglements of collective subjectivity or the sense of mission on the one hand and the pervasive inequality of power that prevailed in the world at the time on the other.

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